How to Build a Winning Team:
A Parent & Coach’s Communication Guide for Children and
Youth with Different Abilities

Participating in sports or other community activities are an important part of growing up, teaching essential skills, and building life-long friendships. However these activities can, at times, seem overwhelming for a child with special needs. The following are some tips to help you collaborate with coaches and other volunteers who may work with your child. This will enable everyone involved to have a successful, fun, and rewarding experience!

TALK! Initiate a conversation as soon as possible.
• Begin an open dialogue with the coach or volunteer that will work with your child as soon as you can.
• Contact the coaches to make sure they are aware that your child has special needs, and you should have a conversation prior to starting.
• In order to help prepare the coach, staff, volunteers, you, and your child, it may be helpful to have an in-person meeting and tour.

BE SPECIFIC AND PROVIDE INFORMATION! Provide specific information to help others understand your child.
• If your child has behavioral or sensory concerns discuss what they are, as well as what strategies are being used to work with your child.
• Provide as much knowledge about your child as you can such as their likes and dislikes as it may relate to the activity.
• Document and provide information about your child. This information could include:
  o behavior and reward systems you use at home and school
  o what motivates your child
  o things to avoid doing
  o ways to explain instructions
  o best ways of providing feedback and praise for your child
DISCUSS ACCESSIBILITY! Help anticipate how the program can be inclusive.

- Talk with the person who will be leading the activity about the best way for your child to participate, including any accommodations that may need to be made in order for your child to participate to the fullest.
- Discussing accessibility up front will enable children of all abilities to participate to the fullest, paving the way for fun and success!

EDUCATE! Educate others on how to best interact with your child.

- Help to teach the people who will be working with your child. For example, if your child has communication needs, teach how best to communicate with them, how to use their communication devices, etc.
- Help the coach feel comfortable answering questions that other children may have about your child.

SHARE! Maintain an open dialogue.

- Always feel free to voice your thoughts, concerns, or ideas with the people working with your child.
- Maintain ongoing conversation with the staff about your child’s progress. Communication should not occur just at registration time, but throughout the session or season.

GET INVOLVED! Join your child & the team in having fun!

- See if you are able to become a parent volunteer in the program that your child is involved in. If you are not able to volunteer come and cheer your child on!

ENJOY!

- Celebrate all of your child’s accomplishments and achievements no matter how small!

Resources


NJ Commission on Recreation for Individuals with Disabilities:  [njcid.org](http://njcid.org)

Community Pass:  [https://register.communitypass.net](https://register.communitypass.net)

Children’s Specialized Hospital:  [www.childrens-specialized.org](http://www.childrens-specialized.org) (Kaylee McGuire, CTRS 908.233.3720 ext. 5736)

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