

This research has enabled the inclusion of autistic children in a community physical activity program.



Parents told us about their child's experiences with Nippers

85% who went to Nippers had enjoyed one or more things

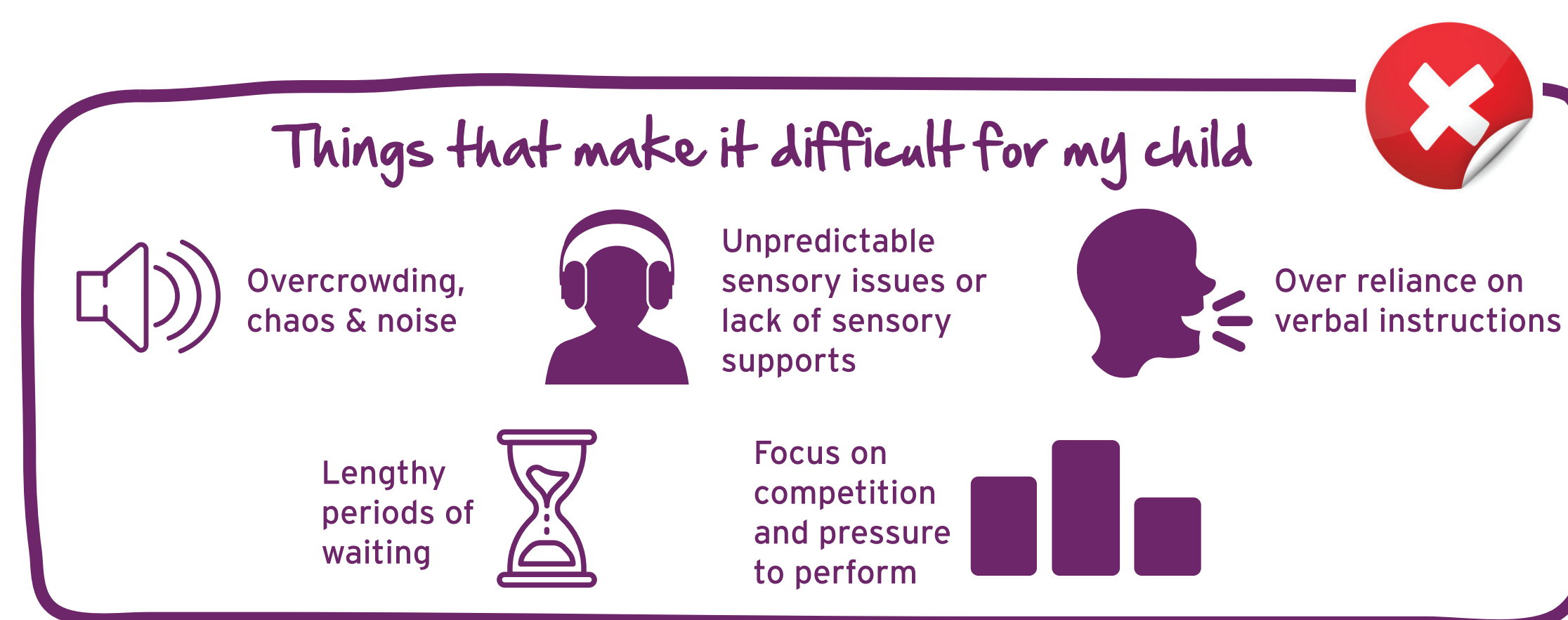
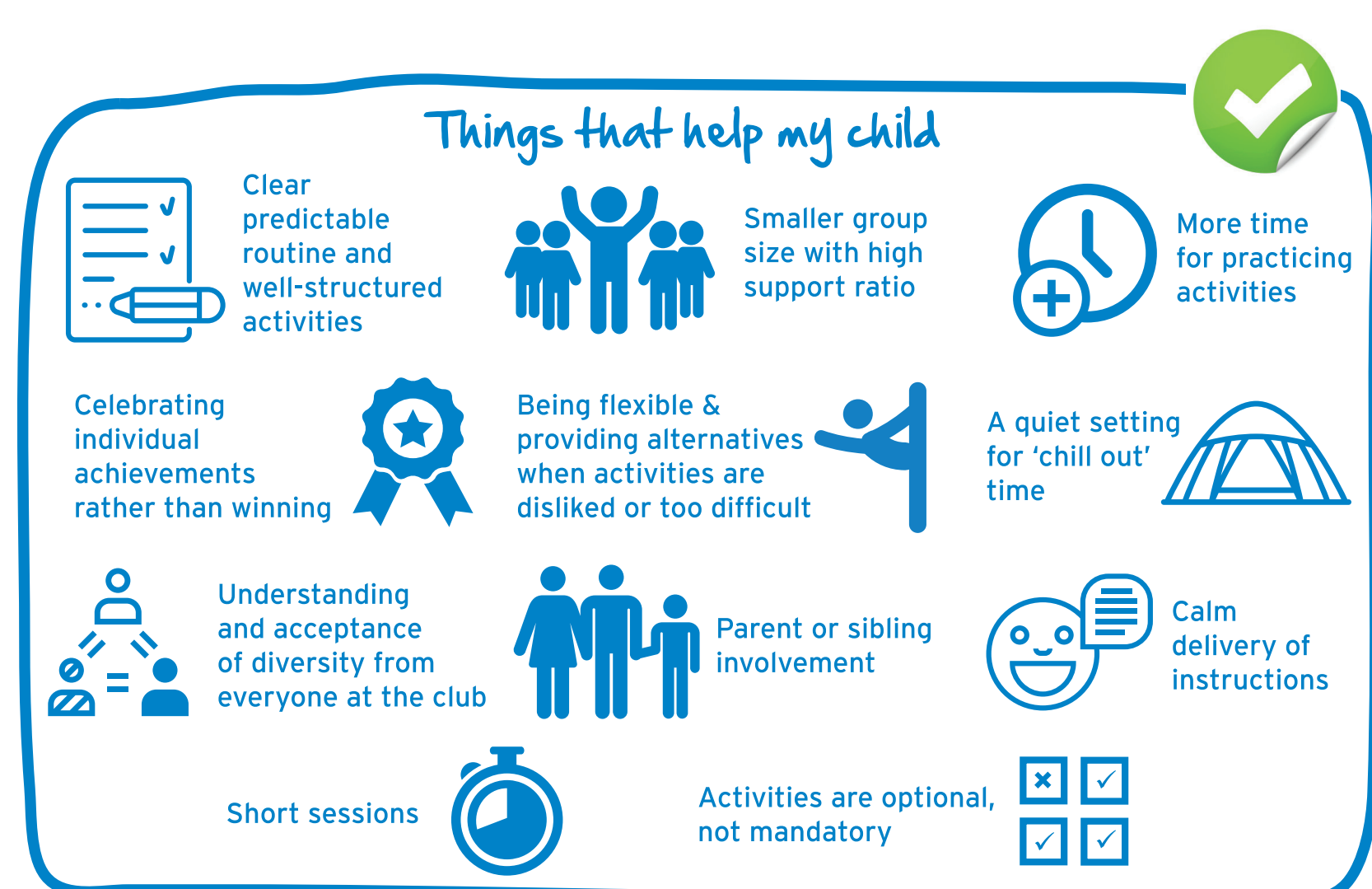
82% did not enjoy at least one thing

56% who had been to a mainstream program said their child did not feel very included

100% who had been to an adapted program said their child felt very or mostly included

88% who had not been to Nippers had thought about or had wanted their child to

We identified what makes it easier or difficult for autistic children to feel included at Nippers



The research findings were used to develop and implement the Inclusive Beaches program

The program provided clubs with resources, training, guidance and support to adapt their Nippers sessions to be autism-inclusive.



Evaluation showed an adapted program can work

Simple adaptations and training evidenced by research was effective in making it easier for autistic children to enjoy, participate and feel included.

Adapted programs may require more resources and staffing than is provided in mainstream programs.

The attitudes, knowledge and skills of personnel delivering an autism inclusive program play a vital role in its success.

This research has enabled Aspect to provide surf lifesaving clubs across Australia with a set of resources they can use to run autism-inclusive Nippers sessions.

Barriers and facilitators to the participation of autistic children at Nippers

BACKGROUND

Participation in a community physical activity program can have many benefits for any child.

Autistic children are, on average, less physically active and have lower rates of community participation compared to non-autistic children.

Being 'different' can mean that it's not easy for autistic children and their families to be and feel included in mainstream community physical activity programs.

A popular community weekly physical activity program for Aussie kids is Nippers, provided each summer by surf lifesaving clubs across Australia.

Aspect was funded to provide a program of support to enable surf lifesaving clubs to run autism-inclusive Nippers sessions during the 2017-2018 summer. This was called the Inclusive Beaches project.

PURPOSE and AIMS

Inform the development and implementation of an autism-inclusive Nippers program.

Identify and understand what makes it either easier or difficult for an autistic child and their family to enjoy, take part in and feel included at Nippers.

METHODS

Online questionnaire by over 100 families across Australia with an autistic child aged 5 to 15 years about their experiences and perceptions of Nippers.

FINDINGS

Four key factors made it either easier or difficult for autistic children to enjoy, participate in and feel included at Nippers:

- How well the program catered to the child's autistic ways of being
- Whether the emphasis was on competition and pressure to perform, or on having a good time, doing your best and taking part
- The understanding and support shown by others, including club personnel and other parents
- The additional supports that were available for the autistic child.

Parents identified a range of adaptations that could facilitate the participation and inclusion of their child, in particular, the need for club personnel to receive training so that they had a sound understanding of autism and how to support and instruct autistic children.

IMPLICATIONS

The extent of barriers to participation and inclusion identified by this research demonstrated that there was a significant need for autistic children to have access to organised, community-based recreational activities that have been adapted to be inclusive of autistic children, and that this need may be largely unmet.

Adaptations needed to provide an autism-inclusive program are often very simple, are easily incorporated into mainstream programs and will likely also benefit non-autistic children.

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Find out more www.autismspectrum.org.au/about-autism/our-research/

