



A Blueprint for Building Quality Participation in Sport for Children and Youth with Intellectual Disabilities



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Canadian Disability Participation Project

Le projet canadien sur la participation sociale
des personnes en situation de handicap

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PREFACE

OVERVIEW

The Blueprint for Building Quality Participation in Sport for Children and Youth with Intellectual Disabilities is adapted from the Canadian Disability Participation Project's Blueprint for Building Quality Participation in Sport for Children, Youth, and Adults with a Disability. The resource is tailored to Special Olympics Canada's Active Start and FUNdamentals recreational youth programs and provides strategies for building quality participation in programs specifically for children and youth with intellectual disabilities. The research evidence supporting this Blueprint will be presented in an upcoming scientific paper.

Bruno N, Richardson A, Kauffeldt KD, Tomasone JR, Arbour-Nicitopoulos K, & Latimer-Cheung AE. (2020). Exploring experiential elements and strategies of quality participation for children and youth with intellectual and developmental disabilities: A systematic scoping review

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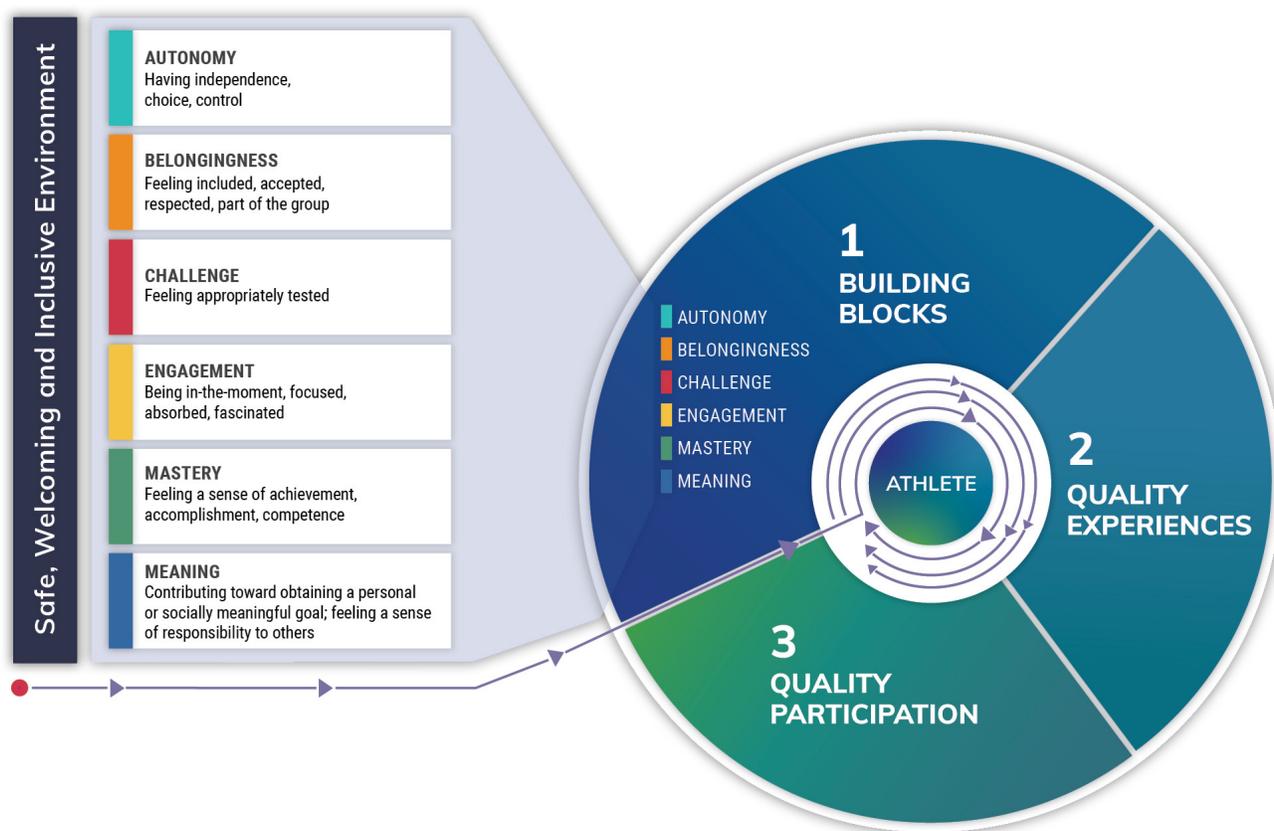
KEY CONCEPTS IN QUALITY PARTICIPATION

Introduction

This Blueprint has been tailored to Special Olympics Canada's (SOC) Active Start and FUNdamentals recreational sport programs for children and youth with intellectual disabilities. The purpose of this document is to introduce key concepts that underpin quality participation to program leaders and volunteers to better facilitate quality sport experiences for athletes.

What is quality participation?

Quality participation is achieved when athletes with a disability view their involvement in sport as satisfying and enjoyable, and experience outcomes that they consider important.



How to build quality participation?

Quality experience is built from six building blocks: autonomy, belongingness, challenge, engagement, mastery, and meaning. In turn, these six building blocks must be supported with a proper foundation consisting of physical, program and social environments that are safe, welcoming, and inclusive. Repeated and sustained exposure to these building blocks can lead to quality experiences which should contribute to lasting quality participation.

QUICK GUIDE TO THE BUILDING BLOCKS

To foster quality participation, organizations and program leaders must have a thorough understanding of the **building blocks**.

The quick guide includes a case study example that demonstrates a program accomplishing the respective building block.

AUTONOMY

Having independence, choice, control

BELONGINGNESS

Feeling included, accepted, respected, part of the group

CHALLENGE

Feeling appropriately tested

ENGAGEMENT

Being in-the-moment, focused, absorbed, fascinated

MASTERY

Feeling a sense of achievement, accomplishment, competence

MEANING

Contributing toward obtaining a personal or socially meaningful goal; feeling a sense of responsibility to others



AUTONOMY

AUTONOMY

Having independence,
choice, control

Autonomy can be defined as an athlete having independence, choice, and/or control. This building block refers to the ability of the athlete to make their own choices in regard to their participation in sport.

Case Study Example

Alex is a 11-year-old who joined SOC 4 years ago in hopes of playing with peers in an enjoyable sports environment. Prior to the throwing session, Alex's program leader allowed them to choose a warm-up activity from two options. By offering options and the opportunity to choose the first drill for that session, Alex is able to feel in control and thus, experienced *autonomy* while participating.



BELONGINGNESS

BELONGINGNESS

Feeling included, accepted, respected, part of the group

Belongingness can be defined as participants experiencing a sense of connection, acceptance, and inclusion during the sport experience.

Case Study Example

Jordan is a 9-year-old who has been a FUNdamentals athlete for 2 years. Jordan values the community that has been built and the friends they made throughout their time at SOC. Jordan hopes to create the same feelings for new athletes joining the program. Jordan has taken on a role of “peer mentor,” where the focus is helping new members feel comfortable in the space and feel like they are a part of the group. Jordan aims to create *belongingness* – a community feeling within the program – by making new athletes feel like they are welcome and included in the environment, just how Jordan feels.



CHALLENGE

CHALLENGE
Feeling appropriately tested

Challenge can be defined as feeling appropriately tested. Challenge exists when activities are appropriately tailored to the skill level or ability of each participant, while offering opportunities to realistically push skill boundaries to improve.

Case Study Example

Riley is a 7-year-old who recently joined FUNdamentals. Riley's program leader monitors their skill progression during the various baseball drills and has given them the opportunity to partner up when they feel ready. Recognizing that Riley is new to the sport sessions, Riley's program leader offered them the opportunity to *challenge* themselves alongside more experienced athletes, thus pushing their limits in an appropriate manner.



ENGAGEMENT

ENGAGEMENT

Being in-the-moment, focused, absorbed, fascinated

Engagement can be defined as feeling fully involved in the activity as they are participating. If an athlete is engaged, they are more motivated to participate.

Case Study Example

Taylor is a 4-year-old who is sensitive to high-stimulus environments. To ensure Taylor feels welcomed, safe, and ready to participate, their program leader reduced distractions by putting away equipment not being used and avoided music during the warm-up. Taylor's program leader was able to create a space that helped them feel more focused and absorbed while participating and as such, encouraged their *engagement*.



MASTERY

MASTERY

Feeling a sense of achievement, accomplishment, competence

Mastery can be defined as experiencing achievement and feeling confident in one's skills and abilities.

Case Study Example

Bailey is a 6-year-old who loses interest in activities if they cannot succeed in the first 3 tries. During the throwing competition, Bailey misses the hoop and starts to get frustrated with their team. Bailey's program leader tells them to step forward while throwing and have their tummy face the target. Within the next few tries and some verbal praise from Bailey's program leader, they are able to throw their bean bag in the hoop. Through words of encouragement and teaching cues, Bailey successfully accomplished the task and feels a sense of *mastery* and competence.



MEANING

MEANING

Contributing toward obtaining a personal or socially meaningful goal; feeling a sense of responsibility to others

Meaning can be defined as making each and every sport experience matter. Athletes experience meaning if they feel that their participation will help them to achieve a valued goal.

Case Study Example

Dylan is a 12-year-old who wants to spend more time improving their kicking skills. Dylan's program leader made sure to ask athletes their goals at the beginning of the program and consistently revisited these each week. By doing so, Dylan's program leader fostered *meaning* because they recognized importance of having athletes feel as though they were fulfilling goals that were valuable to them.



KEY CONSIDERATIONS FOR QUALITY PARTICIPATION

Quality experience is **individual and dynamic**:

- Individuals will place different values on these key building blocks – the way to create a quality experience for one athlete will often not be exactly the same as for another athlete.
- The value athletes place on each building block may change over time – for example, a sense of belonging may be important at the start of an athlete’s participation, but challenge and meaning might be the most important later on.
- There is no need to incorporate all of the building blocks. Ideally, all six building blocks would be used to meet the needs of all athletes. However, it likely is more effective to do a good job implementing the buildings blocks that are most important to the majority of the athletes in the program, as opposed to doing a poor job incorporating all of them.

Safe, Welcoming and Inclusive Environment

AUTONOMY

Having independence, choice, control

BELONGINGNESS

Feeling included, accepted, respected, part of the group

CHALLENGE

Feeling appropriately tested

ENGAGEMENT

Being in-the-moment, focused, absorbed, fascinated

MASTERY

Feeling a sense of achievement, accomplishment, competence

MEANING

Contributing toward obtaining a personal or socially meaningful goal; feeling a sense of responsibility to others

QUALITY PARTICIPATION PRIORITIES

To better understand quality participation priorities for Special Olympics Canada, we asked youth development coordinators, program providers, and parents/caregivers to rank the importance of each of the six building blocks.

Belongingness, mastery, and challenge were consistently ranked as the most important building blocks for Special Olympics programming and athletes. Conversely, **autonomy, and meaning**, were less of a priority and rankings fluctuated according to program providers (ranked autonomy higher for the organization) and parents/caregivers (ranked meaning higher for athletes). **Engagement** was consistently last for rankings.

BUILDING BLOCK RANKING

BELONGINGNESS
Feeling included, accepted, respected, part of the group

MASTERY
Feeling a sense of achievement, accomplishment, competence

CHALLENGE
Feeling appropriately tested

AUTONOMY
Having independence, choice, control

MEANING
Contributing toward obtaining a personal or socially meaningful goal; feeling a sense of responsibility to others

ENGAGEMENT
Being in-the-moment, focused, absorbed, facinated

USING PRIORITIES TO ENHANCE QUALITY PARTICIPATION

Based on priority feedback, it is especially important that at minimum the top three building blocks – **belongingness, mastery, and challenge** – are fostered within Special Olympics Canada programming.

As previously stated, there is no need to incorporate all six of the building blocks, although, it may ideal as building block priorities may vary across athletes and time. Hence, effectively targeting **autonomy, meaning, and engagement** – in addition to belongingness, mastery, and challenge – can further enhance quality programming by striving beyond the minimum priority needs for athletes.

Consider your specific program's priorities and ask for your athletes' input to understand why they're participating. **Understanding your program's and athlete's unique needs will help you identify which building blocks you should focus on and, ultimately, prioritize your strategies.**



QUALITY PARTICIPATION STRATEGY GUIDE

ORGANIZED BY BUILDINGS BLOCKS

We gathered 30 strategies from the child and youth intellectual disability literature¹ that can be used to ensure programs offer **safe, welcoming, and inclusive environments** to support the six building blocks and thus, foster quality sport experiences and participation.

The **Quality Participation Strategy Guide** presented in the following pages links the six building blocks with a list of safe, welcoming, and inclusive strategies. In addition, examples of how these strategies can be integrated into Special Olympics Canada Active Start and FUNdamentals programming are provided.

Key Considerations:

- Utilize strategies that align with your program's priorities and athlete's needs.
- Implementing one strategy could influence numerous building blocks of quality participation.
- It may not be possible or necessary to use all the strategies, however, implementing more strategies will likely increase the potential for creating a quality experience.



¹Bruno N, Richardson A, Kauffeldt KD, Tomasone JR, Arbour-Nicitopoulos K, & Latimer-Cheung AE. (2020). Exploring experiential elements and strategies of quality participation for children and youth with intellectual and developmental disabilities: A systematic scoping review

BELONGINGNESS

| ENVIRONMENT | STRATEGY DEFINITION | EXAMPLE |
|--------------------------------|---|--|
| Physical | Accessibility: Environments should be modified to accommodate all children and their individualized needs (e.g. ramps, adapted toilets, suitable doorways, accessible parking). | When the physical environment accommodates all children participating, they feel part of the group. Program leaders should select a user-friendly setting that has space for parents/caregivers to be involved to help foster a welcoming atmosphere. |
| | Travel and Access: Activity setting is conveniently located. Programs that are close by, at appropriate times (accommodate family schedules), and accessible by transit are valued. | Encouraging opportunities and access for children enables them to feel as though the environment was built to include them. Program leaders that consider the availability of all children when scheduling sessions to help foster belonging. |
| Program | Diversity: In general, children appreciate participating in settings with individuals of differing abilities with regards to skills, age, and disability status, if the program environment is supportive of everyone's participation. | Creating an environment that encourages participation of all children equitably enables a sense of community. To ensure all athletes feel equally included, learn about the athletes preferred method of communication, physical abilities, skills, interests, dislikes, and reinforcers. By doing so, program leaders can create challenges based on individual needs to help the athlete feel comfortable participating. |
| | Open Play: Time for free play should be incorporated into programming to allow children to interact with peers and participate in activities they enjoy. | Open play can encourage children to engage with peers which can create a sense of acceptance. Introduce athletes with similar interests/skill sets to help foster peer connections. |
| Social - Program Leader | Behavioural Guidance: Program leaders should be experienced in providing behavioural guidance for children and youth with IDD. Behavioural difficulties/challenges that arise should be managed in an appropriate manner and program leaders should be prepared to address any behaviours that are harmful to the athlete or others. | Program leaders should consult parents/caregivers to ensure that they are aware of any behavioural or attentional challenges to better include children and facilitate positive peer interactions. Discuss techniques to address behaviours (e.g. offering the option to spend some time in a quiet hallway) and provide feedback in a way that is favoured by the athlete. |
| | Interpersonal Skills of Program Leader: It is important that program leaders are understanding, accepting, and empathetic. Program leaders must have welcoming attitudes to foster an engaging, and supportive social environment. | Program leaders should create a trusting and collaborative atmosphere to foster a sense of acceptance and belonging. When getting to know an athlete, integrate their interests into the activity, as this can help build trust. |
| | Program Leader Encourages Open Communication: Program leaders should have both strong communication and listening skills such that children and youth with IDD are able to openly communicate their needs. | Creating an environment that respects and values the input of all children can foster a sense of belonging. Look for opportunities to start conversations with athletes about their thoughts/feelings regarding activities to create an inclusive atmosphere. |
| | Program Leader Knowledge, Skill, and Learning: Program leaders should be flexible, prepared, knowledgeable, innovative, and consult children to make collaborative decisions. Additionally, program leaders should be equipped to diffuse conflicts and adapt activities. | Program leaders are trained to facilitate positive program experiences and possess the skills/techniques necessary to foster a welcoming and accepting environment. Program leaders should be able to adapt activities according to athlete abilities to encourage a sense of belonging. |
| | Program Leader Validates Contributions: Program leaders should validate children's contributions and encourage peers to recognize each other's accomplishments. Validation may include awards, prizes, and/or verbal praise to acknowledge attainment (e.g. stickers, high fives). | Program leaders can encourage peers to cheer each other on to develop a welcoming setting. By doing so, athletes can feel supported by both their peers and program leader within sessions. |
| Social - Peer | Group Environment: Group environments should foster teamwork, social interaction, a sense of belonging and group identity among peers. Program leaders must recognize their role in facilitating positive group environments. | Creating small groups of children with similar interests can encourage shared experiences with the added outcomes of fun and friendship development. Offer opportunities for athletes to work together as a team to foster a cohesive group dynamic. |
| | Mentorship or Role Modelling: Children have opportunities to mentor others, or to seek personal mentors to establish relationships with. Peers also contribute to the teaching/learning process. | When appropriate, create opportunities that allow children to work together to learn tasks and new skills can help foster a sense of acceptance and belonging. If a child shows particular interest in a given activity, allow them to lead/demonstrate. |
| Social - Family | Familial Support and Integration: Offer opportunities for family members to support their children's participation by integrating them into activities and the community more broadly. However, familial integration should not interfere with athlete independence. | Program leaders should involve siblings and parents/caregivers within activities to encourage support and networking. |

BELONGINGNESS CONTINUED

| ENVIRONMENT | STRATEGY DEFINITION | EXAMPLE |
|------------------|---|---|
| Social - General | Protection from Harassment: All children should have the capacity to practice, achieve mastery and express themselves without being subjected to scrutiny or humiliation. Program leaders must prepare strategies to help children speak about and cope with their negative social experiences and address problematic behaviours effectively. | It is critical that the social environment encourages growth, understanding, respect, and acceptance for all children – instructors must monitor peer interactions to ensure no child experiences harassment. To foster belonging, teach and promote inclusion and appropriate conversation between peers to enable a sense of belonging. |
| | Supportive Attitudes: Children perceive positive societal attitudes toward their participation, particularly from members of SOC. Program leaders should ensure that all children perceive a sense of support and recognition from them as well as their peers. | Encourage group huddles/cheers at the beginning and end of every session. By doing so, children will feel part of the group and community. |
| | Status of disability: Environments should support everyone equitably as this leads to mutually satisfying interactions. | Program leaders should create environments that treat all athletes equally regardless of disability, achievement, or skill level to create a sense of belonging. When designing sessions, provide frequent positive reinforcement and encourage peers to demonstrate respectful and inclusive behaviours towards each other. |



MASTERY

| ENVIRONMENT | STRATEGY DEFINITION | EXAMPLE |
|-------------------------|---|--|
| Program | Diversity: In general, children appreciate participating in settings with individuals of differing abilities with regards to skills, age, and disability status, if the program environment is supportive of everyone's participation. | By creating environments that are supportive to individual needs while accommodating diverse abilities, children can feel a sense of accomplishment. Promote individual success and avoid comparisons between athletes. |
| | Goal Setting: Program leaders should encourage self-selected goals as this has been beneficial for motivation and creating a sense of meaningfulness for participants. | By motivating children to reach goals of interest, instructors can help foster a sense of competence and accomplishment. Create opportunities for skills to be repeated and practice to help athletes reach their goals. |
| | Individual Level of Challenge: Consult with the participants to ensure programs and activities are individualized to each child's needs and capabilities. Further, each child will have a different pace for developing skills and it is crucial that activities are tailored accordingly. | Get to know athletes and gauge if they are ready to take on additional responsibilities in sessions. Offer opportunities for athletes to demonstrate drills, set up equipment, lead cheers, become an 'assistant coach', teach their volunteer a new skill/activity, create a new drill, etc. to enable a sense of competence and pride. |
| | Routines: Routines – a sequence of activities regularly followed – in programming can be crucial for creating a sense of security and fostering understanding for children. | Keeping a consistent and welcoming program environment can help athletes feel more comfortable and open to trying new skills. Maintaining a set order of activities (i.e. warm up, group cheer, etc.) helps to facilitate children's understanding of the task at hand which enables a sense of competence. |
| | Structure: Programs should be structured and organized with a clear purpose throughout sessions while also remaining flexible to the participants goals and interests. | When activities are organized according to a specific objective, children can work towards achieving the purposefully set goals, fostering a sense of mastery. Structure each session in a similar manner so athletes know what to expect. |
| Social - Program Leader | Program Leader Knowledge, Skill, and Learning: Program leaders should be flexible, prepared, knowledgeable, innovative, and consult children to make collaborative decisions. Additionally, program leaders should be equipped to diffuse conflicts and adapt activities. | Program leaders should possess the knowledge and skills to keep all children on track and actively involved within the session. Provide visual and verbal guidance when demonstrating an activity so athletes see and hear what is expected. Break down activity instructions into multiple steps so the activity is easier to follow. |
| | Program Leader Tracking Athlete Improvement: Program leader encourages self-monitoring so that athletes know when they have improved, even marginally to foster a sense of competence, achievement, and satisfaction. | Program leaders should motivate children to track improvements, provide support in logging personal progress and offer recommendations for achieving new skills. Provide immediate, constructive, and positive feedback as parts of a skill are learned, not just when the whole skill is mastered. |
| | Program Leader Validates Contributions: Program leaders should validate children's contributions and encourage peers to recognize each other's accomplishments. Validation may include awards, prizes, and/or verbal praise to acknowledge attainment (e.g. stickers, high fives). | Praise and validation can foster a sense of accomplishment and encourage progress for children. Whenever possible, provide positive feedback from multiple staff or volunteers, so athletes have varied encouragement. |
| | Interpersonal Skills of Program Leader: It is important that program leaders are understanding, accepting, and empathetic. Program leaders must have welcoming attitudes to foster an engaging, and supportive social environment. | Being a successful communicator as an instructor can provide children with the support necessary to develop skills and experience success. Demonstrate enthusiasm about athlete accomplishments and be genuine in your excitement. Let the athlete know they are doing well to help instill a sense of confidence and self-efficacy. |
| Social - Peer | Mentorship or Role Modelling: Children have opportunities to mentor others, or to seek personal mentors to establish relationships with. Peers also contribute to the teaching/learning process. | To support a sense of competence, program leaders should facilitate positive and successful interactions between peers by encouraging children to lead activities or model techniques that they were successful at/showed interest in. |
| Social - Family | Collaboration with family members: Collaboration should be encouraged between program leaders and family members to enable knowledge sharing, joint understandings, and partnership. | High levels of communication should occur between family members and program leaders. Program leaders should be patient, understanding, and willing to learn from parents to encourage optimal experiences for children. Wherever possible, have parents complete a profile/detailed registration form for their child before beginning the program (i.e. information about preferred method of communication, physical abilities, skills, interests, dislikes, reinforcers, and needs). |

MASTERY CONTINUED

| ENVIRONMENT | STRATEGY DEFINITION | EXAMPLE |
|-------------------------|--|--|
| | <p>Educating Family Members: It is crucial that program leaders are able to answer parent and participant questions and further, educate parents on how they can support activities at home to ensure successful experiences for children.</p> <p>Familial Support and Integration: Offer opportunities for family members to support their children's participation by integrating them into activities and the community more broadly. However, familial integration should not interfere with athlete independence.</p> | <p>By educating family members on how to create a supportive participation environment, children may be able to develop skills more readily which can instill a sense of competence. Ensure family members understand the child's progress so that home activities match the pace needed to foster growth.</p> <p>Family members that support children's learning can encourage success and thus, instill a sense of achievement. Communicate with parents/guardians about the athlete's goals to facilitate a cohesive understanding of how they can participate in sessions to facilitate success.</p> |
| Social - General | <p>Status of disability: Environments should support everyone equitably as this leads to mutually satisfying interactions.</p> <p>Unique Pathways: All children should have a welcoming experience pursuing various forms of participation and competition levels.</p> | <p>Activities that are designed to thoughtfully include all children can enable confidence while participating. While teaching new skills, be sure to provide athletes with systematic and scaffolded support – break down complex tasks to help isolate and correct errors.</p> <p>All children, regardless of their unique pathway and progress, should feel validated by their social environment to enable a sense of mastery. Offer a small reward (i.e. sticker, ribbon) for attending sessions and completing a full program. Athletes can then collect the rewards so they can look back and be proud of their achievements.</p> |



CHALLENGE

| ENVIRONMENT | STRATEGY DEFINITION | EXAMPLE |
|-------------------------|---|--|
| Physical | Access to Equipment: Physical environments should have a variety of appropriate equipment (e.g. different sizes and textures) and aids available (e.g. assistive devices for activities). | Equipment should suit participants individual needs and skill-levels to ensure they are appropriately tested. Simplify and/or extend activities to meet individualized athlete's needs using different equipment (e.g. have athletes start with a large target and progress to a smaller one). |
| | Safe Places: It is critical that environments are designed to make children feel safe and protected to create a more pleasurable experience. Environments that are familiar are perceived as safe by the children. | Audit the space for flight risks, danger zones, and weapons to promote athlete safety. Safe environments can help children feel as though they can try new activities and test their limits without worrying about getting hurt. |
| Program | Diversity: In general, children appreciate participating in settings with individuals of differing abilities with regards to skills, age, and disability status, if the program environment is supportive of everyone's participation. | The program environment should be supportive to everyone's participation and activities should be adapted to be challenging for all participants. To appropriately test children, pair or group participants with complementary abilities to encourage challenge. |
| | Individual Level of Challenge: Consult with the participants to ensure programs and activities are individualized to each child's needs and capabilities. Further, each child will have a different pace for developing skills and it is crucial that activities are tailored accordingly. | Activities should constantly be adapted to children's needs and strengths to ensure they are appropriately challenged throughout the program. Though, be sure to add in a more difficult components at each step of learning the skill, so the athlete can be challenged through the learning process (i.e. when learning to dribble a basketball, have athletes try their non-dominant hand as well). |
| | Options: Programs should offer a range of activities with varying difficulties according to the needs and strengths of those participating. | Instructors should provide a range of alternative/preferred activities with varying difficulties according to the needs and strengths of those participating. However, try to create an expectation that athletes try all activities at least once, and then make appropriate modifications as necessary. |
| | Structure: Programs should be structured and organized with a clear purpose throughout sessions while also remaining flexible to the participants goals and interests. | To appropriately test children, programs should be designed to accomplish specific objectives that can be thoughtfully adapted and broken down into manageable components. Give clear and constructive feedback can help athletes overcome obstacles. |
| Social - Program Leader | Program Leader Autonomy Support: Children should be consulted, feel that their ideas are valued, and encouraged to offer their opinions. | By creating an autonomy supportive environment, program leaders may be able encourage children to select activities they feel they are capable of performing instead of assuming their needs. |
| | Program Leader Knowledge, Skill, and Learning: Program leaders should be flexible, prepared, knowledgeable, innovative, and consult children to make collaborative decisions. Additionally, program leaders should be equipped to diffuse conflicts and adapt activities. | Program leaders should be equipped to diffuse conflicts and adapt activities to ensure athlete needs are met while also challenging them appropriately. Make difficult activities more enticing by sandwiching them between more rewarding and preferred activities. |
| | Program Leader Tracking Athlete Improvement: Program leader encourages self-monitoring so that athletes know when they have improved, even marginally to foster a sense of competence, achievement, and satisfaction. | Children are motivated by their program leader's encouragement and support to develop new skills and challenge themselves to take risks. Get to know the comfort level of each athlete so you can help athletes extend beyond their comfort zone. |
| Social - Peer | Interpersonal Skills of Program Leader: It is important that program leaders are understanding, accepting, and empathetic. Program leaders must have welcoming attitudes to foster a supportive social environment. | Program leaders that possess strong interpersonal skills can motivate children to try new activities and challenge themselves in a safe manner. Be sure to reward attempts at skills, even if they are unsuccessful to foster a respectful and trusting environment. |
| | Group Environment: Group environments should foster teamwork, social interaction, a sense of belonging and group identity among peers. Program leaders must recognize their role in facilitating positive group environments. | Children can be tested appropriately by grouping them with partners or teams of similar/complementary abilities. Keep consistent athlete pairings between sessions, whenever possible, to increase their opportunity to make strong connections – alternate after children have the opportunity to challenge each other. |
| Social - Family | Collaboration with family members: Collaboration should be encouraged between program leaders and family members to enable knowledge sharing, joint understandings, and partnership. | Family members can help to educate program leaders regarding their children's needs, and capabilities to optimally tailor the program with a range of activities at the appropriate level of challenge. |
| Social - General | Unique Pathways: All children should have a welcoming experience pursuing various forms of participation and competition levels. | Program leaders should educate children regarding opportunities to progress to higher levels of competition if desired. By doing so, children can continuously experience progress towards more advanced sessions/programs. |

ENGAGEMENT

| ENVIRONMENT | STRATEGY DEFINITION | EXAMPLE |
|-----------------|---|---|
| Physical | Accessibility: Environments should be modified to accommodate all children and their individualized needs (e.g. ramps, adapted toilets, suitable doorways). | By ensuring the environment is accessible, children are better able to focus during activities. To promote optimal engagement, remove visual, physical, and auditory interruptions from the surrounding environment. |
| | Access to Equipment: Physical environments should have a variety of appropriate equipment (e.g. different sizes and textures) and aids available (e.g. assistive devices for activities). | Keep all equipment in the same location every session to ensure children have access to equipment that meets their needs. Only make equipment that will be used during the session available to athletes to keep them absorbed in-the-moment. |
| | Safe Places: It is critical that environments are designed to make children feel safe and protected to create a more pleasurable experience. Environments that are familiar are perceived as safe by the children. | Locations should include soft surfaces or mats to encourage participation and decrease fear around falling or injury. When children feel safe, they can experience flow and progress to new skills of interest. |
| | Travel and Access: Activity setting is conveniently located. Programs that are close by, at appropriate times (accommodate family schedules), and accessible by transit are valued. | It is crucial that activities are available at appropriate times that can accommodate to family's schedules and children's energy levels to encourage focus and involvement. Provide a variety of days/times/locations to select those that are best suited to your athletes. |
| Program | Goal Setting: Program leaders should encourage self-selected goals as this has been beneficial for motivation and creating a sense of meaningfulness for participants. | Consult with athletes to better understand their interests and challenges to help guide attainable targets. If they have broad and/or long-term goals, create short-term goals and ensure skill-building activities are an appropriate length. If goals are not realistic and activities last too long, there is a greater chance that athletes will become bored or distracted and disengage from the session. |
| | Individual Level of Challenge: Consult with the participants to ensure programs and activities are individualized to each child's needs and capabilities. Further, each child will have a different pace for developing skills and it is crucial that activities are tailored accordingly. | Ensuring activities are individualized will encourage feelings of flow for children. Add new activities and games into sessions to both maintain athlete interest and appropriately test/progress their skills. |
| | Low-Stimulus Environment: Program environments should consider the sensory sensitivities of all athletes participating. As such, low stimulus environments with few distractions are recommended. | Consult children and their parents to ensure sensory environments are optimal for focus and engagement. It may be helpful to prepare children for activities in advance (i.e. session plan) to encourage flow. |
| | Open Play: Time for free play should be incorporated into programming to allow children to interact with peers and participate in activities they enjoy. | Open play can allow children to engage and focus on activities that they may prefer. If athletes are interested in a non-activity related task, use first/then prompting to attempt to engage them in the current task, and then allow them some time to complete their preferred activity (i.e. first bounce the ball 5 times, then play with the stuffed animal). |
| | Options: Programs should offer a range of activities with varying difficulties according to the needs and strengths of those participating. | Allow athletes to be creative with alternatives. For example, if an athlete wants to attempt a skill in a different way than is being taught, allow them to try, before gently guiding them back to the task at hand. |
| | Routines: Routines – a sequence of activities regularly followed – in programming can be crucial for creating a sense of security and fostering understanding for children. | Use consistent activity flow in every session (e.g. warm up, group activity, peer mentor, open play, and cool down routine) to encourage engagement and focus. Also, ensure each session is held in a consistent setting so athletes will be familiar and comfortable with the environment. |
| | Safe Activities: Activities should be low-risk and limit the possibility for injury. Program leaders should monitor the participation environment to make adjustments as needed and incorporate breaks to ensure children are able to perform the activities appropriately. | Explain the rationale and purpose behind completing the activity to foster cohesive understanding among the group and offer safety tips to prevent injury. When children feel safe while participating in activities, they are better able to focus and experience feeling in the moment. |
| | Structure: Programs should be structured and organized with a clear purpose throughout sessions while also remaining flexible to the participants goals and interests. | Having a structured program with activities that are purposefully included can increase children's understanding, focus, and active involvement in programs. |

ENGAGEMENT CONTINUED

| ENVIRONMENT | STRATEGY DEFINITION | EXAMPLE |
|--------------------------------|---|--|
| Social - Program Leader | Behavioural Guidance: Program leaders should be experienced in providing behavioural guidance for children with IDD. Behavioural difficulties/challenges that arise should be managed in an appropriate manner and program leaders should be prepared to address any behaviours that are harmful to the athlete or others. | Program leaders should be prepared to regulate children's involvement by reinforcing positive behaviour, providing clear expectations, cues and feedback, and correcting missteps as they occur. Model the steps of an activity to help athletes understand the tasks. Provide an appropriate level of prompting to help athletes remain focused through activities. |
| | Interpersonal Skills of Program Leader: It is important that program leaders are understanding, accepting, and empathetic. Program leaders must have welcoming attitudes to foster an engaging, and supportive social environment. | Program leaders should be enthusiastic (e.g. offer continuous encouragement) and demonstrate a strong commitment to working with the children (e.g. flexible to needs of athletes, dedicated to progress and group cohesion) to increase their engagement. Program leaders that are actively engaged themselves are better able to encourage focus and flow. |
| | Program Leader Autonomy Support: Children should be consulted, feel that their ideas are valued, and encouraged to offer their opinions. | When children are provided with opportunities to share their ideas and opinions they will be more actively involved in programs. Work with the athlete to personalize activities to make them more enjoyable, especially if the athlete is feeling unmotivated. |
| | Program Leader Encourages Open Communication: Program leaders should have both strong communication and listening skills such that children and youth with IDD are able to openly communicate their needs. | Program leaders that encourage children to actively contribute and share their ideas can better involve and engage participants in sessions. Create a visual schedule with athletes so they know what to expect, have a greater sense of control, and can offer feedback on preferred activities. This demonstrates their input is valued. |
| | Program Leader Knowledge, Skill, and Learning: Program leaders should be flexible, prepared, knowledgeable, innovative, and consult children to make collaborative decisions. Additionally, program leaders should be equipped to diffuse conflicts and adapt activities. | Instructors should possess the knowledge and skills to keep all children on track and actively involved within the session. Before delivering instructions, ask the athlete to do simple tasks (i.e. touch your nose, clap once, etc.) so athletes are attending to the information that follows. After delivering instructions, ask athletes questions to check if they understood the information presented. |
| | Program Leader Validates Contributions: Program leaders should validate children's contributions and encourage peers to recognize each other's accomplishments. Validation may include awards, prizes, and/or verbal praise to acknowledge attainment (e.g. stickers, high fives). | Recognizing children's involvement can reinforce engagement and active contributions. Positively reinforce engaged behaviours (i.e. when the athletes are fully focused on the activity) with the type of praise preferred by the athlete (i.e. high fives, clapping, preferred activity, break etc.) |
| Social - Peer | Group Environment: Group environments should foster teamwork, social interaction, a sense of belonging and group identity among peers. Program leaders must recognize their role in facilitating positive group environments. | Group environments can be used as a method to engage children e.g. having a team solve a problem can increase active involvement in the session. Whenever possible, repeat group activities in subsequent sessions so there will be some familiarity for the athlete. |
| | Mentorship or Role Modelling: Children have opportunities to mentor others, or to seek personal mentors to establish relationships with. Peers also contribute to the teaching/learning process. | Engagement and focus on the task at hand can be fostered by offering children the choice to model skills related to their interests. Provide an appropriate level of prompting to help athletes through paired activities, but only prompt when athletes need support. |
| Social - Family | Collaboration with family members: Collaboration should be encouraged between program leaders and family members to enable knowledge sharing, joint understandings, and partnership. | Ask parents/guardians to bring reinforcing items (i.e. favourite toy, book) to sessions, so it can be used as a reward to help motivate athletes. Use first/then statements to help engage athletes in the activity at hand (i.e. first we will shoot baskets, then read the book). |
| | Educating Family Members: It is crucial that instructors are able to answer parent and participant questions and further, educate parents on how they can support activities at home to ensure successful experiences for children. | Family members that are aware of opportunities and techniques to engage their children can help to facilitate positive experiences both within and outside the participation environment. Ensure take-home activities are simple and straight-forward, so athletes and family members can easily understand what is expected. |
| | Familial Support and Integration: Offer opportunities for family members to support their children's participation by integrating them into activities and the community more broadly. However, familial integration should not interfere with athlete independence. | Siblings can be positive role models and facilitate engagement for children when offered the opportunity to join in a manner that does not interfere with athlete independence. Athletes can draw on the enthusiasm of the family members and engage further with the activity. Play family member/staff vs. athlete scrimmages to allow athletes to practice the skill in a new environment. |

AUTONOMY

| ENVIRONMENT | STRATEGY DEFINITION | EFFECT ON ELEMENT |
|--------------------------------|---|---|
| Physical | Access to Equipment: Physical environments should have a variety of appropriate equipment (e.g. different sizes and textures) and aids available (e.g. assistive devices for activities). | Access to a variety of equipment can provide children with choice and foster a sense of control while completing a skill (i.e. shooting a ball into a hula-hoop instead of a basketball net, providing a large ball that will be easier to kick, etc.) |
| Program | Goal Setting: Program leaders should encourage self-selected goals as this has been beneficial for motivation and creating a sense of meaningfulness for participants. | Offering children the opportunity to set goals of their choice can instill a sense of control. Assist athletes in setting individualized, simple, and attainable goals. Get to know an athlete's abilities, strengths, and weaknesses to help them overcome obstacles. |
| | Open Play: Time for free play should be incorporated into programming to allow children to interact with peers and participate in activities they enjoy. | Although it is recommended to have structure within programming, include time for open play for athletes to experiment with activities of their choice. Create playful competitions between staff/volunteers and athletes, where athletes have the opportunity to showcase skills and try new skills. |
| | Options: Programs should offer a range of activities with varying difficulties according to the needs and strengths of those participating. | Provide participants choice in activities, equipment, modifications, etc. Instructors should actively seek and present options and opportunities to children. |
| Social - Program Leader | Program Leader Autonomy Support: Children should be consulted, feel that their ideas are valued, and encouraged to offer their opinions. | Instructors should provide choice (e.g. between objects) when facilitating programs to ensure children feel consulted. If an athlete does not want to participate in a certain activity, offer options of similar activities that target the same skill. |
| | Program Leader Encourages Open Communication: Program leaders should have both strong communication and listening skills such that children and youth with IDD are able to openly communicate their needs. | Instructors may use a variety of different methods (e.g. 1:1 consultation, written goals) and communicative cues (e.g. verbal, visual, tactile) to provide alternative ways for children to share their ideas and opinions. |



MEANING

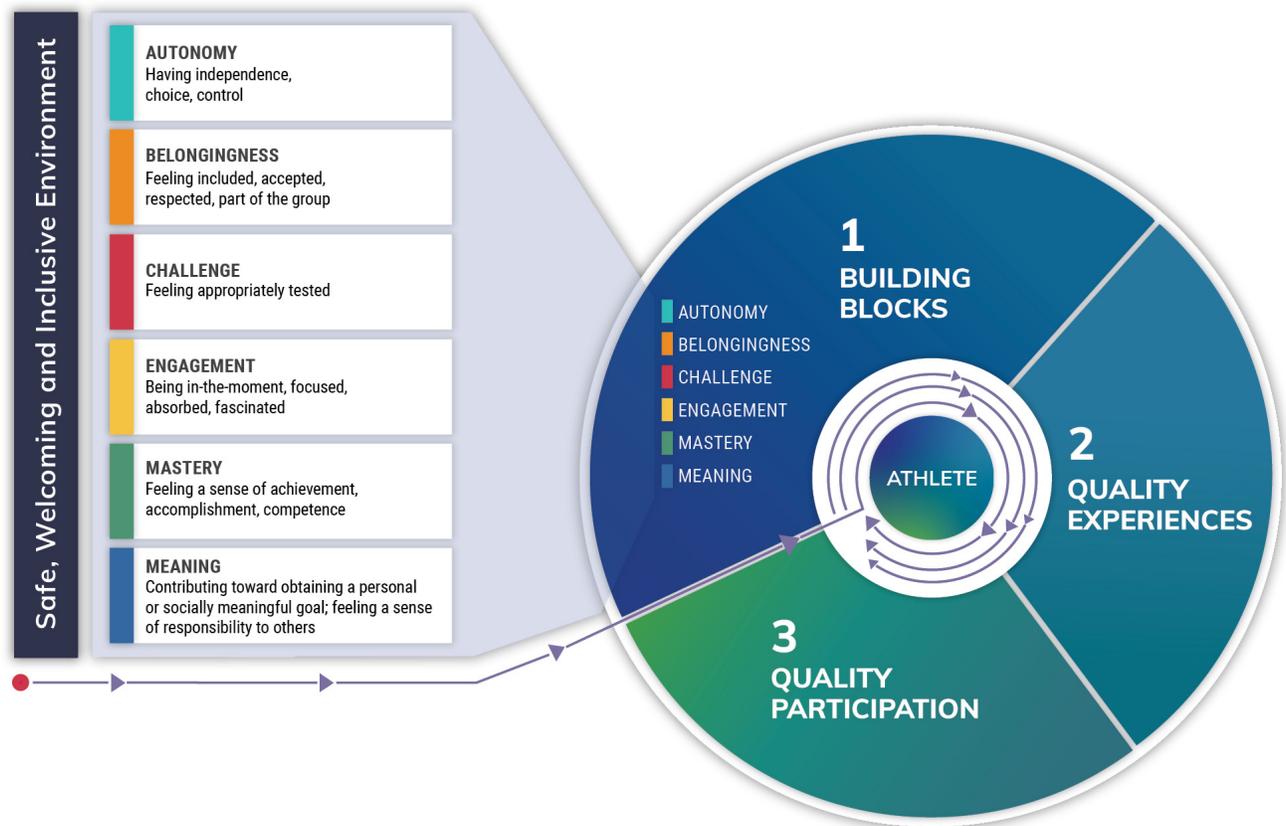
| ENVIRONMENT | STRATEGY DEFINITION | EXAMPLE |
|--------------------------------|---|---|
| Program | Diversity: In general, children appreciate participating in settings with individuals of differing abilities with regards to skills, age, and disability status, if the program environment is supportive of everyone's participation. | Ensuring that participation environments accommodate and include children of diverse abilities can enable a sense of purpose for athletes. Learn about the athlete (interests, abilities, communication style, dislikes etc.) to help ensure interactions with athletes are optimal. |
| | Goal Setting: Program leaders should encourage self-selected goals as this has been beneficial for motivation and creating a sense of meaningfulness for participants. | Instructors should encourage athletes to set activity and session goals that are meaningful to them to instill a sense of purpose. Help athletes set individualized, attainable goals both specific to the session and for the duration of the program/season (i.e. short and long-term goals). When possible, help athletes set goals that will encourage self-growth. |
| | Individual Level of Challenge: Consult with the participants to ensure programs and activities are individualized to each child's needs and capabilities. Further, each child will have a different pace for developing skills and it is crucial that activities are tailored accordingly. | Children appreciate learning new skills in manageable components that they can successfully perform by themselves. When activities are appropriately tailored to children's needs, they can experience success while achieving personally/socially meaningful goals. |
| | Options: Programs should offer a range of activities with varying difficulties according to the needs and strengths of those participating. | Incorporating options that align with the child's goals and interests can foster a sense of meaning. Whenever possible, embed flexibility into programming, where athletes have some choice in which activities they complete, the order of activities, and/or the length and timing of breaks. |
| Social - Program Leader | Program Leader Autonomy Support: Children should be consulted, feel that their ideas are valued, and encouraged to offer their opinions. | Program leaders that recognize their athletes' capacities for independence and autonomy can contribute to a sense of meaning for children. Involve athletes in programming decisions (e.g. equipment colour, order of activities, group name), so they have a voice in session activities. |
| | Program Leader Encourages Open Communication: Program leaders should have both strong communication and listening skills such that children and youth with IDD are able to openly communicate their needs. | When children feel as though they can openly communicate their needs and goals, program leaders will be able to create a more meaningful and purposefully tailored environment. Take time to talk to athletes one on one and keep a log of key points in your records to make sure that you are integrating athlete feedback in subsequent sessions. |
| | Program Leader Validates Contributions: Program leaders should validate children's contributions and encourage peers to recognize each other's accomplishments. Validation may include awards, prizes, and/or verbal praise to acknowledge attainment (e.g. stickers, high fives). | By ensuring children's achievements are recognized, program leaders can help children feel as though they have attained the goals that are meaningful to them. Consider implementing a reward system, where athletes are provided with a prize/sticker/reinforcer for attending and participating in sessions. Present the rewards in a manner that is comfortable for the athlete (silent thumbs up, etc.). |
| | Interpersonal Skills of Program Leader: It is important that program leaders are understanding, accepting, and empathetic. Program leaders must have welcoming attitudes to foster an engaging, and supportive social environment. | Accepting and supportive program leaders can better engage children to strive for personal and socially meaningful goals. Model team spirit to help teach athletes how to interact with teammates and create strategies to foster a respectful program environment (e.g. athlete names tags, having peers high-five to recognize contributions, etc.). |
| Social - Peer | Group Environment: Group environments should foster teamwork, social interaction, a sense of belonging and group identity among peers. Program leaders must recognize their role in facilitating positive group environments. | Children that are encouraged to work together as a group can feel a sense of purpose, responsible, and strive for socially meaningful goals. Provide t-shirts/uniforms so athletes have a sense of being part of a community and offer larger group games or scrimmages where athletes are given the opportunity to work as a team with peers. If the group dynamic causes anxiety, prepare a 1:1 teaching setting with a volunteer or pair athletes if that is not feasible. |
| | Mentorship or Role Modelling: Children have opportunities to mentor others, or to seek personal mentors to establish relationships with. Peers also contribute to the teaching/learning process. | Offer opportunities for athletes to become buddies for subsequent sessions to learn/work through new skills together. Mentorship and role modelling drive children to work towards personally and socially meaningful goals as a team. |

MEANING

| ENVIRONMENT | STRATEGY DEFINITION | EXAMPLE |
|-------------------------|--|---|
| Social - General | <p>Protection from Harassment: All children should have the capacity to practice, achieve mastery and express themselves without being subjected to scrutiny or humiliation. Program leaders must prepare strategies to help children speak about and cope with their negative social experiences and address problematic behaviours effectively.</p> | <p>Instructors should encourage children to reach a common goal (e.g. program leader/volunteers vs athletes' scrimmage) as this has been demonstrated to develop meaning and shared interests amongst children. Prepare athletes for potentially tense situations (i.e. game where there will be a loser), by explaining how to be a good sport and how to appropriately react if their team loses (i.e. shaking hands, congratulating the other team).</p> |
| | <p>Supportive Attitudes: Children perceive positive societal attitudes toward their participation, particularly from members of SOC. Program leaders should ensure that all children perceive a sense of support and recognition from them as well as their peers.</p> | <p>By supporting children to participate, they can feel as though they have the capabilities to strive for personally and meaningful goals. Encourage athletes to cheer on or speak small words of encouragement to their peers. Give positive feedback when athletes demonstrate respectful and inclusive behaviour towards peers.</p> |
| | <p>Status of disability: Environments should support everyone equitably as this leads to mutually satisfying interactions.</p> | <p>Activities that were designed to thoughtfully include all children can help them feel a sense of purpose while participating. Provide positive reinforcement when athletes show responsibility to others and team spirit. This is often more difficult for children with IDD's, so rewarding prosocial and compassionate behaviour is important.</p> |



BUILD A PLAN TO ENHANCE PROGRAM QUALITY



SWOT Analysis:

Strengths: Which building blocks are your program's strength areas? How well do these strengths align with your program priorities?

Weaknesses: Which building blocks align with your program priorities but are not strength areas in your program currently?

Opportunities: Identify up to three building blocks your program could focus on to improve athletes' quality participation. Identify strategies your program could incorporate to support these building blocks. Jot down some notes about how these strategies can be implemented into your program. Consider if there are any upcoming opportunities for implementing these strategies such as a training camp, funding opportunities, etc.

Threats: Identify any barriers or threats you foresee impeding the implementation of your strategies to target these building blocks.