

# Guidelines for Adapting Health Promotion Programs for Youth with IDD and/or Autism

Health Promotion Program: An initiative aiming to improve health by changing behaviors and attitudes, empowering people to take charge of their own health.

## 1

### Program Planning



**Goal: Ensure program facilitators are well-equipped to support youth with IDD/Autism.**

- Provide training on Autism, IDD, and neurodiversity addressing person first language, stigma, ableism, and the importance of strength-based approaches.
- Train staff on using clear, simplified language and alternative communication.
- Teach strategies for managing sensory and behavioral differences. Provide facilitators with community resources to share with families and participants.

## 2

### Content Adaptation



**Goal: Create a flexible, accessible, and engaging program.**

- Conduct check ins with participants prior to program start to assess needs, establish rapport, and brainstorm accommodations.
- Utilize universal design principles to make content accessible.
- Incorporate structured routines, clear expectations, and various education formats.
- Design sensory friendly sessions with movement breaks offered.

## 3

### Program Implementation



**Goal: Deliver an engaging, embracing, and effective program.**

- Establish consistent staff and predictable routines to improve comfort of participants and family members.
- Assess, acknowledge, and validate communication style and language preferences.
- Use visuals, social stories, and interactive activities to enhance engagement.
- Allow extra time and support for assessment tools.

## 4

### Program Evaluation



**Goal: Measure effectiveness and refine the program for long-term success.**

- Use accessible evaluation tools (visual surveys, simple questions, caregiver support, etc.)
- Use health outcomes validated for use with the IDD community.
- Provide ongoing training for new staff and refreshers for existing facilitators.
- Adapt materials and strategies based on emerging best practices and participant needs.

**Author:** Cortney Pfeaster, Public Health LEND Fellow '24-25

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**References:**



# Tools & Resources for Implementing Guidelines

1

## Program Planning



- The [National Education Association's Words Matter! Disability Etiquette Training](#) details how to be a disability ally through your words.
- The [Harvard Implicit Association Test](#) allows you to check your internal assumptions about people with and without disabilities.
- [NCHPAD's Health Promotion Programs: Access 101](#) video training teaches how to make your health promotion program accessible and welcoming to all.

2

## Content Adaptation



- [WebAim's Contrast Checker](#) helps ensure materials are accessible and readable.
- The [CDC's Plain Language Resources](#) ensures content is easy to read and understand.
- Section 508.gov has [Universal Design Resources](#) that can be applied to any program to increase accessibility and usability.

3

## Program Implementation



- Visual Schedules and Timers: Helps participants anticipate transitions and structure activities in a comfortable way.
- [Alternative Communication](#): Choice boards, chat functions, and universal signs allow non-speaking individuals to select activities and express preferences.
- [Social Stories & Role-Playing Guides](#): Helps prepare youth for new experiences and interactions.

4

## Program Evaluation



- Utilize [Cognitive Interviewing](#) qualitative evaluation of measurement tools to understand literacy and usability of testing measures.
- Incorporate up to date reviews of outcome evaluation tools that have been validated for people with intellectual disability, such as [Kumar, et al \(2024\)](#).