

The project objectives are to: 1) develop accommodation guidelines to facilitate inclusion and participation of children with an Autism Spectrum Disorder in extracurricular and community programs 2) Implement guidelines in two pilot training sessions with children with AS or HFA and their parents and 2) develop an accessible resource list of such programs for families and professionals.

## Introduction

Impairments in social interactions and forming peer relationships and friendships are key impairments in autism (American Psychiatric Association, 2000). Although children with an ASD demonstrate impairments in social interactions and are often socially isolated relative to typically developing peers, studies show they are capable of spontaneously engaging in social interactions with other children (Macintosh & Dissanayake, 2006; Begeer et al., 2008; Klin, Saulnier, Sparrow, Cicchetti, Volkmar, & Lord, 2007). Individuals with an ASD are not withdrawn or devoid of social interest; in fact, they often approach others but in an eccentric ways. They also report that they want more peer social interactions (Bauminger & Kasari, 2000) and their interest in having friends and social contact may in fact be quite striking (Klin, Volkmar & Sparrow, 2000). Despite their desire for friends and knowledge of skills needed for social interactions, these children don't appropriately utilize the skills or integrate them in a socially acceptable manner during spontaneous interactions that occur when participating in extracurricular and community activities such as Parks and Recreation programs (Macintosh & Dissanayake, 2006; Begeer et al., 2008; Klin, Saulnier, Sparrow, Cicchetti, Volkmar, & Lord, 2007). Thus, unless there is a specialized recreational program available to them, children with an ASD frequently lack the opportunity to participate in community sports and extracurricular programs. This can result in children with an ASD and their families becoming more isolated from community programs and less likely to participate in organized activities, leading to a compromised quality of life (Lee, Harrington, Louie, & Newschaffer, 2008).

## Overview & Rationale

Under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), public programs or programs that receive federal funds cannot limit program participation on the basis of disability if a child meets the participation criteria and can participate when

able accommodations are individualized techniques and resources  
mentally altering a program (ADA, 1990).

D can be successfully included in the general education environment if  
provided with appropriate accommodations. Research supports use of behavioral supports, routine and predictability,  
transition supports, visual supports and schedules, peer mediation and family involvement when addressing inclusion and  
learning in programs within an educational setting (Bauminger, 2007a; Bauminger, 2007b; Gevers et. al, 2006; Hwang &  
Hughes, 2000; Rao, Beidel & Murray, 2008; White, Keonig & Scahill, 2007). The challenge arises in expanding these  
supports and accommodations for children with an ASD beyond the doors of the educational environment to extracurricular  
and community recreational activities.

A lack of after school programming and activities that successfully facilitate participation and inclusion of children  
with an ASD is often reported by parents and professionals that work with these children. Finding such resources for  
families of children with an ASD proves disappointing. Families and organizations need an easily implemented, systematic  
method to assist with modifying and/or adapting activities and programs to promote meaningful participation.

## **Project Aims**

The aim of this project is to develop accommodation guidelines that facilitate the inclusion and participation of  
children with an ASD in extracurricular and community recreational programs. These guidelines will also assist upstart  
programs with integrating these children more efficaciously from the initial stages of program development. Implementation  
of guidelines in two pilot training sessions with children with AS or HFA and their parents will provide feedback on the utility  
of these guidelines. Additionally, an accessible resource list of such programs will be developed and disseminated for each  
participating State.

## **Program Overview**

These guidelines will be designed for both male and female children/youth with a diagnosis of High Functioning  
Autism or Asperger's Syndrome. This project is designed for this particular population as it is more difficult to find programs  
that actively promote participation of these children as more than just casual observers. Parents and clinicians can use  
these guidelines to educate directors/staff of extracurricular and community programs to promote and facilitate inclusive



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parent centers and disability organizations will be approached about  
versions of the information.

A parent questionnaire was developed to ascertain perceived effectiveness of the guidelines as provided in a website format. The guidelines, supported by current literature, must be easily implemented by parents, care providers, program coaches, program staff, and the child. The questionnaire developed solicits feedback on ease of use, likelihood of use, and additional comments about the website format.

## Procedures

The guidelines were developed based on recommendations in the current literature. Current literature supports the use of routine scheduling, visual supports, sensory and behavioral accommodations to facilitate successful participation in group or activity. The design for distribution of guidelines was created for an introductory brochure and a website. The website can be a link on established sites such as: Parents : Let's Unite for Kids (<https://sites.google.com/a/pluk.org/>), The Autism Society of America (<http://www.autism-society.org>) or Family Voices (<http://www.familyvoices.org>). Brochures can be placed in doctor offices, community recreational centers, health centers, and schools.

The website includes: 1) introduction to the issue of inclusion in recreational activities for children with High Functioning Autism and Asperger's syndrome, 2) suggested action plan, 3) possible limitations and subsequent accommodations, 4) templates to use for visual supports and accommodations, 5) suggestions for choosing an activity, 6) suggestions for education of teammates regarding child's specific challenges in participating, 7) a form for feedback from coach/parent to create open dialog, 8) resource list for additional information and supports.

A sample website was given to parents for feedback. Overall, the response was positive with recommendations to include "buddy system" to accommodations list, flashcard template for teaching child game rules or game terminology, questions like, "what are the child's current skills" and "what are the skills required for this game that can be pre-taught" in program considerations. A recommendation was made to change "children" to "teammates" in the section on education. Additional resource sites were mentioned: Familiestogether.org and sites that are specific to sports information and skills.

...e that can be accessed not only by children with autism and their  
...ches, staff, care providers, event volunteers, and teammates. A

brochure in strategically placed locations opens up conversation between a child/parent and a program director. The guidelines are designed to implement without excessive expenditure of effort by offering templates, scripts for discussion and feedback, and lists of frequently seen limitations to participation with corresponding accommodations.

Limitations with this project include lack of direct teaching on potential limitations and behavioral triggers, or on implementation of accommodations. The guidelines are generalized and may not include the breadth of challenges that children with autism may encounter. The guidelines are subject to over generalization. And last the website design can be improved for ease of use by professional website designers.

Creating a guideline information website opened a door to other opportunities for tools to enhance participation in recreational activities. Teaching modules can be created in an educational series format. The modules could include: 1) Understanding the Challenges of children with autism, 2) Behavior supports in recreation, 3) Sensory overload during sport/group activity participation, and 4) Teaching skills and game/group participation concepts. The module can be presented in university physical education classes, as community enrichment classes for parks/recreational staff, or at parent night as part of the program.

The opportunity to engage in a recreational activity has physical and social benefits for all children who participate. Many learning opportunities present themselves naturally when children can engage in the game/activity. Children with autism can participate with appropriate supports, enriching their learning experience.

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