

Participation 101

Trying a New Activity

Participating in a new activity can be a fun and exciting way to experience health and well-being. Whether you are trying to choose a new activity for your child or helping your child transition into that new activity, it can be helpful to think about three things: the **activity** (e.g., will the activity be a good fit both for your child and for your family?), your **child** (e.g., what are your child's interests and skills?), and the **environment** where the activity takes place (i.e., think ACE). Here are some tips for you to consider.

Q. There are so many activities to choose from. How do we decide on the one that will be the best fit for our child?

1) Consider the type of activity and purpose for engagement:

- *Team activities* can be a good choice for children who like structured rules, routine, and like to be part of a group. Team activities often require a significant time commitment both for practices and games, and some team activities involve numerous costs related to registration and equipment. Examples of team activities include hockey, ringette, soccer, baseball, basketball, lacrosse, football and volleyball.
- *Individual activities* can be a good choice for children who want to learn a new activity but prefer to focus on their own performance, and learning new skills at their own pace. Examples of individual activities include music or art lessons, dance, horseback riding, martial arts, gymnastics, archery, running, swimming, skating and skiing.
- *Organized group activities or clubs* can be a good choice as an alternative to competitive sports activities. Examples of organized group activities include Brownies/Scouts, chess, band, choir, school clubs and taking a course such as The Babysitter's Course or First Aid/CPR.

2) Consider your child's interests, strengths and needs:

- Your child may learn about a various options for activities through siblings, peers, watching TV, or by spending time at school or in the community. Try and choose an activity that your child is interested in, as this may result in greater motivation and enjoyment.
- Consider your child's strengths and how specific strengths (e.g., physical abilities, problem-solving skills, ability to get along with others) may be a good fit for specific activities.

Participation 101

Trying a New Activity

3) Consider opportunities in your environment:

- Watch the newspaper and check your local recreation guide or recreation centre website to find out about upcoming opportunities to try a new activity before signing up for a program.

Q. How do I help my child to have fun and to participate successfully in the new activity that we have chosen?

1) Think about the activity:

Are there changes that can be made to the activity to help your child have a fun and successful experience?

- **Instructions:** Do instructions need to be simplified, and/or given one step at a time? Would pictures be helpful? Do the movements/skills need to be shown first, and then described in words, or could this happen at the same time?
- **Length:** Does your child need the activity to be shorter with more breaks? What about participating once per week instead of twice? Keeping the activity short and successful will be enjoyable for your child, and you can then work up to more participation.
- **Rules/Structure:** Could the rules or structure be modified to make the activity simpler, and to promote a positive experience? (e.g. no goalie in soccer to focus on aiming at the net)
- **Equipment:** Would modified, adapted or alternate equipment choices make for a more successful experience? (e.g. lighter baseball bat, shorter basketball net, lifejacket for swimming)
- **Feedback:** Try and use clear and specific language so your child will know how to how to change the way they are moving their body or using equipment (e.g. “raise your hands above your head” instead of “raise your hands”).
- **Encouragement:** Try and reward any efforts and small progress that your child makes by providing verbal praise and positive body language.

2) Think about your child:

- **Role:** Consider playing in different positions to determine the best fit (e.g., some positions require less mobility or the use of specific skills only such as the positions of pitcher or goalie).

Participation 101

Trying a New Activity

- **Feedback:** Encourage ongoing conversations with your child about what is going well and what is difficult about the new activity. What new skills have been learned, and what skills require more practice? Ask your child what may be needed to help with performance, such as extra practice at home, or different equipment.

3) Think about the *environment*:

- **Physical space:** Is the facility and spaces used for the activity accessible? Is there enough room to move around and participate in the activity and/or to move around or maneuver any mobility equipment?
- **Sensory qualities:** How will your child cope with the sounds, light, temperature and textures of objects related to the activity?
- **Supports:** Will your child need another person to assist with more difficult parts of the activity (e.g. push the wheelchair when moving around the field in a baseball game)? Are instructors and peers patient and understanding?

Take home messages:

Choosing an activity that your child is interested in may result in greater motivation to work through the challenges along the way, and result in a more fun and successful experience. In the longer term, your child's enjoyment may be one of the most important factors in deciding whether to continue with a new activity, or to move on.

Once you have chosen an activity, think about the changes that could be made to the activity and/or the environment to create a better fit between your child's skills and the demands of the activity.

A Resource from *CanChild's* Participation Knowledge Hub

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