



Value of team skills

Being part of a team in sport has shown to benefit people with Autism in different ways, especially in the area of social skills and friendships. The development of teamwork skills—valuable for everyone—is especially valuable for those with Autism for whom the idea of engaging collaboratively with other people doesn't come naturally. The prime attributes of a good friend are the same as for a team member (Attwood, 2007). You look out for them, help where you can—in friendship and in a team. Teamwork skills are also highly valued in employment. People with Autism who are in very successful employment are showing their ability to develop great skills, as valuable members of a workplace team.

Learning teamwork and cooperation

People with Autism might be regarded as self-centred. It's true that the term 'Autism' is derived from the Greek word 'autos', meaning self; but individuals with Autism are certainly not always about 'self'. Once comfortable in a new environment and familiar with the people around them, they may become very keen to engage with others in a friendly way. Unfortunately, as their approach may be unusual, or may sometimes be considered intrusive, others may be wary of their advances.

Being part of a sporting team provides a great opportunity for many (not only those who have Autism) to acquire the skills to engage with others in a way of understanding and cooperation toward a common goal.

Social Stories™

The Social Story concept, developed in the U.S. by Carol Gray (1990 – 1993), provides a way of presenting clear, concise information about specific social situations. The Social Story format may be adapted according to the ability of the reader. Even those unable to read may be helped with a Social Story with a few key words and pictures to show meaning. A collection of Social Stories can be a valuable asset for some people with Autism—they may enjoy reading them, especially alongside a friend or family member.

Prime elements of the format are:

- Information is presented visually (with or without pictures) and can be retained and accessible to reinforce concepts.
- The language is positive—does not dictate or criticise.
- The reader is always guided to take the perspective of other people. For example, a simple story for a child with Autism, to reinforce the idea of taking turns:

WE TAKE TURNS IN GAMES

Playing games with other people can be fun.

When we play some games, we all wait for our turn.

Sometimes I can go first. I like going first.

I can try to remember that other people like to go first too.

Sometimes I am waiting for everyone to have a go, and then it's my turn. This is OK!

In some games, we all have a go at being first.

Playing games with other people can be fun!

1/100

people in Australia receive a diagnosis of Autism.



More males than females are currently identified.

Adapted from: Autism, sport & physical activity (2016); The National Autistic Society (UK).



Following the rules and playing safe

Present the basic rules of any game visually, according to the person’s ability (with or without pictures). An element of why rules should be followed—player safety—could be reinforced with a simple script, such as:

SAFETY WHENEVER WE PLAY

When we play _____
I want to stay safe.

Everyone else wants to stay safe.

If we all follow the rules it will be safer for everyone.

I can try to remember the rules.

We all try to remember the rules.

It’s safer when we follow the rules.

We may have a good game!



TIP: When writing scripts, such as the above, maintain a positive tone without over-promising. For example, a person might fall and hurt themselves while playing—and they had been following the rules. The link between following the rules and not getting hurt can be made—but subtly and without certainty.

Perfectionism—the need to win!

Children with Autism, into adulthood, tend to be perfectionists. Sometimes, they may even refuse to embark on an activity, sensing they may not be able to complete it in time, or fearing they won’t be able to perform the task perfectly. Taking into account the characteristics of Autism, this is not surprising. They may be inclined to have a strong sense of right and wrong e.g., the right way of entering the room, without deviating. Changes present uncertainty. Losing a game may throw the person out of their comfort zone. “It’s wrong to lose!” Some preparation, along with a social story, could help ease the pain for those who simply cannot bear to lose.

WE PLAY A FRIENDLY GAME

We all want our team to win.

But it’s OK to lose.

Everyone wants their team to win.

Only one team can win.

I’m in a good team.

When my team loses we know the other team was very good.

We can say ‘Well done!’ and shake their hands.

They will like us for that.

Sometimes we win. Sometimes we lose.

We play a friendly game.

It’s all OK!

For further visuals and social stories with graphics, see: [Examples of visual supports & resources](#).

