

## Facilitating Physically Active Play for Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD): Strategies and Adaptations

In addition to the general strategies for all students that are summarized in the Tips for Success handout, below is a list of strategies and adaptations for facilitating active play with children with ASD. No single set of adaptations would be appropriate for every child with ASD. As a teacher, you know your students well and should consider their individual strengths and needs when selecting appropriate strategies. You might choose to select individual strategies or combine multiple strategies together. Many of these adaptations are things that you may already use with your students in other areas of the curriculum. We hope that this table helps you to think about how to include these adaptations when leading active play.

Consulting with a child’s paraprofessional or other special education service providers may also be helpful in identifying the best strategies for including a child in active play. Your school’s physical therapist, BCBA, or school psychologist may be a good resource for further problem-solving.

Category	Strategies and Types of Adaptations
Preparing for Active Play	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure that the equipment for game play is accessible for children in your group</li> <li>• Minimize distractions within your play space</li> <li>• Determine an appropriate group size               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Consider dividing the class into two smaller groups</li> <li>○ Consider what ratio of adults to children would be best for the play session</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Plan ahead for using strategies that you feel are appropriate for your students</li> <li>• Consider the complexity of a game and find ways to simplify when appropriate.               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ For games involving multiple roles, assign all children the same role instead and have teaching staff serve in the other role</li> <li>○ Include fewer and simpler elements in an obstacle course</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Review activities and strategies you plan to use with your teaching team</li> <li>• Use a social story about active play time to preview the plan as well as behavioral expectations</li> <li>• Show the video from the library to provide a visual preview</li> <li>• If a child has a paraprofessional, have this person preview games with the child individually               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ If materials are set up in advance, show materials when previewing</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Explaining Rules of Games	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gain student attention before issuing instructions</li> <li>• Consider the communication abilities and tools used by children in your class and use their preferred form of communication to explain active games (for example, a picture exchange system)</li> <li>• Use simple language               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Provide one-step instructions</li> <li>○ Repeat instructions if necessary</li> <li>○ Use simple rules (e.g., “touch yellow” instead of “Put your elbow on a yellow one”)</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Use visuals               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Visual schedule for active play session</li> <li>○ Visuals for game instructions</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Model how to play the game</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Have teachers model appropriate game play</li> <li>○ Have peers model appropriate game play</li> <li>○ Pair a child with a partner who can model appropriate game play throughout an activity</li> <li>○ Use hand over hand prompts if necessary</li> <li>● Check for understanding <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Provide verbal and nonverbal ways for children to show that they understand instructions</li> <li>○ If a supporting staff is available, ask this person to individually check for understanding</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Use reinforcement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Reinforce children for listening to instructions</li> <li>○ Reinforce children during modeling</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Allow a child to observe the game before participating to increase the child's understanding of how to play</li> </ul>
<p>Keeping Children Engaged in Game Play</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Provide verbal and/or physical prompts to help children engage in game play appropriately</li> <li>● Reinforce children for effort <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Verbal praise</li> <li>○ High 5</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Use rewards to motivate children during active play <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Individual reward for appropriate participation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Avoid using edible rewards</li> </ul> </li> <li>○ Group reward for effort and engaging in play appropriately</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Adjust the pace of the game and the session based on students' needs</li> <li>● Use cool down activities between games to help children maintain appropriate behavior</li> <li>● Use calm music if children are becoming overexcited</li> <li>● Use corrective feedback and redirection in response to unsafe behavior <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Remind child of appropriate behavior</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Provide opportunities for children to use their communication device to express their needs</li> </ul>
<p>Minimizing Frustration</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Keep structured active play brief (10-15 minutes) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Monitor early warning signs of frustration and adjust game length accordingly</li> <li>○ Transition to a new game if children show signs of disengagement</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Balance task difficulty <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Include some tasks that children have mastered and some that are at their growing edge</li> <li>○ Similarly, if introducing a new game, also include familiar games in the session</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Exercise shared control <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Allow a child to make some choices within play, such as the order of activities or their role within an activity</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Help children tolerate non-preferred activities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ For students who have difficulty tolerating the activity, determine what aspects they can tolerate and allow them to engage appropriately (e.g.,</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

	<p>observing, participate for the first few minutes, participating for half of the games)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Use reinforcement to engage children</li> <li>● Provide children with a break outside of the play space between activities</li> <li>● Review the social story about expectations during active play for a child who becomes frustrated</li> </ul>
Sensory Needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Children avoiding sensory input <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Keep volume of music low or consider omitting music</li> <li>○ Be mindful of students' ability to share personal space</li> <li>○ Noise canceling headphones may be helpful for children who are overwhelmed by sensory input in an active play space</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Children seeking sensory input <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Use sensory tools that already work for your student and have been approved by the child's team and family (for example, a weighted vest, bouncy ball, etc.)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Promote Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Review children's IEPs to find ways to connect the goals of the game with the students IEP goals</li> <li>● Play the same game multiple days in a row to promote children's learning and ability to engage in the game appropriately</li> </ul>

