

A Blueprint for Building Quality Participation in Sport for Children and Youth with Autism Spectrum Disorder



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Canadian Disability Participation Project

Le projet canadien sur la participation sociale
des personnes en situation de handicap



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PREFACE

OVERVIEW

The Blueprint for Building Quality Participation in Sport for Children and Youth with Autism Spectrum Disorder is adapted from the Canadian Disability Participation Project's Blueprint for Building Quality Participation in Sport for Children, Youth, and Adults with a Disability. The resource is tailored to recreational sport and physical activity programs for children and youth with autism spectrum disorder and provides strategies for building quality participation in such programs. The research evidence supporting this Blueprint is presented in this scientific paper: Streach, E., Bruno, N., & Latimer-Cheung, A. E. (2022). Investigating strategies used to foster quality participation in recreational sport programs for children with autism spectrum disorder and their perceived importance. *Adapted Physical Activity Quarterly*, 40(1), 86–104.

This Blueprint also used data from:

Bruno, N., Richardson, A., Kauffeldt, K. D., Tomasone, J. R., Arbour-Nicotopoulos, K., & Latimer-Cheung, A. E. (2022). Exploring experiential elements, strategies and outcomes of quality participation for children with intellectual and developmental disabilities: A systematic scoping review. *Journal of Applied Research in Intellectual Disabilities*, 35(3), 691–718.

FUNDING

This work was supported by a Partnership Grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (grant number 895-2013-1021) for the Canadian Disability Participation Project (www.cdpp.ca).

CITATION

Canadian Disability Participation Project (2020). Blueprint for Building Quality Participation in Sport for Children and Youth with Autism Spectrum Disorder. Queen's University, Kingston, ON.

WEBSITE

This report is available online at www.cdpp.ca

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We would like to thank the Ausome Ottawa staff, volunteers, and parents/caregivers who provided feedback for this Blueprint. Additionally, we would like to thank Canucks Autism for inspiring the idea of tailoring the Blueprint to children with ASD.

PUBLICATION DATA

April 2023 - version 2.0

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KEY CONCEPTS IN QUALITY PARTICIPATION

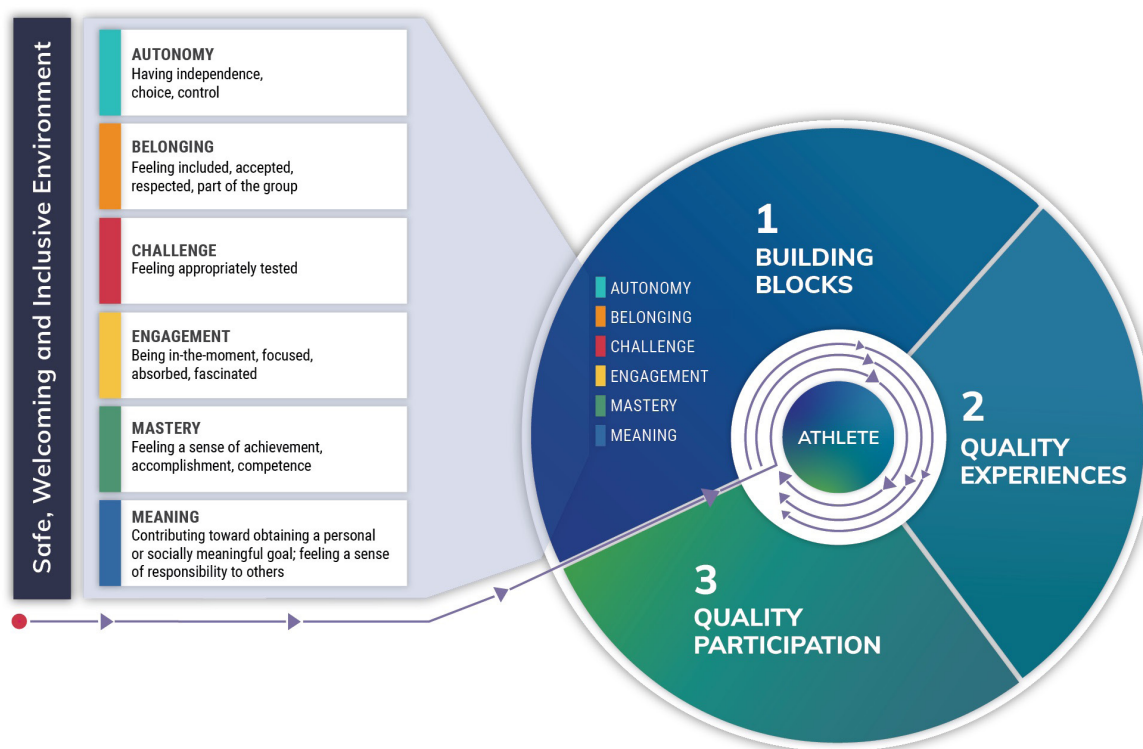
Introduction

This Blueprint has been tailored to recreational sport programs for children and youth with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). The purpose of this document is to introduce key concepts that underpin quality participation to coaches and volunteers to better facilitate quality sport experiences for athletes.

What is quality participation?

Quality participation is achieved when athletes with a disability view their involvement in sport as satisfying and enjoyable, and experience outcomes that they consider important.

How to build quality participation?



Quality experience is built from six building blocks: autonomy, belonging, challenge, engagement, mastery, and meaning. In turn, these six building blocks must be supported with a proper foundation consisting of physical, program, and social environments that are safe, welcoming, and inclusive. Repeated and sustained exposure to these building blocks can lead to quality experiences, which should contribute to lasting quality participation.

QUICK GUIDE TO THE BUILDING BLOCKS

Prior to using tools for building quality participation, organizations and program leaders must have a thorough understanding of the **building blocks** that foster quality participation.

The quick guide includes a case study example that demonstrates a program accomplishing the respective building block.

AUTONOMY

Having independence, choice, control

BELONGING

Feeling included, accepted, respected, part of the group

CHALLENGE

Feeling appropriately tested

ENGAGEMENT

Being in-the-moment, focused, absorbed, fascinated

MASTERY

Feeling a sense of achievement, accomplishment, competence

MEANING

Contributing toward obtaining a personal or socially meaningful goal; feeling a sense of responsibility to others



AUTONOMY

AUTONOMY

Having independence,
choice, control

Autonomy can be defined as an athlete having independence, choice, and/or control. This building block refers to the ability of the athlete to make their own choices in regard to their participation in sport.

Case Study Example

Alex is an 8-year-old who joined a soccer program for youth with ASD 4 years ago, in hopes of playing with peers in an enjoyable sports environment. Prior to the session, Alex's program leader allowed them to choose a warm-up activity from two options. By offering options and the opportunity to choose the first drill for that session, Alex is able to feel in control and thus, experienced *autonomy* while participating.



BELONGING

BELONGING

Feeling included, accepted, respected, part of the group

Belonging can be defined as participants experiencing a sense of connection, acceptance, and inclusion during the sport experience.

Case Study Example

Jordan is an 11-year-old who has been participating in a sports program for youth with ASD for 2 years. Jordan values the community that has been built and the friends made throughout the time in this program. Jordan hopes to create the same feelings for new athletes joining the program. Jordan has taken on a role of “peer mentor,” where the focus is helping new athletes feel comfortable in the space and feel like they are a part of the group. Jordan aims to create *belonging* – a community feeling within the program – by making new athletes feel like they are welcome and included in the environment, just how Jordan feels.



CHALLENGE

CHALLENGE
Feeling appropriately tested

Challenge can be defined as feeling appropriately tested. Challenge exists when activities are appropriately tailored to the skill level or ability of each participant, while offering opportunities to realistically push skill boundaries to improve.

Case Study Example

Riley is an 8-year-old who recently joined a sports program tailored to children with ASD. Riley's coach monitors their skill progression during the various drills and has given them the opportunity to partner up when they feel ready. Recognizing that Riley is new to the sport sessions, Riley's coach offered them the opportunity to challenge themselves alongside more experienced athletes, thus pushing their limits in an appropriate manner.



ENGAGEMENT

ENGAGEMENT

Being in-the-moment, focused, absorbed, fascinated

Engagement can be defined as feeling fully involved in the activity as they are participating. If an athlete is engaged, they are more motivated to participate.

Case Study Example

Taylor is a 9-year-old who is sensitive to high-stimulus environments. To ensure Taylor feels welcomed, safe, and ready to participate, their program leader reduced distractions by putting away equipment not being used and avoiding music during the warm-up. Taylor's program leader was able to create a space that helped them feel more focused and absorbed while participating and as such, encouraged Taylor's *engagement*.



MASTERY

MASTERY

Feeling a sense of achievement, accomplishment, competence

Mastery can be defined as experiencing achievement and feeling confident in one's skills and abilities.

Case Study Example

Bailey is a 7-year-old who loses interest in activities if they cannot succeed in the first 3 tries. During the shooting competition, Bailey misses the net and starts to get frustrated with their team. Bailey's program leader tells them to look at the target and shows them what part of the foot to use when kicking. Within the next few tries and some verbal praise from Bailey's program leader, they are able to score a goal. Through words of encouragement and teaching cues, Bailey successfully accomplished the task and feels a sense of *mastery* and competence.



MEANING

MEANING

Contributing toward obtaining a personal or socially meaningful goal; feeling a sense of responsibility to others

Meaning can be defined as making each and every sport experience matter. Athletes experience meaning if they feel that their participation is helping them to achieve a valued goal.

Case Study Example

Dylan is a 12-year-old who wants to spend more time improving their throwing skills. Dylan's program leader made sure to ask athletes their goals at the beginning of the program and consistently revisited these each week. By doing so, Dylan's program leader fostered *meaning* because they recognized the importance of having athletes feel as though they were fulfilling goals that were valuable to them.



KEY CONSIDERATIONS FOR QUALITY PARTICIPATION

Quality experience is **individual and dynamic**:

- Individuals will place different values on these key building blocks – the way to create a quality experience for one athlete will often not be exactly the same as for another athlete.
- The value athletes place on each building block may change over time – for example, a sense of belonging may be important at the start of an athlete's participation, but challenge and meaning might be the most important later on.
- There is no need to incorporate all of the building blocks. Ideally, all six building blocks would be used to meet the needs of all athletes. However, it likely is more effective to do a good job implementing the buildings blocks that are most important to the majority of the athletes in the program, as opposed to doing a poor job incorporating all of them.

Safe, Welcoming and Inclusive Environment

AUTONOMY

Having independence, choice, control

BELONGING

Feeling included, accepted, respected, part of the group

CHALLENGE

Feeling appropriately tested

ENGAGEMENT

Being in-the-moment, focused, absorbed, fascinated

MASTERY

Feeling a sense of achievement, accomplishment, competence

MEANING

Contributing toward obtaining a personal or socially meaningful goal; feeling a sense of responsibility to others

QUALITY PARTICIPATION PRIORITIES

To better understand quality participation priorities for youth athletes with ASD, we asked Ausome Ottawa staff, volunteers, and parents/caregivers to rank the importance of each of the six building blocks.

BUILDING BLOCK RANKING

BELONGING

Feeling included, accepted, respected, part of the group

MASTERY

Feeling a sense of achievement, accomplishment, competence

CHALLENGE

Feeling appropriately tested

MEANING

Contributing toward obtaining a personal or socially meaningful goal; feeling a sense of responsibility to others

AUTONOMY

Having independence, choice, control

ENGAGEMENT

Being in-the-moment, focused, absorbed, facinated

Belonging, mastery, and challenge were consistently ranked as top priorities. Conversely, **meaning, engagement, and autonomy** were less of a priority. Rankings fluctuated for autonomy and engagement between staff, parents, and volunteers (parents ranked engagement higher than autonomy, while staff and volunteers prioritized autonomy).

USING PRIORITIES TO ENHANCE QUALITY PARTICIPATION

Based on the priority feedback, it is especially important to ensure that at minimum the top three building blocks – **belonging, mastery, and challenge** – are fostered within sport programming for children or youth with ASD.

As previously stated, there is no need to incorporate all six of the building blocks, although, it may be ideal for meeting the needs of all participants as building block priorities may vary across athletes and time. Hence, effectively targeting **meaning, autonomy, and engagement** – in addition to belonging, mastery, and challenge – can further enhance quality programming by striving beyond the minimum priority needs for athletes.

Recognizing the building block ranks provided above, it is still critical to consider your specific program's priorities and ask for your athletes' input to understand why they are participating. **Understanding your program's and athlete's unique needs will help you identify which building blocks you should focus on and, ultimately, prioritize your strategies.**



QUALITY PARTICIPATION STRATEGY GUIDE

ORGANIZED BY BUILDINGS BLOCKS

We gathered 22 unique strategies from the child and youth ASD literature¹ and surveying with Ausome Ottawa staff. These strategies can be used to ensure programs offer **safe, welcoming, and inclusive environments** to support the six building blocks and, ultimately, foster quality sport experiences and participation.

The **Quality Participation Strategy Guide** presented in the following pages links the six building blocks with a list of safe, welcoming, and inclusive strategies for sports and exercise programs for children or youth with ASD.

Key Considerations:

- Utilize strategies that align with your program's priorities and athlete's needs.
- Implementing one strategy could influence numerous building blocks of quality participation.
- It may not be possible or necessary to use all the strategies, however, implementing more strategies will likely increase the potential for creating a quality experience.



¹Bruno, N., Richardson, A., Kauffeldt, K. D., Tomasone, J. R., Arbour-Nicitopoulos, K., & Latimer-Cheung, A. E. (2022). Exploring experiential elements, strategies and outcomes of quality participation for children with intellectual and developmental disabilities: A systematic scoping review. *Journal of Applied Research in Intellectual Disabilities*, 35(3), 691–718.

BELONGING

STRATEGY	ENVIRONMENT	EXAMPLES
<p>Build a Team Atmosphere</p> <p>- Encourage teamwork, collaboration, and communication through group games and team cheers. Explain how to work as a team and ensure all athletes have opportunities to contribute to the team's success. Create an inclusive environment and demonstrate an awareness of bullying to help athletes feel safe and respected.</p>	<p>Physical</p>	<p>Ensure each session is held in a consistent setting so athletes will be familiar and comfortable with the environment.</p> <p>Add signage, program organizers should feel confident in the space they are using. This helps athletes feel like they are in the right place and they belong.</p> <p>Ensure the space is safe and dedicated to your program. Audit the space for flight risks, danger zones, and weapons to promote athlete safety.</p>
	<p>Program</p>	<p>Provide t-shirts/uniforms so athletes have a sense of being part of a team.</p> <p>Have group huddles/cheers at the beginning and end of every session.</p> <p>Have athletes, staff, and volunteers wear name tags to help form connections.</p> <p>If necessary, allow family or friends to partake in an activity until the athlete feels they belong.</p> <p>Involve athletes in programming, so they have a voice in session activities.</p> <p>Structure each session in a similar manner so athletes know what to expect.</p>
	<p>Social - Instructor</p>	<p>Greet athletes upon arrival to ensure they feel welcome.</p> <p>Make sure all athletes feel equal, by creating challenges based on individual needs, without making them stand out.</p>
	<p>Social - Peer</p>	<p>Encourage support from friends and peers.</p>
	<p>Social - Family</p>	<p>Encourage support from family.</p>
	<p>Social - General</p>	<p>Make sure athletes feel their safety and dignity is a priority.</p> <p>Promote an inclusive environment and implement strategies to help athletes identify and deal with negative social situations.</p> <p>Teach inclusion to help ensure athletes are accepted and accepting of others.</p>
<p>Create Personal Connections</p> <p>- Get to know athletes on a more personal level and look for opportunities to make them feel comfortable. Strategically pair volunteers and athletes and keep pairings consistent whenever possible so athletes can form stronger connections. Promote genuine interactions between volunteers/staff and participants, and validate opinions and feelings expressed by athletes.</p>	<p>Program</p>	<p>Introduce athletes to their paired volunteers immediately upon arrival to allow time for them to get to know one another before the session begins.</p> <p>Assign volunteer pairings strategically to help meet individual athlete's needs.</p> <p>Whenever possible, ensure that there is at least one staff member or volunteer working with each athlete.</p> <p>Keep consistent volunteer-athlete pairings between sessions, whenever possible, to increase their opportunity to make strong connections.</p>
	<p>Social - Instructor</p>	<p>Learn about the athlete, including their name, their preferred method of communication, physical abilities, skills, interests, dislikes, reinforcers, and needs. This can help you to make the athlete feel more comfortable in a program setting.</p> <p>When getting to know an athlete, follow their lead or motivation even if it doesn't match the setting, as this can help build trust and create a connection with the athlete, especially if they are struggling to integrate into a group setting.</p> <p>Look for opportunities to help, rather than relying on the athlete to ask for help.</p> <p>Call athletes and volunteers by name to create a feeling of inclusion and connection.</p> <p>Start conversations with athletes about their interests and validate those interests. This will help build connections and trust with athletes.</p> <p>Allow athletes to get to know their coach/volunteer on a more personal level.</p>
	<p>Social - Family</p>	<p>Consult parents/guardians about athletes, and whenever possible, have parents complete a profile/detailed registration form for their child before beginning the program (i.e. information about preferred method of communication, physical abilities, skills, interests, dislikes, reinforcers, and needs).</p>

BELONGING CONTINUED

STRATEGY	ENVIRONMENT	EXAMPLES
Promote Appropriate Socialization -Model team spirit and encourage prosocial behaviour between athletes. Pair athletes with similar abilities and communication styles to help foster connections between peers. Teach athletes how to appropriately react in difficult situations and play group games or volunteer vs. athlete scrimmages where athletes are encouraged to work together and communicate.	Program	Offer opportunities for athletes to be involved in larger group games where they work as a team with other athletes.
	Social - Instructor	Prepare athletes for potential tense situations (i.e. game where there will be a loser), by explaining how to be a good sport and how to appropriately react if their team loses (i.e. shaking hands, congratulating the other team). Give positive feedback when athletes demonstrate respectful and inclusive behaviour towards peers. Encourage athletes to cheer on or speak small words of encouragement to their peers.
	Social – Peer	Teach and promote appropriate conversation between peers. Pair athletes with similar skill sets/interests for group work to help foster peer connections. Whenever possible, play a volunteer vs. athlete scrimmage so athletes have the opportunity to be part of a team with peers and work together towards a common goal (athletes can come up with a team name and cheer, etc.). If the group dynamic causes anxiety, prepare a 1:1 teaching setting for that athlete. Encourage them to join the group with their support person. Foster connections between peers by starting conversations about similar interests. When appropriate, allow athletes to mentor their peers through leading activities or demonstrating skills.
Use Positive Reinforcement -Provide athletes with frequent, varied, and positive feedback for all successes and attempts. Reward engaged behaviours and offer rewards for attending sessions. Provide constructive feedback when athletes are learning new skills. Encourage athletes to persevere at difficult tasks, show responsibility to others, and be proud of their own accomplishments.	Program	Consider implementing a reward system, where athletes are provided with a prize/sticker/reinforcer for attending and participating in sessions. Present the rewards in a manner that is comfortable for the athlete (round of applause by peers, silent thumbs up, etc.). Athletes can then collect rewards from each session.
	Social - Instructor	Provide frequent encouragement and positive feedback as athletes progress through activities. Whenever possible, provide positive feedback from multiple staff or volunteers, so athletes have varied encouragement. Provide the feedback favoured by the athlete (i.e. high fives, tickles, piggy-back rides, verbal praise, clapping etc.)
Consult Parents/Guardians -Ask parents/guardians to complete a profile about their athlete before the program. Check in with parents/guardians during and after sessions to ensure athletes are supported and ask about other ways to make the athlete feel more comfortable.	Program	When designing programs or planning sessions, consult parents for feedback on how to best support and encourage their children.
	Social – Family	Gather important information from parents/guardians regarding athlete interests, dislikes, reinforcers, needs, and communication styles. Discuss behavioural needs and support strategies to ensure the athlete can be successful in the program environment. Discuss ways to better support athletes during and after sessions with parents/guardians.
Demonstrate Interpersonal Skills -Ensure staff/volunteers have the skills necessary to facilitate a warm, welcoming, and caring environment for athletes. Staff/volunteers should understand their role to facilitate friendly peer interactions and pair similar athletes to foster connections.	Social - Instructor	Ensure staff are knowledgeable about ASD so they can better support athletes. Create a welcoming and caring environment for athletes, by building trust and showing interest in the athletes. Show interest in the activity at hand and be involved in the session. Treat athletes with respect and dignity and demonstrate positive attitudes towards all athlete abilities. Use an appropriate level of guidance, so athletes have both independence and support. Be flexible and adapt to different situations when they arise. Show understanding for behavioural challenges and deal with difficult situations appropriately.
	Social – Peer	Encourage staff to look for opportunities to introduce peers and encourage athletes to ask each other questions and speak about their interests. Get to know athletes to help create pairings based on similar interests and skill sets.

MASTERY

STRATEGY	ENVIRONMENT	EXAMPLES
Create an Environment that Promotes Success -Train volunteers and staff to simplify and extend activities based on athlete's needs/abilities so everyone can experience success. Provide clear, consistent instructions and maintain a similar routine between sessions so athletes feel comfortable and are willing to attempt new things.	Program	Maintain a consistent and welcoming program structure so athletes are more comfortable and open to trying new skills (i.e. signing in, same staff/volunteers each session, welcoming athletes upon arrival, starting with a group cheer). Ensure there are enough staff to provide a low ratio program, as this will allow athletes to have individual opportunities for success.
	Social - Instructor	Ensure staff are knowledgeable about athlete abilities and know how to both simplify and extend activities so all athletes can experience success. Deliver instructions in a clear and consistent manner to avoid confusion and distraction. Provide visual and verbal guidance when demonstrating an activity so athletes see and hear what is expected. Break down activity instructions into multiple steps so the activity is easier to follow. Promote individual success and avoid comparisons between athletes.
Adapt to the Athlete's Level -Ensure all athletes can experience success by adapting the environment and extending or simplifying activities to meet individual skill levels/abilities. Learn about the athlete to help them overcome obstacles and meet individual goals. Use the appropriate level of prompting to meet athlete's needs while encouraging progress and independence.	Physical	Provide different equipment to ensure all athletes can be successful in completing a skill (i.e. shooting a ball into a hula-hoop instead of a basketball net, providing a large ball that will be easier to kick, etc.) Allow athletes to complete activities in an environment that suits their needs (i.e. offering the option to spend some time in a quiet hallway)
	Program	Allow athletes to spend some time each session on a preferred activity where they can experience success.
	Social - Instructor	Provide athletes with systematic and scaffolded support and prompting so they can become more independent over time. Break down complex skills into steps when teaching athletes. This can also help isolate and correct errors. Provide visual prompts to help guide athletes. Get to know the athlete's interests, abilities, strengths, and weaknesses to help them overcome obstacles. Adapt activities so individual athletes can have success right away and progress the difficulty of the activity at the pace of the athlete. Incorporate athlete's interests into teaching strategies to promote engagement and understanding of instructions.
Use Positive Reinforcement -Provide athletes with frequent, varied, and positive feedback for all successes and attempts. Reward engaged behaviours and offer rewards for attending sessions. Provide constructive feedback when athletes are learning new skills. Encourage athletes to persevere at difficult tasks, show responsibility to others, and be proud of their own accomplishments.	Program	Offer a small reward (i.e. sticker, ribbon) for attending sessions and completing a full program. Athletes can then collect the rewards so they can look back and be proud of their achievements.
	Social - Instructor	Provide immediate, constructive, and positive feedback as parts of a skill are learned, not just when the whole skill is mastered. Encourage and reward all attempts at a skill. Use the type of feedback preferred by the athlete (i.e. high fives, time doing preferred activity, verbal praise, a break, etc.) Vary the type of praise used during a session to maintain athlete interest. Demonstrate enthusiasm about athlete accomplishments and be genuine in your excitement. Let the athlete know they are doing well to help instill a sense of self-efficacy.
Promote Goal Setting -Help athletes to set individualized and attainable goals so athletes have frequent opportunities for success. Encourage athletes to challenge themselves to work towards their goals and celebrate/praise all achievements. Modify goals/ create new goals as athlete progresses and help athletes expand their comfort zone.	Program	Create opportunities for skills to be repeated and practiced which may help athletes reach their goals.
	Social - Instructor	Assist athletes in setting individualized, simple, and attainable goals. Get to know an athlete's abilities, interests, strengths, and weaknesses to help them overcome obstacles.
	Social - Family	Communicate with parents/guardians and family about individual social goals that may be incorporated into sessions. Consult with parents and family to better understand the athlete's challenges to help guide goal setting.
Promote Teamwork - Encourage group work when problem solving and strategically pair children of similar abilities and communication styles to promote group success.	Program	Encourage teamwork and problem solving with peers by playing larger group games.
	Social - Peer	Pair children of similar abilities to encourage teamwork and group success.

CHALLENGE

STRATEGY	ENVIRONMENT	EXAMPLES
<p>Adapt to the Athlete's Level -Ensure all athletes can experience success by adapting the environment and extending or simplifying activities to meet individual skill levels/abilities. Learn about the athlete to help them overcome obstacles and meet individual goals. Use the appropriate level of prompting to meet athlete's needs while encouraging progress and independence.</p>	Physical	Provide enough space for athletes to try activities off to the side or privately with support, if they are initially uncomfortable performing a skill in a group setting.
	Program	Design activities in a way that different athletes can be working on the same skill while allowing for adaptations to meet individual needs.
	Social - Instructor	Simplify and/or extend activities to meet individual athlete's needs. Get to know the comfort level of each athlete so you can help athletes extend beyond their comfort zone. Add in a more difficult component at each step of learning the skill, so the athlete can be challenged through the learning process (i.e. when learning to dribble a basketball, have the athlete try to dribble with their non-dominant hand as well). Personalize activities so they reflect the athlete's interests. Promote goal setting, where athletes can work towards meeting attainable and individualized goals. Use visual aids and graphic organizers as needed to best support athletes. Create an expectation that athletes try all activities at least once, and then make appropriate modifications to the activity, as necessary.
	Social – Peer	Group athletes of similar abilities so they can challenge each other as they progress.
<p>Progress with the Athlete -Progress the difficulty of tasks and build on skills at the pace of the individual athlete.</p>	Social - Instructor	Progress the difficulty of activities based on the pace of individual athletes, so they can have both success and opportunities to improve. As an athlete becomes more independent with a skill, add new elements of difficulty so they are still progressing. Ensure athlete abilities are not underestimated, and activities are instead adapted to the current ability of the athlete and modified as needed with time.
<p>Use Positive Reinforcement -Provide athletes with frequent, varied, and positive feedback for all successes and attempts. Reward engaged behaviours and offer rewards for attending sessions. Provide constructive feedback when athletes are learning new skills. Encourage athletes to persevere at difficult tasks, show responsibility to others, and be proud of their own accomplishments.</p>	Social - Instructor	Make difficult activities more enticing by sandwiching them between more rewarding and preferred activities. Use the type of feedback that is most preferred by the athlete (i.e. high fives, social praise, piggy-back rides, time for preferred activity, break etc.) Encourage and reward all attempts at skills, even if they are unsuccessful. Provide motivation to help athletes try all skills at least once. Help athletes to challenge themselves and encourage perseverance or determined behaviours. Give constructive feedback to help athletes overcome obstacles. Help instill a sense of self-efficacy and confidence by providing frequent positive feedback to athletes.
<p>Create Personalized Activities -Embed athletes' interests into the environment or activities, so challenging tasks are more fun and appealing. Create playful competition between participants and volunteers/staff to encourage athletes to try new skills.</p>	Program	Incorporate athlete interests into session activities (i.e. using characters and settings from video games, books, movies, toys).
	Social - Instructor	Learn individual athlete's interests so interests can be embedded into the activity, providing a more motivating environment for the athlete. Create playful competitions between staff/volunteers and athletes, where athletes have the opportunity to showcase skills and try new skills.
<p>Offer Different Program Levels -Allow athletes to register for different levels of a program (i.e. Beginner/Intermediate/Advanced) so athletes can progress from learning basic skills to more complicated or advanced skills. Have athletes register for a program level based on skill/ability, instead of age alone.</p>	Program	Whenever possible, offer multiple program levels to allow athletes to participate with others of a similar skill set. As athletes progress, provide the opportunity to be placed in more advanced programs. Divide program levels based on athlete ability and not always just age.

MEANING

STRATEGY	ENVIRONMENT	EXAMPLES
Create Personal Connections - Get to know athletes on a more personal level and look for opportunities to make them feel comfortable. Strategically pair volunteers and athletes and keep pairings consistent whenever possible so athletes can form stronger connections. Promote genuine interactions between volunteers/ staff and participants, and validate opinions and feelings expressed by athletes.	Program	Whenever possible, maintain consistent volunteer/staff and athlete pairings each week, so athletes have a greater opportunity to form a strong connection.
	Social - Instructor	Learn about the athlete (interests, abilities, communication style, dislikes etc.) to help ensure interactions with athletes are genuine. When appropriate, encourage staff to share personal stories about the important role of sport or physical activity in their life. Give athletes the chance to express opinions and views and be sure to validate their feelings.
Use Positive Reinforcement -Provide athletes with frequent, varied, and positive feedback for all successes and attempts. Reward engaged behaviours and offer rewards for attending sessions. Provide constructive feedback when athletes are learning new skills. Encourage athletes to persevere at difficult tasks, show responsibility to others, and be proud of their own accomplishments.	Social - Instructor	Encourage athletes to step outside their comfort zone and provide positive feedback for all attempts. Ensure athletes focus on their own successes, and do not compare themselves to their peers. Help instill a sense of competence in athletes and show them they are valuable through encouragement and positive feedback.
	Social – Peer	Provide positive reinforcement and feedback when athletes show responsibility to others and team spirit. This is often more difficult for children with ASD, so rewarding prosocial and compassionate behaviour is important.
Promote Goal Setting -Help athletes to set individualized and attainable goals so athletes have frequent opportunities for success. Encourage athletes to challenge themselves to work towards their goals and celebrate/praise all achievements. Modify goals/ create new goals as athlete progresses and help athletes expand their comfort zone.	Social - Instructor	Help athletes set individualized, attainable goals both specific to the session and for the duration of the program/season (i.e. short and long-term goals). When possible, help athletes set goals that will encourage self-growth.
Offer Opportunities to Help -If athletes are ready to take on additional responsibilities, offer opportunities to help during sessions and take on new roles.	Program	Offer opportunities for athletes to demonstrate drills, set up equipment, lead cheers, become an ‘assistant coach’, teach their volunteer a new skill/ activity, create a new drill, etc.
	Social - Instructor	Get to know athletes and gauge if they are ready to take on additional responsibilities in sessions.
	Social – Peer	Offer opportunities for athletes to become buddies or peer mentors for other athletes.
Promote Appropriate Socialization -Model team spirit and encourage prosocial behaviour between athletes. Pair athletes with similar abilities and communication styles to help foster connections between peers. Teach athletes how to appropriately react in difficult situations and play group games or volunteer vs. athlete scrimmages where athletes are encouraged to work together and communicate.	Social - Instructor	Get to know individual athletes to help pair athletes with peers of similar abilities, interests, or communication styles. Model team spirit to help teach athletes how to interact with teammates and work as a team.
	Social – Peer	Match athletes and help foster connections between peers. Play larger group games or scrimmages where athletes are given the opportunity to work as a team with peers. This could sometimes involve volunteer/staff vs. athlete games where the athletes can create a team name and cheer to bond with their peers. Encourage athletes to cheer on their peers and positively reinforce prosocial behaviour.
Build a Team Atmosphere - Encourage teamwork, collaboration, and communication through group games and team cheers. Explain how to work as a team and ensure all athletes have opportunities to contribute to the team’s success. Create an inclusive environment and demonstrate an awareness of bullying to help athletes feel safe and respected.	Social - Instructor	Recognize individual contributions in group games, and ensure all athletes have opportunities to contribute to the team’s success. If applicable, remind athletes about the importance of assists and that when a goal is scored, it is the team that scored. Take the time to teach athletes about playing games as a team, demonstrating how to work together and communicate with each other. Have team cheers at the beginning and end of each session and encourage all participants to join in.
Extend the Value of Activities -Make activities more meaningful by incorporating life skills into tasks and explain the value/ importance behind completing different activities.	Program	Explain the value and importance between session activities. When possible, incorporate life skills into session activities.
	Social - Instructor	Try to make activities more personally meaningful for individual athletes by relating them to interests and goals.

AUTONOMY

STRATEGY	ENVIRONMENT	EXAMPLES
<p>Provide Autonomy Supportive Instruction -Ensure staff and volunteers are trained/skilled at providing individual support and feedback so athletes can be successful and make independent choices in a low ratio environment. Maintain consistent routines between sessions to reduce anxiety and provide the appropriate level of prompting so the athlete can become more independent in skills and routines.</p>	<p>Program</p>	<p>Ensure there are enough staff/volunteers to provide a low-ratio environment. This will allow athletes to make individual choices within a group setting. Provide training for staff and volunteers to teach how to provide an appropriate level of support, where athletes can gain independence and experience success. Repeat activities between sessions so athletes know what to expect each week. Maintain a consistent routine each session so as athletes become comfortable in the program environment, they can progress through sessions with minimal prompting (i.e. know where to put their water bottle, know where to wait for instructions etc.) Use appropriate program signage and wayfinding so athletes can more independently attend programming.</p>
	<p>Social - Instructor</p>	<p>Help athletes set attainable, individualized goals. Give positive feedback to athletes when they achieve their goals. Provide physical, visual, and gestural prompts and use props to help guide athletes through activities (but only provide the level of prompting that is needed by the individual athlete). Allow athletes to first attempt a skill on their own, before providing support. Create a visual schedule with athletes so they know what to expect and have a greater sense of control.</p>
<p>Consult Athletes -Ask athletes about their interests and embed their interests into activities when possible. Ensure athletes can spend some time on preferred skills and interests and help athletes to set individualized goals.</p>	<p>Program</p>	<p>Consult athletes when designing programs or choosing activities for a session, and show their input is valued.</p>
	<p>Social - Instructor</p>	<p>When a new athlete attends a session, follow the athlete's lead, and learn about what the athlete enjoys before asking them to try an activity. Gauge or ask athletes which skill in a given activity they enjoy the most. Whenever possible, allow the athlete to spend more time on their preferred skill. Encourage athletes to set individualized goals, and always check if there is something specific they want to work on.</p>
<p>Provide Choices and Options -Allow athletes to choose between options for activities.</p>	<p>Physical</p>	<p>Provide athletes with choices between what type of equipment they want to use (i.e. red ball or green ball, etc.), while still maintaining control of the overall goal.</p>
	<p>Program</p>	<p>Whenever possible, embed flexibility into programming, where athletes have some choice in which activities they complete, the order of activities, and/or the length and timing of breaks.</p>
	<p>Social - Instructor</p>	<p>Whenever possible, always offer individual athletes the choice between two options. This helps athletes feel a sense of control. Ensure athletes know that they can always take a break. If an athlete does not want to participate in a certain activity, offer options of similar activities that target the same skill.</p>
	<p>Social – Peer</p>	<p>Allow athletes to choose a peer with whom they would like to complete an activity.</p>
<p>Compromise with Athletes -Work with athletes to find a balance, where they complete designated activities for the session but can also choose their own activities to complete/ take a break. Use first/then prompting to make compromises. Allow athletes to share ideas about activities and methods of learning different skills.</p>	<p>Social - Instructor</p>	<p>If athletes are interested in a non-activity related task, use first/then prompting to attempt to engage them in the current task, and then allowing them some time to complete their preferred activity (i.e. first bounce the ball 5 times, then play with the stuffed animal). Always honour athlete requests for breaks, even if they are outside designated break times. Work with the athlete to personalize activities or make them more enjoyable, especially if the athlete is feeling unmotivated with a certain task. Allow athletes to be creative. For example, if an athlete wants to attempt a skill in a different way than is being taught, allow them to try, before gently guiding them back to the task at hand.</p>

ENGAGEMENT

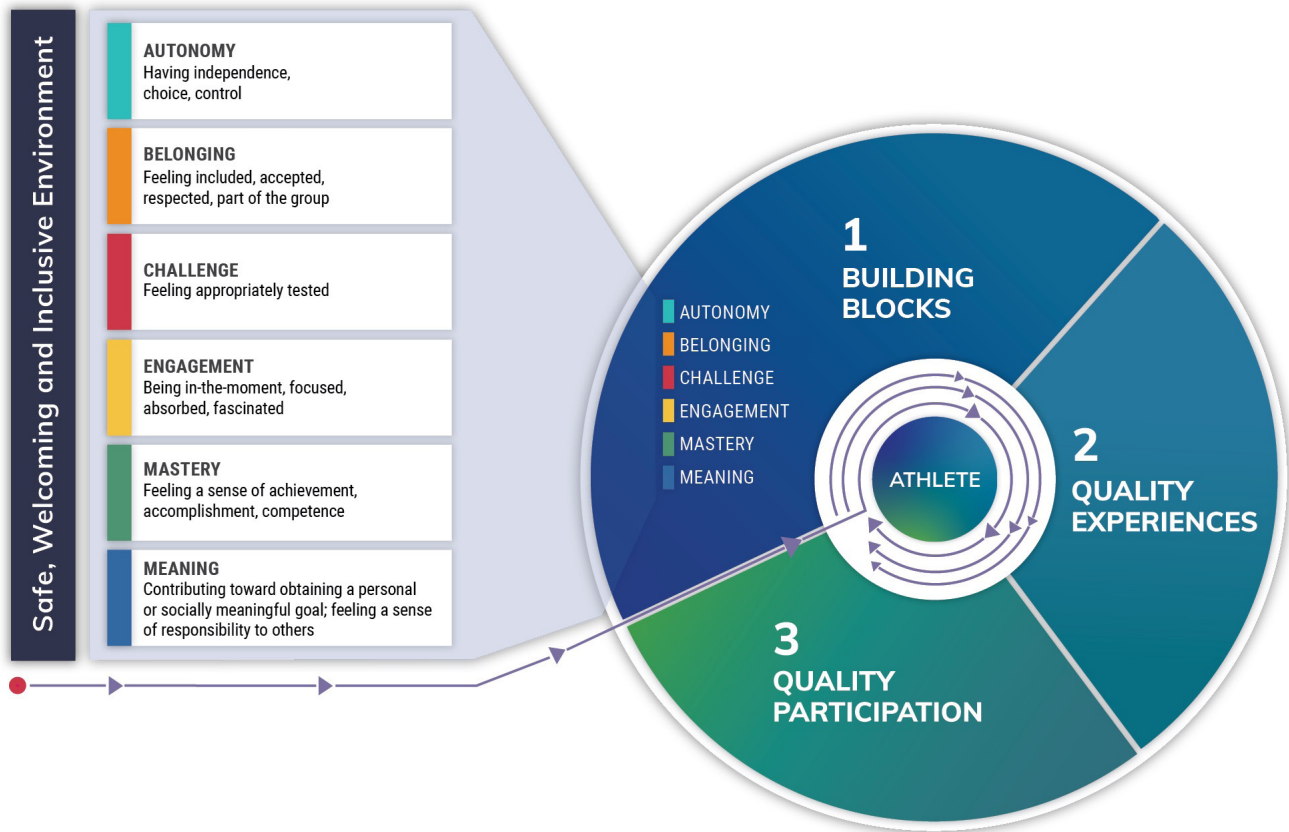
STRATEGY	ENVIRONMENT	EXAMPLES
Create a Consistent and Encouraging Program - Maintain a consistent routine and schedule for each session so athletes know what to expect and will be less distracted. Use visuals/targets/timers/props to reduce athlete anxiety/distractibility and ensure there are enough staff/volunteers every session to engage participants appropriately.	Physical	Keep all equipment in the same location every session. Only make equipment that will be used during the session available to athletes. Remove visual, physical, and auditory distractions from the environment whenever possible, so athletes can more easily stay focused during the session. Use appropriate program signage and wayfinding so athletes can engage with all parts of the programming. Audit the space for potential flight risks, as this can help promote continued focus and engagement in the session.
	Program	Ensure there is an appropriate ratio of staff and volunteers so they can encourage/engage/redirect individual athletes as needed. Maintain a consistent schedule and routine for each session. This way athletes know what to expect and will be less distracted. Repeat activities in subsequent sessions so there will be some familiarity for the athlete. Ensure activities are an appropriate length. If activities last too long, there is a greater chance that athletes will become bored or distracted and disengage from the activity at hand.
	Social - Instructor	Use visuals and/or timers to help athletes focus on the task at hand and prevent distractibility (i.e. targets on the floor, props).
Create Personalized Activities -Embed athletes' interests into the environment or activities, so challenging tasks are more fun and appealing. Create playful competition between participants and volunteers/staff to encourage athletes to try new skills.	Social - Instructor	Get to know individual athlete's interests so you can pair the environment or activity with their interests (i.e. working with favourite staff member, using characters/themes they enjoy in activities, promoting group interactions about interests). Ask athletes if they have ideas to make activities more interesting or fun.
Adapt to the Athlete's Level -Ensure all athletes can experience success by adapting the environment and extending or simplifying activities to meet individual skill levels/abilities. Learn about the athlete to help them overcome obstacles and meet individual goals. Use the appropriate level of prompting to meet athlete's needs while encouraging progress and independence.	Physical	Provide different equipment if needed to ensure all athletes can be successful in completing a skill (i.e. shooting a ball into a hula-hoop instead of a basketball net, providing a large ball that will be easier to kick, etc.). Success may help encourage future attempts and repeated participation in the activity. Allow athletes to complete activities in an environment that suits their needs (i.e. offering the option to spend some time in a quiet hallway). Finding an environment that best suits the athlete may help them to remain focused.
	Social - Instructor	Ensure the activity is at an appropriate difficulty for each individual level (simplify or extend it if needed). This will help maintain athlete engagement in the task at hand. Create opportunities for success in each activity, as success may help motivate the athlete to continue to participate.
Use Positive Reinforcement -Provide athletes with frequent, varied, and positive feedback for all successes and attempts. Reward engaged behaviours and offer rewards for attending sessions. Provide constructive feedback when athletes are learning new skills. Encourage athletes to persevere at difficult tasks, show responsibility to others, and be proud of their own accomplishments.	Social - Instructor	Encourage athletes to stay motivated by cheering them on and supporting them. Athletes will feel more confident and at ease if they feel supported. Positively reinforce engaged behaviours (i.e. when the athletes are fully focused on the activity) with the type of praise preferred by the athlete (i.e. high fives, clapping, preferred activity, break etc.) Vary the feedback used to help maintain participant interest.
	Social - Family	Ask parents/guardians to bring reinforcing items (i.e. favourite toy, book) to sessions, so it can be used as a reward to help motivate athletes. Use first/then statements to help engage athletes in the activity at hand (i.e. first we will shoot baskets, then we will read the book).
Use Strategic Instruction Delivery - Ensure activities are simple enough to be easily understood and use straight-forward, short instructions for activities. Model the steps of the activity so athletes know what is expected and check athlete understanding of activity instructions. Before beginning instructions, ask athletes to	Program	Ensure activities are simple and straight-forward, so athletes can easily understand what is expected.
	Social - Instructors	Keep instructions short and clear. Model the steps of an activity to help athletes understand the tasks. Provide an appropriate level of prompting to help individual athletes through activities, but only prompt when athletes need support. After delivering instructions, ask athletes questions to check if they understood the information presented and what is expected. Staff/

ENGAGEMENT CONTINUED

STRATEGY	ENVIRONMENT	EXAMPLES
complete simple tasks so they are attending to the information.		volunteers can ask athletes to show/teach you how to do the activity. Before delivering instructions, ask the athlete to do simple tasks (i.e. touch your nose, clap once, etc.) so athletes are attending to the information that follows. Explain the rationale and purpose behind completing the activity.
Add Novelty and Variance - Add new activities/games into sessions to maintain athlete interest and run activities for an appropriate length of time so athletes do not disengage. Consult participants and parents for ideas to make activities more interesting.	Program	Add new activities and games into sessions to maintain athlete interest. Ensure activities are an appropriate length, so there is variance within a session.
	Social - Instructors	Whenever possible, involve volunteers and staff in activities. Athletes can draw on the enthusiasm of the staff and volunteers and engage further with the activity. Play volunteer/staff vs. athlete scrimmages to allow athletes to practice the skill in a new environment.
	Social - Family	Consult parents/guardians for ideas on programming and how to best engage their athletes.



BUILD A PLAN TO ENHANCE PROGRAM QUALITY



SWOT Analysis:

Strengths: Which building blocks are your program's strength areas? How well do these strengths align with your program priorities?

Weaknesses: Which building blocks align with your program priorities but are not strength areas in your program currently?

Opportunities: Identify up to three building blocks your program could focus on to improve athletes' quality participation. Identify strategies your program could incorporate to support these building blocks. Jot down some notes about how these strategies can be implemented into your program. Consider if there are any upcoming opportunities for implementing these strategies such as a training camp, funding opportunities, etc.

Threats: Identify any barriers or threats you foresee impeding the implementation of your strategies to target these building blocks.