AUTISM in CRICKET
What every coach & club needs to know
Contents

Autism in Cricket Program ......................................................... 3
- A Message from Gilly
- About the Program
- What is Autism Spectrum Disorder

Cricket & Inclusion .................................................................. 6
- Why is Cricket a Good Sport for Children with Autism?
- How can we Create Inclusion in Cricket

Strengths & Challenges ........................................................... 8
- Strengths of People with Autism
- Potential Difficulties
- Getting to Know People with Autism through Sport

Join the Team ........................................................................... 10
- How we can help
- Top 10 Tips for Coaches
- Top 10 Tips for Club
- Useful Websites and Resources

Example Visual Supports & Resources .................................... 14
- The Value of Visual Supports
- Profiles - child and club
- Social Stories
- Visual Schedules
- Reward Charts
Autism in Cricket Program

A message from Gilly

I’m proud to be an ambassador for WA’s first Autism in Cricket Program. This program is something I know will ultimately “leave our game in better shape” – as the great Sir Donald Bradman called on us all to do.

We’ve all seen first-hand how much joy kids get from being part of their local cricket club and from playing our great game with their mates. Sure, it is about learning the game, scoring runs, taking wickets and of course beating the other side! But it is about much more than that – more than anything, it is about belonging. Cricket is not just about the individual – it is about the joy and satisfaction of being part of the team.

Sadly though, this is a joy that thousands of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) are missing out on.

I know there are real challenges and uncertainty when it comes to having children with Autism on the team. That’s why the Autism Association of WA have created a special program that gives your club all the resources, information and support you need to help these kids join the team!

About the Program

At Autism Association of WA, we understand there are barriers that can make clubs, coaches and parents uncertain about how to welcome kids with Autism into their club environment and include them in a meaningful way.

By partnering with WA Department of Communities, Wembley Districts Junior Cricket Club and The WACA, we have set out to change that, with a special program designed to make it easier to break down the barriers. This program is about giving coaches, club volunteers and others involved with the team, the support they need to take our children with Autism off the sidelines and get them involved in the game.

Cricket is a great sport for children with Autism to be involved with in a range of different ways and there are a number of clubs already successfully including these children, with great mutual benefits. This program is a win-win: a win for your club, a win for children with autism and their families, a win for others on the team.

You can sign up today to get involved in the program. But signing up is just the start. We are here to make it as easy as possible with our experts on hand to lend advice and a wide range of easily accessible resources to guide you through confidently welcoming children with autism into your club.

Join the team!

Find out more

Join the Autism in Cricket team: www.autismincricket.com.au
What is Autism Spectrum Disorder?

Autism Spectrum Disorder is a complex, life-long developmental disability which is neurological in origin. Approximately 1 in 100 children in Australia is diagnosed with Autism.

The core features of Autism are differences in:
- Social communication and interaction.
- Restricted and repetitive behaviours.
- Sensory processing.

Social communication and interaction

People with Autism may have very limited ability to communicate; or, may appear to be quite proficient with language. However, even those with good verbal skills often experience difficulties. Although they may be able to get their own message across, generally, people with Autism are less skilled at understanding other people’s communication. They tend to be very literal in their understanding of words and have difficulty with abstract concepts and inferences. In addition, they are likely to have difficulty interpreting facial expression and tone of voice.

Restricted and repetitive behaviours

The person may demonstrate a range of repetitive behaviours e.g., hand movements, the way they always enter a room or take a particular path across a certain space. It is sometimes considered that this desire for sameness stems from a sense of uncertainty—the world can be confusing, with Autism. Actions, over which they have some control, might be reassuring. People with Autism may have difficulty coping with change—especially from the familiar into the unknown.

Sensory differences

People with Autism may experience sensations differently. This is most common with sound. To us the sound might not appear too loud but this could be experienced as painfully loud to some people with Autism. Some people may choose to wear headphones or earmuffs, while others may need quiet breaks.

Some individuals may want to avoid the body closeness of contact sports or in queue formation, as for them the sensation of touch is intensified. Contrarily, others may be hyposensitive and seek the sensation of touch, frequently touching surfaces around them. N.B. not all people with Autism experience sensory differences, in these ways.
Other features of Autism:

**Not always able to see ‘the big picture’**—people with Autism are inclined to focus on detail, rather than seeing the ‘big picture’. Therefore, what might be obvious to others is not always obvious to a person with Autism.

**Not always able to see another person’s perspective**—people with Autism are likely to have difficulty understanding the thoughts, feelings and intentions of other people. Never assume that they might ‘get the message’. Be explicit with instruction.

**Special interests**—people with Autism often develop interests that may be unusual; or may feature with a great intensity of interest. Get to know their interests—they may provide a useful way to build their motivation.

**Visual learners**—it has long been known that people with Autism understand and learn more from what they see, rather than from the spoken word. Demonstration, along with other visual resources will be valuable teaching tools.

**Eye contact may be difficult**—but they may still be maintaining attention without looking at you. While this is fairly common to Autism, some individuals may present with good eye contact.
Cricket and Inclusion

Why is cricket a good sport for children with Autism?

Being a part of any sporting team can have lots of benefits for children with Autism but it can also present lots of challenges as well. Many team sports can be hard for children with Autism to engage with as they often require a high level of social communication skills, strength and coordination. Cricket however can provide a team environment which also celebrates and encourages the role of the individual. Here are some of the ways that cricket can be a good sport for children with Autism:

Motor Skills

Motor skills, sometimes not strong for children with Autism, may be developed through physical activity i.e. batting, bowling and fielding.

Reduce Stress and Anxiety

Physical activity has been shown to alleviate stress and anxiety - often experienced by children with Autism.

Build confidence & self-esteem

One of the main advantages of being part of a cricket team is building confidence and self-esteem.

Improved Communication Skills

Being part of a cricket team will provide new opportunities for social interaction which will assist with communication skills.

Developing Friendships

Developing team work skills, required in cricket, may assist with building friendships on and off the pitch.

Structured Game

The structured format of a cricket game can provide a sense of routine and predictability for a child with Autism. This allows for them to know what’s expected of them during the game.
How can we Create Inclusion in Cricket?

Many children with Autism will miss out on the health and social benefits of being a part of a sporting team because coaches and clubs aren’t always aware of the ‘hidden’ ways in which Autism can affect their participation. For example, a person with Autism might have heightened fear and anxiety of trying a new activity; they might experience sensory challenges wearing a uniform or might find it difficult to understand someone’s body language or the banter of their peers. By getting to know the individual we can help break down some of these barriers and create a successful and inclusive team environment.

There are lots of ways in which an individual with Autism can be involved with your cricket club. Being part of a cricket team doesn’t have to involve playing in a match; you might find the strengths and interests of a team member that could benefit your club in other ways. For example as cricket scorers, preparing refreshments for the breaks, or setting up equipment for training sessions. For a child with Autism, feeling like an integral part of the team can be just as valuable as scoring a century!

3 Simple Ways to support and include players with Autism

1. Keep instructions clear and concise. Don’t overload players with information.
2. Try to create a consistent and routine coaching environment
3. Be patient, positive and have fun!
Strengths and Challenges for Children with Autism

Strengths of people with Autism:

- Visual skills—able to respond well to visual instruction.*
- Rote learning—those with good reading skills could learn a list of rules. Help may be needed to apply those rules appropriately.
- A strong memory for facts.
- May participate well within routines and structure. Coaching, by way of routine and structure can be an effective support for people with Autism.
- Attention to detail.
- High level of concentration and focus once interest is gained.
- Reliability and loyalty once familiar with people/ environment.

Potential difficulties:

- Verbal and non-verbal communication.
- Communicating to coach and other players.
- Being able to understand instructions, especially if given fast pace.
- Understanding the intentions of other people.
- Coping with the unpredictable nature of competitive sport.
- Coping with change (new coach or change of venue).
- Sensory overload—loud noise and physical contact in some sports.
- Remaining focused when new to the venue or training.
- Gross motor skills and coordination.
- Managing frustration, stress or disappointment.

*While we advocate the use of visual supports, these do not need to be complicated. Simple line drawings, photos torn from magazines and objects may all serve well to aid communication.
Getting to Know People with Autism Through Sport

Get to know the individual with Autism—this is the starting point to providing the best possible support. With the appropriate support they may develop confidence and thrive, while learning to take part in different activities and engaging socially in different ways.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The person who has Autism ...</th>
<th>How you may help ...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>May not understand the words, especially if there is more than one part to an instruction.</td>
<td>Use clear and concise language, demonstrating the action with the words, where that applies. Explain one point at a time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May not respond immediately to an instruction. While they may hear the words they are likely to need longer than most others to gauge the meaning.</td>
<td>Wait for at least ten seconds before repeating an instruction if the person has not responded.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May have a very literal understanding of words.</td>
<td>Clearly tell them what to do, for example “run fast” rather than “Fly!” The child with Autism, wanting to follow the instruction as best they could, literally may run flapping their arms if asked to “Fly!”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May be sensitive to sound or the physical contact of a game. Enjoyment and motivation in the game may help to over-ride discomfort.</td>
<td>Some adaptations to reduce unnecessary sounds or physical contact may help. Discuss with parent or carer if concerns arise.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is likely to have difficulty understanding the rules of the game.</td>
<td>Break down the rules into steps and where possible use visual supports or demonstration.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is likely to perform well through routine and structure.</td>
<td>By keeping to a predictable routine within the coaching session the person is more likely to participate and learn. For example, if activities begin and end in a consistent way and are presented with some consistency in words and style of coaching.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May have difficulty with change or having to leave an activity that they enjoy.</td>
<td>Provide warning when the session is coming to an end. Some might benefit from a visual image to show what they will be doing next. For example, a simple line drawing of a house to indicate going home. Countdown timers or sand timers may be helpful.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May surprise you with their skills, growing confidence and engaging personality.</td>
<td>Please don’t take it personally if they say the ‘wrong thing’. Generally, children and adults who have Autism try very hard to please. They want to do the right thing. With understanding and support they can do very well!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Once you register you will be part of the team and are committing to creating better inclusion for children with Autism in cricket.

**Here’s how we can help when you join us:**

- We can come to your club and provide a short training session on Autism and how to better include children with Autism in the game
- You will receive a book and poster that you can share with your coaches
- Follow us on Facebook and Instagram; show us how you are being Autism inclusive and win a prize!
- Specialist consultancy will be provided by our Autism experts!

**Contact Us:**

- Autismincricket@autism.org.au
- [www.facebook.com/AutismWesternAustralia/autism_association_wa](http://www.facebook.com/AutismWesternAustralia/autism_association_wa)
Top 10 Tips for Coaches: 
to Create Inclusion for Children with Autism

1. Check your registrations to see if a child with Autism has registered for your team

2. Get to know the child with Autism by asking parents how best you can support their child

3. Prepare the child for what to expect on the first day, talk it through with the parents

4. Use clear, concise language and wait at least 10 seconds before repeating an instruction

5. Demonstrate tasks; break them down into steps or use visual supports when appropriate*

6. Work with their strengths and get them to practice and build on those skills

7. Give plenty of warning when moving to another task or making changes to the routine

8. Talk to the opposing coach on game days to discuss any accommodations needed for the player with Autism

9. Address the players by their names to ensure you have their attention

10. Be understanding if they need a break and be generous with praise

*Right: Visual supports can assist in demonstrating to a child what to do by breaking a task up into smaller steps - see page 15.
See www.autismincricket.com.au to download all resources mentioned in this booklet plus additional videos, tip sheets and support for the tips above.
Top 10 Tips for Clubs: to Create Inclusion for Children with Autism

1. Make a commitment to Autism awareness—display our Autism in Cricket poster at your club.

2. Follow us on Facebook for ongoing updates that you can share on your club social media pages to increase awareness.

3. Make sure you check all your registrations pre-season and identify children who have Autism.

4. Develop a process that ensures all coaches and managers contact the parents of children who do have Autism to ask the parents what they need to know to prepare for a successful first day.

5. Set up a positive open relationship with the parents so they can guide the club on what support their son or daughter needs.

6. Support coaches to feel confident throughout the season and allow for flexibility in the training/game environment.

7. Join the team; email us on autismincricket@autism.org.au and we can help you, by providing training and ongoing support to your coaches and managers.

8. Download our resources from our website www.autismincricket.com.au and watch our great simple videos for coaches, parents and clubs.

9. Create roles in your club for kids with Autism who want to be part of your club but are not yet interested in playing the game.

Useful Websites and Resources:

**Useful Websites**

**WACA Cricket Manager**
For information about cricket clubs and the cricket programs that are available in your local area contact your WACA Area Manager. You can find your Area Managers and other community cricket staff information on this website: https://waca.com.au/community/community-cricket-contacts

**Play Cricket Resource Hub**
Provides information on the different cricket programs that your local club, school or organisation runs - visit - https://www.playcricket.com.au. This website provides a good overview of the cricket blast and junior cricket game.

**Community Junior Cricket Council WA (CJCC)**
To find the rules of the different age and formats in Junior cricket and the code of conduct of cricket visit: http://cjcc.wa.cricket.com.au/

**Indoor Cricket WA**
Find all the information on your nearest Indoor Cricket Centre and the programs they run here: https://www.waca.com.au/get-involved/indoor-cricket

**Useful Apps:**

**CA Coach**
A coach resource on the basics of cricket, fielding, throwing, wicket keeping and bowling. Videos includes fitness programs, how to run a training session, video analysis and ways to help players mentally prepare for the game.

**CA Junior Coach**
Rules, scoring and game set up for Junior cricket.

**Woolworths Cricket Blast**
Resources for Blast Program activities, upcoming sessions within games and videos of activities. Resources on the different activities you may do while participating in the Blast Program. Videos of what the activities are; as well as the option to have information on the upcoming session the players will be participating in.

**MyCricket**
Game day information, team and player statistics and ladders for the Junior format. Clubs can send players messages, news and event updates as well as links to the resources from the CA Coach, CAJunior and Cricket Blast apps.

**Live Score**
Team members can score the game live so other people watching on the app can keep updated.
EXAMPLE

Visual Supports & Resources

All visual supports and resources are available for download from our website: www.autismincricket.com.au
The Value of Visual Supports

The value of providing information visually to people with Autism has long been known and is well documented—for times of change visual supports make it easier for them to predict “what is going to happen”.

One of the real strengths of people with Autism is their visual skills. They are usually more able to understand what they **SEE** than what they **HEAR**.

The term ‘visual supports’—referring to anything that allows information to be presented in visual form—enables better understanding and serves as a reminder of what has been said. A visual support can also act as a useful prompt for the child with Autism to convey their message to us—they may have their own, personalised, visuals.

Everybody uses visual supports—shopping lists, traffic signs, reminder notes, appointment cards etc.

**Why are visual supports so helpful for children with Autism?**

- They allow the child to **see what you mean**, rather than relying on their ability to understand what was said.
- Some visual supports, e.g., a calendar or timetable, can **help them understand the sequence of events** over the day or week and help them to predict what will happen next. This could certainly help to reduce anxiety.
- Visual supports **give the child more time to process incoming messages**. The visual remains in view whereas words ‘disappear’ as soon as they’re spoken.
- Visual supports can help them to be more **independent**, as they are less likely to rely on verbal prompts. The information is literally to hand.
- Visual supports can help to **motivate** the child as they build on their (visual) strengths—information is instantly grasped.
- Visual supports can provide the child with Autism a means of getting their own messages across, instantly.

One of the most common causes of challenging behaviour is the frustration experienced by people with Autism when they are not able to communicate what they need or want.

By providing them with appropriate visual supports, we can make it possible for them to get their messages across more effectively.
About Me Profile

The About Me profile aims to provide you with key information to help make joining your cricket team a success for the child with Autism. It can also be useful for when a new coach or volunteer joins the club so they have the same information.

Instructions

Download a template from our website and ask the parents if they are happy to complete an About Me profile for their child. Also check who they are happy for you to share this information with, for example, opposing coaches on game days.

Examples

Here is an example of how a completed About Me Profile might look:

- **My Communication**
  - I express myself by:
    - I am verbal but can find it hard to express myself when excited or talking to a new person
  - Help me understand by:
    - Giving me more time to process new information, repeating the instruction clearly and offering choices
  - I use the following visual supports:
    - I find schedules really helpful to know what’s happening next. I am good at reading so don’t need too many pictures
  - When I am stressed...
    - Might not be able to express myself verbally and might not be able to follow instructions
  - Help me calm down by:
    - Offering me a break and giving me choices for what I can do such as stretching, taking a walk, or having a snack

- **About Me**
  - My name is: Jessie Andrews
  - I live at: Scarborough
  - Important people in my life are:
    - My mum Anne, dad Phil, little brother Christopher and my auntie Paula
  - I am good at:
    - Drawing
    - Helping Other People
    - Throwing and Catching
  - I like:
    - Playing with our dog Ted
    - Going to the park with my brother
    - Pizza
  - I don’t like:
    - Making mistakes
    - When people are upset
    - Maths

- **More About Me**
  - What I like about cricket:
    - I like practicing with my team mates
  - What cricket skills I have:
    - I’m good at bowling and fielding
  - What cricket skills I’m learning:
    - Batting
  - What I don’t like about cricket:
    - Waiting for my turn to bat

Thank you for taking the time to get to know me!
Introduction to Coach & Club

The Introduction to Coach and Club profile is a good way to help the child know what to expect when they arrive for the first day at your cricket club and feel welcome in the team.

Instructions

Download a template from our website and send a completed profile to the parents at least 1 week before the start of the season.

Examples

Here is an example of how a completed Introduction to Coach & Club Profile might look:

---

**Introduction to Coach and Club**

Hi, my name is: Brad

and I am a coach at: Wembley Districts Junior Cricket Club

Our first day of practice will be held on the 10th November

We will start at 9:00am and finish at 1:00pm

You can bring with you:

- Hat
- Water Bottle

This is the grounds:

This is the club room:

---

The toilets are here:

The water fountain is here:

On the 10th November you will also meet the rest of the team and coaches. If you have a question, need some help or a break you can ask myself or one of the other coaches.

We will practice some cricket skills, such as:

- Bowling
- Batting
- Fielding

If you’re not sure about trying or playing a game that’s ok. You can speak to me or one of the coaches and you can watch instead.

We look forward to you joining the team!
First/Then Boards

First/Then Boards are used to show a short sequence of activities. They are designed to help follow directions and motivate them to either learn new tasks or complete challenging and less desirable tasks. The ‘First’ section contains the task that is new, less desirable or challenging. The ‘Then’ section contains a rewarding activity.

Instructions

The First/Then Board template is available to download on our website: www.autismincricket.com.au. Depending on their preferences and what they best understand, you can use words, photos, symbols or even pictures from magazines.

Pictures can be stuck onto the First/Then Board using blu-tack or velcro so they can be moved or taken on and off as needed. It is a good idea to laminate the First/Then Board for durability. You could also use a white board or laminate the template and write activities with a white board marker so they can be used again.

Examples

Here is an example of how a completed First/Then Board might look:
Reward Charts

Reward Charts are used to gradually work towards the child’s preferred reward, such as a favourite activity or object that relates to one of their special interests – something that is meaningful and motivating for them. You could also offer a choice of rewards for the child to pick from.

Also known as Token Charts or Tick Charts, Reward Charts allow you to positively reinforce your player’s behaviours more frequently and in a way that is visually supported and tangible for them.

Instructions
The example reward chart below is available as a downloadable template from our website: www.autismincricket.com.au

For this type of reward chart you can cut each of the tokens out and place a picture or word that represents the rewarding activity or item in the “I’m working for” box. You could also tick the boxes instead of using the tokens or change the number of boxes from 3 to 5 or even 10 as necessary.
Visual Schedules display a sequence of events within a certain timeframe – for example, a part of the day or week.

Instructions
You can find Visual Schedule templates to download on our website: www.autismincricket.com.au. Depending on their preferences and what they best understand, you can use words, photos, symbols or even pictures from magazines.

Pictures can be stuck onto the schedule using blu-tack or velcro so they can be moved or taken on and off as needed. It is a good idea to laminate the Visual Schedules for durability. You don’t have to use a printed schedule, you could use a white board or App instead.

Examples
Here are two examples of how a completed Visual Schedule might look:

A Visual Schedule made using symbols

A Visual Schedule made using words and a whiteboard
Choice Boards

Choice boards can be a helpful way for the child to make choices in a less structured time of the day. For example whilst they are waiting their turn to bat or when they need a sensory break. Place some motivating options on the choice board to encourage engagement and communication.

Instructions

Templates of the example choice boards below are available for download on our website www.autismincricket.com.au.

You can cut and blu tac or Velcro the options to the board or write some options in the boxes and the child can choose the option they want. It’s a good idea to have some blank boxes to create additional choices as necessary.
Social Stories

Social Stories are a specially formatted way of helping children with Autism understand a situation, skill or concept. The amount of text, level of language and related pictures used in a Social Story will depend on the child’s ability.

Instructions

We have a number of Social Stories for different situations available for download on our website. You can send these to families prior to games or practice sessions to prepare the child for what might happen or target a specific need.
Being a Good Sport

It’s important to be a good sport when playing cricket with other people.

If I try to be a good sport, the people I play with will feel happy. They may ask me to play more games with them. Then I’m a good sport.

I feel happy when I win a game. Other people also feel happy when they win a game.
I can try to say ‘good game, thanks for playing’ at the end of the game. Then I’m a good sport.

I can try to tell another person what they have done well. Then I’m a good sport.
I can tell my friend or an adult what I did well in the game. I’m trying to be a good sport.

If I try to be a good sport my parents and my coach will be proud of me.

References
Boardmaker™
The Picture Communications Symbols © 1987-2008 by Mayer-Johnson LLC. All Rights Reserved Worldwide. Used with permission. Boardmaker™ is a trademark of Mayer-Johnson LLC.

Carol Gray Social Stories™: www.carolgraysocialstories.com
Thank you

We’d like to extend a big THANK YOU to everyone who has been involved in this wonderful initiative!

A special thank you to:

- all those families and children with Autism for your love and commitment to inclusion in sports.
- Margie Oldfield, President of Wembley Districts Junior Cricket Club for your passion and drive to create inclusive communities
  - Adam Gilchrist for your commitment to children with Autism and their families
- all our partners in this program: The WACA and Wembley Districts Junior Cricket Club

This project is an NDIS Information, Linkages and Capacity Building (ILC) initiative.
About the Autism Association of Western Australia

The Autism Association of Western Australia is the largest specialist lifespan organisation providing services to people with an Autism Spectrum Disorder in Australia. Services are best practice and based on leading international peer-reviewed research in the field of Autism. The Autism Association has well established links both nationally and internationally.

Services include:

- Autism Advisors and family support for newly diagnosed children
- Trans-disciplinary Early Intervention Services
- School Support Service and Therapy Services for school age children
- Therapy and Clinical services for adults with ASD
- Community Living Support: Shared and Individual Homes
- Short Breaks for Children (Respite Service)
- Individual Support Programs tailored to individual-needs, including Post School Options
- Employment Placement and Support Program
- Professional Development and Training Services
- State-Wide Consultancy Service
- Family Support

Email: Autismincricket@autism.org.au
Visit: www.autismincricket.com.au
Follow us: www.facebook.com/AutismWesternAustralia
autism_association_wa

Contact Us: