

PARENTING FOR ATHLETES WITH ADHD

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

WHAT PARENTS MAY NOTICE

- Difficulty finishing tasks or following instructions
- Trouble managing time or remembering responsibilities
- Procrastinating tasks that require sustained attention
- Strong preference for activities with immediate rewards
- Intense focus on areas of passion or interest
- Strong emotional reactions to mistakes, criticisms, or setback

1 in 9
athletes
have ADHD

5 WAYS TO SUPPORT YOUR ATHLETE

1. **Create external structure**

Calendars, checklists, and consistency supports executive functioning.

2. **Breaks big tasks into small steps**

From "Get ready" to "Get dressed → pack bag → fill your water bottle → get in the car."

3. **Use visual cues & systems**

Whiteboards, packing lists, phone reminders, and designated places for equipment can reduce the need for repeated verbal reminders.

4. **Prepare for transitions**

Give time for your athlete to mentally shift activities: "Ten minutes until we leave."

5. **Reinforce effort and progress**

Notice improvement, dedication, energy and sportsmanship – not just wins.

WHEN SPORTS GET HARD

When your athlete...

- Spirals over a mistake → Help them zoom out.
- Wants to quit → Wait until emotions settle before making big decisions.
- Lashes out → Hold boundaries while giving them time to cool down.
Regulate first. Problem-solve second.

Athletes with ADHD may bring energy, creativity, adaptability, and enthusiasm in areas that interest them. By understanding how our athletes are motivated, we can create environments that help them succeed both on and off the field.



for more
parent info



PARENTING FOR ATHLETES WITH AUTISM

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

WHAT PARENTS 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 for the need
behind the behavior.

5 WAYS TO SUPPORT YOUR ATHLETE

1. **Be clear and direct**

Use clear, specific language.

2. **Give time to decompress**

Allow space for potential quiet time, stimming, or self-regulation after competition.

3. **Prepare for changes**

Give your child advance notice when plans change.

4. **Support sensory needs**

Notice what sounds, textures, or environments feel overwhelming.

Consider headphones, quiet spaces, breaks, or comfortable equipment.

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

Ask what your child needs before making assumptions.

LOOK FOR THE NEED BEHIND BEHAVIOR

Look for the need behind behavior

Before correcting the behavior, ask: *"What is my athlete trying to tell me?"*

- A shutdown may mean *"I'm overwhelmed"*
- Avoiding practice may mean *"I'm burned out"*
- A strong reaction may mean *"This is too much for me right now"*

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.



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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](#)