

## **[www.autismhelp.info](http://www.autismhelp.info)**

### **Physical education**

#### **Points to note**

- Many children with Asperger's Syndrome or other autistic disorders have some degree of motor clumsiness. Some have an odd gait when walking or running. There may be a lack of co-ordination between the upper and lower limbs.
- The child may have poor ball handling skills, particularly if visual perception is a problem. For example, he may be unable to anticipate a ball being thrown in his direction. A child with poor ball handling skills may be ridiculed by his peers and excluded from school ground games. Unfortunately, when this occurs the child has limited opportunities to practice his skills and enjoy the social aspects of sporting activities.
- A child with tactile problems will dislike the physical contact of team sports.
- The child may have a very strong sense of justice; he might get very upset if he believes someone has cheated in a game. Some cannot bear to lose a game; they cannot handle the outcome being other than what they expected and they are often perfectionists.
- Proprioceptive difficulty leads to an inability to judge the position of one's body in space. The child may not be very good at imitating. Balance may also be affected.
- The child may have auditory sensitivities; acoustics in a gymnasium can be unbearable to children with autism. The sound of whistles, bouncing balls and children's voices echoing off the walls can be horrendous.

#### **What you can do**

- A physiotherapist or occupational therapist can put together a remedial program to assist with co-ordination.
- Ball handling skills can greatly improve the child's acceptance by his peers. He may never be an outstanding player but ball skills can be improved through a regular physical education program.
- If auditory sensitivity is a problem, the child may prefer to wear ear protectors. Have an agreement that the child can remove himself from the gym if he is feeling overloaded.
- Use a social story to teach rules of games and develop an understanding of fair play.
- Always use teacher selected groups to ensure the child with autism is not left out. Due to the child's difficulties with motor skills he may be among the last to be picked by his classmates.
- The ability to swim does not seem to be affected greatly. This can be one area where the child can develop competence and be on a par with his peers. See the Recreation section for tips on teaching Aquatics to children with autism.