



**able WITH
athletics**

BY AUSTRALIAN ATHLETICS

Able with Athletics Delivery Toolkit

A guide for delivering inclusive athletics events for children and young people with disability



Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land upon which we run, jump, throw, and roll. We pay our respects to Elders past and present and acknowledge the significant contribution that First Nations people have and continue to make to athletics in Australia.

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Introduction

The Able with Athletics program is Australian Athletics' national disability inclusion initiative, supported by the Department of Social Services funding. It provides children and young people with disability the opportunity to experience athletics in a safe, fun, and inclusive way.

Since launching in 2024, the program engaged over 1200 participants and families through inclusive Come and Try days, school clinics and community programs. This toolkit, developed in partnership with the La Trobe Centre for Sport and Social Impact, draws on evidence and feedback from coaches, clubs, families, and participants in athletics. It highlights that children are most engaged when athletics is delivered in friendly, welcoming, and sensory-considerate environments.

Why this Toolkit?

We understand that there are still barriers to participation for people with a disability, including:

- Environments that feel overwhelming (noise, crowds, lack of sensory support).
- Limited knowledge among coaches about adapting activities and sessions.
- Confidence gaps for families unsure if athletics is “for them.”
- Access challenges such as cost, infrastructure, transport, and awareness of opportunities.

This toolkit has been developed to help athletics member associations, clubs and centres overcome these barriers and provide practical steps to create positive experiences for every participant, regardless of their disability.

Who is this Toolkit for?

- **Athletics Clubs** looking to run inclusive Come & Try days and better welcome families with children with disability.
- **Member Associations (MAs)** supporting clubs with training, resources, and other support.
- **Coaches and Volunteers** looking for clear guidance, simple adaptations, and tools to boost confidence in delivering athletics to children with a disability.

The toolkit works through the five steps to developing and delivering an inclusive Able with Athletics event and provides links to a bunch of resources and templates that you can use.

IMPORTANTLY – it does not matter how experienced or confident you or your club are to deliver an experience for children with disability, what is important is that you are willing to give it a go. This toolkit is for all clubs, those just starting and those that are further along.

Principles of an Inclusive Come and Try

PRINCIPLE 1

Nothing for us without us

Nothing for us without us is a phrase used when planning inclusive programs. It highlights the importance and value in involving people directly affected by the program (i.e. children and young people with disability and their families) in program design and decision-making to ensure that what is delivered is relevant, engaging, and meets their needs.

How this could look:

Asking people with disability already engaged in the club what best supported their engagement or talking to disability organisations about what they have seen work.

PRINCIPLE 2

We are not all the same

Children and young people with disability are not all the same. They will have different needs, interests, and abilities. This means when planning an event, you may need to think broadly and about things you had not considered before (e.g. having modified equipment available). In general, opportunities should be fair, open, and welcoming.

How this could look:

Try to understand who might be coming to the event, their disability, their needs, and their interests. Ask them what could best support them to engage at the event.

PRINCIPLE 3

Make it easy

To maximise engagement, make it easy for people. Give them all the information they need when they need it, give them someone to contact if they have questions, tell them what to do, where to park, how to get there, what to wear, and explain the activities that will be delivered on the day.

How this could look:

Provide up-to-date communication through emails and websites and make sure there is a contact number for someone to call.

PRINCIPLE 4

Be realistic

Clubs often have limited resources and rely heavily on volunteers, so be realistic about what you can do and what the outcomes from the day will be. It can be as simple as delivering some fun activities in a supportive environment for a few hours. Don't overcomplicate it or take on too much. If only a few people show up and have a good time, then that is a successful event.

How this could look:

Make a plan and be realistic about what can be achieved with the resources you have.

Step 1: Understand your community and context

Why?

Understanding your community and context has several purposes:

- Knowing the current delivery of athletics in your area and how children and young people with disability are currently engaged (or not) means you can identify gaps to fill and other resources to draw upon.
- Exploring how families with children and young people are supported in your community might help you identify a potential partner to engage with.
- Thinking also about your own resources, strengths, and gaps that need to be filled will help you plan.



Step 1: Understand your community and context

How?

This is the first stage of planning and should start with thinking about the needs of the community and the resources of the club to deliver.

Activities could include:

1. Putting together an organising group that can support the club to plan and deliver the day.

Think about who could help you organise, are there already children or young people with disability and their families that could provide advice and support.

2. Think about what the goals are for the club from running the event. This could be to:

- Bringing together people in the community with an interest in delivering athletics for and with people with disability
- Gauging the interest in athletics from families, children and young people in the area
- Providing a taster of the athletics opportunities that the club provides and recruiting new participants
- Provide an entry-level opportunity to athletics that could lead to a pathway for ongoing engagement.

Understanding your goals will help to plan a better event. Decide on what type of event you want to deliver. Is this a one-off Come and Try Day, is it a series of Come and Try events over a period of time or is it a Come and Try Day that leads into a dedicated program or club activity.

Step 1: Understand your community and context

3. Read through this document and consider for each component:

- Strengths of the club, what could we deliver ourselves.
- Areas we need help and where that help might come from. This could include people from the athletics community (e.g. local coaches, other athletics clubs in the area, other athletics clubs that have run an Able with Athletics event before, the state body) or other stakeholders such as schools, local council, facility managers.
- Create an action list of activities that need to be done, who will do them, and when.

4. Look at the context of sport, disability and athletics in the community.

- What is currently being delivered in the area and where are the gaps?
- Are there programs in schools that we could use to connect to potential participants?
- Are there other athletics providers that could support our day (e.g. Sports4All, Special Olympics Australia)
- Are there local children and young people with disability, their families, their carers and/or disability support groups that you could collaborate with to make sure the event is accessible and what would best support them to engage in athletics.
- Is there funding available to support you to deliver the day and/or any future programs.

Step 1: Understand your community and context

Useful Templates

- [Event Planning & Action Template](#)
- [Stakeholder Engagement Plan](#)

At the end of Step 1, you should have

- An organising group to support event planning and delivery.
- A clear set of goals for the event
- An action list that identifies what the club can do themselves, who will do it, and what help the club may need and where that help could come from.
- A list of stakeholders that could support the day

Step 2: Creating a safe and supportive environment

Why?

A safe and supportive environment is one where children and young people with disability and their families feel welcomed, like they belong and where they can be themselves.

This could be feeling physically safe, where they are not put in danger by doing activities that are not properly supportive of their needs, or socially safe where they do not feel like a burden or feel like they don't belong.

When families feel confident that an event is safe and supportive, they are far more likely to return and remain engaged.



Step 2: Creating a safe and supportive environment

How?

There are several components to consider when creating a safe and inclusive space.

1. Accessibility of the venue

- Consider directions to the venue and how participants get there. Also think about ease of entry and how to get around the venue.
- Can participants navigate through the area seamlessly or do they have to roam around a fair bit to find what they're looking for?
Make sure you have clear signage for the car park, and then how to get into the venue.
- Check for accessible parking, smooth pathways, ramps, and accessible toilets.

2. Registration, welcome and signage around the event

- It is a great idea to set up a registration or information desk that can serve as a go-to point for families to ask questions or seek support.
- To avoid confusion, display clear, high-contrast signage with universally recognisable symbols, and colour-code zones to clearly identify registration, quiet spaces, toilets, and event areas. Also ensure signage is clear, consistent, and easy to follow.

3. Sensory room and quiet areas

- Identify or set up quiet spaces with minimal noise, calm lighting and soft seating. Provide sensory supports like noise-reducing headphones, fidget tools, compression tubes etc.
- Think about highlighting low-stimulation areas on maps or through signage so families know where to go when they need to step away.

Step 2: Creating a safe and supportive environment

4. Pre-event communication

- Consider sharing pre-event information using plain language, visuals and easy read materials.
- Include visual venue maps, photos of key spaces, schedules and sensory guides so participants know what to expect. Plan one step ahead and reach out to families to ask if there are specific supports they'd like in place. Reassure them that it is okay to bring along any support equipment or tools they would like to bring along.

Useful Templates

- [Autism Friendly Toolkit for Athletics Events](#)
- [Sport 4 All Tips for Inclusive Clubs](#)
- [Able with Athletics - Visual Story](#)

At the end of Step 2, you should have

- An action plan to deliver a safe and supportive environment
- A venue and accessibility map
- A sensory guide

Tips

- Use signage that is inclusive and welcoming (e.g., “Everyone is welcome here” or “Not all disabilities are visible”).
- Sensory spaces don't need to be expensive. A simple sensory toolkit can go a long way. For ex: fidget toys, textured mats, weighted cushions, or stress balls. Encourage families to bring their own supports if they'd like. Whether it's a sensory tool, or mobility aid, letting families know this is welcome creates reassurance and can make a big difference.

Step 3: Delivering safe and inclusive activities

Why?

There will be a mix of children and young people with disability that engage on the day. Some may have athletics experience, and some may not. The aim is to ensure every person feels they can participate, contribute, and succeed in a way that works for them.

Activities should focus on enjoyment, social connection, and skill development, while also being adaptable for various needs and abilities of participants. This helps build confidence, reduces barriers, and creates positive early experiences of athletics.



Step 3: Delivering safe and inclusive activities

How?

When planning and delivering activities, think about:

1. The role of coaches and volunteers

- Provide clear, simple, step-by-step instructions, paired with visual cues where possible. Recognise that you may need to slow down, repeat instructions and demonstrate multiple times.
- Be proactive in encouraging participation without forcing it. Sometimes children may join in after watching.

2. The types of activities & modifications

- Planned activities could be those that introduce alternative ways to participate in the traditional run, jump, and throw. Think about participants across a broad range of disabilities and how you would interact and engage with them.
- For example; shorten running distances, allow walking or buddy support, offer seated throws, or use softer/lighter equipment.
- And remember to have alternatives ready for participants who may not be comfortable with a particular activity.

3. Equipment to be provided

- Consider using lightweight and adapted equipment like foam javelins, beanbags, soft shot puts, or low hurdles to make activities safer and less intimidating.
- Where possible, ensure equipment size and weight are adjustable for the participant (e.g., shorter relay batons, adjustable-height cones, foam starting blocks).
- Keep a sensory toolkit on hand (fidget items, noise-cancelling headphones) to help regulate emotions during activities.

Step 3: Delivering safe and inclusive activities

4. How to engage parents, carers and support staff

- Welcome parents, carers or support staff to be involved alongside participants where it helps.
- Encourage them to assist with communication, regulation, or motivation when needed.

5. Fun, connection and positive reinforcement

- Use fun, playful activities (e.g., relay games, frog jumps, beanbag throws) to build fundamental athletics skills without pressure.
- Encourage teamwork and social connection as much as physical performance.

Useful Templates

- [Able with Athletics Inclusive Coaching Guide](#)
- [Session Adaptation Planner \(TREE\)](#)
- [Volunteer Roles & Equipment Checklist](#)
- [Visual Communication Cards](#)

At the end of Step 3, you should have

- An action plan and a set of activities designed and adapted to be inclusive of all participants.
- A plan for coach/volunteer roles, including how they will support children with varying needs and disabilities.
- An equipment checklist

Tips

- Use visual demonstrations rather than just verbal instructions.
- Start with simple, familiar and easy to try activities (something they may know from school) then add variations if the group is ready.
- If a child disengages, don't force them. Instead offer an alternative or simply let them observe.

Step 4: Connecting people to athletics

Why?

The aim of Able with Athletics is to provide more opportunities for children and young people with disability to connect with athletics.

For participants and families, the experience extends beyond the day itself and we need to think about the whole experience, how we promote, engage, and connect people to come to the event, and how do we keep them connected for ongoing involvement.



Step 4: Connecting people to athletics

How?

Connecting people to athletics is about showcasing various opportunities and pathways for engagement. This includes:

1. Promotion of the event

- Use multiple channels to spread the word including local schools, disability service providers, community groups, and councils.
- Identify and partner with local disability, sport organisations and networks to reach families who may not yet be engaged in athletics (eg. School Sport, local councils, disability service providers)
- Ensure promotions are accessible - use Easy Read flyers, inclusive imagery, and social media posts that clearly explain what to expect.

2. Planning for the NEXT opportunity after the event.

- Have means to communicate about what's next after the event. This could be a series of come & try's, training sessions, multi-class programs, next athletics or other club-based offerings.
- Be open to the idea that participants will have varying needs and motivations to get involved. While some may be excited to compete, others might simply be looking for fun, social connection, or to try something new. Our role is to connect them to the right opportunity.
- Think about keeping brochures and flyers at events, short info decks, and having coaches or volunteers available on the day to explain the different opportunities that exist for families.

The Able with Athletics Opportunities Map on the next page provides a snapshot of the different ways children and young people with disability can engage with athletics, from Come & Try Days and school programs to club activities, competition and para pathways.

Step 4: Connecting people to athletics

Useful Templates

- [Promotional Toolkit](#)
- [Para Athletics Classification Flyer](#)

At the end of Step 4 you should have

- A clear promotion plan and timeline to advertise your event.
- A visible pathway for participants and families to continue beyond the day, and key stakeholder contacts.

Tips

- Promotions: Use club social media channels, school newsletters, local councils, disability organisations, and word of mouth through community ambassadors.
- Illustrate next steps and pathways clearly. Share simple resources about classification, how it works and provide key contact points for families to learn more.

Bonus Tip:

- Keep communication clear, predictable and accessible; provide visual reminders of upcoming opportunities and reassure families that support persons are welcome to encourage participation.

Able With Athletics Opportunities Map

Where participants come from

School

Friends or family

Local club or centre

Another athletics or sport provider

Allied health professionals

Disability Sport Organisations

Community organisations

General advertisement / social media

Able with Athletics Come and Try Day

An Able with Athletics Come and Try Day includes:

ACTIVITIES

- Little Athletics - Modified track and field events
- Next Athletics - Fun, games-based activities
- Guidance on inclusive practice, classification and pathways
- Disability providers or partner activations

OUTCOMES

- Enjoy athletics
- Experience a traditional athletics setting - feel safe in a new environment
- Build fundamental skills and confidence
- Connect to other participants and families
- Learn from athletics coaches/program deliverers
- Connect to diverse athletics opportunities

Where to NEXT

After the event, participants can:

- Be more active and engaged:
 - at home
 - at school
 - with friends and family
- Join NEXT Athletics community programs
- Become part of a local Athletics Club or Little Athletics Centre to stay involved regularly.
- Get classified and compete in local, state, or national para-athletics events.

A participant may want to take up one or more of these opportunities as their enjoyment of athletics grows and their confidence and skill build.

Classification at any stage may support engagement by ensuring your child is participating or competing with their peers.



Step 5: Celebration and next steps

Why?

Celebrating the success of your event is just as important as planning it. After the event, reflecting on how it went and celebrating that with everyone involved is a great way to thank volunteers and other supporters who helped deliver the day. Reflection also ensures you capture learnings, highlight impact, and identify the next steps to keep participants engaged in athletics.



Step 5: Celebration and next steps

How?

One

Take photos and videos on the day and share these on social media, email them out to participants and share them with others via club newsletters, and other channels. You can also share key highlights with your State/territory Member Association, Australian Athletics and other stakeholders to showcase your club's commitment.

Two

Don't forget to get participants (or their carers/parents) to sign photo/video release forms and waivers. Ensure you gather the right consents for using photos, videos, and stories in future reporting or promotion. This avoids liability issues and ensures participants feel respected and safe.

Three

Arrange a catch up with the organising group or club committee and reflect on what worked well and what you might do differently next time. Record your thoughts and file them away for next time. Think also about what you learned on the day, what did you hear or observe that could support the club to plan out the next step in engaging and retaining children and young people with disability in athletics.



Step 5: Celebration and next steps

Useful Templates

- [Post-event 'Thank You' Email](#)

Tips

It could be useful to get feedback from families when they are at your event to help with future planning and delivery.

Questions you could ask families are:

- What could make it difficult to participate in athletics?
- How could the club or state association best support you to engage in athletics?
- Why did you come along today and what were you hoping to get out of it?
- What did you enjoy most about today?



Case Study 1: Partnering with Disability Organisations

Partnerships with disability organisations play a crucial role in delivering inclusive come and try events. They not only provide expertise and insights into accessibility but also bring trusted networks and practical supports that make families feel comfortable and welcomed.

If you are new to this space, or you are unsure, partnering or seeking input and support from disability organisations can be a great way to build confidence and knowledge.





Case Study 1: Partnering with Disability Organisations

What happened:

- In the ACT, Capital Athletics worked with Abilities Unlimited Australia, a local disability service provider, to deliver an inclusive Come and Try day. Abilities Unlimited promoted the event directly to families in their network, many of whom had never engaged in athletics before.
- In NSW, Athletics NSW partnered with Aspect (Autism Spectrum Australia) to conduct an environmental assessment at a local all-abilities meet. Aspect provided practical recommendations to make athletics environments more autism-friendly, including the introduction of sensory spaces and quiet rooms. Some of these adaptations were then trialled at an Able with Athletics Come and Try event in Sydney, where a local group, Step Up Disability Services, attended with 25 young people with autism, each supported by their own staff to ensure they felt comfortable, safe, and confident to participate.

Impact

- The events reached children who might not otherwise have found athletics, including those with autism and intellectual disability. Feedback reported higher confidence among 76% of the families to return because they recognised familiar faces from their support network at the event.
- Autistic participants were more likely to stay engaged throughout the event when sensory considerations were in place and each participant was accompanied by a support person. The presence of support staff, combined with autism-friendly adaptations, meant that students who might normally sit out were confident to take part, try new skills, and leave with a sense of belonging.





Case Study 1: Partnering with Disability Organisations

Key Lesson

Disability organisations provide valuable knowledge and experience. Working alongside them means that events are not just accessible in theory but in practice. Their presence reduces barriers, builds trust with families, and provides clubs and Member Associations with specialist expertise and strong community connections.

Takeaway for Clubs and MAs

Build partnerships early with local disability groups and service providers as they are the bridge to families, participants, and the practical supports that make inclusion possible.



Case Study 2: Adaptable to different delivery models

Able with Athletics Come & Try days are designed to be flexible so they can be delivered in a variety of settings - whether it's a state-based carnival or a standalone club event.

The adaptability allows organisers to create a program that suits their facilities, community, and participant needs while maintaining core principles of inclusion and demonstrating all the different opportunities athletics has on offer.

Here are some tips from events run across the country!





Case Study 2: Adaptable to different delivery models

What Happened

State events (SA and WA):

Delivered with Athletics SA and Athletics West, the Come and Try days at the SA and WA Athletics Stadiums offered participants exposure and a true experience to athletics competition venues while keeping the atmosphere friendly and low-pressure. Sensory spaces and clear signage were set up to help families navigate the facilities and activity areas, offering a positive first experience of a large athletics setting without the overwhelm.

Club events (VIC and NSW):

Williamstown Little Athletics Centre (VIC) and North Rocks Carlingford Little Athletics Centre (NSW) hosted come and try days at their home grounds to build trust with local families and provide a welcoming, low-pressure introduction to athletics. Both centres created space for quiet zones and included adaptations for wheelchair users and athletes interested in frame running or wheelchair racing. North Rocks' grass oval worked especially well for Next Athletics games-based activities, helping participants with autism feel comfortable and engaged while experiencing athletics in a familiar community setting.





Case Study 2: Adaptable to different delivery models

Impact

Across these events, nearly 100 participants and their families engaged with athletics, many for the first time. SA and WA events provided families and athletes with first-hand exposure to competition settings, together with access to sensory spaces and clear wayfinding, helping participants feel confident in larger environments. Club-based events in VIC and NSW demonstrated how a local, low-pressure approach can build trust and draw in families who might be hesitant to join traditional athletics. Together, these models engaged new participants, demonstrated genuine accessibility and strong sense of inclusion.

Key Lesson

Come & Try days are highly adaptable. Regardless of whether you're looking to deliver at a state level or a local club, success depends on tailoring the environment via quiet zones, sensory supports, activity modifications and an accessible design. Partnering with disability organisations and encouraging support staff participation ensures families feel welcome and clubs have the extra hands and expertise needed to run inclusive events with confidence.



Stay Connected

We'd love to hear from you and support your journey towards making athletics more inclusive.

Able with Athletics

Learn more about the program, explore resources and get in touch for guidance and support.

Website: www.athletics.com.au/ablewithathletics

Glossary & Resources:

Next Athletics

The Official Junior Program of Australian Athletics for children aged 3 - 12 years.

Find a program: <https://nextathletics.com.au/>

Para Athletics and Multi Class Competition

Find out how athletes can get involved and progress through para athletics pathways

Website: <https://www.athletics.com.au/participant-hub/get-involved/multi-class-athletics/>

Disability Sport Partners

We're proud to work alongside our disability sport partners to create more opportunities for people with a disability across Australia.

More info: www.athletics.com.au/ablewithathletics

Education

Visit: [Online Education - Athletics Learning Centre](#)

For more information, contact:

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