



# AUTISM

## WHAT IS AUTISM?

Autism is a lifelong developmental impairment which affects how people communicate and interact with the world. It is diagnostically defined by a certain set of behaviours which can affect each individual differently and to varying degrees (National Autistic Society).

People with autism may experience and interact with the world in a different way to you, indeed each person with autism will experience the world in their own unique way and their sensory processes may be different, this is all to be embraced through a person-centered approach.

By having a person centered approach, listening to individuals and understanding their own requirements through feedback, we can make reasonable adjustments which will benefit their overall experience and engagement in tennis.

## HOW CAN WE SUPPORT INDIVIDUALS IN OUR TENNIS PROGRAMMES?

Autism is a spectrum, and every individual is unique, so it is not possible to give you a definitive list of things to do/not to do. The key focus is to work with the individual involved and listen to their needs and as coaches utilise the STEP principle to enhance your sessions.

### Top Tips to Effective Communication

- **Verbal** – Keep sentences short, with more direct and specific language and avoid using abstract or ambiguous statements.
- **Non-Verbal** – Be aware that autistic people may struggle to read your expressions appropriately while considering the wider social situation (also be aware that you may not be conveying your expressions in the way in which you intend, which can cause confusion).
- **Written** – Be clear and concise about the information requested and where possible justify the need for it. Be clear that this request will support their needs within your programme or club.

## DID YOU KNOW:

Statistics show around **1 IN 100 PEOPLE** in the UK are diagnosed as autistic (National Autistic Society)

Autism is **THREE TIMES MORE PREVALENT** in boys than girls. (Office for National Statistics)

**NEARLY 50% OF PEOPLE** with autism have associated learning difficulties (National Autistic Society)

Tennis players competing with autism are now able to be **CLASSIFIED TO COMPETE IN VIRTUS SPORT INTERNATIONAL TENNIS COMPETITIONS** in the II3 category.

# VENUE/CLUB CONSIDERATIONS

## Preparation and Planning

- **Venue Guide** - Could you prepare a venue guide so people know what it will look like before they arrive? A short video filmed via mobile phones may help to reduce people's anxieties about visiting a new environment
- **Information** - Can you let people know what they will be doing in advance? Could you show them videos of new techniques they will be learning before they attend?
- **Changes** - Give advanced notice of changes where possible, this could be a session having to be moved, or knowledge that a certain changing room is being repaired so will be closed.

## Before, During and After

- **Before** - How do people sign up for a programme? Share information about all aspects of arrival, including parking, a venue guide, directions, and timings (think about what time you want people to arrive, and what time the session will start to ease any anxiety)
- **During** - Consider the environment, and any factors which could be easily changed to help individuals. Some individuals may wish to take a time out at certain points, is this something you could facilitate? Ensure any changes are communicated clearly and punctually to ease any anxiety.
- **After** - Consider the feedback you are asking for? Do you want feedback, or do you want praise? If you are going to follow up with people, try to be specific about when this will be done and for what purpose.

# COACHES' CORNER

SPACE/ ENVIRONMENT	TASKS	EQUIPMENT/ RULES	PEOPLE/ COMMUNICATION	SAFETY
Allow extra space for tasks	Chunk information into manageable chunks	Use colourful equipment to aid understanding	See and understand the ability of the player not the disability	Consider any other medical or other impairments
Consider other noise taking place at the same time	Repeat steps frequently	Set clear boundaries for behaviour	Consider your non-verbal communication and avoid abstract statements or metaphors	Create safe spaces for activity if needed to help players with anxiety
Create visible timetable of activity	Allow time for processing (6 second rule)	Grey areas lead to confusion	Consider your volume and pitch of voice	

# USEFUL RESOURCES AND LINKS

Click the links below for some more useful resources:

- [Learning Disability Tennis Factsheet](#)
- [Disability Tennis Coaching Resource](#)
- [Tennis Coaching Article from Spautism](#)



# CONTACT US FOR MORE INFO

For further information on hearing impaired tennis please contact the LTA Disability Development team:

Email: [disabilitytennis@lta.org.uk](mailto:disabilitytennis@lta.org.uk) Tel: +44 (0)208 487 7000

Please visit: [www.lta.org.uk](http://www.lta.org.uk)