



CONFIDENTLY COACHING ASD CHILDREN

Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) children are often associated with being challenging, but with understanding, coaches can have the patience, knowledge and strategies to cater for and provide effective coaching practices just as they do for non ASD children. This disorder cannot be cured, but with support and appropriate coaching strategies in place, it can be managed effectively and provide additional satisfaction and reward to coaching.

POTENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF ASD CHILDREN

Communication

- Limited understanding and/or use of body language
- Interpret instructions or speech literally
- May not understand verbal or written language
- Monotonous tone – lacks expression and pauses
- Limited control of voice volume

Social interactions

- Inappropriate methods to seek social interaction
- Limited ability to initiate and maintain social interaction
- Lacks humour or displays inappropriate humour
- Cannot imagine what other people are thinking
- Say things “the way they are”

Behaviour

- Lacks awareness of self in space and surroundings
- Has tantrums as a way of expressing confusion and frustration
- Has sensory sensitivity to sounds, colours, tastes, touch, smells, textures, temperature, light
- Has obsessions with topics, objects, places, people or activities
- May have body movements such as hand flapping, toe walking, fidgeting or clumsiness

Strengths

- A good memory
- Very knowledgeable on particular topics
- Follows rules
- Follows routines and set patterns
- Stays on task if motivated and has clear direction

Other Characteristics of children with ASD

- Children with Autism have limited organisational skills.
- Children with Autism have limited abstract and conceptual thinking.
- Misbehaviour is not a personal attack (read difficulties in ‘behaviour’ above)



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PRACTICAL COACHING STRATEGIES

- Many children with autism are visual thinkers. Try using images, pictures or visual demonstrations to compliment any verbal instructions I.e. show them or draw in the sand
- Avoid long verbal instructions. Keep them concise, precise and clear (this will benefit communication in general)
- Keep a consistent routine – set start and finish times reduces anxiety – this is good practice for all children
- Many autistic children get fixated on one topic or object. Acknowledging and including this rather than avoiding it can help to motivate these children
- Some nonverbal children cannot process visual and auditory input at the same time. They are mono-channel. Try to focus on one type of input at a time, when using multiple forms. I.e. show, then speak
- Coaching generalisation is often a problem for children with autism. To coach a child the principle of paddling onto a wave, it must be explained and done on many different waves (using above methods)
- Children with ASD work well with consistency. Repeating instructions (whatever the format) will aid these children
- Technology – try to adapt your coaching strategies to incorporate digital components – children with ASD often engage well with technology, so YouTube clips related to the learning task will improve outcomes. This can double as a way for parents to be involved at home
- Provide a positive and supportive environment to allow children to feel confident
- Time for use of calming and concentration tools specific to children, if necessary
- Some examples include taking 3 deep breathes, focus on one sound, holding a yoga pose
- Since these individuals experience various communication difficulties, do not rely on children with autism to relay important messages to their parents about events, date changes, or passing on their progress



Using visual demonstrations alongside verbal and on beach demonstrations can have great results when coaching ASD kids