

Inclusive Coaching in Football

Webinar



Acknowledgement of Country



Special Olympics Australia acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the land on which we work and live.

We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging, and celebrate the valuable contribution Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people make to Australian society and sport.

Hello! Nice to meet you!



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National Education & Youth Programs Manager

Guest Speaker



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SOA Athlete Leader - VIC

What will you learn?

- Special Olympics – Our Movement
- Intellectual Disability & Autism Spectrum Disorder
- Coaching Tips and Strategies
- Communication
- TREE Model
- Coach Support Resources



Special Olympics – Our Movement



Special Olympics is part of a global sporting and inclusion movement using sport, health, education and leadership initiatives around the world to empower people with intellectual disabilities.

Eunice Kennedy Shriver, who founded Special Olympics in 1968, envisioned creating opportunities for people with intellectual disabilities to develop new strengths, skills, and abilities, achieving success through the power of sport.

What's the Difference?



Intellectual Disability &
Autism
Elite Pathway
Classification
Sport Inclusion Australia

*Special
Olympics*



Intellectual Disability &
Autism
Participation pathway
Divisioning
Special Olympics Australia



Mainly physical
disabilities
Elite pathway
Classification
Paralympics Australia

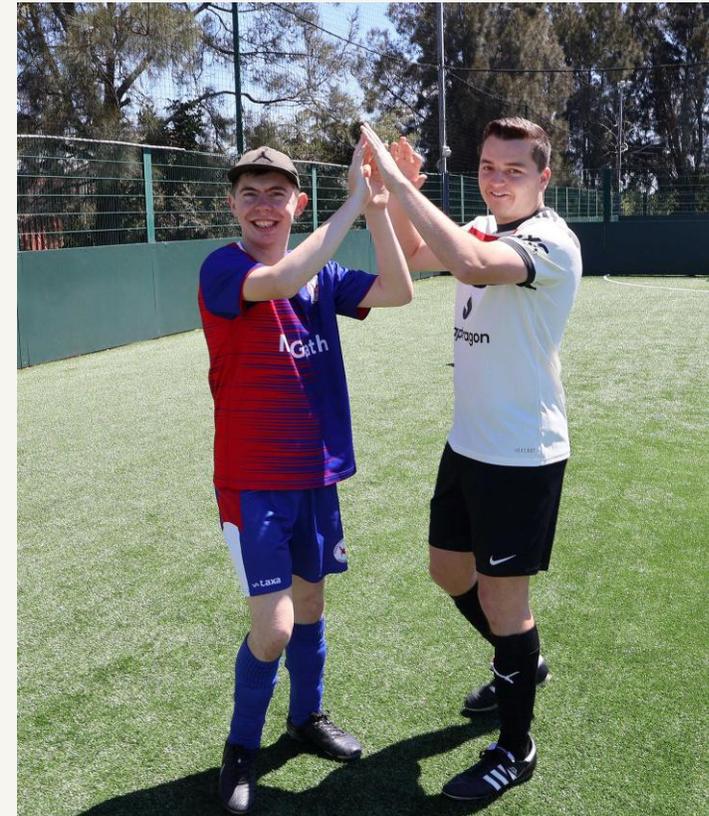
Intellectual Disability & Autism Spectrum Disorder



What is an Intellectual Disability?

Intellectual disability (or ID) is a term used when a person has challenges in **cognitive functioning** including **conceptual, social and practical skills**, such as **language, social and self-care skills**. These limitations can cause a person to develop and learn more slowly or differently than a typically developing person.

Intellectual disability can be associated with some genetic conditions such as Down Syndrome and Fragile X Syndrome. Each person's experience is unique, and their strengths and abilities extend well beyond any diagnosis.



Intellectual Disability

People with an intellectual disability may:

- **Learn best with routine and repetition**, which helps build confidence and independence
- **Benefit from extra time to process information**, often leading to steady and thoughtful learning
- **Communicate in varied ways**, including through visuals, gestures, or simplified language
- **Appreciate clear, concrete instructions**, making expectations easier to understand and follow
- **Develop speech and language skills at their own pace**, often supported by visual or interactive tools
- **Prefer familiar, calm environments**, where they can feel secure and supported in new or busy situations

What is Autism Spectrum Disorder?



Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), or autism, is a complex neurological and developmental disorder that affects **how a person acts, communicates, learns and interacts with others.**

ASD is called a **developmental disorder**. People with this disorder may have differences with **communication, interactions with other people (social skills), restricted interests and repetitive behaviours.**

Every person with autism has their own unique strengths and challenges. For this reason, autism is known as a **spectrum disorder** – ASD includes Autistic Disorder, Asperger Syndrome and Pervasive Developmental Disorder (PDD-NOS).

Autism Spectrum Disorder



People with autism may:

- **Value routine and predictability**, which can help them feel safe and organised
- **Take time to thoughtfully process information**, often leading to careful, considered responses
- **Communicate in diverse ways**, using gestures, visuals, or communication devices to express themselves
- **Understand language literally**, bringing honesty and clarity to conversations
- **Use repetitive movements (stimming)** to self-regulate, manage emotions, or express excitement
- **Develop deep knowledge and passion** for specific interests or topics
- **Prefer clear, direct communication**, as reading social cues or small talk can be confusing

Sensory Sensitivities

- **Noise** – difficulty coping with loud cheering, whistles or shouting
- **Visual** – bright sunlight, stadium lights or moving objects can be overwhelming or distracting
- **Touch** – discomfort with physical contact, uniforms, shin pads, or certain textures (e.g. grass, tight clothing)
- **Smell** – strong odours (e.g. from grass, sweat or sunscreen) may cause discomfort
- **Balance and Movement** – some may find rapid movement, collisions or unpredictability on the field stressful



Stimming

Stimming, short for self-stimulatory behaviour, refers to repetitive movements or sounds that individuals use to **regulate their emotions, manage sensory input or express strong feelings.**

What can it look like?

- Hand flapping
- Rocking
- Pacing
- Repeating words or phrases
- Hair twirling
- Excessive blinking
- Spinning objects
- Jumping or bouncing
- Flicking or snapping fingers
- Staring at an object
- Flicking switches on and off
- Rubbing/scratching skin

Coaching Tips and Strategies



Before the Program Starts...



COACH PROFILE



Hi! My name is _____

I will be your Football coach.

We will play games that are fun.
The games will teach you new skills.

I like Football because _____

I am looking forward to meeting you soon!

CLASS PROFILE



The **class profile** will give coaches a snapshot of the educational support needs of your class, by providing information about strategies to support students that will help the coach modify the program as much as possible beforehand, to suit the needs of the class. This may include modified equipment, learning styles, support needs etc.

Teachers – please complete the information fields below and email this profile to your coach before the first session.

Teacher Name _____ Class Name _____

No. of students _____ Grade/Year range of students _____

Are there children in this class that require support/modification in the following categories?

<input type="checkbox"/> Intellectual	<input type="checkbox"/> Learning
<input type="checkbox"/> Autism	<input type="checkbox"/> Developmental
<input type="checkbox"/> Sensory (Hearing, sight)	<input type="checkbox"/> Mental Health
<input type="checkbox"/> Physical	<input type="checkbox"/> Behavioural

Does the class have any goals, or skills they are working on?

Are there children in this class that have sensory support needs?
(i.e. touch/tactile, hearing, sight, movement, balance)

Are there children in this class that have communication support needs?
(i.e. non-verbal, use of visuals, lip-reading, processing challenges)

Are there any other accessibility considerations?
(i.e. mobility, physical supports)

Is there anything else we need to know, or can do, to better support students in your class?
(i.e. modified equipment, learning styles, behaviour expectation)

Before the Program Starts...



Football Visual Story



During Football lessons, I will play games that will help me get better at

- Dribbling a football with my feet
- Passing a football with my feet
- Kicking a football into a goal

Learning these skills will help me feel healthy, fit and strong.



Dribbling



Passing



Kicking

6

Top Tip! Get to Know the Participants



What could you ask?

- What do you like best about Soccer?
- What are the things you are really good at in Soccer?
- Are there any skills you want to get better at?
- Are there any things you find difficult?
- How can I best support you?
- Talk also with parents/carers

Program Design & Structure

- Keep the program **simple, consistent and predictable** (same structure each week)
- Use **clear routines and visual schedules** to outline each session
- Plan activities to match the **participants skill level**, not age with **gradual progression** to maintain attention
- Allow **flexibility** in the program to adapt to individual needs
- Incorporate **repetition** to support learning and build confidence



Visual Schedule

Football Visual Schedule 

	To Do	Finished
1.	Welcome 	→
2.	Warm Up 	
3.	Pair Activity 	
4.	Small Group Activity 	
5.	Rest 	
6.	Whole Group Game 	
7.	Session Review 	
8.		
9.	Goodbye 	
10.		
11.		
12.		
13.		
14.		

Environment & Sensory Considerations

- Choose a **calm, predictable environment** with minimal distractions
- Reduce **sensory overload** – limit loud music, shouting or sudden noises
- Be aware of **lighting, textures and smells** that might cause discomfort
- Offer **quiet areas** for participants to take breaks and regulate
- Use **visual markers** (cones, signs, arrows) to define activity spaces clearly



Learning & Skill Development

- Focus on **individual progress**, not comparison or competition
- Break down complex skills into **small, manageable steps**
- Use **demonstrations** with verbal instructions
- Pair participants with **consistent peers or mentors** for support
- Provide **lots of positive reinforcement** and encouragement
- Use **consistent cues and language** for the same skills each week
- Allow **extra time** for participants to practice and master skills

Other Considerations

- Allow **extra transition time** between activities or locations
- Offer **visual or verbal countdowns** for changes in activity
- Maintain a **low participant to coach ratio** for more individual support (e.g. best practice = 1 coach: 4-6 participants)
- Involve **families, carers or support workers** to share insights about participant needs
- Consider **transport, accessibility and comfort needs** of all participants (e.g. accessible parking available, clear start and finish times, accessible facilities, visual signage, check temperature and weather conditions etc.)

Communication



Communication

- Use **short, simple and specific language** (e.g. run around the blue marker)
- Give **one instruction at a time** and allow processing time before repeating or rephrasing
- Use real language and avoid slang (e.g. words to avoid “pick up the pace” and words to use “run faster”)
- Use **visual supports** (e.g. communication cards) and/or communication devices to enhance understanding
- Check understanding by asking participants to **show**, rather than verbally repeat instructions
- Use **calm, encouraging tone and body language** to build confidence

Communication Cards

 <p>Stop</p>	 <p>Have a Drink</p>	 <p>Rest</p>	 <p>Line up</p>
 <p>Wait</p>	 <p>Finished</p>	 <p>I need help</p>	 <p>Sit down</p>
 <p>My turn</p>	 <p>Your turn</p>	 <p>Raise your hand</p>	 <p>More</p>

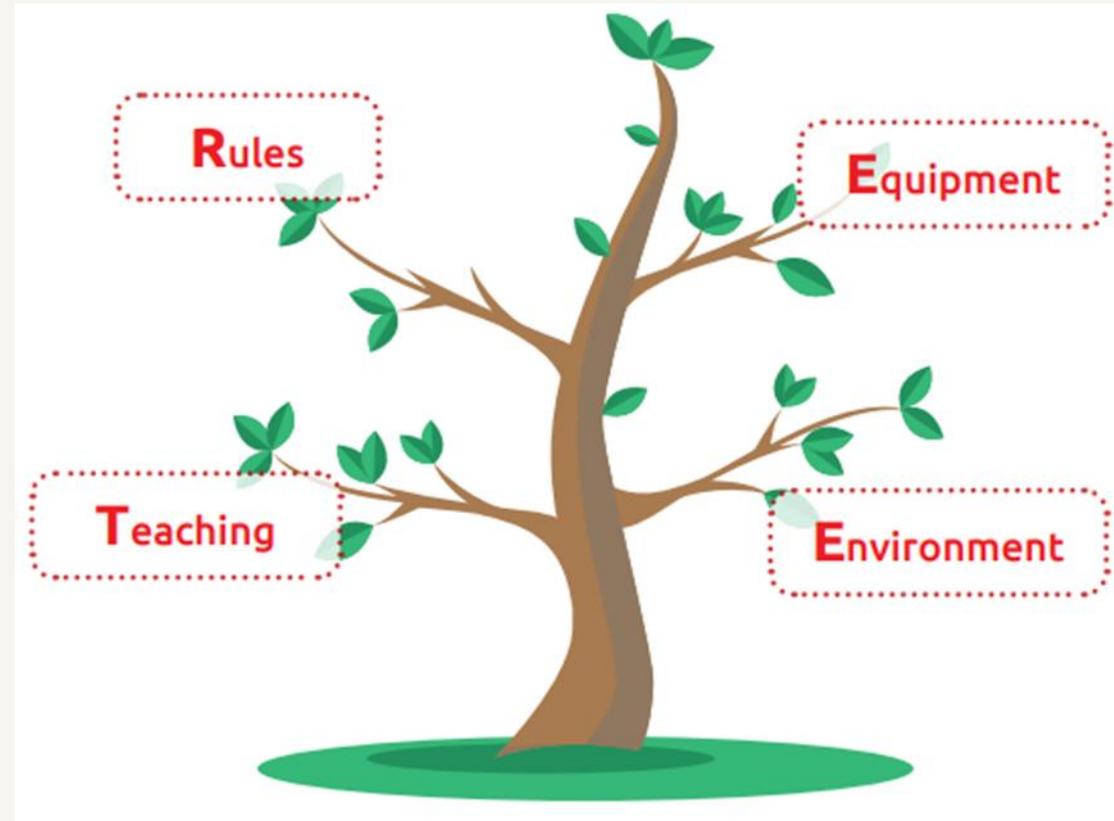
Communication

- Demonstrate rather than over-explain – show what you want players to do
- Keep **verbal directions consistent** each week (same words for the same skills)
- Ask simple, direct questions using *when, where, who or what* – avoid open-ended *why or how* questions that may be confusing
- **Avoid giving multiple questions or instructions at once** – break them into steps
- Provide **specific and positive feedback** (e.g. *great job keeping your eyes on the ball!*)

TREE Model



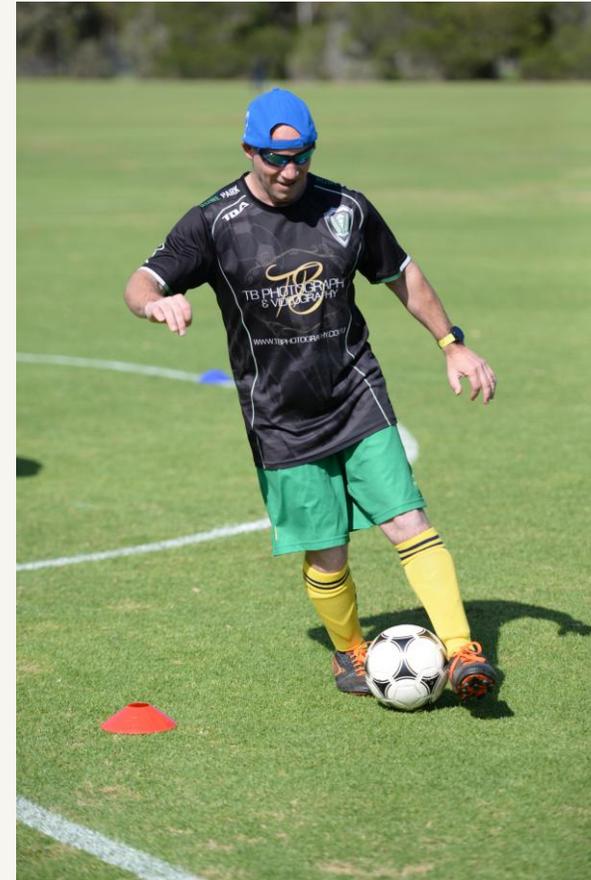
What is the TREE Model?



Teaching/Coaching Style

You're running a dribbling drill, but one player seems confused and stops frequently when you give group instructions.

How can you change your teaching style to support their understanding?



Rules

During a small-sided game, one participant with ASD becomes upset when others don't follow the rules exactly or when the play is interrupted.

How could you adapt the rules of the game to reduce stress and allow participation in a way that suits all needs?



Equipment

Some players struggle to kick or control a standard football due to coordination or sensory sensitivities.

What equipment changes could you make so the players can still participate successfully?



Environment

A player becomes overwhelmed by noise, shouting and unpredictable movement during team drills.

How could you modify the environment to help this player feel calm and remain focused on training?



Understanding and Managing Behaviours



Understanding Behaviours

Behaviour is Communication

Athletes may express needs, emotions or discomfort through behaviours rather than words

Trigger May Be Unseen

Loud noises, changes in routine, unfamiliar people, or sensory overload can lead to stress-related behaviours.

Common Responses

- Withdrawing from the activity
- Repetitive movements (stimming)
- Frustration or emotional outbursts

Focus on Prevention and Support

- Build strong, respectful relationships with athletes
- Understand the individual needs and triggers
- Set clear, consistent expectations and routines
- Provide positive reinforcement for desired behaviours
- Use visual supports to reinforce instructions and schedules
- Recognise signs of overwhelm early (e.g. withdrawal, fidgeting)
- Allow breaks or access to quiet space if needed
- Stay calm, patient and avoid escalating situations



Managing Behaviours

When emotions are rising:

- **Stay calm and neutral** – your tone and body language matter
- **Use minimal language** – short, clear phrases work best
- **Offer space and time** – let them self-regulate
- **Avoid arguing or correcting** – focus on safety

At the peak:

- **Prioritise safety** – for all participants, others and yourself
- **Don't take it personally** – the participant is overwhelmed, not acting out on purpose
- **Limit instructions** – use calm, repetitive reminders like “it's okay, you're safe”
- **Involve familiar support** – assistant coach, parent, support workers that they trust can help

Coach Support Resources



Special Olympics

INCLUSIVE SPORT ACADEMY



Thank You!

Please get in touch if you have any questions

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