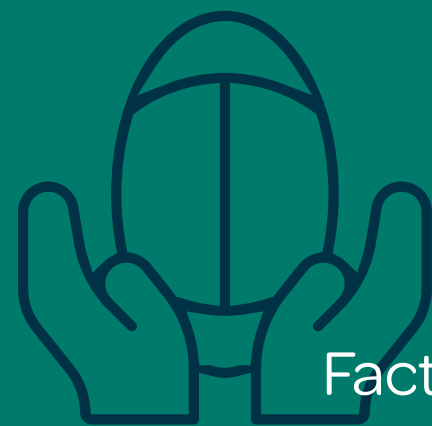




# Autism

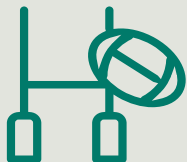


## Fact Sheet

## What is Autism?

**Autism is a lifelong condition that affects how a person communicates and interacts with others. It also affects how a person makes sense of the world around them. Autism is much more common than many people think, '1 in 65 people in Ireland' and Autism can be a hidden disability – you can't always tell if someone has Autism.**


Some of the strong qualities a person with Autism can bring to the team are loyalty, dedication, new way of thinking or seeing things from a different perspective.



## What we may see when coaching people who have Autism

- A person with Autism may use or take other people's things or enter their personal space
- Some people with Autism may stay on their own and not join games or activities. They may watch others or remove themselves completely from the area
- Some people with Autism might want to follow the rules rigidly and may get distressed if there are any changes in the routine
- A person with Autism may have differences in communication and social skills to approach another person and initiate a conversation with them. A person with Autism may behave in a way that is perceived to be inappropriate, such as snatching objects away from others to start a chasing game, standing beside other people but not saying anything or saying inappropriate things to get their attention
- A person with Autism may become upset easily over seemingly small issues
- A person with Autism may talk out of turn, longwinded, off topic, one sided conversations etc. • A person with Autism may misunderstand commonplace phrases or teasing. For example, "pull up our socks", "think on our feet", and "let's get the show on the road"
- A person with Autism may misunderstand general instructions such as "let's go in"
- A person with Autism may find it hard to focus on the activity and may be easily distracted
- The movements of a person with Autism may be uncoordinated and appear clumsy



 **People with Autism may have difficulties with the following areas:**

### Social Communication

- Not understanding or misinterpreting unwritten social rules, e.g. around friendship
- Appearing to be insensitive because they have not recognised how someone is feeling
- Preferring to spend time alone
- Being aloof, distant or uninterested in others
- Not seeking comfort from other people
- Appearing to behave strangely or inappropriately, as they are not always able to express feelings, emotions or needs

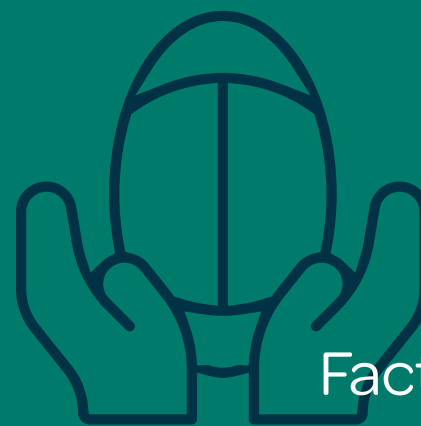
- Not speaking, unusual use of language, echolalia, making up words, pronoun reversal – e.g. James looks across the pitch and says to his coach 'you scored a goal'. The ideal coach response would be: Yes James, you did score a goal, well done! James uses 'you' when he should have said 'I'
- Not understanding or misinterpreting 'jokes or sarcasm
- Not understanding or misinterpreting 'common phrases or sayings

### Restricted Interest and Repetitive Behaviours

- Being able to understand and interpret other people's thoughts, feelings and actions
- Predicting what will happen next, or what could happen
- Understanding the concept of danger
- Engaging in imaginative play and activities
- Preparing for change and planning for the future
- Coping in new or unfamiliar situations



# Autism



Fact Sheet (cont'd.)

## How to include people with Autism in your rugby coaching sessions

### 1. Provide information before the session:

**Give participants plenty of details about the rugby activity in advance to reduce anxiety.**

Try the following:

- » Share photos of the rugby club, pitch and coaches/volunteers.
- » Provide a description of what typically happens during a session, along with a general timetable of activities (e.g., warm-up, drills, small sided game, cool down).
- » Explain the Laws of rugby and the equipment used
- » Offer a visit to the rugby club when no one is around, so they can get familiar with the environment.
- » Allow them to attend and observe a rugby session without needing to participate initially.

### 2. Use visual aids in coaching:

**Incorporate more visuals to help explain rugby drills and skills.**

Try the following:

- » Use picture cards, video clips, or demonstrations to show rugby techniques (e.g., passing, tackling).
- » When introducing new drills, allow the participant to go last so they can watch others complete the drill first.
- » Use visual cues, like placing markers or cones to indicate where players should stand, run, or pass during drills.
- » Use color-coded markers or visual guides to illustrate specific rules or drill areas on the pitch.
- » Provide clear, concise instructions when explaining the laws of rugby or any specific activities.

### 3. Have a clear session plan and prepare for changes:

**Create a structured session plan and inform participants about it in advance.**

Try the following:

- » Structure sessions with predictable routines (e.g., warm-up, skills practice, small sided game, cool down).
- » Write down the session plan, listing drills and exercises so the player knows what to expect. This can be on a notepad or board.

- » Prepare them for changes ahead of time, such as if a different coach will be leading the session or if the session will be held at a different location.

### 4. Clearly communicate the laws/rules:

**Be explicit about rugby Laws/Rules, including safety regulations.**

Try the following:

- » Clearly explain the Laws/Rules of rugby and why they're important for everyone's safety.
- » Make the laws/rules easily accessible by writing them down, especially for complex aspects like scrums, tackles and rucks.
- » If an incident occurs, take time to calmly explain why certain actions might be unsafe and how to avoid them in the future.

### 5. Provide a safe space for time-outs:

**Create a designated area where the participant can go if they feel stressed or overwhelmed during rugby session.**

Try the following:

- » This could be a quiet spot on the sidelines, a bench, or a corner of the pitch.
- » Provide "calming equipment" such as fidget toys, stress balls, or a water bottle they can use to self-regulate before rejoining the group.
- » Allow time for the participant to use this space to regain composure before returning to the rugby session.
- » By implementing these strategies, you can create an inclusive, structured, and supportive environment that helps individuals with Autism engage in and enjoy rugby.

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