



## Tips for Encouraging your Shy or Anxious Child to Participate in Recreation

### Why recreation?

- Recreation provides opportunities to build confidence by learning new skills, meeting new friends, and experiencing new routines in an environment that is safe and motivating
- Finding an activity that your child enjoys and is motivated to do means that a child will want to return to it, even if there are aspects of the recreation activity or routine that they find challenging

### Finding the right program

- Choose a program that interests your child
- Look for a recreation provider that focuses on fun, skill building, and inclusion rather than training competitive athletes
- Look for programs with low student to instructor ratios. Sometimes the smaller studios/clubs are a better fit for shy or anxious children as there is more opportunity for communication and personalization

### Sharing information about your child

- Let the program know that your child may be shy or anxious at first, and give them some tips for helping your child feel welcome and relaxed, for example:
  - “She may want to watch rather than participate. Please encourage her to participate after she’s had a few minutes to watch and learn.”
  - “He is very shy around new people, but loves to talk about our dog Chester or superheroes if you ask him.”
- If things are going well, ask the instructor what strategies they used to encourage participation, so that you can share those strategies with future coaches or instructors
- Create an All About Me handout to give to the program leaders prior to the start of the program. Instructions on how to create an All About Me handout as well as examples can be found on the KidsAbility website: [www.kidsability.ca](http://www.kidsability.ca)





## Preparing your child for the program

- Anticipate what your child's worries will be, and give your child enough information to ease their worries, for example:
  - How long the program will be
  - Where mom or dad will be while they are participating
  - What activities they may be doing
  - What the rules or expectations are
  - What will happen when the program is over
- Visit the location ahead of time, or look at pictures of the program/facility online with your child
- Ask the program if they have a recreation social story about the program. Reading a story about the program and what is going to happen during the program can reduce anxiety about the unknown. Instructions on how to create a recreation social story as well as examples can be found on the KidsAbility website: [www.kidsability.ca](http://www.kidsability.ca)
- Minimize your child's opportunity for choice to help reduce feeling overwhelmed. Set clear and reasonable expectations for your child ahead of time. Ask them to take small steps each week, for example:
  - "Last week I stayed in the room with you for the whole class. This week I'll stay in the room for the first part of the class with you, but then I'm going to go watch from the window with the rest of the moms for the last ten minutes. I'll give you a wave to let you know when I'm moving to the window. I'm not going to leave the building; I'm just going to go watch from the window."

## Seek help if participation in community recreation is not going well

- If your child is experiencing challenges participating in, or is at risk of removal from a community recreation program, contact KidsAbility. A Recreation Therapist can work with you and the program leader to explore participation strategies, provide education or training, and problem solve to help your child participate in community recreation programs

**For more information, training or consults please call  
KidsAbility and ask for a Recreation Therapist  
519-886-8886 or 1-888-372-2259**

