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## Tips for Working with Autistic Children

Almost everyone on the autism spectrum has at least some challenging behaviors. These may range from the odd (spinning, flapping) to the self-injurious (head banging) to the truly dangerous (hitting, kicking, dashing into traffic). Children may also find undesirable ways to avoid doing what they don't want to do: they may hum, slide under the table, or otherwise avoid non-preferred activities. Listed here are tips which can be useful to parents, teachers, and therapists.

*Think and teach visually.* Many autistic kids are visual thinkers and learners, and using pictures and other visual aids during teaching helps. Visual aids are especially effective when teaching number concepts, directional terms, and word recognition.

*Use an area of interest.* A fixation, a special talent to connect with the child to improve academic skills and increase attention. If the interest is bugs, incorporate bugs into the lesson plan or therapy session. Count toy bugs or play a video about bugs with subtitles to improve word recognition. If the child has tactile sensory problems, searching for bugs outside may be a motivational tool to encourage acceptance of different textures such as grass, sand, or water.

*Be aware of environmental distractions,* such as bright lights and loud sounds, which may interfere with learning or comfort. You must consider sensory needs during teaching and therapy. Some children learn better when moving or using their hands, while other children may require silence or near-darkness in order to concentrate. Explore a variety of sensory environments with the child to determine which one is most conducive to learning.

*Utilize technology.* Such as television, CDs, and computers. Because autistic children usually respond better to visual cues than verbal or written instructions, software programs such may be beneficial. Some children find it easier to communicate by typing than by speaking or writing. Encourage use of the computer and keyboard to improve communication.

*Avoid figurative language.* Make your expectations simple and clear. Use only concrete terms, reinforcing with pictures or modeling. Avoid lengthy verbal instructions, break tasks/instructions into clearly defined steps. Wait for the child to complete the first step before moving on.

*Be aware of generalizations.* Children with autism often associate a skill or behavior with one specific location. For example, the child may use a fork and spoon at home without realizing he must use utensils when away from home. Mastery of each skill may need to take place at a variety of locations.

*Do not reinforce undesired behavior.* If the child asks for juice, give him juice, even if he really wants milk. Use prompting to help the child respond appropriately, and then reward correct responses. Ignore negative behaviors and incorrect responses, but do not punish the child.

*Stick to a routine.* Kids with autistic disorders need routine to feel secure. Even the slightest disruption in schedule can cause regression or tantrums. A daily planner that includes photos or other visual aids is a helpful tool for many parents and teachers. Schedule meal times and therapy at the same time every day. Prepare the child in advance, whenever possible, for schedule changes or trips away from home.

*Use repetition to modify behavior.* Teach new skills, and improve communication. Autistic children learn and retain information more easily when given that information repeatedly and in a variety of settings. Contrary to what some people believe, repetition will not encourage robotic speech or behavior in an autistic child.

*Tackle one problem at a time* when attempting to modify behavior. If the child has multiple behavioral problems, make a list of these problems and rank them in order of importance or severity. Address behaviors that place the child or his caretakers at risk first. Choose one problem at a time, and then work with the child until that behavior reaches an acceptable level. Trying to change too many behaviors simultaneously is rarely effective.

*Use modeling* to improve socialization. Because they have a difficult time reading and processing social cues, autistic children require help to know how to act and respond in social situations. One of the most effective means of teaching social skills is through modeling. If your goal is to teach the child to shake hands following a social introduction, you must model this behavior by shaking hands in front of him when encountering new people. Alert the child to the behavior as you do it, so he or she can cue in to what you're doing.

*Be patient* and understanding with yourself and the child. Working with an autistic child can be frustrating, and it may take considerable time before you see improvements. Remember to take frequent breaks, and do not feel discouraged if your attempts are initially unsuccessful.

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*Cheryl Cirelli;*  
Transitional Goals in the IEP

IDEA’s §300.320(b) mandates each student’s IEP includes post-secondary goals no later than when that student turns 16 (Texas requires by age of 14). When writing post-secondary goals, consider the following questions:

* Is it measurable?
* Can the goal(s) be counted?
* Does the goal(s) occur after the student graduates from school?
* Are the goals based on an age-appropriate transition assessment?
* Are there annual IEP goals that reasonably enable the child to meet the postsecondary goal(s) or make progress toward meeting the goal(s)?
* Are the transition services (including courses of study) in the IEP that focus on improving the academic and functional achievement of the child to facilitate his or her movement from school to post-school?
* Do the transition services listed in the IEP relate to a type of instruction, related service, community experience, development of employment and other post-school adult living objectives (and, if appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills), and provision of a functional vocational evaluation?
* Are representatives of other agencies invited (with parent consent or the student’s) to IEP meetings when transition services are being discussed that are likely to be provided or paid for by these other agencies?

There are three key domains of transition planning: education/training, employment, and independent living. The following NSTTAC’s examples have been adapted a bit to make them more appropriate for use by IEP teams.

Education/training: Upon completion of high school, John will enroll in courses at Ocean County Community College.

Participation in postsecondary education is the focus of this goal. Enrollment at a community college can be observed, as John enrolls in courses or he does not. The expectation, or behavior, is explicit, since John enrolls at the community college or he does not. Enrollment at a community college occurs after graduation, and it is stated that this goal will occur after graduation.

Employment: John will work in an on-campus part-time job while in college.

Obtaining employment is the focus of the statement. Working part-time is an explicit outcome that can be observed. The phrase “while in college” indicates that the goal will occur after John has graduated from high school.

Independent living: Upon completion of high school, Lisa will learn to use public transportation, including the public bus and uptown trolley.

Participation in independent living skill development, specifically community participation, is the focus of this goal. Use of the bus can be measured, as in Lisa performs the necessary activities or does not perform the activities. The expectation, or behavior, is explicit, as in Lisa performs the required activities or she does not. It is stated in this goal that the instruction will occur after graduation.

7 Rules of Handling Difficult Students

If you’re like most teachers, two or three students take up most of your time. On the days when they’re absent, or pulled from your class, everything goes smoothly. Teaching is more fun. You’re more relaxed. And you can cruise through your lessons without interruption. Hooray! But when they’re sitting in class, which seems like all the time, they can make you want to pull your hair out. Unfortunately, the frustrations you feel dealing with difficult students can cause you to make mistakes. The following is a list of 7 rules—all don’ts—that will help you avoid the most common pitfalls, and turn your most difficult students into valued members of your classroom.

Rule #1: Don’t question. It’s normal for teachers to force explanations from difficult students as a form of accountability. But asking why and demanding a response from them almost always ends in resentment. And angry students who dislike their teacher never improve their classroom behavior.

Rule #2: Don’t argue. When you argue with difficult students, it puts them on equal footing with you, creating a “your word against theirs” situation. This negates the effects of accountability. It also opens the floodgate: everybody will be arguing with you.

Rule #3: Don’t lecture, scold, or yell. Lecturing, scolding, and yelling will cause all students to dislike you, but when you direct your diatribe toward one particular student, it can be especially damaging. Creating friction between you and your most challenging students virtually guarantees that their behavior will worsen.

Rule #4: Don’t give false praise. Teachers often shower difficult students with praise for doing what is minimally expected. But because these students can look around at their fellow classmates and know that it’s a sham, false praise doesn’t work. Instead, give only meaningful, heartfelt praise based on true accomplishment.

Rule #5: Don’t hold a grudge. “Every day is a new day” should be your mantra with difficult students. They need to know that they have a clean slate to start each day—and so do you. To that end, say hello, smile, and let them know you’re happy to see them first thing every morning.

Rule #6: Don’t lose your cool. When you let students get under your skin and you lose emotional control, even if it’s just a sigh and an eye roll, you become less effective. Your likeability drops. Classroom tension rises. And when difficult students discover they can push your buttons, they’ll try as often as they can.

Rule #7: Don’t ignore misbehavior. Given that there is an audience of other students, ignoring misbehavior will not make it go away. It will only make it worse. Instead, follow your classroom management plan as it’s written. If a difficult student breaks a rule, no matter how trivial, enforce it immediately.

It’s About Relationships. What if the two or three (or more) difficult students in your classroom admired you? What if they looked up to you, respected you, and liked being in your company? What if they embraced whatever you had to say to them? Your success in helping them change their behavior would go through the roof, and you’d have peace in your classroom. The fact is, everything hinges on your ability to build relationships with your students. Your classroom management plan merely nudges them in the right direction. Done correctly, it gets students to look inward, to self-evaluate, and to feel the weight of their transgressions. But by itself, it can only do so much. It’s your relationship with your students that makes the greatest difference. When you build trusting rapport with them, which anyone can do, you then possess a tidal wave of influence that can change their behavior, improve their academic performance, and profoundly impact their lives.

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Hello, just a quick note from the SERS desk.

Deadline for turning in inventory sheets and submitting requisitions is February 28th. Please feel free to contact me regarding any questions about inventory at idele.on@bcc.esc2.net or you may ask your BCC instructional support person.

Thanks,

Lori

“The you’ve got sink dishes here, cluck clucks there, and the moo moses are everywhere! You have got to get a handle on this inventory!”