

Volunteer Tips



What to expect when working with individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder

All individuals with autism spectrum disorder are unique. They present varying degrees of challenges as well as a variety of strengths. The important thing is to be patient, understanding, and positive in your interactions. The ultimate goal is for the individual to have FUN!

Challenges you might see:

- Need for consistency and routine, structure, and clear expectations
- Difficulty with transitions (moving from one activity to another, arrival/departure to golf clinic)
- Communication challenges, both expressive and receptive, difficulty understanding idioms, sarcasm, jokes. Challenge understanding nonverbal communication (body language, facial expressions)
- Sensory needs: hypo or hyper sensitive to: sounds (planes flying above, loud clapping/cheering), temperature (may easily over heat), touch (may be tactile defensive), auditory processing speed
- Easily distracted: short attention span, hyperactivity, poor concentration due to visual and auditory distractions, or internal thoughts/self-talk.
- Self- stimulatory behaviors; repetitive body movements (hand flapping, rocking, etc.), repetitive vocalizations (repeating the same things over and over, babbling type repetitive sounds),
- Social challenges: inconsistent eye contact, non-responsive to name, unaware of personal space, difficulty with perspective taking and understanding emotions.
- Motivation: may need extrinsic motivators to participate and follow directions (could involve just praise, high five, etc.)
- Difficulty problem solving, planning ahead, understanding others' actions, and impulse control.
- Lack of awareness for danger (may swing the golf club around) and may wander off (many love water and may be driven to run off.

Special abilities you may see:

- May have hidden potential with activities involving pattern recognition, logical reasoning, and irregularities in data
- Ability to retain concrete concepts, rules, sequences, and patterns
- Strong visual skills
- Computer and technology skills
- Intense concentration or focus, especially on a preferred activity or area of interest
- Vast knowledge of specific areas of interests (e g. sports cars, planes, solar system, etc.)
- Provide a fresh & useful way of seeing the world

Tips for Working with Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

Support areas of weakness and maximize areas of strength



- Model: people with ASD are usually visual learners therefore SHOW instead of TELL. Use “my turn””your turn”.
- Grab their attention before giving an instruction. Get down at their eye level, show them the golf club, ball, etc. at eye level, then give the instruction coupled with gestures to increase understanding.
- Motivate by using special interests in your instruction. For example, if they child is fixated on Spiderman, use Spiderman as part of your instruction or game.
- Motivate by using high levels of praise. Celebrate even the smallest accomplishments.
- Provide time structure: organize your time together so the child knows the sequence of activities/stations over the course of the session
- If needed, use exaggerated facial expressions, body language, and tone of voice to support receptive understanding of your message/instruction
- Avoid asking questions to minimize the amount of verbal demands on the child.
- Allow for processing time by slowing down and waiting for a response. Remember, the child has to process what you said, organize their thoughts, think of the best response, and then execute the motor response. Be patient and use wait time.
- Remember that these individuals thrive on routines and repetitive behaviors because the expectations are clear and therefore, the fear of the unknown is eliminated.
- Allow for a short break, and then return to play/instruction.
- Give a “warning” before transitioning to another activity. For example : One more ball toss into the target and then we will move to the putting station.
- Use clear, concise instructions. Make sure to grab the individual’s attention before giving the direction.
- Redirect self-stimulatory behavior by engaging them in another activity. For example: You are at the putting station and the child begins flapping their arms. Ask them to hold the extra golf balls while you show them how to grip the golf club.

Things to Avoid

- perfume
- velcro if person is sensitive to the sound or feel
- cellphones ringing (turn off or on vibrate)
- peanuts
- pictures or video to maintain confidentiality

References

Autism Speaks: www.autismspeaks.org

National Autism Center: www.nationalautismcenter.org

“Accessible Golf: Making It A Game Fore All”: Ladies Professional Golf Association with Dane Drane and Martin Block (2006)