

12 Tips for Including Individuals with Autism in Games and Play



1. **Demonstrate and Model** – When starting a game, allow the person with autism to go last so that they can see what the process is prior to being put on the spot to perform the tasks of one's turn.
2. **Physically Pass the Turn** – Use boxes or baskets to hold the game-playing board or cards and physically pass this around to make it clear whose turn it is and whose turn it is not. Receiving the box or basket also serves as a visual prompt and reduces the need to repeatedly say, "It's your turn."
3. **Go Clockwise** – Always take turns in a clockwise direction to build understanding of the process and provide comfort through routine.
4. **Shorten it Up** – Find ways to shorten games so players can ease into this new activity which may hold little or no interest initially. The offer to play again can always be an option.
5. **Play with Partners** – For beginning players, a partnership with an experienced player can enable learning and engagement without the stress. Partners can also help maintain the flow of the game so players don't become bored and disengaged.
6. **Consider the Invitation** – For some, the question, "Would you like to play a card game?" may trigger a thought process like this: Process the question, consider options, anticipate what a 'yes' response would mean (including: Have I done this before? Did I like it? Do I want to do it now?), making the decision, formulating the response, and finally producing the response in a timely manner in a way that will be understood. For some, a more effective invitation may be "Come and try this card game with me. I will help you." while extending an out-stretched hand.



7. **Last Move First** – Someone reluctant to try a new activity may be eased into it by being given the chance to make the last move or placing the last piece in the puzzle. There may be comfort in knowing their involvement will be short and easy for them to achieve. The last move can then grow to the last two and then three until there is greater comfort or interest in the activity.
8. **My Turn is My Turn** – An experienced player may feel their turn is an opportunity to teach the inexperienced player about the game. While this might be true, it is more natural and fun if this teachable moment is done by simply narrating through their turn. For example: “My turn. I roll the dice. I got a 3. I move 1-2-3. My turn’s done.” An individual with autism may also need the down time while other people are taking their turns.
9. **Skip the Quiz** – It is common to use questioning as a way of teaching but this can be over used. Learning can naturally come through play, so it’s best to keep it fun. Try to avoid questioning (“What number is that?”) and instead use comments of support (“Wow, you got a 6! Start here.”). We all learn best through doing.
10. **Give a Little Time** – Remember that our friends and family members with autism often benefit from a little extra processing time. Silently count 5 seconds before using a touch to their elbow as a prompt or a nudge of the card basket.
11. **Count Backwards** – Knowing when a new, non-preferred (as yet) activity will be finished can greatly increase a person’s comfort level with the activity. For example, if playing pitch and catch with a ball, start by shouting, “Ten!” at the first catch and continue to countdown with each catch. It is clearly understood that when we reach one, we’ll be finished.
12. **Be Observant** – Watch for signs indicating the individual is having a good time or feeling anxious. If anxious, the activity can be shortened or more support can be given. Always give choices and make note of favored activities which can be expanded upon in the future.

