

COACHING FOR ATHLETES WITH ADHD

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder is a neurodevelopmental disorder that is characterized by ongoing patterns of **inattention**, **hyperactivity**, and **impulsivity**.

WHAT COACHES MAY NOTICE

- Short attention span and difficulty sustaining focus
- Forgetting daily activities or misplacing items
- Trouble getting started on a task
- Favoring work with quicker rewards
- Strong emotional reactions to mistakes or criticisms
- Asking for instructions to be repeated

1 in 9
athletes
have ADHD

5 COACHING STRATEGIES THAT HELP

1. **Keep instructions clear**

Break drills and directions into smaller steps.

2. **Make feedback immediate**

Recognize effort and progress quickly.

3. **Prepare for transitions**

Give warnings before changing drills or expectations.

4. **Use visual cues & routines**

A whiteboard itinerary or consistent system can reduce the need for repeated reminders.

5. **Help athletes reset after mistakes**

Redirect them toward the next play/rep rather than dwelling on the error.

MAKE PRACTICES WORK WITH ADHD

Use what engages them: *competition, urgency, variety, clear goals, rewards*

- Timed challenges
- Rotating drills
- Partner activities
- Point/reward system

Athletes with ADHD may bring energy, creativity, adaptability, and enthusiasm in areas that interest them. Strength-based coaching creates an environment where athletes can develop their skills while working through challenges.



for more
coaches info



COACHING FOR ATHLETES WITH AUTISM

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a neurodevelopmental disorder that can affect *communication, sensory processing, routines, and stress responses.*

WHAT COACHES MAY NOTICE

- Difficulty socializing or connecting with teammates
- Need for extra processing time
- Preference for routines and predictability
- Sensitivity to noise, lights, clothing, or equipment
- Difficulty with unexpected changes
- Repetitive movements or behaviors that support regulation

Autistic behaviors
can look like
disinterest or
disrespect.

Look beyond the
behavior.

5 COACHING STRATEGIES THAT HELP

1. **Be clear and direct**

Say exactly what you want the athlete to do.

2. **Give processing time**

Pause after instructions. Allow time to respond or ask follow-up questions.

3. **Make practice predictable**

Keep routines consistent or use a visual schedule.

4. **Prepare for changes**

Give warnings before transitions or schedule changes.

5. **Ask, don't assume**

Don't be afraid to ask the athlete and family what works best for them.

MAKE PRACTICES WORK WITH AUTISM

Support regulation, not compliance

- Allow appropriate stimming
- Be aware of sensory triggers
- Allow time to decompress
- Use visual demonstrations during complex drills
- Consider exceptions for clothing and equipment comfort

Sports have the power to build confidence, teamwork skills, and resilience. With greater awareness and small adjustments, athletic spaces can become more supportive and empowering for autistic athletes.



RESOURCES

FOR AUTISTIC ATHLETES

- [ASAN — Navigating College](#)
- [Autism&Uni — Student Resources](#)
- [College Autism Network — Student Resources](#)
- [UC Berkeley — Autism Spectrum Services: Student Resources](#)
- [NCHPAD — Adapted Sports Resources](#)
- [Move United](#)

FOR ATHLETES WITH ADHD

- [ADDitude — College ADHD Resources](#)
- [CHADD — National Resource Center on ADHD](#)
- [APA — Survival Guide for College Students With ADHD or LD](#)
- [NIMH — ADHD](#)
- [American Medical Society for Sports Medicine — ADHD & the Athlete](#)

FOR PARENTS

Autism

- [ASAN — Resources](#)
- [Autistic Women & Nonbinary Network](#)
- [NIMH — Autism](#)
- [CDC — Autism](#)

ADHD

- [CHADD — ADHD Toolkit for Parents](#)
- [CHADD — Parenting a Child With ADHD](#)
- [CHADD — Parent Training & Education](#)
- [CHADD — ADHD & School Toolkit](#)
- [CDC — ADHD Treatment](#)

FOR COACHES

- [U.S. Soccer — ADHD & Youth Sports Guide](#)
- [Special Olympics — Sports & Coaching Resources](#)
- [Special Olympics — Coaching Special Olympics Athletes](#)
- [Special Olympics Wisconsin — Coaching Resources](#)
- [Special Olympics — Unified Sports Coaching Resources](#)
- [Move United — Education & Training](#)
- [NCHPAD — Adapted Sports](#)
- [Special Olympics — Coach Education](#)