ADAPTIVE SPORTS essential CHECKLIST

Step 1: Use Movement as a Biological and Emotional Reset

Physical activity is an incredible tool that naturally engages your child's sensory systems. Instead of focusing on strict competition, look at movement as a safe, constructive way for your child to feel more grounded and connected to their body.

- ☐ **Engage the vestibular and proprioceptive systems:** Choose activities that involve running, jumping, or balancing to help organize your child's sensory processing.
- ☐ **Channel pent-up energy:** Use vigorous physical movement to naturally lower daily frustrations and physiological stress levels.
- ☐ **Treat the game as a social laboratory:** Use the predictable, structured rules of games to practice turn-taking and peer-to-peer bonding in a low-pressure way.

Step 2: Prioritize Safety with Structured Aquatic Frameworks

For many families, water safety is an absolute necessity due to high-stakes wandering risks. A step-by-step approach balances vital safety mechanics with deep empathy for your child's comfort level.

- ☐ **Acknowledge the sensory attraction to water:** Recognize that a child with autism may be naturally drawn to pools or lakes, making proactive water safety a priority.
- ☐ **Practice systematic sensory desensitization:** Allow your child to gradually acclimate to the unique temperatures, pressures, and echoing sounds of a pool facility.
- ☐ **Break safety skills into micro-steps:** Focus on mastering tiny, predictable habits first - such as independent floating, identifying pool boundaries, and safely exiting the water.

Step 3: Modify Game Frameworks and Tracking Metrics

Traditional sports focus heavily on scoreboards and winning, which can lead to confusion and isolation. Redesigning the mechanics of play ensures your child focuses on skill-building and fun rather than environmental stressors.

- ☐ **Shift to "Personal Bests" (PBs):** Celebrate customized milestones tailored entirely to your child's current capabilities, like holding a position or executing a single pass.
- ☐ **Simplify and show instructions:** Break complex athletic drills down into single-action pieces, pairing minimal spoken words with an immediate visual demonstration.
- ☐ **Deploy visual aid supports:** Use colourful, illustrated posters or charts in the gym or dugout to map out the "order of play" and whose turn is next.

Step 4: Proactively Manage Sensory Overwhelm

Bustling ice rinks, echo-prone gyms, and bright fields are inherently high-stimulus places. Adults can prevent sensory exhaustion by learning to read early signs of dysregulation and offering discrete, non-stigmatizing tools.

- ☐ **Manage loud noises:** Provide comfortable noise-cancelling headphones or earplugs to use during bench time, unexpected whistles, or loud crowd cheers.
- ☐ **Protect your child's vision:** Encourage the use of polarized sunglasses or brimmed hats during outdoor field sports to manage intense light sensitivity and glare.
- ☐ **Enhance tactile comfort:** Wrap high-grip, textured tape around bats, racquets, or sticks to provide grounding sensory feedback and improve physical control.
- ☐ **Map out a "Quiet Zone":** Designate a clearly marked, easily accessible, low-stimulation space near the playing area where your child can safely reset before returning to play.

Step 5: Build Community Support with Peer Scaffolding

True inclusion bridges the gap between clinical support and community acceptance. You can help create a welcoming environment by building a network of support around your child.

- ☐ **Implement a "Big Buddy" system:** Pair your child with autism with a supportive peer partner to provide an organic social model on the field.
- ☐ **Foster authentic friendships:** Use shared physical activities as a natural icebreaker to build meaningful connections rooted in play.
- ☐ **Share strategies with coaches:** Gently share these practical modification tips and sensory frameworks with local coaches and recreational leaders to set the whole team up for success.

You are doing a wonderful job. Creating an inclusive world of play for your child takes dedication, and your efforts are paving the way for their growth and happiness. Monarch House is always here to provide a safe, welcoming space where your family is celebrated, supported, and truly belongs.

MONARCHessentials
You belong