

QUICK TIPS

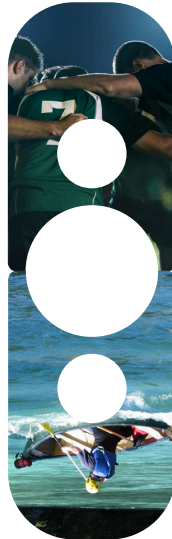
SUPPORTING SOCIAL INTERACTION



For some neurodivergent's, socialising is a complex and difficult experience, for others, it comes easily and freely. You may need to rethink what socialising looks like and how to tell if someone is finding a genuine connection with others.

NEUROTYPICAL PARTICIPANTS

- May seek out others to engage and prefer to play with others rather than alone.
- May turn to others when distressed for comfort and support.
- May pick up on social cues and unwritten rules or "in jokes" with little effort.
- May suppress their own interests/needs in favour of the team or group as a whole - this can increase group cohesion while reducing personal well-being and sense of identity and worth over time.
- May rely on creating an us/them dynamic to strengthen group bonds.



NEURODIVERGENT PARTICIPANTS

- May prefer to stick to themselves or play alongside others rather than with them.
- May withdraw from others when distressed rather than seeking out supports.
- May struggle to identify unwritten rules or pick up on social cues - either appearing disengaged or overly enthusiastic.
- May not express their interests/needs or have the skills to self-regulate effectively - which can reduce group cohesion and lead to personal burnout.
- May rely on adopting a defensive or dismissive attitude to avoid rejection.



TIP 1: START SLOW & BUILD UP GRADUALLY

Begin with 1-1 or small group activities. Find less intense opportunities to join in such as practice sessions or non-competitive matches. You may need to adopt a staggered or circuit approach to integrating participants into a larger group by gradually adding more people into the activity.



TIP 2: ASK FOR HELP FROM OTHERS

Parents or the participants' support workers are often more than happy to step in to help a struggling participant and usually hang back until asked. Or perhaps you can share the role with an assistant coach to keep the match going while maintaining support off-field.



TIP 3: FOSTER RESPECTFUL RELATIONSHIPS

Teaching participants to treat others with dignity and respect, rather than forcing "friendships", fosters team cohesion and genuine bonds based on shared experiences and interests to occur.

WORKING WITH, NOT AGAINST, YOUR NATURE

As a coach, you can use these insights to support both neurodivergent and neurotypical participants.

While team-based sports may favour neurotypicals, you can lose team cohesion by allowing us/them dynamics to form (especially within the team) or letting stronger voices drown out teammates.

Likewise, the reduced focus on social interaction of solo or club-based sports may better suit neurodivergents, however, there will always need to interact at some level. Supporting this process allows participants to continue to thrive both individually and within the broader group.

Above all else keep an open mind as every person will have a different level of skills and abilities in both their social and their physical performance.



An Australian Government Initiative

The 'Active Inclusion' initiative is funded by the Australian Government Department of Social Services (DSS) through the Information Linkages and Capacity Building (ILC) Social and Community Participation (SCP) grant. It is made possible through the ongoing efforts of the MCGG Autism Centre in partnership with COMPS ACT.

Fact sheets are for general information only. They are not intended to be and should not be relied on as a substitute for specific medical or health advice. While every effort is taken to ensure the information is accurate, Marymead CatholicCare Canberra & Goulburn makes no representations and gives no warranties that this information is correct, current, complete, reliable or suitable for any purpose. We disclaim all responsibility and liability for any direct or indirect loss, damage, cost or expense whatsoever in the use of or reliance upon this information.

