

# Hosting an autism-friendly event

## sports activity

Autism-friendly events open doors to new opportunities for families impacted by autism and/or special needs. With some simple accommodations, you can give families a game-time experience that they've never had or may have found challenging. Thank you for your support of the autism community. Your efforts play a vital role in creating a kinder, more inclusive world for people with autism.

### Why might going to a sporting event be difficult for a person with autism?

Autism, or autism spectrum disorder (ASD), refers to a broad range of conditions characterized by challenges with social skills, repetitive behaviors, speech and nonverbal communication. Here are three reasons why a trip to a game can present challenges for a fan with autism:

#### 1. Sensory differences

Game-day sounds, like the whistle from a referee or the calls of a hot dog seller, can be painfully loud to a person on the spectrum. Flashing lights on the scoreboard can be disorienting or distracting. Loud and aggressive fans can be overwhelming to someone with autism.

#### 2. Preference for routine and predictability

Part of the excitement of a game is its unpredictability, both on and off the field, court or ice. But the crowds, noises and fast pace of a sporting event can lead to uncertainty, discomfort or over-excitement.

#### 3. Managing community challenges

Families affected by autism may choose not to go to an event to avoid having to explain a child's behavior in public. Unusual behaviors often are a sign that an autistic person is excited about or is working hard to be in a certain place or situation. People who don't know about autism often misunderstand and wrongly judge these behaviors.

### What can you do to make the sporting event "autism-friendly"?

Providing accommodations to help support people with autism and their families at a sporting event is simple and can make all the difference for an enjoyable outing. Here's what you can do:

#### 1. Support sensory differences

- Provide seats in a quieter part of the arena or stadium. Let autistic individuals and their families choose where they want to sit.
- Have a quiet room where fans can go if they are feeling overwhelmed. Quiet rooms can include calming activities like coloring; calming items like yoga balls; and comfortable seating like bean bag chairs.

#### 2. Promote routine and predictability

- Use visuals – like maps, arrows, signs and photos – throughout the stadium/arena to help support fans with autism.
- Create a visual schedule to help people with autism know what to expect during the game. Make the schedule available at guest services and online.

#### 3. Create an inclusive environment

- Announce that the event is autism-friendly so that fans and employees know about available supports.
- Have a designated staff member at guest services to help support families during the event.
- Provide training for staff on best practices to support fans with autism. Autism Speaks can provide training resources.

**We're here to help.**