

Make the Invisible Visible

A practical tool for NDIS conversations



AUSTRALIAN
Autism Alliance

The participation people can see may depend on support they can't see.

Changes to social, community and civic participation supports may affect Autistic people differently. Support needs can be invisible, variable and highly dependent on the environment. Someone may be able to participate in one setting but need substantial support in another because of sensory conditions, communication demands, unpredictability or other barriers.

Being able to participate with support is not the same as being able to participate independently.

MAKE THE INVISIBLE VISIBLE

Show what support is needed.

Show what it makes possible.

Show what happens without it.

Six things you can do now

1



Record what the support makes possible.

Go beyond the number of support hours or the name of the activity. What does the support make possible — relationships, belonging, sport, recreation, volunteering, education, independence, communication, confidence, safety or connection with people outside the family?

2



Make hidden support visible.

If you make it possible for someone to participate, record what you do. This might include preparation, visual schedules, transport, communication with the organisation, managing transitions, remaining nearby, supporting regulation or providing support afterwards.

3



Describe support needs across different environments.

Avoid simply saying "they can do this". Explain what changes in different places or situations — including sensory load, unfamiliar people, changes to routine, communication demands, crowds, unexpected events or distress.

4



Check whether another option will actually work for this person.

If something different is suggested, ask:

- Can they get there?
- Can they communicate and be understood?
- Can they manage the sensory environment?
- Is it sufficiently predictable?
- Are the necessary adjustments actually available?
- Can they participate safely?
- What individual support will they still need to participate?

5



Record what happens when support isn't available.

Keep simple examples. Does the person stop participating? Become more isolated? Lose relationships or independence? Do others have to step in? Are there impacts on wellbeing, regulation or safety?

6



Define meaningful participation for this person.

Participation does not have to look conventionally "social". It might mean sport, study, work, volunteering, a library, an interest, one trusted relationship, online participation or quieter activities. What matters is that it is chosen, meaningful and adequately supported on their own terms.

Keep a simple record

You don't need an enormous dossier. Short notes and real examples can help tell the story.

What do I want to do? Activity, goal or community connection	What gets in the way? Sensory, communication, transport, regulation or other barriers	What helps? Support, adjustments, preparation, communication support or transport	What happens without support? What becomes harder, stops or causes concern?	Would another option actually work? Can this person access, use and participate safely?

Bring this to your next NDIS conversation



What is changing?

What support is changing,
and what could that mean?



What information has been used?

Does it show what the person
actually needs — including
needs that are hard to see?



If something different is suggested, will it actually work?

Can the person access it
safely and get the support
they still need?



What if it doesn't work?

Who can I contact?
What can I do next?
What should I record?



Think about the whole journey

BEFORE

Getting ready • planning •
transport • visual supports



DURING

Communication • prompting •
regulation • practical or
trusted support



AFTER

Recovery • regulation •
transition • follow-up support

Sometimes, the better the support is working, the less visible the need for that support becomes.