

# Participation 101

## Making it Work & When to Move On...

In a perfect world, participation in leisure activities would always be the right mix of challenge, enjoyment and fun. However, in the real world, extra-curricular activities can involve tears, stress and feelings of dread on the part of both children and parents alike. While it is important to face challenges and to keep trying during difficult times, it is also important to make a confident decision about when to move on. Here are some things to consider when deciding whether to stick it out, or to move on and try another activity, or the same or similar activity at another time. By breaking down the issues it may be easier to identify which things will be easier to change and which may be harder to change – this may influence your decision about when to move on.

### Factors related to your child/young adult:

Is your child interested and motivated to participate in this activity?

- *Remember that enjoyment of an activity doesn't always happen right away, especially when the activity is new.*

Are your child's skills and the demands of the activity a good fit? Consider the physical demands (e.g., coordination, strength & endurance), the cognitive demands (concentration, attention & problem-solving) and the social demands (e.g., communication & interaction with others).

- *If not, can the activity be changed so that your child can participate more successfully?*

Are there skills that your child can practice at home that will make the activity more successful?

- *Consider referring to our "I Want to Participate In" series of tip sheets for examples of activity specific skills.*

Is this activity a priority for your child to learn? (e.g., swimming for safety or an activity you would like to participate in as a family)

# Participation 101

## Making it Work & When to Move On...

### Factors related to the environment:

What parts of the environment are contributing to a less than ideal experience? Examples of environmental factors are:

- physical layout and accessibility (e.g., can your child easily access all areas required for participation?)
- sensory features (e.g., can your child cope with the noise, lighting, crowds associated with this activity?)
- social supports (e.g., are the facility, instructor and peers welcoming and supportive?)
- learning supports (e.g., can information and instructions be presented in small steps, be repeated several times and/or be demonstrated or shown using pictures?)

### Factors related to the activity:

Is the activity individual or team-based?

- Sometimes families stick it out longer with team-based activities due to a feeling or perception that the team is relying on their child's participation. While this is a factor for consideration, many families also move on from team experiences.

Before you decide to move on, are there changes to the activity that could be made so that your child is able to participate successfully? Examples may include:

- Moving up a level or down a level in the activity
- Talking to the instructor and/or coordinator to discuss a participation plan and to identify changes that may lead to a better experience
- Changing the timing of the activity (e.g., Saturday morning instead of a weekday evening) if possible
- Changing the length and/or frequency of the activity (e.g., scheduling in a break, making the activity shorter or participating once per week instead of twice)
- Individual or smaller group instruction versus large group instruction
- Changing or modifying the equipment that is needed for the activity

# Participation 101

## Making it Work & When to Move On...

Here is a parent example of a successful 'Making it Work' experience:

*I have had a few experiences which weren't going well for my child and I think it is important to stop a failing experiment. For example, one session of swimming lessons was particularly challenging. The instructor was quite young and my son didn't click with her. During the lesson, the kids in the class needed to wait at the edge of the pool while she helped one child at a time with a particular skill. This meant the other kids were bored most of the time. Because of the group dynamics, behaviours spiraled downwards and my son wasn't cooperating. In the middle of one lesson, I left the parent gallery and went to sit close to my son on the deck. I gently tried to provide support for him (and the teacher) and encourage him to follow the group. After that experience, we decided to opt out of the last few lessons of the session. He wasn't enjoying it, which brought out negative behaviours and it was frustrating for me. We tried lessons again a few months later with a different teacher and group of kids, which combined with maturity, led to a successful swimming experience.*

*There are enough things in his life that are challenging. Activities need to be fun and easy. I don't want to take on anything that requires a lot of energy to get him to do. For instance, we haven't tried music lessons, which would require daily practicing. He is not interested and getting homework done for school is enough "nagging" for me!*

### Take home messages:

By thinking about factors related to your child, the environment and the activity, you can find ways to make your child's participation more successful.

However, moving on is a part of life, and an important consideration when thinking about fun and successful participation in extracurricular activities.

A Resource from *CanChild's* Participation Knowledge Hub

<https://www.canchild.ca/en/research-in-practice/participation-knowledge-hub>