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University College Cork, Ireland
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"Autism and Physical Activity"

What every parent needs to know



Written by
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Health Action Zone

Sports Studies & Physical Education
B.Ed. Sports Studies & Physical Education

Foreword

This handbook is the work of a collaboration between Health Action Zone, Health Service Executive, Cork and Sports Studies and Physical Education, School of Education, University College Cork, Ireland. The handbook has been created to provided parents with a snapshot guide to the role physical activity can have in the lives of children and adults with autism. The idea was born from my own experience as the mother of a young man with autism, who for many years has been actively engaged in quality physical activity. Over years and throughout our journey, parents frequently ask me why Tomas my son appears so happy and regulated. The secret is very simple: Tomas and I engage in moderate intensity physical activity on a daily basis. His greatest love is running and to date at the age of 17 years, he has completed two half marathons and several 10km runs. He is also a keen swimmer, plays tennis and cycles. The secret is to treat any physical activity as an integral part of your child's life at any age. Activity can be great fun, provide opportunities for sharing together and of course keep you and your child healthy. And as importantly, it doesn't have to cost anything. So go for it, get up and get active and above all enjoy.

Collaboration:

Since 2008, Health Action Zone, Health Service Executive, Cork and Sports Studies and Physical Education, School of Education, University College Cork have been actively working together to promote quality physical activity for all across the lifespan. This handbook is a product of such meaningful community/university collaboration.

My thanks in particular for this initiative to Stephen Murphy, Community Health Worker, Gurranabrahar, Cork.

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Introduction

Autism is described as a neurodevelopmental disorder, usually diagnosed in early childhood and presenting with an array of different issues and difficulties. A typical diagnosis begins with a child not speaking or having developed some speech and losing it. Coupled with this the child may begin to show issues around delayed comprehension and behaviour. The presentation of the condition varies from child to child but difficulties with communication, comprehension and social engagement are common to all.

Physical activity is an essential component of healthy living. It maintains a healthy heart, lungs, brain and kidneys while also ensuring we have a positive sense of wellbeing. For children and adults with autism and their families these are essential components of everyday life.

This handbook provides parents with an overview of autism, different types of methodologies that may be useful and pointers on how to encourage and maintain quality physical activity in their child's life.

We have developed the pack in such a way so as to develop not only an understanding of the different types of disability which we encounter everyday but also to develop an appreciation of their strength and determination as individuals.

SECTION 1:
Understanding Autism

Autism is described as neurodevelopmental disorder indicating that there is a difference or delay in how the child functions in everyday life. These differences vary with each child hence autism is often described as a "spectrum disorder". A child may be diagnosed as having mild, moderate, severe or profound autism and this affects the degree to which different aspects of the condition present.

The presentation usually includes:

- Delayed or no speech.
- Lack of comprehension or understanding.
- Delayed or limited eye contact.
- Difficulties with social interaction.
- Desire to be alone.
- Unusual play patterns.
- Difficulties with touch, smell, sounds, tastes, busy environments.
- Behaviour issues.
- Difficulties with writing, coordination and balance, catching, throwing, running.

Physical Activity and Autism

Physical Activity provides us with the tool to maintain a healthy lifestyle. It is essential for maintaining our physical health i.e. circulation, breathing, muscles, posture, balance and overall functioning. Physical activity helps release our “happy hormones” thus inducing a sense of wellbeing. This in turn helps us to stay “regulated” i.e. feeling in tune with our surroundings and increasing our ability to integrate with our family and friends. These are all issues that affect a child/adult with autism.

Further physical activity helps to promote our ability to run, catch and throw, while also dealing with issues of smells, sounds, eye contact and touch. To get these benefits it is essential to participate in physical activity on a daily basis for at least 30 to 50 min. Activity has to be of moderate intensity i.e. increase our heart rate, increase our breathing and involve the large muscles of the body.



Fundamental Movement Skills (FMS) and Autism

Fundamental movement skills are those skills of movement that ensure we develop and stay mobile and active i.e. running, walking, catching, throwing, jumping. The development of appropriate fundamental movement skills is essential to ensure we participate in quality physical activity and sport.

Delay in the development of fundamental movement skills is common for children and adults on the autistic spectrum. However, children and adults with autism can develop FMS skills with practice. As for any group, early intervention is key to addressing this.

It has also been established that programmes of FMS and physical activity can promote concentration, learning, social interaction and behaviour management for individuals with autism. Hence, practice of FMS needs to be incorporated into the child's everyday life.



SECTION 2: METHODOLOGIES

Approaches:
There are many methodologies for helping a child/adult with autism to participate in physical activity.

These include:

- TEACCH
- Applied Behaviour Analysis
- Pivotal Response Training

TEACCH

TEACCH provides a structured environment of visual schedules and work schedules with reduced distractions. Parents are actively involved at all times.

Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA)

ABA uses the idea of breaking the activity down, repeating the skill involved and reinforcing any success with a treat.

Pivotal Response Training (PRT)

PRT focuses on behaviours i.e. self regulation and motivation that when targeted produce widespread improvements and positives changes in other untargeted areas of functioning.

SECTION 3:
Preplanning your Child's Programme



Environment

Your Child

The Skill / Activity

Getting Started: Points to Consider

The purpose of physical activity is to ensure your child is healthy and happy and not based on a label of autism. Therefore the programme content should consider the interests, needs and support of your child.

Start a diary and record the following:

- Consider the individual interests and strengths that accommodates choice for your child.
- What activities are age appropriate.
- What peer interests are in the community
- What are your interests as parents
- Does the social and cognitive demands of the activity suit the comprehension and tolerance of your child.
- Consider how your child will cope with competition and co-operation.
- Consider if physical activity programme planning can become a continuous and ongoing process.
- Consider how your child will relate with different activities
- Consider how your child will relate to changing environments.
- Consider how your child will relate to changing personnel

SECTION 4:
Physical Activity Programme Planning

Different points need to be addressed when planning your child's programme.

These will be dealt with in detail in the next section.

Specific points to address:

- Individual likes and dislikes
- One to one ratio
- Varying the task
- Generalising the tasks learned
- Choice
- Structured environment
- Routines and transitions



1. Individual likes and dislikes

- Consider what your child likes and dislikes and make a list of each.
- Ensure the activities chosen are enjoyable, meaningful and likely to lead to success.
- Particular preferences should be accommodated i.e. favourite colour ball, texture, smells, environments.



2. One to One Ratio

- Plan to start with one to one interaction especially if your child has learning disability and/or behaviour issues.
- Use the “buddy system” i.e. a peer who will participate in a specific activity with your child, to promote peer interaction.
- Ensure “buddies” are know to the child and will participate voluntarily.
- Buddies can help promote interaction by engaging in the activity with your child and are usually at a similar level to promote eye contact.
- Buddies can also provide demonstrations and guidance but must know the skill or activity themselves first.
- Buddies can assist with physical and verbal prompts for different skills under supervision and guidance.

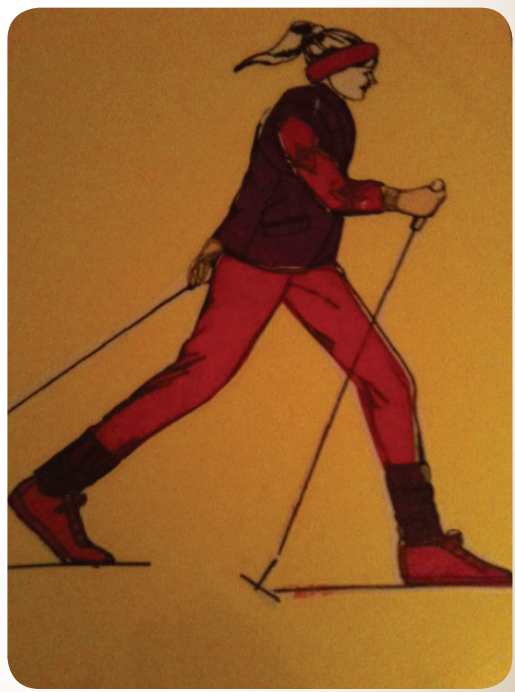


3. Skill Variation

- Involves teaching new skills i.e. rolling, catching, throwing,
- This should be interspersed with skills already mastered i.e. catching a ball is followed by kicking.
- Practice trials of new skills should also be included with those already learned.

Decreases aggression and self stimulation

Necessary for younger children and those with learning disabilities



4. Generalising the task learned

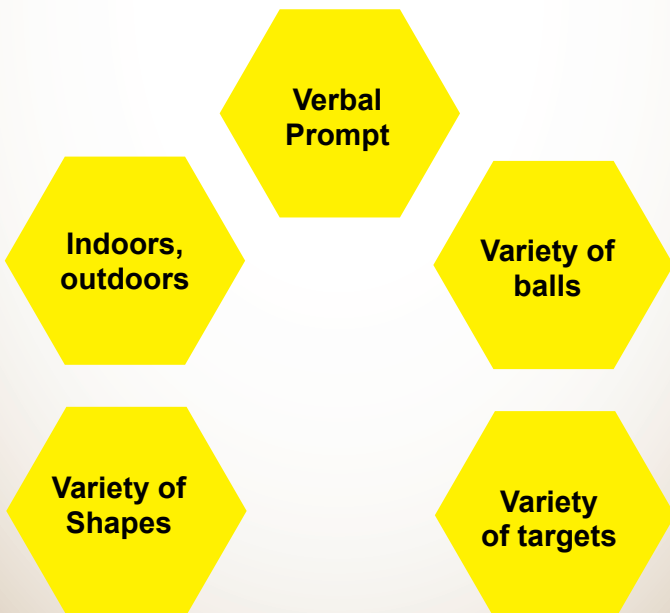
Generalising tasks or skills means practicing and using them in a variety of settings, with a variety of people and in different environments.

This requires:

Different cues:
Can be verbal, visual, physical cues.

Different materials:
Can be using different balls, cones, markers, bibs.

Different people:
Can be siblings, carers, family members, team mates, club mates



5. Choice

- Choice is integral to the success of the programme:
- Encourage your child to choose his/her own activity, decide the location and the materials he/she will use.
- Encourage self management: placing a star on the board with each success. Sorting the work schedule, setting up the activity.
- Encourage personal goal setting: Work from 10 laps to 12 laps, likewise with catches, throws, lengths.
- Assist to record scores

Use star board to document success



Encourage to count jumps on trampoline

6. Structured learning Environment

- Providing your child with a structured environment gives him/her a greater chance of success, engaging with the activity and others meaningfully. Clutter or disorganisation spells distraction.

- **Physical Structure:**
  Room/Hall Dividers
  Covered Windows
  "wait" chairs for programmes

- **Use of Schedules:**
  Sequence of Activities
  Indicate what is next
  Making transition from one skill to another

- **Work Systems:**
  Instruction in picture form
  Task broken into component part
  Each part forms part of the work system
  i.e. swimming: show swimsuit, entering the pool, submerging and swimming



7. Routines and Transitions

- Start and finish each activity in a consistent manner:
- Warm up: Chose an appropriate warm up and stretching routine for your child's age and the activity.
- Main activity: Ensure the main activity includes what you have promised. Your child needs consistency.
- Cool down: Use an appropriate cool down and stretching routine as per the warm up.
- Water stop: Include water stops after the warm up, through out the main activity and after the cool down. Hydration should be an integral part of your child's physical activity routine.
- Priming is useful: This is where an activity is introduced prior to its use i.e. in story, video or actual visit to site/park/pool.
- Talk about a new activity in transit and establish what your child thought of the new activity afterwards.
- Be enthusiastic, your child will pick up on any negativity you might have about specific activities especially if they involve high cost, extra driving and overall planning.

SECTION 4:
Maximising Skill Acquisition

To maximise the acquisition of new skills you need to establish a consistent routine and programme with your child including the following components.

- Allow time for familiarity
- Promote eye contact
- Use clear language
- Be aware of sensory preferences and over selectivity
- Balance social skills training and physical activity objectives
- Use applied behaviour analysis
- Use recording format
- Use of prompts
- Use of reinforcers
- Use of incidental teaching
- Use of pivotal response training

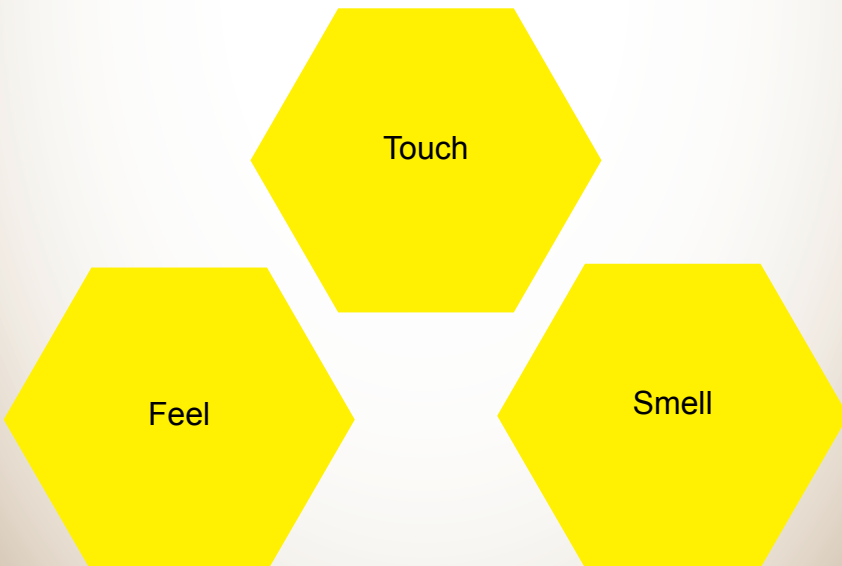


1. Allowing time for familiarity

- Take your child to the venue/hall/outdoor facility for your physical activity session several times prior to actually starting the session.
- When you arrive allow your child to walk around the venue, so that he/she may become familiar with the area prior to starting the activity.
- He/she may wish to touch the wall perimeter, examine the layout of the area.
- Be aware that he/she may need to become familiar with sounds which may echo, birds/animals in the outdoors, other people using the facility, smells associated with a new facility.
- He/she should be introduced to the toilet facilities and how to be safe in a public facility.
- Chat about new premises/facilities with enthusiasm at home.
- With permission, video the area so that he/she can revise in his/her own space.
- Staff should be introduced one by one. Allow your child to initiate contact when ready.
- If others are assisting you with your physical activity programme ensure they are familiar with your child's likes, dislikes, issues that may arise and safety.

Allowing time for familiarity: Case Scenario

We decided to take Tommy swimming. For the first week we went along for three days without ever suggesting he enter the actual pool. We would walk through the reception, introducing him to the staff by name. They were wonderful. Tommy, walked around the pool touching the walls and the floats. We sat at the side of the pool area, getting him used to the smell, the sounds and turning on and off the showers. There was a disabled changing room which meant he was safe in every way changing and we had privacy to assist him when he needed it. On the second week we took out the swimming gear and Tommy changed and sat on the poolside, dangling his feet in the water. Out of the blue he just slid into the water and we have never looked back. Its great, almost like he could sense he was in safe hands!

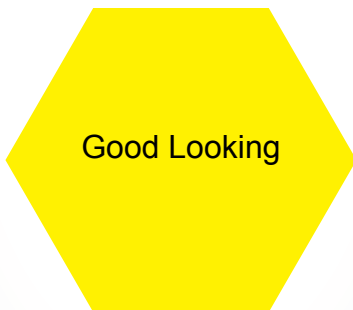


2. Promoting eye contact

- Introduce your child to other buddies, participants, famil y members participating in the activity as appropriate.
- Encourage your child to look at each individual prior to activity.
- Be at eye level with your child and encourage others to do likewise.
- Promote choice of activity and respond to your child's choice. This will provide more potential for positive eye contact and engagement.
- Allow your child space: do not try and force eye contact, he/she may need time to assimilate to new people, tasks and surrounds.
- Praise and reinforce positive eye contact i.e. "good looking".

Promoting eye contact: Case Scenario

I always ensured Michael looked at me when I spoke. When he indicated he wanted something I praised him saying “good looking”. In the early days, I would move in front of him. I insisted all our family and teachers did likewise. I also rewarded him for looking at new people when ever he met them. I know it probably sounded unusual to others but he seemed to understand and made an effort to make eye contact when he met people. I also insisted people got down to his level when they spoke to Michael. It became automatic with us all. After a while we didn’t need to do this as much as Michael was looking at us 90% of the time. Now sometimes if he is tired the eye contact is not as good.



3. Use clear language

- Use the appropriate communication modality for your child i.e. visual aids e.g. PECS, ipad, pictures and make sure to bring it to all activity sessions. Ensure coaches/teachers/ tutors are familiar with this aid.
- Use two/three word sentences during activities, depending on your child's comprehension and increase the word count accordingly.
- Gain your child's attention first by calling his/her name before activities.
- Do not give long instructions or complicated rules during activities/games time. Go through rules in a non game situation, until your child understands what is expected of him/her.
- Build on communication, comprehension and language at your child's pace.
- Provide videos of activities and clearly label these as they occur i.e. running, jumping etc.
- Build on extending sentences as tolerated. Allow time to observe, wait and listen to encourage your child to initiate language throughout an activity.

Use clear language: Case Scenario

Almost at the beginning, John was introduced to basic photographs. He was non verbal. We would show him a photo of a particular venue/activity e.g. beach and then make sure we took him there. The Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) was introduced when he was about 3 years old. We worked on it all the time and had soon graduated to two and three icons making a sentence. He took to it immediately and would walk up to me with the sentence strip all ready. He was also able to use a similar icon if the actual one wasn't there. I remember we were in a hotel and he realised there was a swimming pool downstairs. We didn't have an icon for pool so handed me the sentence strip with "I want bath" on it. I couldn't believe it. Each time he handed anyone the sentence strip, they read it out as a sentence. He had remained non verbal, until just before his 5th birthday, he handed me the strip with "I want ball" on it. I said the sentence and out of the blue he went "ball". This was one of the most incredible days of my life. I endeavoured then to persevere and now he can ask for whatever he wants. I encourage him with "use your sentences."



4. Balance social skills training

- Where physical activity is an important goal, social skills training can also take place.
- Start with one to one interaction and slowly increase to small groups as tolerated.
- Encourage your child to respond when addressed.
- Introduce your child to each participant and encourage to acknowledge others.
- Encourage turn taking in activities, “wait your turn”. Reward good waiting and good turn taking.
- Encourage to assist with setting up of activities with others and to tidy up after. This will go from parallel engagement where your child will concentrate on the chore to actually becoming aware of and engaging with buddies and team mates who can be encouraged to initiate engagement.
- After a session try and include a snack/drink at the end for all to ensure the social aspect of engagement is maximised.
- Encourage your child to draw a picture/ write a story of the activity. Build a book of buddies and events that he/she can return to.

Balance social skills training: Case Scenario

Tomas was always a runner: at the start, up at night running up and down the hall, you name it. I decided to turn it to our advantage and began to take him out for short walks and run home. The distance increased and he really seemed to like it. After a few months of just the two of us, I asked my friends if they would join us on Sunday mornings and they agreed. We soon had a routine of long Sunday runs, followed by breakfast together. In time Tomas was setting the table for the others. Funnily, when he ran his first half marathon with the group, one of the gang was struggling at the end to keep up. He told us to head on without him but Tomas refused to leave him, insisting we all stay together and finish together. Whatabout that for loyalty born from running.



Friends

Fun Runs

5. Use Applied Behaviour Analysis

- Applied behaviour analysis is commonly used as a teaching methodology/technique with children/adults on the spectrum.

- Break skills down into smaller parts as necessary i.e. extending your child's arm to catch a ball; throwing a ball a short distance and increase as success is achieved; use of a big ball reducing the size as progressing.

- Work one to one with your child until he/she achieves fluency i.e. can participate in the skill/activity without prompting.

- Reward/reinforce each success with a treat and/or praise.

- Use repetition until a skill is mastered.

- Ensure the environment is uncluttered when teaching new activities, keeping distractions to a minimum.

- Provide demonstrations and prompts as necessary.

Use Applied Behaviour Analysis

We were using applied behaviour analysis from when Aidan was 3 or 4 years old. We learned the basics through workshop training organised by an amazing dad of a young boy with autism. So when ever we wanted to teach Aidan a new skill, we would look up Cathering Maurice's book "Hear your Voice" and use it as our guide. We bought a timer and counted how often he did each skill or part of a skill in a minute and graphed our findings. Aidan learned to catch, throw, jump and run by breaking each of the skills down, working one to one with him and using constant repetition and reinforcement. We still use ABA 15 years later and it still works. You get used to breaking everything down and finally putting it all back together again.

Reinforce
The
Positive

1:1
Breaking Skills



6. Use Recording Format

- Begin by recording what your child can do i.e. catch, throw, run, jump.
- Quantify how much of each skill your child can do i.e. 10 throws to a hoop, 10 laps of the track.
- Is he/she using arms, trunk or legs with different activities.
- Document short term goals and build toward long term goals.
- Keep a daily/weekly diary of activities participated in: note details of your child, the activity and the environment.
- Record reaction to and engagement with others.
- Use a written diary, voice recorder, video with itouch, ipad, video recorder, pictures.
- Encourage your child to write up/draw/record his/her experiences also, these can be used to reinforce positive activities and promote recurrence.
- Keep a record of reinforcers and note if primary reinforcers i.e. food, objects are being replaced by secondary reinforcers i.e. praise.
- Record if your child has difficulties or appears unhappy with any particular activity. Note what happened before the activity, during the activity or after the activity.

Use Recording Format: Case Scenario

As a family we always videoed our kids playing, outdoors you know the usual. When Anne was diagnosed with autism, we were able to look back and see the delays that were there, especially in her walking, climbing the stairs. When we were encouraged to promote fundamental movement skill programmes we were told by the facilitator to video all activities and use them to set new targets. It was great advice, now we use the iphone all the time. Its non invasive, can pick up spontaneous activities, engagement and different successes. Anne likes looking at them too. Parents of children with autism should be encouraged to record how their children are doing in different settings; how they interact with others and if they do well.

Video, Itouch, ipad

Write, Draw

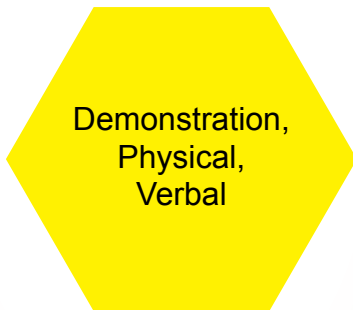


7. Use of prompts

- A prompt is used to elicit a response but should be faded when not needed.
- Verbal prompts can be used depending on your child's comprehension of language.
- Record prompts to help your child understand what comes next.
- Use visual prompts where possible i.e. pictures, schedules, video and the written word.
- Physical prompts can be used to give your child the "feel" for an activity e.g. extending your child's arm to catch a ball.
- Model prompting: Demonstrate an activity firstly in its entirety and then break it down and model in parts until your child correctly responds to each.
- Reinforce success but prepare to fade prompts as your child participates more.

Use of prompts: Case Scenario

I was working on teaching John how to swim. I used a visual schedule showing him what the day involved. I then had a work schedule to break down the actual skill of swimming from arriving at the pool to getting him into the water. I model prompted each part of the swim as the swim tutor taught me. I used to move John's arm through each of the skills, getting him used to the feel of it both in the water and out of it. The more he practiced the less prompts he needed both verbally and physically. To me prompting is essential for the child's success and its never too late to use them.



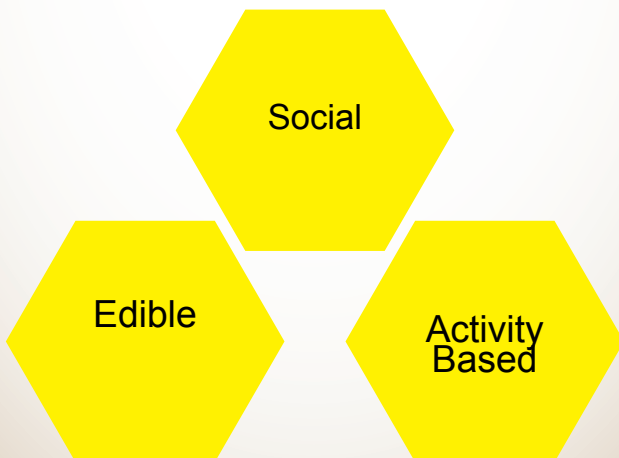
8. Use of Reinforcers

- Reinforcers can be important tools to promote your child to engage in physical activities so choose wisely.
- Ask your child!
- Consider your child's age, interests, likes and dislikes.
- Reinforcers can be material objects, activity based or social based.
- Always accompany reinforcers with praise.
- Know what reinforcers you will use before embarking on activities.
- Reinforcers should only be used if the target activity has been completed.
- At the beginning reinforcers should be immediate with delays between activity and reinforcement being introduced as tolerated.



Use of reinforcers: Case Scenario

Over the years I've seen Tomas reinforcers change from his favourite sweets when he was very young to going for a swim now he is older. I used to cut jelly tots into tiny pieces and when ever he achieved success at a task I'd reward him. Each time he got a sweet, I'd praise him being specific as to what he had succeeded at i.e. good throwing. He loved praise and would smile at any enthusiastic encouragement. Soon we were able to replace some of the jelly tots with praise. I also introduced a star board and encouraged Tomas to earn a star with each additional lap or jump he achieved. He loved this and it also helped his counting. His most recent reinforcer is his love of having a shower. He now looks to go running each day and on the way back he talks about his shower. I use it as a positive, healthy reinforcer. Parents should monitor what motivates their children and build on skill development with their individualised reinforcers. Make a list, watch what makes them light up. All children like tangible or edible reinforcers at the start but they will learn to work for praise especially as they get older.



9. Use of incidental teaching

- Learning in other areas can be incorporated into any physical activity programme.
- Encourage your child to monitor his or her own progress e.g. counting laps, successful catches, throws, jumps.
- Use the changing environment to comment on other aspects of daily life i.e. weather, animals/birds outdoors.
- Avail of opportunities to promote use of vocabulary, sentences, develop comprehension.
- Develop opportunities to engage in activities with others promoting social interaction
- Concepts of size, shape, rules can all be explored through activity.
- Body awareness can be developed: labelling body parts, changing direction, feeling the impact of activity on bones, joints and posture.



Use of incidental teaching: Case Scenario

We live by the ocean and I take Cathal walking there several days a week. While we're walking I choose different routes across rocks, grass and sand. This really helps his posture, coordination and balance. We chat about the weather, the number of people on the beach, comment on the different activities going on i.e. surfing, sailing, swimming. We talk about the Atlantic ocean and the countries it touches. I am constantly teaching and Cathal is constantly learning while engaging in activity, its our endless blackboard! Activity provides all round opportunity for incidental teaching.

See the stars

Count the cows



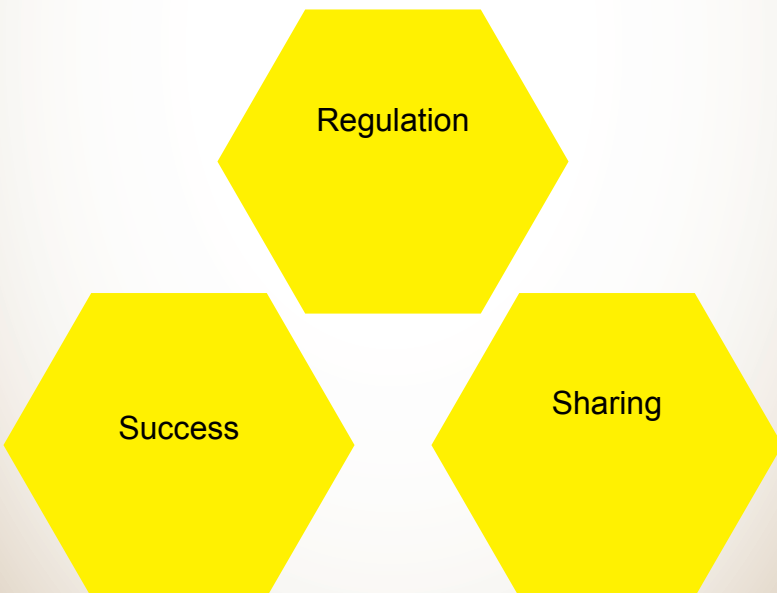
10. Use of pivotal response training

- Pivotal response training is useful tool to consider when engaging in activity.
- Pivotal Response Training considers those activities that will motivate your child to engage i.e. enjoys water so will run so he/she can have a bath/shower.
- PRT looks at activities that promotes your child to respond to multiple cues i.e. running outside promotes use of seeing, hearing, smell and instruction
- PRT aims to promote your child's social interaction i.e. catching and throwing games with a buddy.
- PRT seeks to promote self regulation for your child i.e. enhanced feeling of wellbeing and "happy in his/her own skin" after a game of football.



Use of pivotal response training: Case Scenario

I enrolled John in the Special Olympics athletics team. I wanted him to be a part of something that would involve activity and training. I also wanted to give him the chance to meet others. It has been incredible what we have all gotten from this. John is motivated to train, has friends, can tolerate crowds, noise and is much calmer and more regulated after training sessions. He and all of us has also had the experience of succeeding and winning gold.



11. Use of TEACCH components

- TEACCH uses a highly structured environment: distractions are reduced.
- The physical environment is actively organised i.e. an obstacle course is clearly set up with each area of equipment clearly marked.
- Skills are broken down into small parts i.e. start with dipping toes in the pool until child is comfortable to submerge with assistance.
- Visual schedules indicates what the activity session involves i.e. Drive to park, kick football, have picnic, return home.
- Work schedules further breaks this down i.e. take ball from car, place on the ground, swing with right foot, kick ball, score a goal.
- Routine is integral to the success of the programme i.e. be consistent when planning and delivering a programme

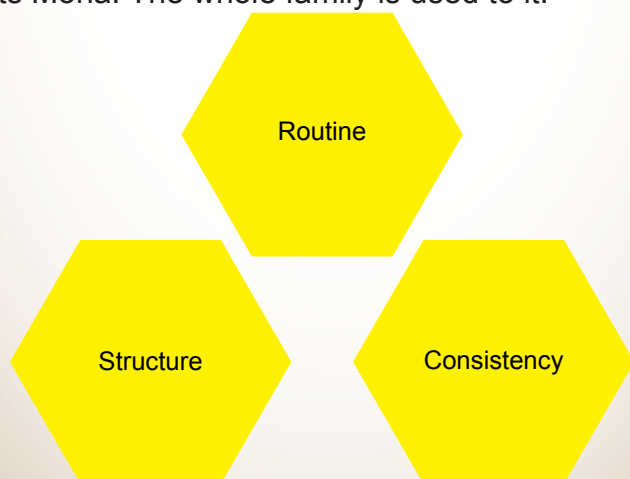




Use of TEACCH components: Case Scenario

W e are using TEACCH for the past 3 years with Mona. Firstly we have our daily visual schedule that's like a timetable. Activity of some kind is a part of every day and Mona chooses which activity she wants for each day and we put the icon on the board. Once the activity is completed she takes the icon off the board.

We use the work schedule to break down any new activity. This summer Mona joined a surf camp for children with autism. We did a work schedule of pictures starting with the beach, the surf board, the wet suit, surfers, carrying the board to the water, lying on the board with support and coming in from the water. We also used the iphone to video Mona on the board and she can look back at it after each session. We did warm up sessions beforehand, jogging up and down the beach and then doing the stretches. We finished off with a similar cooldown and kept the routine consistent. The structure and routine of TEACCH really suits Mona. The whole family is used to it.



Section 6:
Specific Activity Areas

Here are some specific activity areas that can be explored and developed. Access support from relevant bodies as listed in the resource section to give your child the option to try out different activities with appropriate support.

- Athletics
- Aquatics
- Adventure Activities
- Games
- Dance
- Gymnastics
- Health Related Activity



Athletics

- This includes jumping, running and throwing.
- Each skill can be introduced individually and new skills introduced as each is developing.
- Each skill can be broken down into smaller parts and each part practiced both on a one to one basis and then in small group settings.
- Acquisition of these skills can then be incorporated into game situations as tolerated.
- Personal goals should be set for and with your child to aim for specific improvement with each session.
- Generalisation of each skill can be practised in different settings, with a variety of sizes, shapes and textures of equipment i.e. balls, rackets, running track, treadmill.
- Be aware of challenging environments both indoors and outdoors in relation to multi sensory overload.
  Note if your child is blocking his ears, closing his eyes.

Sample Programme: Running

- Ensure your child has appropriate clothing and running shoes to start.
- Bring a water bottle and some fruit for afters.
- Start with a warm up routine: walking or gently jogging followed by stretches.
- Encourage your child to run freely in a safe, open space i.e. running track, park.
- Accompany him/her unhindered.
- Introduce specific cues one by one i.e. “head up, shoulders back, back straight, moving our arms”. Accompany each with a full demonstration. New cues can be introduced as each one is mastered.
- Vary the pace with “run slow, run fast” cues.
- Use your runs to comment on the weather, environment, count laps, choose a running buddy and set targets for the next session.
- Use reinforcers to reward success, introducing praise with each achievement.
- Cool down with a walk and repeat stretches.

Aquatics

- Create a visual schedule of the day and a work schedule of the swim session.
- Bring your child to the pool before starting a swim programme to familiarise him/her with the environment: sounds, smell, changing facility, swim wear and staff.
- If feasible video the environment and preplay before starting the programme.
- Halliwick methology provides one to one input in a group setting and is appropriate for a child with ASD to become water tolerant and water safe. Source a Halliwick instructor if possible.
- Accompany your child into the pool or arrange for a significant other to do so. Never leave your child alone in the water.
- Use the “Disabled persons” changing facility if less threatening than open changing rooms.
- Do a warm up routine of stretches.
- Bring your child’s communication aid poolside and interpret as necessary for the instructor.
- Allow your child to progress through the entry and participation of pool activities at his/her pace.
- Finish with cooldown stretches.
- Reward success after each session.

Adventure Activities

- Adventure activities can include orienteering, team challenges and campcraft.
- Introduce your child to the environment pre session i.e. picnic in the area.
- Only undertake adventure activities in a safe environment with appropriate support.
- Be aware of changing environments outdoors and video examples of each to preplay to your child.
- Always ensure you have appropriate equipment.
- Remember your child's communication modality.
- These are ideal settings for team work and social engagement, choose buddies wisely.
- Use the setting for incidental teaching and PRT.
- Video new achievements, labelling accordingly.
- Maintain the routine of warm up and cooldown and frequent fluid intake throughout.

Games

- Games provide your child with an opportunity to develop tactical awareness and understand the principles of play.
- This may prove a challenging aspect of development but is worth exploring.
- Choose games that your child shows an interest in.
- Speak with the coach and establish if he/she is in a position to accommodate your child with your support.
- Participate in the warm up and as much of the session as is feasible.
- Encourage the coach/team to give your child a chance to participate in a game situation.
- Monitor success and where difficulties arise.
- Liaise with the coach after each session for feedback and to plan the next session.
- This is a good environment to help your child to develop physically, socially and personally.
- Coaches in games settings need to know you are ready & willing to assist and support them accommodate your child.
- Contact the National Governing Body of the sport your child is interested in for advice on joining.

Dance

- Dance provides your child with an opportunity to develop aesthetically and artistically.
- It provides a non threatening environment for personal, social and physical engagement.
- Encourage your child to participate and imitate basic actions.
- Observe changes in the quality of movement with practice.
- Encourage your child to choose and listen to different types of music.
- Promote participation in dance in different settings.
- Encourage your child to watch music videos.
- If attending a dance class/studio discuss your child's participation and progress with the teacher.
- Warm up and cool down at each dance session.
- Reinforce success in developing participation and movement quality.

Gymnastics

- Gymnastics provides your child with aesthetic experience and opportunity for physical and social development.
- Your child will also develop movement vocabulary and body awareness.
- Liaise with the gymnastics tutor pre and post sessions.
- Reinforce progress and success with sessions.



Health Related Activity

- Health related activity emphasises participation in physical activity for physical wellbeing, fitness, training and lifelong engagement.
- Your child will develop the habit of physical activity and gain the health related benefits.
- This list is inclusive of all types of activity that can be home, school and community based.
- Your child should be encouraged to participate in daily physical activity for health and wellbeing.
- Incidental opportunities for physical activity should be encouraged i.e. cutting the lawn, carrying shopping, assisting in farm based activities.
- Teenagers with autism should be encouraged to take responsibility for their own health related activity.
- Source user friendly gymnasiums with individualised, supervised programmes.

Conclusion

This handbook sought to provide parents with a guide to promoting quality physical activity for their children with autism. Quality physical activity promotes and maintains personal, social, emotional, physical and cognitive wellbeing. It enhances self regulation, motivation and independence for individuals with autism. It also provides opportunities for family engagement and seeing beyond a label of autism. As indicated at the outset many of these opportunities are free but need commitment to get established and maintained.

Ensure quality physical activity is a way of life for both you and your child and enjoy the benefits for you all.



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Resources

www.specialolympics.ie:
Access local sports clubs and support in your area.

www.caraapacentre.ie:
link to Sports Inclusion Disability Officers in your area.

www.irishsportscouncil.ie:
Access local Sports Partnerships and National Governing Bodies of Sport for different sports in your area.

www.autismspeaks.org



Health Action Zone

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