

15 How young children with additional needs are involved in decision-making in a GAA club

Ranelagh Rockets is a team in Ranelagh Gaels GAA club for five to 10-year-old children with additional needs. This is the story of how the club organisers make sure that the youngest five-year old children have a voice in decision-making on how they participate in the club.

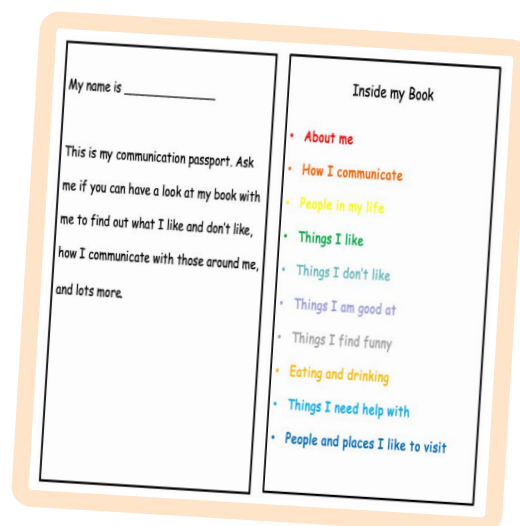
Every child has an individual coach, all of whom are volunteers and many of whom are parents. The club has three professionals who offer voluntary support and advice, an Occupational Therapist, a Psychologist and a Special Education Teacher. These professionals give talks to the coaches and provide advice on engaging with children with additional needs as well as answering questions from coaches.

Before the children join the club

1. Parents are sent a social storybook about the Rockets to share with their child. The social story explains all about the club in pictures and language suitable for children with additional needs (link to social story). Here is one of the pages from the social story:
2. Parents are sent a communication passport template, which has several pages for the child and family to complete.
3. Parents are invited to bring the child to watch a club session to see if they would like it.
4. On the first day a child joins the Rockets club, parents and/or siblings can stay if the child wants that.

The routine in the Junior Rockets club every Saturday

- There is a routine to the sessions, but children are free to do what they want throughout the session. This can be accommodated because each child has their own individual coach.
- The session starts with a warmup of all 24 children and 24 coaches. They do stretches and running from one side of the pitch to the other. At the end of the warmup everyone stands in a circle, puts their hands in the middle and lifts their hands in the air saying 'Ranelagh Rockets'.
- Then all the children and coaches move in groups to one of four skills stations at the corners of the pitch, which are colour coded: blue (kicking), red (bouncing), yellow (running) and green (throwing).
- Each group has three minutes at every station, and then they move until they have been at all four stations.



- While at each station, children can choose to follow the actions and guidance of the coach or not. They are free to do whatever they like. Some children just sit and watch, some go to the nearby playground, and some join in and out of the activities. Coaches go with the flow of whatever their child wants to do.
- Each coach wears a lanyard with pictures of the different skills stuck on with Velcro. Children can either point to the picture or pull off the picture once they have completed each skill station.



The final part of the Rockets sessions is where all children take hold of a large colourful parachute, after which they are given a treat and go home. Coaches wear a lanyard showing pictures of this session (see below).

How 5-year-old children in Ranelagh Rockets GAA club are ensured Space, Voice, Audience and Influence

Space

- Children feel safe to express their views because they are with their parents. Other things that help them feel safe are that they have read or listened to the social story and have completed the communication passport about things they like and things they need help with before they join the Rockets.
- Each child has an individual coach who listens to and meets the needs of that child.
- All children are heard because coaches enable children to choose how they want to take part in the sessions.

Voice

- Individual coaches provide support to children and encourage them to express their views. The structure of the sessions enables children to give their views about how they want to take part.
- Children have the choice to follow the structure of the sessions or to decide to sit and watch or go to the nearby playground.
- Children can tell coaches their views, point to the pictures on coaches' lanyards or pull off pictures once they have completed each skill station.

Audience

- Coaches show they are ready and willing to listen to children by always being with the child and by using open communication.
- Coaches explain to children the extent to which they can act on their views.

Influence

- Children know they are having an influence on decisions because the structure of the sessions and the individual communication with coaches allows children to take part whatever way they like or opt out of taking part.
- Children are given feedback by coaches and see the impact of their views because those views are acted on.

