KidsAbility
Centre for Child Development

Coaching skiers who move, communicate, learn, or behave differently

The 10 Tips:

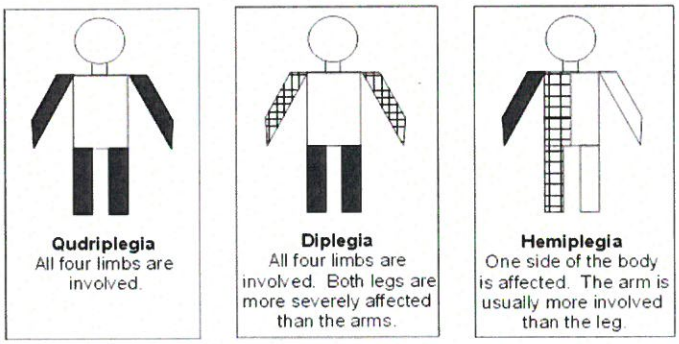
1. **Find ways to connect with your skier**. Relationship building is very important! Be fun and silly, but also stay firm with reasonable boundaries and expectations.
2. **Try using visuals to teach new skills, routines, and rules**. If the student can read, words are fine. This can include social stories, schedule boards, rules pictures, choice boards, stop signs, etc. Don't forget to demonstrate too!
3. **Provide consistent, predictable routines**. Prepare the student if there will be a change in the routine (remind them of changes frequently, provide a new updated schedule).
4. **Count down every transition.** Five minutes, two minutes, one minute, 10, 9, 8, 7... Try focusing on something exciting about the next activity, or give the student a concrete task like helping to hold or carry equipment.
5. **Get creative with using motivators.** "Let's play follow the leader." "Let's see how many turns we can make."
6. **Provide opportunities for choice whenever possible.** "Do you want to hold the hoop or hold my hands?" "Do you want to do five turns or do you think you can do ten?"
7. When giving instructions, **use the child's name, a concise and positively worded command, please and thank you**. "Sally, keep your hands on your knees. Good job." "Jimmy, keep your bum on the chair. Thank you."
8. **Try using helper language** – some kids respond really well to being given helper jobs or responsibilities
9. **Use redirection and distraction** as early intervention strategies to prevent or minimize behaviours
10. **Catch the good stuff, and tell them what you saw** (reinforcement)

BONUS TIP: Get help! Ask the Track3 staff, the parents, other instructors, or a recreation therapist for ideas or support. You are not alone – lots of people want to see your skier be successful, and are willing to help you.

Skiers who move differently:

Skiers who move differently might have a physical disability like Cerebral Palsy, spina bifida, spinal cord injury, ataxia, developmental coordination disorder (DCD), muscular dystrophy, visual impairment, etc.

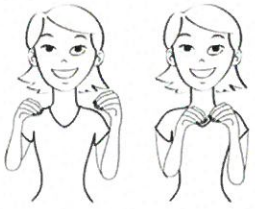
- Many skiers with physical disabilities will be extra susceptible to the cold (tight muscles get tighter, a skier who is not moving as vigorously will also get cold faster)
- Differences in sensation – monitor cold and circulation, pay attention to clothing or equipment that may rubbing if the skier has compromised sensation. (FYI... if a skier has an injury that they cannot feel due to their compromised sensation this can lead to a medical emergency). Compromised sensation can affect bowel and bladder management as well.
- Skier may fatigue more easily
- Tone kicks in with both anxiety and excitement, and high tone makes coordination more difficult. This can make for a unique learning curve! (e.g. they may be unable to repeat a learned skill if they are excited to show it off.) High tone does not mean strong muscles.
- Conserve energy for the fun stuff!
- Some conditions that affect the muscles may also affect the muscles of the face and mouth, impacting communication. Get to know the individual and how they communicate!
- Fall reflexes may be compromised
- A visual impairment will be unique to the individual, impacting different areas of their field of vision, clarity, and depth perception. Most individuals with a visual impairment have some sight. Remember, night time and weather will impact vision!
- Motor planning/coordination – physical assistance may be necessary, one side may be easier than the other, etc.

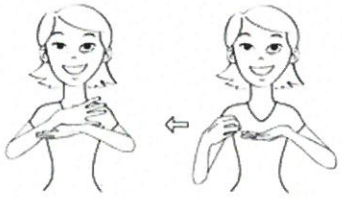


Skiers who communicate differently:

Skiers who communicate differently may: have difficulty understanding or processing verbal information or may have difficulty expressing themselves (or both!) Some skiers may be unable to speak, but able to understand everything you say. Others may be able to talk, but it won't necessarily be functional, meaningful communication (e.g. echolalia).

- **Simplify and minimize language** as much as possible. "NAME, do this" (demonstrate) "Show me your pizza skis" "Watch me" (demonstrate) "Your turn" Use words to direct attention, identify turns, and to label the skill you want to see.
- **Tell them exactly what you want them to do** (and for how long!) Use concrete, literal language. Also tell them what they need to do during waiting or watching times. "Keep your bum right there" Don't move your feet" "Eyes on me"
- **Try using visuals**. Photos of skills sometimes work better than explanations and/or demonstrations. For a skier who has a difficult time communicating, try offering pictures of a toilet or a parent, so that they can indicate what they need if they become frustrated or upset.
- **Use "First...then"** language to encourage a skier to try a skill they are resisting. First the challenging activity, then the fun or motivating activity (e.g.) first five runs, then hot chocolate. First two runs, then a hug from mom or dad
- **Give two choices.** Avoid open ended questions, and give two options instead. This will help with engagement and participation, and help you to understand their choice if their speech is not clear.
- **Support verbal instructions with signs** (e.g. "more" or "all done")

More: 

All Done: 

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Skiers who learn differently:

Children who learn differently often have challenges focusing on, understanding, remembering, and/or processing verbal information. See tips in the communication section regarding simplifying language used, and use visuals and demonstrations to support teaching whenever possible.

- Consider the **sensory experiences** of your environment and how that may impact your skiers ability to focus on your instructions

- **Use the skiers name** to make sure you have their attention before giving an instruction.
- **Work hard to get and keep their attention**. You may need to increase your energy and enthusiasm – but your hard work will pay off!
- **Experiment with different forms of providing information:** Options include: Demonstrations, physical assistance, verbal instructions, photos or other visuals, etc. Find what works best for your skier.
- **Try to find a motivator**, or a game that the skier will love to build a strong relationship and reward focus and skill attempts (e.g. high fives, funny nick names, etc.)
- **Counting:** Use numbers to make your instructions more concrete. (e.g. "three turns and then stop"). A start/stop visual can also help a skier to know how long they need to practice a skill for.
- Give the skier **time to process** your request (count to five). If they do not follow, use the same, basic instruction again. Only then, change the language or approach you're using.
- Help a busy or distractible skier **learn what to do when waiting**. Don't just assume they know what to do – tell them! "Stay beside me. Skis need space." Remind them when they forget, and praise frequently when they do well.
- **Lots of positive reinforcement**. This will help to build a strong and positive relationship, and when they get positive attention for positive behaviours, they are more likely to repeat those behaviours!
- **Minimize variety in the class**: Repetition in activities and approaches will support learning and mastering of skills
- **Learning social rules** does not come naturally to some children with special needs. These 'hidden' rules that are often learned naturally may need to be taught.

Skiers who behave differently:

A skier who is causing you a problem is only trying to solve their own problem. You need to identify what their problem is, and help them find a better way to solve it. Their problem could be related to: not understanding the instructions, not remembering the instructions, anxiety, sensory challenges, difficulty waiting, frustration, not being able to communicate their needs, etc.

Behaviours always serve a purpose. They may be to escape or avoid a demand, because the skier is having difficulty managing the sensory environment, an attempt to get something they want, or because they are looking for attention. The instructor needs to

consider the function or purpose of the behaviour to know how to prevent it or how to respond to it.

- For **escape/avoidance** behaviours, you can:
    - Prevent them by preparing the skier by letting them know the plan at the beginning of the lesson
    - have visuals available to support understanding of task
    - make the task simpler or provide more assistance
    - break the task down into smaller steps and focus on the first step
    - provide lots of praise for trying
    - use first... then language (first the challenge, then the fun or motivating activity)
    - Engage them in helper jobs
- **Sensory based behaviours** arise when a person has differences in how they register sensory information (how their brains perceive sensory input like noise, visual stimulus, or even physical sensations like balance or pressure to the body/joints) and/or how they regulate their response (an escalating or out of whack sensory response can lead to melt down or shut down)
    - Sometimes it takes some tricky detective work to figure out what the specific trigger is (e.g. a label in a new mitt, a squeaky chairlift)
    - look for ways to build up to the challenging environment slowly (e.g. have them practice wearing their ski boots or helmet at home while watching TV)
    - Behaviours may result when a child is either over or under stimulated in a particular environment
    - Coach calming strategies – ahead of time if possible!
- For behaviours that come from **not getting something they want** (to keep skiing, to stop skiing, to not wait, etc.)
    - set clear and predictable expectations, and use visuals to support the routine
    - Always follow through on your promises (if you promised that they could do one more run, do one more run!)
    - coach calming strategies (deep breaths, counting to ten)
    - negotiate to come to a reasonable solution
    - use the desired activity as a motivator (e.g. if you earn 5 high fives for good listening during the lesson, we can take a run down your favourite hill at the end.) Hot chocolate.

- Support transitions (e.g. finishing the lesson and returning to the chalet) by giving lots of warning that the end is coming. Remind families to use their 'My Skiing Story". Use your tools (visuals, counting boards, etc.)
- Offer choices (do you want to do Littlefoot or Bearfoot for your last run?)
- Avoid the word "no" and assign blame to something un-blamable. E.g:
  - "That's not one of our choices right now, but we could to A or B. Which would you prefer?"
  - "My watch says we don't have time for that tonight"
  - "That's not on our schedule for this week. Should we make sure it's on the schedule for next time?"

- For **attention seeking behaviours**:
  - Remind the child how to get your attention appropriately, and then respond with extra attention/enthusiasm when they do
  - Lots of social attention and public praise when they demonstrate appropriate behaviour ("Hey Mom, guess what Jack did today!")
  - Build a strong, fun relationship
  - Ignore minor behaviours when it is safe to do so
  - Use token systems to promote expected behaviours (stars, stickers, etc.)

Questions?

KidsAbility Recreation Therapists are available to consult to community recreation providers. Email us a question, or a book a Q & A session to discuss strategies

Waterloo: Contact Meg Shirley:

mshirley@kidsability.ca or 519-886-8886 x1302

Cambridge: Contact Sheryl Dedman:

sdedman@kidsability.ca or 519-886-8886 ext 3260

Kitchener: Contact Sue Gibson:

sgibson@kidsability.ca or 519-886-8886 ext 2241

Guelph/Wellington: Contact Heather Granger:

hgranger@kidsability.ca or 1-888-372-2259 ext 6235

Behaviour Basics

Why?

A child causing you a problem is only trying to solve their own problem. Your job is to identify the problem and help them find a better way to solve it

Behaviour is communication (they are communicating that they have a problem!)

What happens?

The ABCs of behaviour: **A**ntecedent (what happened before, the trigger), **B**ehaviour, **C**onsequence (what happened after the behaviour)



Both the Antecedent and the Consequence affect the behaviour. Both need to be continuously observed to understand the cause of the behaviour and to know how to change it.

Sometimes you need to focus on the antecedent. You may need to remove the trigger, or remind the child of the expected behaviour before the challenging situation (pre-corrections) or provide other forms of support to help them navigate the situation.

Sometimes you need to focus on the consequences. If the child gets what they want as a result of the problem behaviour, that behaviour will happen more often. That behaviour has been reinforced.

95% of your energy should go towards preventing the behaviours. Understanding the triggers, and using strategies that will prepare the child to behave appropriately and giving them tools to manage the situations that they find challenging.

Key Points:

A well-organized program with a predictable routine and clear rules and expectations will set participants up for success. Developing a strong, positive relationship with each child is also imperative for good behaviour. Provide lots of praise (use their name, be specific and descriptive, and convincing) to reinforce the behaviours you want to see. Try to provide four instances of praise for every one correction. 4:1 ratio.

Understanding Autism Spectrum Disorders

Core challenges

Communication
Social difficulties
Restrictive behaviours



Common Associated Features

Cognitive Impairment
Sensory Processing
Sleep problems
Gastro-intestinal stuff
Medications & side effects
Motor planning challenges

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Autism Spectrum Disorders

You might see:

- Differences with information processing
- Difficulty with communication
- Difficulty with social skills
- Restrictive and/or repetitive behaviours
- Sensory sensitivities or deficits
- Motor planning difficulties
- Uneven skills sets (strengths and challenges)

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Understanding ASD: Communication

Challenges with expressive and/or receptive language - the child may have difficulty with:

- **Following** verbal instructions
- **Responding** verbally to questions
- Understanding and using **figurative** language

Leaders should:

- Simplify language as much as possible (use as few words as possible)
- Incorporate visual learning strategies (pictures, demonstrations, etc.)
- Look for communication – behaviour is communication!

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Understanding ASD: Rigidity

- Change is challenging!
  - Prepare the student for new experiences (provide schedules and clear expectations)
  - Keep your routine consistent and give warning if there will be change
  - Support transitions
- Do you accommodate or redirect a rigid/repetitive behaviour?
  - Is the behaviour impacting learning, performance or social acceptance?
  - Is the behaviour calming or serving a useful function?
  - Can you replace the behaviour with something that serves the same function but is more socially acceptable?
- Use their interests to keep their attention and improve motivation
- Follow through – do what you say you are going to do!

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Understanding ASD: Social Understanding

- Difficulties with social interactions could include challenges with:
  - Understanding and using non-verbal behaviour
  - Listening and responding in conversations
  - Initiating social interactions
  - Reciprocity in relationships

"Even when I tried to talk to my peers, somehow my words only compounded the issue. My father once said to me, "Make friends, Wendy." I knew how to make rice pudding, I even knew how to make the dog sit, but I had no idea how to make friends!" ~ Wendy Lawson

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Autism Spectrum Disorders

Summary of Key Strategies:

- Keep communication simple
- Support transitions and routines
- Find motivators
- Reinforce appropriate behaviours
- Be aware of the sensory environment – give sensory breaks
- Assign helper jobs
- Support social interactions and teach appropriate social behaviour

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