



YOUR GUIDE TO GETTING ACTIVE

FOR AUTISTIC AND ADHD TEENS



Government of South Australia
Office for Recreation, Sport and Racing

This program is funded by the SA Government through the
Office for Recreation Sport and Racing



1 Getting started with sport and physical activity

PAGE 03



2 Understanding community sport

PAGE 04



3 Ways to participate

PAGE 05



4 Setting yourself up to succeed

PAGE 06



5 Things to consider

PAGE 07



6 From school sport to community sport

PAGE 08



7 Pathways in sport, next steps and resources

PAGE 09-11



Your Guide for Getting Active

CONTENTS

GETTING STARTED WITH SPORT AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY



Sport and physical activity are powerful ways to build confidence, connection, and wellbeing. Participation in sport should be about having fun, learning new skills, and finding a sense of belonging.

This guide is to support autistic and ADHD teens be prepared to participate in sport and physical activity by addressing some of the common concerns and providing tools to minimise these challenges.

Why being active matters;

- Builds confidence and self-esteem through learning new skills and achieving personal goals
- Offers social opportunities to meet new people and practice communication
- Supports physical and mental health, improving fitness and reducing stress or anxiety
- Develops important life skills, like resilience, focus, and teamwork
- Encourages self-advocacy, helping to express needs and preferences
- Provides multiple ways to participate, including playing, volunteering, or leadership roles
- Offers the chance to be part of a team or community.

UNDERSTANDING

Community Sport



COMMUNITY SPORT

Community sport is the foundation of Australia's sporting culture. It's where friendships can start, skills can grow, and participation builds confidence and belonging.

You'll find community sport through local clubs, schools, recreation centres, councils and associations. Sporting clubs are usually run by volunteers, whereas activities are more likely to have qualified coaches, leaders and instructors. There are programs for people of all ages and experience levels.

SPORT AND ACTIVITY SUGGESTIONS



Flowchart for illustration purposes, this is not an extensive list.

Before joining a sport or activity, it may be helpful to explore their website, social media or YouTube to understand the activity, learn how participation is supported, or contact the club to discuss what might be possible

WAYS TO PARTICIPATE

There are many ways to participate in sports and physical activities.

Here are some suggestions:

- Join social or inclusive teams that focus on fun and fitness
- Find a skills development program that focuses on fundamental skills for a specific sport
- Play competitively
- Join a gym or exercise class
- Volunteer as a scorer, timekeeper, social media coordinator, or at events
- Learn to coach, umpire, referee, or become a sports trainer.

Each sport and activity operates a little differently, however they share a similar goal – to help people lead an active lifestyle and find a way for everyone to participate.

Finding the Right Sport or Activity

The best sport for you is one that matches your interests, needs, and preferences.

Think about:

- Do you like being in a team or prefer individual activities?
- Do you prefer less competitive environments?
- Do you like fast-paced or calm activities?
- Do you enjoy indoor or outdoor settings?
- Are there sensory elements (noise, touch, lights, crowds, temperature) that impact your ability to participate?
- Are there any sports you have always wanted to try?
- What is the cost to participate?
- What equipment is required?
- What is the availability or location of the sport?

SET YOURSELF UP TO SUCCEED



Many sports offer short programs, sometimes called introduction to sport/activity, come & try, or skills development – that let you experience the sport before joining a team, paying for a season and buying uniforms.

You may be able to attend training sessions and perhaps bring a buddy. These are a great way to explore different options and see what feels right.

Do some research to understand the sport or activity:

- Where is the activity played? e.g. is it played indoors or outdoors or in water or in regional towns.
- When can you do the activity?
- Is it a team or individual activity?
- Is a uniform required?
- Watch some videos on the activity
- Ask your friends and family about activities
- Is specialised equipment required?
- Who is involved in the activity? e.g. a coach or a referee or opposition.
- How noisy is the environment?
- Do you need any particular skills or experience to get started?
- Will you get hot and sweaty while participating?
- Do you have to run around a lot?

Questions to ask a sport or activity:

- What level of experience is needed to join?
- Can I try a session first to see if I like it?
- Do I have to participate in trials to be placed in a team?
- How long does the season or program run?
- When are the training sessions and games?
- What is the cost and what's included (equipment, uniform, etc.)?
- What should I wear or bring to the first session? (E.g. mouthguard, hat, water bottle)
- Who is the coach or main contact, and what is their coaching experience? And how do they give feedback?
- Is there a video showing the sport I could watch before I go?

THINGS TO CONSIDER



One of the best things to do is go and watch the activity or experience the sporting environment before making any commitment.

Keep in mind the things you may need to do to be ready to participate. This maybe listening to music or having something to eat.

About Inclusion and Support

- Do coaches or leaders have any qualifications specific to the activity or inclusion?
- Are coaches supported to get to know the participants?
- Is there a sensory friendly, quiet space or is it ok to take breaks as needed?
- Advise the coach or leader if you haven't been active recently.

About the Environment

- What is the noise like during activities?
- How many people are usually involved?

How Your Body May Feel When Active

- Being active may make your heart beat faster, you may sweat, and your muscles may get heavy and tired.

Sensory Needs and Aids

Each activity will have different requirements, it is best to discuss this with the coach or activity leader. Here are some suggestions;

- Using ear plugs or hearing aids to reduce auditory input or background noise
- Wearing a uniform prior to a session to get used to the feeling.
- A fidget, this could be something like a wristband etc that would stay on the body
- Water tight earplugs to stop the water going into the ears (for sports like swimming)
- Swimming cap
- Sunglasses.

Remember: It's okay to ask lots of questions – a welcoming club will appreciate your openness and will want to help you feel comfortable and supported in your participation.

FROM SCHOOL SPORT TO COMMUNITY SPORT

TIPS FOR A SMOOTH TRANSITION

- Start with short programs or come and try sessions
- Utilise your school sport experience
- Visit and watch a session/activity first
- Keep it fun, participation is about enjoyment and confidence
- Bring a buddy
- Do your research and learn about the sport or activity
- Trying something for the first time is hard, keep trying!
- Get your family involved, share the fun and do something together
- Practise at home or in your local park
- Work with your professionals or support network to ensure a safe and supportive participation
- Consistency helps build confidence and improvement
- Talk to the coach or leader about your needs and preferences.



PATHWAYS IN SPORT

There are lots of ways to participate – just for fun, or at higher levels.

- **Social and Recreational Participation:** Stay active, make friends, enjoy the community.
- **Skill Development:** Join coaching or development programs or school holiday programs.
- **Competition:** Play in local or regional leagues when ready.
- **Inclusive Pathways:** Explore disability or inclusive programs.
- **Volunteer and Official Participation:** Clubs are always looking for more support such as team managers, scorers, referees, or event volunteers. You may be able to share your lived experience by taking on leadership opportunities or joining a club committee, and help to shape programs and make sport more inclusive.
- **High Performance:** For those who want to go further, many sports have talent identification and elite performance opportunities.

Opportunities to participate:

Office for Recreation, Sport and Racing

Find places to get active and information on all the state sporting organisations

<https://www.orsr.sa.gov.au/>

Special Olympics

Opportunities for athletes with intellectual disability and/or autism

<https://www.specialolympics.com.au/>

One Culture

<https://www.oneculturesupportservices.org/>

Inclusive Swim

<https://www.inclusiveswim.com.au/>

Determined2

<https://determined2.com.au/>

NEXT STEPS

Joining a club can feel like a big step, but it's easier when you know what to expect, even better if you can find a friendly person to connect with.

1. Explore local sport options online or ask your community, school, council, or support services
2. Contact the membership officer or inclusion coordinator and ask as many questions as you need
3. Visit a training or game to see what it's like
4. Register for a short program or introduction session
5. Ask for any supports or adjustments you might need, like having a buddy.

Further Resources

- Local Councils, Community Centres or Recreation Centres
- Access affordable sports gear - Play It On
 - <https://www.playiton.com.au/>
- YMCA
- Life Be In It
- Autism Friendly Charter
 - <https://autismsa.org.au/autism-friendly-charter/>





OUR PARTNERS





Government of South Australia
Office for Recreation, Sport and Racing

145B Railway Terrace, Mile End SA 5031
P 08 8234 6369
www.sasma.com.au
admin@sasma.com.au
[@sasportsmedicineassoc](https://twitter.com/sasportsmedicineassoc)

© 2026 SA Sports Medicine Association. All rights reserved.

This handbook is intended for educational and personal use. Content may not be reproduced, distributed, or used for commercial purposes without written permission from the SA Sports Medicine Association.