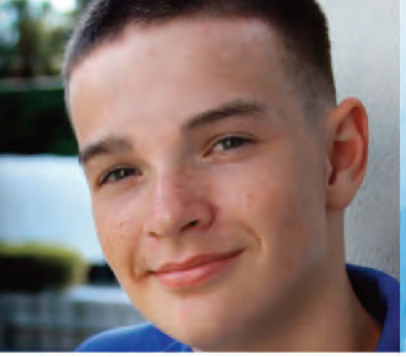

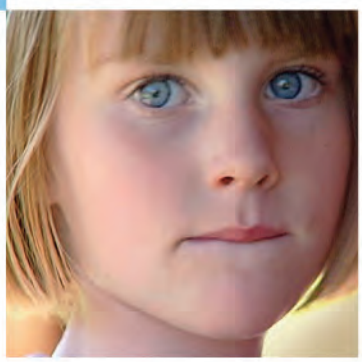

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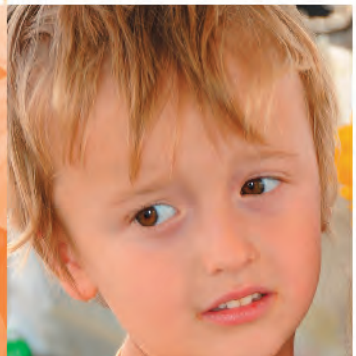

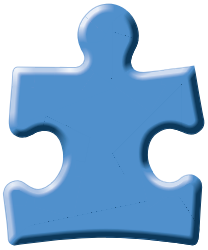

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COMPOSITION BOOK

100 SHEETS • 200 PAGES
9 3/4 X 7 1/2 IN. • 24.7 X 19.0 CMS.

A tool kit to assist members of the school community in understanding and supporting students with autism

Autism Speaks® FAMILY SERVICES

SCHOOL COMMUNITY TOOL KIT

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About the Autism Speaks School Community Tool Kit

The purpose of this kit is to provide helpful information about your students with autism and tools and strategies to achieve positive interactions and increase learning for all members of the school community. It will provide valuable information for general education and administrative school staff, aides, office staff, bus drivers, nurses, custodians, classmates & family members who interact with students with autism.

The information that follows will be useful for staff training, new school employees and problem solving throughout the school year. With help from respected experts in the field of autism and special education, & experienced parents, caregivers and teachers, we've included an introduction to autism and specific strategies for supporting your students.

While this tool kit is not intended to be a curriculum for special education, your special education and administration staff may find it helpful for information and resources to support students with autism in general education environments and involvement in the school community as a whole.

Each Student with Autism is Unique

The most successful programs use a team approach that ensures each student is considered as an individual. One student with autism can have very different strengths, needs and challenges from another. School staff should also be encouraged to seek out people who know the student well – experienced teachers, therapists and families – and try to always seek first to understand. With the support of the entire school community students with autism can make great strides and become valued members of the student body.

About the Information & Resources Included

We have included a wealth of information here - from a wide variety of sources - and new tools and information will be added as they become available. We hope you will become familiar with the kit, use and share it's information and re-visit it frequently over the course of the school year as needs change and time allows.

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How to Use this Tool Kit

Sections of the kit are broken into modules, to be used in short units, such as at staff meetings or in-service.

Examples, success stories, visual supports and links to additional training opportunities, websites, video clips and examples are also included wherever possible.

Training with this tool kit should be as hands-on as possible: role-play, create examples, apply a technique to a current student's needs, discuss and compare!

Preparing your school community to support its students with autism begins with helping them get to know the student as a person first – with hopes and dreams, strengths and challenges, and most importantly, feelings – just like any other person. Increasing the school community's knowledge about and understanding of people autism will benefit everyone.

Autism Basics & **Asperger's Syndrome Basics** are two-page summaries located in the **Appendix** that provide key information on autism and Asperger's Syndrome and (mostly) universal strategies for staff with more limited interactions with a student.

The **School Community** section contains specific information in handout form to be given along with Autism Basics & Asperger's Syndrome Basics for preparing and supporting staff, general education teachers, various members of the school community and classmates.

If extended training opportunities are not available, an introduction from a parent, special education teacher or behavior specialist about the child, coupled with the appropriate Autism Basics & Asperger's Syndrome Basics summary, the relevant For Specific Members section and the About Me Profile information provided by the student & his family or caregiver should provide a start to building understanding and support. Ongoing training and trouble-shooting will help increase success for everyone involved.

The "More Information" sections provide further information for particular areas of concern, additional ideas, strategies and examples. Visit this online resource often for new information and tools as they become available.

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With gratitude, we thank the members of our Advisory Committees for generously donating their time, experience and resources to this project.

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The 2012 version of the School Community Tool Kit was edited by Heather Coburn-Snyder with illustrations and design by Joe Shea.

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For the Family Members & Caregivers Using This Kit to Support their Student with Autism

Autism Speaks' School Community Tool Kit is was created for all members of the school community and that includes you.

From administrators, to support staff, to the bus drivers with whom your student starts and ends his day, we are aware that often it is the student's parent or caregiver who initiates the connections between their child and many members of the school community. Here are some tips for using this kit to help shape positive interactions for your child.

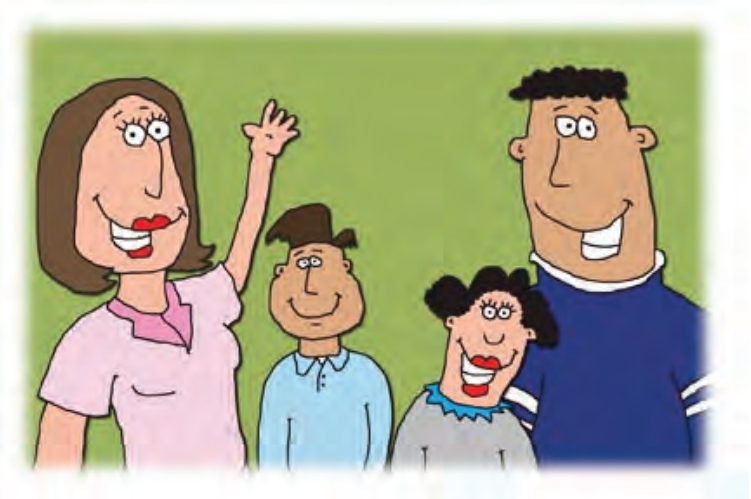
Complete the "About Me" profile for (or with) your student and have copies ready to distribute yourself or for members of your student's team to distribute.

If you would like members of your student's school community to have specific sections of the kit, such as your student's "About Me," the "Autism Basics" or "Asperger's Basics" brochures, or a section created for specific members of the community, ask whether a member of the student's team can make that happen or arrange a visit to the school to do so yourself.

With the exception of your student's "About Me" profile, all of the contents of this kit can be distributed by including a link in an email as well.

The amount of information provided here might be overwhelming at first. Or it might include information you already have. We've done our best to break it down into sections you can use as needed. There is a wealth of good information available from many different sources and we've tried to provide access to as much it as possible. As new tools and information become available, we will strive to provide it here for you.

We hope you will consider the Autism Speaks School Community Tool Kit a resource to revisit throughout the school year and throughout your student's school career.



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"About Me" Profile

A Note to Family Members & Caregivers:

The completed "About Me" profile will help people in the school community become familiar with your student with autism. Various members of the school community interact with your student during the course of the day. Providing some information specifically about your student will go a long way in creating a positive relationship with the bus driver, cafeteria aides, general education teachers and many others.

Please answer the questions or, if it is appropriate, help your student answer them, adding additional information as necessary. Include a photo if possible to help people recognize your student. Photos of family or favorite activities or people are also helpful.

Coordinate with your student's school team to decide how this profile will be distributed to the people who will come in contact with him. Work with the team to decide whether and which other sections of the kit will be distributed as well. The "Autism Basics" and/or "Asperger's Basics" brochures will be helpful in tandem with the "About Me" profile. You may decide to print some of them out to have on hand for situations outside of school too.

This kit includes information for specific members of the school community:

- Bus Drivers / Transportation Supervisors
- Custodial Staff
- General Education Teachers (including Music, Art, Physical Education)
- Lunch & Recess Aides
- Office Staff
- Para-professionals
- School Nurses
- School Security
- Classmates

A Note to the School Team:

If a family member or caregiver is unable to provide this information, consider whether a member of the student's team can help.

The "About Me" profile form is adapted from the Welcome Survey.

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“About Me” Profile Form

Student’s Name: _____

What are some of the things that you are most interested in? _____

What upsets you? _____

What are you afraid of? _____

What makes you laugh? _____

What is ONE thing you would like to get better at this year? _____

What calms you down when you are overwhelmed or upset? _____

What rewards work well for you? _____

What do you do after school or on weekends? _____

Person completing form: _____

Relationship to student: _____

Email address of family or caregiver contact: _____

Phone number of family or caregiver contact: _____

What is the best way to contact the student’s family or caregiver? _____

What days or times are convenient for you to meet with the school team? _____

Are there any issues that you would like to discuss or hear more information about? _____

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About Autism

Many people within the school community who use this kit will be familiar with some aspects of autism, particularly as they relate to the school setting. This information is meant to provide a general overview for people who are new to autism and to fill in the gaps of information for people with experience. Be on the look out for information you didn't know and how it might apply to your future experiences supporting students with autism!

- What is Autism?
- More Information About Symptoms of Autism
- Physical and Medical Issues That May Accompany Autism
- Additional Challenges That May Accompany Autism
- Unique Abilities That May Accompany Autism
- Specific Features of Asperger's Syndrome

What is Autism?

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and autism are both general terms for a group of complex disorders of brain development. These disorders are characterized, in varying degrees, by difficulties in social interaction, verbal and nonverbal communication and repetitive behaviors. They include autistic disorder, Rett syndrome, childhood disintegrative disorder, pervasive developmental disorder-not otherwise specified (PDD-NOS) and Asperger syndrome. ASD can be associated with intellectual disability, difficulties in motor coordination and attention and physical health issues such as sleep and gastrointestinal disturbances.

Each individual with autism is unique. Many of those on the autism spectrum have exceptional abilities in visual skills, music and academic skills. About 40 percent have average to above average intellectual abilities. Indeed, many persons on the spectrum take deserved pride in their distinctive abilities and "atypical" ways of viewing the world. Others with autism have significant disability and are unable to live independently. About 25 percent of individuals with ASD are nonverbal but can learn to communicate using other means.

How Common is Autism?

Autism statistics from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) identify around 1 in 88 American children as on the autism spectrum–a ten-fold increase in prevalence in 40 years. Careful research shows that this increase is only partly explained by improved diagnosis and awareness. Studies also show that autism is four to five times more common among boys than girls. An estimated 1 out of 54 boys and 1 in 252 girls are diagnosed with autism in the United States.

By way of comparison, more children are diagnosed with autism each year than with juvenile diabetes, AIDS or cancer, combined.* ASD affects over 2 million individuals in the U.S. and tens of millions worldwide. Moreover, government autism statistics suggest that prevalence rates have increased 10 to 17 percent annually in recent years. There is no established explanation for this continuing increase, although improved diagnosis and environmental influences are two reasons often considered.

* Comparison based on the prevalence statistics of the Child & Adolescent Health Measurement Initiative

One in every 88 children is diagnosed with autism.

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More Information About Symptoms of Autism

Symptoms of autism, and their severity, vary considerably in each individual on the autism spectrum. The functional areas of communication, social interaction, and repetitive behaviors are viewed as the 'core' symptoms of autism. One child may not have the same symptoms and may seem very different from another child with the same diagnosis. It is sometimes said that if you know one person with autism; you know one person with autism.

The characteristics of autism typically last throughout a person's lifetime, but can change considerably over time and through interventions. A mildly affected person might seem merely quirky and lead a relatively typical life. A severely affected person might be unable to speak or care for himself. Early and intensive intervention can make extraordinary differences in a child's development and outcome.

The descriptions of symptoms that follow are drawn from the **National Institute of Mental Health Website**:

Social Symptoms

From the start, typically developing infants are social beings. Early in life, they gaze at people, turn toward voices, grasp a finger, and even smile. In contrast, most children with autism seem to have tremendous difficulty learning to engage in the give-and-take of everyday human interaction. Even in the first few months of life, many do not interact and they avoid eye contact. They seem indifferent to other people, and often seem to prefer being alone. They may resist attention or passively accept hugs and cuddling. Later, they seldom seek comfort or respond to parents' displays of anger or affection in a typical way. Research has suggested that although children with autism are attached to their parents, their expression of this attachment is often unusual and difficult to "read." To parents, it may seem as if their child is not attached at all. Parents who looked forward to the joys of cuddling, teaching, and playing with their child may feel crushed by this lack of the expected and typical attachment behavior.

Children with autism also are slower in learning to interpret what others are thinking and feeling. Subtle social cues—whether a smile, a wink, or a grimace—may have little meaning. To a child who misses these cues, "Come here" always means the same thing, whether the speaker is smiling and extending her arms for a hug or frowning and planting her fists on her hips. Without the ability to interpret gestures and facial expressions, the social world may seem bewildering. To compound the problem, people with autism have difficulty seeing things from another person's perspective. Most 5-year-olds understand that other people have different information, feelings, and goals than they have. A person with autism may lack such understanding. This inability leaves them unable to predict or understand other people's actions.

Although not universal, it is common for people with autism also to have difficulty regulating their emotions. This can take the form of "immature" behavior such as crying in class or verbal outbursts that seem inappropriate to those around them. The individual with autism might also be disruptive and physically aggressive at times, making social relationships still more difficult. They have a tendency to "lose control," particularly when they're

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in a strange or overwhelming environment, or when angry and frustrated. They may at times break things, attack others, or hurt themselves. In their frustration, some bang their heads, pull their hair, or bite their arms.

Communication Difficulties

By age 3, most children have passed predictable milestones on the path to learning language; one of the earliest is babbling. By the first birthday, a typical toddler says words, turns when he hears his name, points when he wants a toy, and when offered something distasteful, makes it clear that the answer is "no."

Some children diagnosed with autism remain mute throughout their lives. Some infants who later show signs of autism coo and babble during the first few months of life, but they soon stop. Others may be delayed, developing language as late as age 5 to 9. Some children may learn to use communication systems such as pictures or sign language.

Many of those who do speak often use language in unusual ways. They seem unable to combine words into meaningful sentences. Some speak only single words, while others repeat the same phrase over and over. Some children with autism parrot what they hear, a condition called echolalia. Although many typical children go through a stage where they repeat what they hear, it normally passes by the time they are 3.

Some children only mildly affected may exhibit slight delays in language, or even seem to have precocious language and unusually large vocabularies, but have great difficulty in sustaining a conversation. The "give and take" of normal conversation is hard for them, although they often carry on a monologue on a favorite subject, giving no one else an opportunity to comment. Another difficulty is often the inability to understand body language, tone of voice, or "phrases of speech." They might interpret a sarcastic expression such as "Oh, that's just great" as meaning it really IS great.

While it can be hard to understand what a child with autism is saying, their body language is also difficult to understand. Facial expressions, movements, and gestures rarely match what they are saying. Also, their tone of voice fails to reflect their feelings. A high-pitched, sing-song, or flat, robot-like voice is common. Some children with relatively good language skills speak like little adults, failing to pick up on the "kid-speak" that is common in their peers.

Without meaningful gestures or the language to ask for things, people with autism are at a loss to let others know what they need. As a result, they may simply scream or grab what they want. Until they are taught better ways to express their needs, children with autism do whatever they can to get through to others. As people with autism grow up, they can become increasingly aware of their difficulties in understanding others and in being understood. As a result they may become anxious or depressed.

Repetitive Behaviors

Although children with autism usually appear physically normal and many have good muscle control, odd repetitive motions may set them off from other children. These behaviors might be extreme and highly apparent or more subtle. Some children and older individuals spend a lot of time repeatedly flapping their arms or walking on their toes. Some suddenly freeze in position.

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As children, they might spend hours lining up their cars and trains in a certain way, rather than using them for pretend play. If someone accidentally moves one of the toys, the child may be tremendously upset. Children with autism often need, and demand, absolute consistency in their environment. A slight change in any routine — in mealtimes, dressing, taking a bath, going to school at a certain time and by the same route — can be extremely disturbing. Perhaps order and sameness lend some stability in a world of confusion.

Repetitive behavior sometimes takes the form of a persistent, intense preoccupation. For example, the child might be obsessed with learning all about vacuum cleaners, train schedules, or lighthouses. Often there is great interest in numbers, symbols, or science topics.

Physical and Medical Issues That May Accompany Autism

Seizure Disorder (Epilepsy)

Over a third of people with autism develop seizures. These often start in early childhood or during adolescence. Seizures, caused by abnormal electrical activity in the brain, can produce a temporary loss of consciousness (a "blackout"), a body convulsion, unusual movements, or staring spells. Sometimes a contributing factor is a lack of sleep or a high fever. An electroencephalogram (EEG, a recording of the electric currents in the brain through electrodes applied to the scalp) can help confirm the presence of irregular electrical activity or seizures.

People with autism may experience more than one type of seizure activity. The easiest to recognize are large "grand mal" (or tonic-clonic) seizures. Others include "petit mal" (or absence) seizures and sub-clinical seizures, which may only be apparent in an EEG. Especially in the case of absence seizures, school staff may be the first to note that something is awry and it is important to alert the family and school team if seizures are suspected.

Recurrent seizure activity is called epilepsy, and treatment typically involves anticonvulsant medicines to reduce or eliminate occurrence. For a student with a seizure disorder, it is important for the school team to recognize seizure signs and to know the best way to manage the student and ensure his safety should a seizure occur. The team should be made aware of any side effects that might be caused by seizure medications.

Genetic Disorders

A small number of children with autism may also have a neuro-genetic condition such as Fragile X Syndrome, Angelman's Syndrome, Tuberous Sclerosis, Chromosome 15 Duplication Syndrome or another chromosomal abnormality. It is important to know if a student has one of these syndromes because there may be accompanying medical issues.

Allergies, Gastrointestinal Disorders, and Pain

Due to the frequent inability to verbally communicate, pain in a child with autism is sometimes recognized only because of patterns or changes in his behavior, such as an increase in self soothing behaviors (e.g., rocking)

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or outbursts of aggression or self-injury. This may be true of treatable physical pain, such as a toothache, injury or gastrointestinal distress.

Many parents report gastrointestinal (GI) problems in their children with autism and the medical community is starting to recognize this as a real, and treatable, co-occurring condition. The exact number of children with gastrointestinal issues such as gastritis, chronic constipation, colitis, celiac disease and esophagitis is unknown, but surveys have suggested that the majority of young children with autism have problems such as chronic constipation or diarrhea. In addition to the associated discomfort, these issues, coupled with communication, disorganization and sensory difficulties, can result in challenges surrounding toileting for many children with autism. Food and/or environmental allergies are also common in people with autism.

Some students may be under the care of a GI specialist or allergist who recommends specific protocols the team will need to follow, while other families might choose to employ specific nutritional protocols or a popular dietary intervention used in autism - eliminating dairy and gluten containing foods. It is often necessary for the school team to assist in the effective delivery of dietary interventions and it is important to communicate well with the family and be knowledgeable to implement these interventions effectively.

Perhaps because of gastrointestinal concerns, sensory issues, oral motor delays, or learned behaviors, many people with autism experience significant food aversions and eating challenges. This may result in highly restrictive food choices and concerns about nutritional health.

For more information on this topic see Take a Bite in the resources.

Sleep Dysfunction

Sleep problems are common in children and adolescents with autism. Many children have trouble falling asleep, experience night waking, or seem to function on considerably less sleep than is usually considered normal. Lack of sleep can affect attention and learning and the student's ability to benefit from therapeutic interventions.

Medical issues such as obstructive sleep apnea or gastro esophageal reflux may cause sleep issues. Addressing the medical issues may solve the problem. In other cases, when there is no medical cause, sleep issues may be managed with behavioral interventions including "sleep-hygiene" measures such as limiting the amount of sleep during the day, and establishing regular bedtime routines. Experienced school behaviorists may be able to provide the family with strategies that will improve sleep and function for all involved, and in doing so increase the student's ability benefit from educational efforts.

Pica

Pica is an eating disorder involving eating things that are not food. Children between 18 and 24 months old often eat non-food items, but this is typically a normal part of development. Some children with autism and other developmental disabilities persist beyond the developmentally typical time frame and continue to eat items such as dirt, clay, chalk or paint chips.

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Additional Challenges That May Accompany Autism

Sensory Processing

Many people with autism have unusual responses to sensory input (also called stimuli). These responses are due to difficulties in processing and integrating sensory information. Vision, hearing, touch, smell, taste, the sense of movement (vestibular system) and the sense of position (proprioception) can all be affected. This means that while information may be sensed normally, it may be perceived much differently.

The process of the brain organizing and interpreting sensory information is called sensory integration. Children with sensory dysfunction can experience stimuli that seem "normal" to others as painful, unpleasant or confusing. For some, the inability to process sensory information normally might be described using a clinical term such as Sensory Integration Dysfunction, Sensory Processing Disorder or Sensory Integration Disorder. Even for those who do not receive a formal classification, it is important to recognize that a student may have significant sensory issues as an isolated issue, or accompanying a variety of learning and neurological disorders such as autism, dyslexia, dyspraxia, multiple sclerosis, and speech delay.

A student's sensory challenges can involve hypersensitivity (over reactivity), also known as sensory defensiveness, or hyposensitivity (under reactivity). Many people with autism are highly attuned or even painfully sensitive to certain sounds, textures, tastes, and smells. Some children find the feel of clothing touching their skin almost unbearable, or might be distracted by the buzz of an airplane or a bee long before anyone else is aware of its presence. Hyposensitivity might be apparent in an increased tolerance of pain or a constant need for sensory stimulation. Some people with autism are oblivious to extreme cold or heat (dangerous in icy conditions or when working near a stove). A child with autism may fall and break an arm, yet never cry. Responses to sensory overload can range from shutting down and "checking out" of the environment, to preoccupation or distraction, or negative behaviors such as aggression or running away. Sensitivities can change or improve over time.

Sensory imbalances can also occur in a seemingly incongruous combination in a single person, for example one who might crave deep pressure (such as a hug) but cannot tolerate the sensation of light touch (such as a kiss on the cheek.) Shirt labels or seams on socks can annoy a child to distraction, while the hum of a vacuum can be terrifying, or the flicker of a fluorescent light completely disorienting. Many young children with autism seem particularly upset by the 'Happy Birthday' song (or the clapping that follows), so it is helpful to be aware that this might be distressing as it is likely to come up many times over the course of a school year. Indoor lunch, recess, physical education classes and assemblies are also times where the lack of structure, large numbers of students, unpredictability and excessive noise can become overwhelming.

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Some Signs of Sensory Dysfunction

- Overly sensitive to touch, to movement, sights or sounds
- Under-reactive to touch, movement, sights or sounds
- Easily distracted
- Social and/or emotional problems
- Activity level that is unusually high or unusually low
- Physical clumsiness or apparent carelessness
- Impulsive, lacking in self-control
- Difficulty making transitions from one situation to another
- Inability to unwind or calm self
- Poor self-concept
- Delays in speech, language or motor skills
- Delays in academic achievement

Organization and Attention

Students with autism are overwhelmingly challenged by difficulties with organization, both in terms of their own selves, and in their interactions with the world around. While a student with autism might craft an elaborate scheme of associations to aid in structuring his view of the world (i.e. A=red, B=yellow, C=black, etc.), many of these ritualistic patterns do not follow the organizational modes that most of society employs.

In addition, focusing or sustaining attention to subjects that others find interesting or important can be extremely difficult, while at the same time the ability to attend to something motivating to the individual with autism can maintain considerable intensity. Many autism specific interventions view building this shared focus, or 'joint attention' as a component of instruction. The ability to appropriately shift attention, and the speed with which this occurs, is also a noted deficit in autism. This can have profound effects on communication, learning and social ability.

Many of the tasks of 'executive function' are notably disordered in autism, as in ADHD, Alzheimer's and individuals who have sustained injuries to the frontal lobe of the brain. Just as sensory issues are often related to challenges in making sense of the whole, executive function skills are instrumental for proper coordination of cognitive resources: planning and organization, flexible and abstract thinking, short term and working memory, initiating appropriate actions and inhibiting inappropriate actions. Executive function deficits can have broad effects on a learner (for example, if it is impossible to recall the question a teacher just asked, then it becomes equally impossible to answer it). For many higher functioning individuals this deficit is especially problematic, as these organizational skills are not usually taught directly (for example, a student might be able to compose sentences, but not create a journal entry on a specified topic because of the challenges with organizing thoughts and putting these in an understandable sequence on paper).

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People with autism may also have difficulty with respect to 'theory of mind', or the ability to recognize various mental states (beliefs, intentions, knowledge, etc.) in themselves and others, and to understand that others might have beliefs, desires and intentions that differ from their own. While understanding the role of theory of mind is still an evolving area of science, it is worth noting that perspective taking is often an area of great challenge to individuals with all forms of autism, socially, emotionally and even linguistically (e.g. 'when is I you and you me?').

Cognitive Impairment

While average or above average intelligence is intrinsic to the definition of Asperger Syndrome and usually recognized in individuals characterized as having High Functioning Autism, according to most research, some degree of cognitive impairment has been shown in a majority of individuals with classic autism. Formal testing often shows significant variability, with some areas at normal levels and others weak. For example, a student with autism may do well on the parts of an intelligence test that measure visual and problem solving skills, but earn low scores on the language subtests. Significantly language-disordered students who are assessed using non-verbal tests often show markedly higher intelligence scores than when a verbally based test is used.

Many individuals with autism learn at a rate slower than those of their peers, but the specific percentage of those with mental retardation is poorly understood. Intelligence is extremely difficult to assess due to challenges in communication and attention. In addition, while true intelligence is believed to be static (IQ should not change as a person ages and is educated), significant changes in IQ in young children with autism who have received intensive interventions indicates that testing at a particular point in time might not be a true representation of long-term potential. In a particular child, functional, adaptive or problem solving skills can greatly exceed those measured on a test, and more educators are experiencing the intelligence (and language) trapped within nonverbal children once they are given alternative modes of communication and access.

From an intervention standpoint, it is always best to assume intellect and know that every individual deserves the opportunity to learn and reach his fullest potential.

Motor Challenges

Many people with autism experience challenges with muscle tone and/or coordination that can affect their ability to function at age appropriate levels. In some, the difficulty is in motor planning and execution. This can extend from speech to gross motor activities.

Impairments in the ability to coordinate and perform purposeful movements in the absence of motor or sensory impairments are termed dyspraxia (disordered ability) or apraxia (absence of this ability). If a child has apraxic or dyspraxic speech, the brain's ability to plan the movement of the lips, jaw, and tongue may make intelligible speech incredibly difficult, even if he has intact language and knows what he wants to say.

In others, muscle tone might be intact, but he may have challenges in timing and the ability to attend. Sports can be difficult, and fine motor tasks (buttoning, handwriting, using utensils and tools) often require intervention and support using occupational therapy techniques. Some children have difficulty in understanding where their body is in

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space (a sensation that comes automatically to the rest of us), which is extremely disconcerting when moving throughout the environment, navigating stairs, balancing on a bicycle, or even walking down a hallway without 'checking in' with the location of the wall. The communicative, social and behavioral implications of imprecise timing and motor abilities are worth considering when planning for and interacting with a student. There may be specific strategies recommended by the speech pathologist or occupational therapist supporting the team in addressing these issues.

Emotional Issues, including Anxiety & Stress

Imagine being in another country with a different language and markedly different cultural conventions. If the world were swirling all around and language, gestures, schedules and signs made no sense, anxiety would likely result. With no one to tell and no way to ask for help, that anxiety might increase.

Anxiety and stress are very real byproducts of the challenges of autism. Understanding this while interacting with and supporting students will be helpful. Many of the strategies suggested in this tool kit are helpful in reducing these feelings in learners with autism. Recognizing that many of the 'behaviors' of autism may also be signs of stress or anxiety (pacing, distractibility, acting out, nail biting, repetitive actions, etc.) may help in determining the supports needed for an individual student.

The same biochemical differences that might cause anxiety in the general population can be present in individuals with autism. Autism spectrum disorders can co-occur with other behavioral, mood and anxiety disorders, which are more likely to be diagnosed separately as a student ages and reaches adolescence. Co-occurring conditions may respond to therapies or may present additional considerations for the team.

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Unique Abilities That May Accompany Autism

Some individuals with autism possess unusual skills and exceptional abilities. While true savants (savant syndrome describes a person with a mental deficit who has one or more genius level abilities) are rare, many individuals with autism have strengths that may make them unique or interesting.

Some of the strengths some people with autism possess are outlined here. While it is important to never assume that any individual student has any or all of these strengths, awareness that a student has a skill such as one described here might create an opportunity to form a connection, to motivate or reward attention to more difficult challenges, or to use that strength in overcoming other areas of deficit.

Some of the strengths you may see in people with autism – Adapted from A Parent's Guide to Asperger's Syndrome and High Functioning Autism by Sally Ozonoff, Geraldine Dawson, and James McPartland:

- Strong visual skills
- Ability to understand and retain concrete concepts, rules, sequences and patterns
- Good memory of details or rote facts (math facts, train schedules, baseball statistics)
- Long-term memory
- Computer and technology skills
- Musical ability or interest
- Intense concentration or focus, especially on a preferred activity
- Artistic ability
- Mathematical ability
- Ability to decode written language (read) at an early age (but not necessarily comprehend)
- Strong encoding (spelling)
- Honesty
- Problem solving ability (when you cannot ask for something you want, you can get pretty creative about getting your hands on it yourself.)

Often the unique talents of people with autism are a reflection of the focus they place on a particular area, and how much it interests them. If sorting out the days on a calendar helps provide structure and predictability to an otherwise confusing world, then it might make sense that an individual would be able to memorize incredible amounts of information and be able to tell the day of the week on which a person was born, when provided the date. Inherent to the development of these exceptional skills is the individual's understanding of the processes and patterns involved, and the motivation to focus on them - absolutely critical features to keep in mind when undertaking the task of teaching something new. Breaking down tasks into understandable components, and providing motivational support (remembering that what motivates a child with autism may be different from what motivates a typical child) will help expand a student's set of skills and strengths.

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Specific Features of Asperger's Syndrome

Asperger's Syndrome is a neurological disorder on the autism spectrum named after the Austrian pediatrician Hans Asperger, who first described a group of children who had a similar set of behavioral features. People with Asperger's Syndrome have difficulties with social interaction and restrictive or repetitive behaviors, but in contrast to those with classic autism, they do not have delays in language development or evident cognitive delays. Most achieve their early developmental milestones and academic targets on time. Many having IQs in the superior range. As a result of this more subtle presentation, people with Asperger's Syndrome are usually diagnosed later than those with autism, sometimes even in adolescence or adulthood. Asperger's Syndrome is diagnosed in boys approximately ten times more often than in girls.

People with Asperger's Syndrome find it challenging to connect with others, often having difficulty maintaining eye contact, reading other people's facial expressions or body language and taking another's perspective. While they develop language in a typical timeframe and their vocabulary might actually be advanced, they have difficulty understanding the subtle aspects of communication - reading gestures, understanding idioms, recognizing and expressing emotions, and flowing with the social back and forth of communication. Language is usually interpreted very literally, so idioms and sarcasm can be very confusing. Many learn to read easily and early, but decoding skills often obscure significant challenges with comprehension and contextual understanding. Students with Asperger's are usually highly verbal, saying things others have learned to keep to themselves (thereby appearing rude) or producing lengthy dissertations on favored topics (e.g. New York City's train schedules) without the realization that the information is of no interest to those around him. These traits make students with Asperger's particularly vulnerable to bullying.

Sensory processing differences and motor difficulties - issues with attention and timing, clumsiness and low muscle tone - are often present, making social connections through play and sports even more challenging. Organization and attention are often disordered, and most students with Asperger's Syndrome experience ever-present anxiety. Extreme adherence to rules, routines and favored activities or topics often make transitions, changes and flexibility (such as playing a game according to another child's method) extremely difficult and distressing.

Since the challenges presented vary considerably from those of classic autism, the needs of students with Asperger's Syndrome often go unaddressed, leading to increasing isolation and anxiety. Skill deficits with organization and attention - especially in an intellectually gifted child - are often misinterpreted as lack of effort or interest and the student is often penalized, rather than taught the isolated skills. Without failing grades, fine motor issues related to shoe tying or penmanship might not be addressed with occupational therapy and the intricacies of conversational reciprocity might not be addressed in speech therapy sessions. In fact, because of frequent success with typical standards of evaluation (learning factual information, processes and academics), the needs of students with Asperger's Syndrome are often overlooked and inappropriately supported.

As students age and become aware of their differences, anxiety often increases and depression might develop. Again, bullying is common, as naïve students without self-advocacy skills or desperate for friendships become victims. Educating peers and fostering emotional literacy, self awareness and development of the skills required to develop peer relationships can go a long way in helping to create a successful student.

For more information on Asperger's Syndrome, see the **Organization for Autism Research's Steps to Success.**

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For Specific Members of the School Community

The sections that follow address common issues that relate to the specific needs of students with autism and the people who work with them within the school community.

It is important to reinforce the need for teamwork with the people within the school community who know an individual student best. Encourage and answer questions so each staff member feels supported and effective.

Every member of the school community should feel knowledgeable and empowered when they interact with all of a school's students. Communication is the key. While a bus driver rarely attends an IEP meeting, the needs of a child on the bus - and the strategies available to the bus driver - can still be part of the IEP planning process.

A bulleted, comprehensive list of ideas across settings, many of which are included here, can be found at Strategies at Hand.

Each of the members of the school community listed below should be given a copy of the Autism Basics and Asperger's Basics handouts, an "About Me" introduction to the individual student and the information section that is specifically for them.

(Please note that the "About Me" document included in this kit will need to be filled out for the individual student, preferably by a family member of the student or someone designated by their family.)

- Autism Basics Brochure
- Asperger's Basics Brochure
- About Me
- Information for Classmates
- Information for Bus Drivers / Transportation Supervisors
- Information for Custodial Staff
- Information for General Education & Special Area Teachers (includes Physical Education, Music, Art & Library)
- Information for Lunch Aides / Recess Aides
- Information for Office Staff
- Information for Paraprofessionals
- Enrolling Peers to Support Students with Autism
- Information for Peers
- Information for School Administrators, Principals, Interdisciplinary Team Members
- Information for School Nurses
- Information for School Security

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PEERS

Autism Speaks
FAMILY SERVICES
SCHOOL COMMUNITY TOOL KIT

AUTISM SPEAKS
It's time to listen.

Helping Peers Support Students with Autism

Teaching Peers about Autism

Autism education or sensitivity training can occur in a generalized manner, in which students learn about acceptance and sensitivity not related to a particular student at school. It can also be much more specific to the needs of that student and his or her family.

It is very important to communicate with the parents or guardian of the child with autism before any sensitivity training is done. The teacher or school psychologist leading the class discussion should reach out to the parents or guardian of the child with autism to understand what they are comfortable with in terms of disclosure. Some families may be comfortable with general sensitivity training and acknowledgment of their child's strengths and challenges to the class, but not with sharing the autism diagnosis. Other families are more open about their child's diagnosis and are willing to be active participants in the education and sensitivity training. These are personal decision that each family must make and schools should honor. These decisions can also change over time as the needs of the student with autism may change.

It is also important to keep in mind that some families may not have told their children about their diagnosis yet. Some children may know that they have autism but may not want to share their diagnosis with their classmates. Again, these are individual decisions. The other consideration to discuss in advance is if the student with autism will be present during the sensitivity training. Some families want their children be active participants in the training process, and others might prefer that it's done when the student is out of the classroom.

Many schools have found it helpful to have a parent, caregiver or school representative who knows the student well introduce the student at the beginning of the school year or during a new inclusion opportunity. If the family or team feels that protecting the student's privacy is important, the student may not even be mentioned by name and general sensitivity and acceptance may be all that is addressed. Out of respect for the student, a more specific introduction can also be done when he or she is not in the room. It is important to present the student as a person with unique abilities and similarities (a family, siblings, pets, love of music, favorite foods, video games, movies, etc.), while also sharing some of the challenges and differences the students might notice or need to be aware of, such as sensory needs.

Informing Peer Families

In addition to addressing peers, it is also important to reach out to their families. Many parents will not have had experience with autism, and may not understand or have the tools they need to appropriately support their children in fostering relationships with children who seem different. Involving the overall school community will build awareness and sensitivity and benefit everyone involved.

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Families of peers can be informed through assemblies or Parent Teacher Organizations (sometimes called Home & School Organizations). In some cases, it may be necessary to inform the peers' families more directly within a classroom or grade level.

Some families may prefer to protect their child's privacy (which is their right), while others might be inclined to share information in a letter or meeting about their student's challenges and interests, finding that greater understanding and perspective within the community will reduce fear and improve acceptance.

Here is a list of resources broken down by age group...

Resources for Elementary School Children

General Sensitivity Training

These books are designed to teach general acceptance and appreciation of differences between individuals and their peers and classmates. Especially when a family wishes to maintain their privacy, sometimes general sensitivity training is enough to teach students to support and include their peers with autism.

Trevor, Trevor

by Diane Twachtman Cullen

The story of Trevor, a primary school aged child whose problems with social relationships suggest a form of autism. Unfortunately, like so many children with social interaction problems, it is not Trevor's strengths that his classmates notice, but rather his differences. Change comes through the efforts of a caring and sensitive teacher Metaphor, as it is explained in the preface, is a type of storytelling pioneered by Milton H Erickson that concentrates on indirect or symbolic communication in order to transfer the message or meaning of the story in a lasting and powerful manner. Show More Show Less

Wings of Epoh

by Gerda Weissman Klein

Wings of Epoh is a story that teaches acceptance, tolerance and empathy. What unfolds is the gift of friendship, and the joy in helping a person who is misunderstood or who just doesn't fit. The Wings of EPOH is available as both a book and a film.

Autism Specific Education

These books address autism specifically so that peers can learn what autism is and are better able to understand their classmate's strengths and challenges. They can be used when the family involved is comfortable with disclosing their child's diagnosis with his or her classmates.

The Autism Acceptance Book

by Ellen Sabin

The Autism Acceptance Book teaches children about autism, further develops their understanding for the people around them, and encourages them to embrace people's differences with respect, compassion and kindness. For ages 6 and up. There is also a teachers' guide that can be downloaded here.

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The Sixth Sense II

by Carol Gray

Provides a lesson plan for promoting understanding and supportive social climates for children with autism spectrum disorders. "Students (peers) will be better equipped to include a classmate with unique behaviors when provided with accurate social information. Using their five senses as a frame of reference, this lesson plan introduces students to their sixth (or social) sense via activities and discussions."

My Friend with Autism: A Coloring Book for Peers and Siblings

by Beverly Bishop

Written for classmates of spectrum students and the classmates' parents, this kid-friendly book explains in positive ways that children with autism are good at some things, not so good at others - just like everyone else! The narrator (a peer) notes that his friend's senses work "really well" - he can hear sounds no one else can hear; his eyes work so well bright lights can hurt them. In all cases, the differences are described in a kind, understanding manner. There are charming illustrations for readers to color. "Notes for Adults" offer parents more detailed information about the "kid's pages."

Kids Booklet on Autism

presented by Autism New Jersey

A booklet for siblings and peers, with notes for parents and teachers, too! This resource provides children with lots of helpful information about kids and grown-ups who have autism and includes answers to frequently asked questions from children, explanations about autism, descriptions of feelings, ideas and actions plans.

How to Be a Friend to Someone with Autism

adapted, Peter Faustino, PhD

- **Take the Initiative to Include Him or Her -** Your friend may desperately want to be included and may not know how to ask. Be specific about what you want him to do.
- **Find Common Interests -** It will be much easier to talk about or share something you both like to do (movies, sports, music, books, TV shows, etc.).
- **Be Persistent and Patient -** Remember that your friend with autism may take more time to respond than other people. It doesn't necessarily mean he or she isn't interested.
- **Communicate Clearly -** Speak at a reasonable speed and volume. It might be helpful to use short sentences. Use gestures, pictures, and facial expressions to help communicate. Speak literally – do not use confusing figures of speech (He may truthfully tell you, "the sky" if you ask "What's up?")
- **Stand Up For Him or Her -** If you see someone teasing or bullying a friend with autism, take a stand and tell the person that it's not cool.
- **Remember Sensory Sensitivity -** Your friend may be very uncomfortable in certain situations or places (crowds, noisy areas, etc.). Ask if he or she is OK. Sometimes your friend may need a break.
- **Give Feedback -** If your friend with autism is doing something inappropriate, it's OK to tell him nicely. Just be sure to also tell him what the right thing to do is because he may not know.
- **Don't Be Afraid -** Your friend is just a kid like you who needs a little help. Accept his or her differences and respect strengths just as you would for any friend.

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Programs that Promote Inclusion and Support

Perfect Pals

Perfect Pals is a program started by the Autism Speaks Nantucket Resource Center in collaboration with the Nantucket School District to provide students with and without disabilities with to participate in after-school recreational activities.

Light It Up Blue

Autism Awareness Month (April) offers many opportunities for schools to focus on teaching about autism and its impact on students and their families. The Autism Speaks Light it Up Blue campaign provides ideas for preschools, elementary schools, middle schools, high schools, colleges and universities to Light It Up Blue!

Resources for Middle School and High School Students

Books and Resources

What's Up With Nick?

From the Organization for Autism Research

A story about Nick, a new kid in school with autism. This accordion booklet includes sections "Meeting a Kid with Autism", "Hanging Out With Kids That Have Autism", "Things to Remember About Autism" and more!

A Buffet of Sensory Interventions: Solutions for Middle and High School Students With Autism Spectrum Disorders

by Susan Culp

This book offers a smorgasbord of sensory-based interventions for use by educators, occupational therapists and parents. This practical and well-researched tool is unique by focusing on middle and high school students, whose sensory needs are often overlooked. In suggesting interventions for this age group, the author emphasizes the importance of fostering independence, self-advocacy and self-regulation as a way to for teens with autism spectrum disorders to take ownership of their sensory needs as they transition into adulthood.

How to Talk to an Autistic Kid

by Daniel Stefanski (an autistic kid)

Kids with autism have a hard time communicating, which can be frustrating for autistic kids and for their peers. In this intimate yet practical book, author Daniel Stefanski, a fourteen-year-old boy with autism, helps readers understand why autistic kids act the way they do and offers specific suggestions on how to get along with them. Written by an autistic kid for non-autistic kids, it provides personal stories, knowledgeable explanations, and supportive advice–all in Daniel's unique and charming voice and accompanied by lively illustrations.

Social Skills Picture Book for High School and Beyond

by Jed Baker

Winner of an iParenting Media Award, this picture book appeals to the visual strengths of students on the autism spectrum, with color photos of students demonstrating various social skills in the correct (and sometimes incorrect) way. The skills depicted are meant to be read, role-played, corrected when necessary, role-played some more and, finally, to be practiced by the student in real-life social situations.

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Preparing for Life: The Complete Guide for Transitioning to Adulthood for Those with Autism and Asperger's Syndrome

by Jed Baker

Award-winning author and counselor Dr. Jed Baker draws from his experience working with young adults on the spectrum to put together a thorough resource for students with ASD preparing for life after high school. This comprehensive handbook offers "life skills training" on subjects that young adults need to know about, such as nonverbal cues, body language, dealing with anger, frustration and anxiety, as well as building and maintaining friendships and intimate relationships.

The Social Success Workbook for Teens: Skill-Building Activities for Teens with Nonverbal Learning Disorder, Asperger's Disorder, and Other Social-Skill Problems

by Barbara Copper and Nancy Widdows

This workbook includes forty activities teens can do to recognize and use their unique strengths, understand the unspoken rules behind how people relate to each other, and improve their social skills. After completing the activities in this workbook, teens will discover that they can get along with others and build friendships despite the challenges they face. All they need is the confidence to be themselves while still keeping the feelings of others in mind.

Programs to Support Peer Relationships for Middle and High School

Circle of Friends

The Circle of Friends program consists of a trained group of peer mentors who serve as good social role models and interact with a specific student on a consistent basis. Activities can include teaching scripts and how to 'chat' (using topic lists or boxes), noncompetitive games, book clubs, extracurricular activities and more.

Student Clubs for Autism Speaks (SCAS)

Student Clubs for Autism Speaks create the opportunity for students to engage and actively participate in positively affecting the lives of people with autism. Through education, awareness, friendship and fundraising, SCAS includes students at the middle school, high school and college level.

Perfect Pals

Perfect Pals is a program started by the Autism Speaks Nantucket Resource Center in collaboration with the Nantucket School District to provide students with and without disabilities with to participate in after-school recreational activities.

Best Buddies

Best Buddies® is a nonprofit organization dedicated to establishing a global volunteer movement that creates opportunities for one-to-one friendships, integrated employment and leadership development for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). Best Buddies' eight formal programs – Best Buddies Middle Schools, High Schools, Colleges, Citizens, e-Buddies, Jobs, Ambassadors, and Promoters – positively impact nearly 700,000 individuals with and without disabilities worldwide.

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The Peer Buddy Program

Peer buddy programs are designed to increase access to general education curricula and inclusion in school activities by students with disabilities. General education students provide social and academic support to their classmates with disabilities by (a) helping them acquire skills needed to succeed in the general education environment and (b) adapting the environment to be more welcoming and accommodating to individual differences and needs.

FRIEND Program

This inclusive social skills curriculum from SARRC (Southwest Autism Research and Resource Center) provides opportunities for students on the autism spectrum to improve social communication skills in a natural setting, supported by peers, parents, educators, and therapists. An easy-to-use manual describes how to develop and implement a FRIEND group for students in grades k-12 during lunch and recess. Innovative materials including the children's book Wings of Epoh, DVD's, an educator activity guide, and informational tips, can be used for peer sensitivity training to promote awareness of ASD and social differences and appropriate strategies for facilitating social interactions for school age students.

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Bullying & Harassment of Children with Special Needs

Autism Speaks worked with the National Center for Learning Disabilities, PACER's National Bullying Center and Ability Path in partnership with the new documentary film BULLY to raise awareness about how bullying affects children with special needs. Together with our partners, we just released a Special Needs Anti-Bullying Toolkit, full of resources and information specifically tailored to parents, educators, and students dealing with bullying and children with special needs. Below are excerpts from the toolkit.

It has been suggested that children with autism spectrum disorders (ASDs) are especially vulnerable to bullying. The Interactive Autism Network (IAN) is now sharing initial results of a national survey on the bullying experiences of children on the autism spectrum. The findings show that children with ASD are bullied at a very high rate, and are also often intentionally "triggered" into meltdowns or aggressive outbursts by ill-intentioned peers.

The study found that a total of 63% of 1,167 children with ASD, ages 6 to 15, had been bullied at some point in their lives.

Unique Characteristics of Children with Special Needs

Children with special needs face unique challenges for dealing with bullying. They often stand out from their peers in ways that make them targets for bullying, and children who have difficulty with social interactions have an even higher risk of being bullied.

Bullying certainly isn't a new problem; it has existed for generations. Historically, many have seen it as a rite of passage, a type of de facto hazing. According to Dr. Peter Raffalli, a pediatric neurologist at the Children's Hospital in Boston, Mass., this attitude is, in many cases, more dangerous than the bullies themselves. "No matter how you look at it, bullying is a form of abuse victimization, plain and simple," said Dr.Raffailli. "It's a case of the strong - or at least the stronger - preying on the weak. It says volumes about where we are as a culture and race."

Bullying has negative effects on all its victims, but kids with special needs are especially vulnerable, according to Nancy A. Murphy, M.D., FAAP and chair of the AAP Council on Children with Disabilities Executive Committee. "Since these children already struggle with self-esteem issues," said Dr. Murphy, "bullying has a greater impact and they desire to fit in, and are less likely to stand up for themselves."

Learn more about the unique characteristics of children with special needs and why these children are so often the targets of bullying in this article from our partners at AbilityPath.

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Top Ten Facts Parents, Educators and Students need to know

1. The Facts - Students with disabilities are much more likely to be bullied than their nondisabled peers.

Bullying of children with disabilities is significant but there is very little research to document it. Only 10 U.S. studies have been conducted on the connection between bullying and developmental disabilities but all of these studies found that children with disabilities were two to three times more likely to be bullied than their nondisabled peers. One study shows that 60 percent of students with disabilities report being bullied regularly compared with 25 percent of all students.

2. Bullying affects a student's ability to learn.

Many students with disabilities are already addressing challenges in the academic environment. When they are bullied, it can directly impact their education.

Bullying is not a harmless rite of childhood that everyone experiences. Research shows that bullying can negatively impact a child's access to education and lead to:

- School avoidance and higher rates of absenteeism
- Decrease in grades
- Inability to concentrate
- Loss of interest in academic achievement
- Increase in dropout rates

Learn more about other common misperceptions about bullying

3. The Definition - bullying based on a student's disability may be considered harassment.

The Office for Civil Rights (OCR) and the Department of Justice (DOJ) have stated that bullying may also be considered harassment when it is based on a student's race, color, national origin, sex, disability, or religion

- Harassing behaviors may include:
- Unwelcome conduct such as verbal abuse, name-calling, epithets, or slurs
- Graphic or written statements
- Threats
- Physical assault
- Other conduct that may be physically threatening, harmful, or humiliating

4. The Federal Laws - disability harassment is a civil rights issue.

Parents have legal rights when their child with a disability is the target of bullying or disability harassment. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (often referred to as 'Section 504') and Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (Title II) are the federal laws that apply if the harassment denies a student with a disability an equal opportunity to education. The Office for Civil Rights (OCR) enforces Section 504 and Title II of the ADA. Students with a 504 plan or an Individualized Education Program (IEP) would qualify for these protections.

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According to a 2000 Dear Colleague letter from the Office for Civil Rights, "States and school districts also have a responsibility under Section 504, Title II, and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), which is enforced by OSERS [the Office for Special Education and Rehabilitative Services], to ensure that a free appropriate public education (FAPE) is made available to eligible students with disabilities. Disability harassment may result in a denial of FAPE under these statutes."

The letter further outlines how bullying in the form of disability harassment may prevent a student with an IEP from receiving an appropriate education: "The IDEA was enacted to ensure that recipients of IDEA funds make available to students with disabilities the appropriate special education and related services that enable them to access and benefit from public education. The specific services to be provided a student with a disability are set forth in the student's individualized education program (IEP), which is developed by a team that includes the student's parents, teachers and, where appropriate, the student. Harassment of a student based on disability may decrease the student's ability to benefit from his or her education and amount to a denial of FAPE."

5. The State Laws - students with disabilities have legal rights when they are a target of bullying.

Most states have laws that address bullying. Some have information specific to students with disabilities. For a complete overview of state laws, visit Olweus.org.

Many school districts also have individual policies that address how to respond to bullying situations. Contact your local district to request a written copy of the district policy on bullying.

6. The adult response is important

Parents, educators, and other adults are the most important advocates that a student with disabilities can have. It is important that adults know the best way to talk with someone in a bullying situation.

Some children are able to talk with an adult about personal matters and may be willing to discuss bullying. Others may be reluctant to speak about the situation. There could be a number of reasons for this. The student bullying them may have told them not to tell or they might fear that if they do tell someone, the bullying won't stop or may become worse.

When preparing to talk to children about bullying, adults (parents and educators) should consider how they will handle the child's questions and emotions and what their own responses will be. Adults should be prepared to listen without judgment, providing the child with a safe place to work out their feelings and determine their next steps.

It is never the responsibility of the child to fix a bullying situation. If children could do that, they wouldn't be seeking the help of an adult in the first place.

For more information, go to Talking With Your Child About Bullying

7. The Resources - students with disabilities have resources that are specifically designed for their situation.

IEP – Students with disabilities, who are eligible for special education under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), will have an Individualized Education Program (IEP).

The IEP can be a helpful tool in a bullying prevention plan. Remember, every child receiving special education is entitled to a free, appropriate public education (FAPE), and bullying can become an obstacle to that education.

For more information, go to our section on Individualized Education Program (IEP) and Bullying

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Dear Colleague Letter – In 2000, a **'Dear Colleague' letter** was sent to school districts nationwide from the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights (OCR) and Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS) that defined the term "disability harassment."

In 2010, another Dear Colleague letter from the Office for Civil Rights was issued that reminded school districts of their responsibilities under civil rights laws that prohibit discrimination and harassment on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, disability, and religion.

Template Letters – Parents should contact school staff each time their child informs them that he or she has been bullied. PACER has created these letters that parents may use as a guide for writing a letter to their child's school. These letters contain standard language and "fill-in-the-blank" spaces so that the letter can be customized for each child's situation.

These sample letter(s) can serve two purposes:

- First, the letter will alert school administration of the bullying and your desire for interventions.
- Second, the letter can serve as your written record when referring to events. The record (letter) should be factual and absent of opinions or emotional statements.

The two letters – "Student with an IEP, Notifying School About Bullying" and "Student with a 504, Notifying School About Bullying" – are for parents who have a child with an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) or Section 504. The bullying law of the individual state applies to all students as noted in the law. When bullying is based on the child's disability, federal law can also apply under Section 504, Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA), and Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

8. The Power of Bystanders - more than 50% of bullying situations stop when a peer intervenes.

Most students don't like to see bullying but they may not know what to do when it happens. Peer advocacy – students speaking out on behalf of others – is a unique approach that empowers students to protect those targeted by bullying.

Peer advocacy works for two reasons: First, students are more likely than adults to see what is happening with their peers and peer influence is powerful. Second, a student telling someone to stop bullying has much more impact than an adult giving the same advice.

Learn more about peer advocacy

9. The importance of self-advocacy

Self-advocacy means the student with a disability is responsible for telling people what they want and need in a straightforward way. Students need to be involved in the steps taken to address a bullying situation. Self-advocacy is knowing how to:

- Speak up for yourself
- Describe your strengths, disability, needs, and wishes
- Take responsibility for yourself
- Learn about your rights
- Obtain help, or know who to ask, if you have a question

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The person who has been bullied should be involved in deciding how to respond to the bullying. This involvement can provide students with a sense of control over their situation, and help them realize that someone is willing to listen, take action, and reassure them that their opinions and ideas are important.

To learn more go to our section on Student Self-Advocacy

The **Student Action Plan** is a self-advocacy resource. It includes three simple steps to explore specific, tangible actions to address the situation:

1. Define the situation
2. Think about how the situation could be different
3. Write down the steps to take action

10. You are not alone

When students have been bullied, they often believe they are the only one this is happening to, and that no one else cares. In fact, they are not alone.

There are individuals, communities, and organizations that do care. **It is not up to one person to end the bullying** and it is never the responsibility of the child to change what is happening to them. **No one deserves to be bullied**. All people should be treated with dignity and respect, no matter what. Everyone has a responsibility – and a role to play – as schools, parents, students, and the community work together for positive change.

For Peers - Bullying Roles

Bullying can happen to anyone. Bullying is about someone's behavior. That behavior could be directed at the shy, quiet student, or the class tough guy. Girls bully, boys bully, preschool kids bully, and high school kids bully – there is no one characteristic or aspect that indicates who gets bullied. The one sure thing is that no one EVER deserves to be bullied, and if someone is being bullied, they have a RIGHT to be safe.

Learn more about the roles of bullying, and think about where you fit in the cycle of bullying. A person who bullies isn't always "the other kid." Sometimes, it might be… you! Before you say "No way!" think about it.

Have you ever heard yourself saying – or thinking – things like:

- Some people deserve to be hurt.
- Being mean to people doesn't hurt them.
- It is fun to hurt others.
- I'm so cool that kids and adults don't think I would do anything wrong.
- People push me around, so I'm going to do it to other people, too.
- I feel better about myself when I make other people feel worse.
- If kids are afraid of me, then I won't get picked on.
- I am just being funny. What's the big deal?
- I do what it takes to be part of the "cool" crowd.
- I don't want to be the only one getting picked on.
- Some kids deserve to be bullied because of what they do to me.

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- I don't like them, so it's OK to be mean to them.
- Do you recognize any of the signs? Kids bully for a lot of reasons. It might be because of:
- Peer pressure
- Being manipulated into something
- Fear
- Insecurity
- Not understanding that their actions hurt someone
- Not having positive adult role models
- Being bullied themselves

If you think this might be you, talk with an adult. Seriously, they can help. If the first adult you talk with isn't helpful, talk to someone else until you find one who will listen. You have that right.

For more information for peers please click here.

For Teachers and Administrators - Creating a Zero Tolerance Environment

Schools are just one part of the equation to combating the bullying epidemic. However, they play a key and vital role to setting the tone of tolerance. It is important for districts and individual schools to have their bullying policy available and accessible to all.

- Include a prominent link to the school's bullying policy on your website
- Review the highlights of the policy at back to school nights with families,
- Review the policy with students during the first week of school
- Keep the conversation going about the zero tolerance for bullying policy that the school/district follows throughout the year

Just as important as parents and students is sharing the policy with vendors, because they are technically an extension of the school. This includes bus drivers, specialists/therapists providing designated instructional services, substitute teachers and others. Before the contracts with these individuals or companies are signed, reviewing the bullying policy and outlining the process for internal review if a complaint is filed is imperative to extending the zero tolerance beyond the school yard.

Creating a safe environment is necessary for students to learn and thrive. Show your community bulling behavior is not welcomed and doesn't have a place in your community. Consider having students, teachers, administrators, families and vendors sign "contracts" or agreements that they've read the bullying policy and they pledge to adhere to this policy. Celebrate when students show acts of kindness, philanthropy or other social good. This isn't just about discipline and punishment; good anti-bullying practices include reward and recognition for doing the right thing!

For more information for educators, please click here.

For information for parents, please click here.

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CLASSMATES

Autism Speaks
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SCHOOL COMMUNITY TOOL KIT

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Information for Classmates

Whether you already know a student with autism or are just getting to know one, you'll probably find this information helpful. If you make the effort to include, communicate, understand and respect, you'll both be sure to get something out of your friendship.

Include

- Take the initiative to include him - he may desperately want to be included and may not know how to ask. Be specific about what you want him to do.
- Find common interests - It will be much easier to talk about or share something you both like to do (movies, sports, music, books, TV shows, etc.).
- Encourage him to try new things because sometimes he may be afraid to try new stuff.
- Don't ignore him, even if you think he doesn't notice you.

Communicate

- Communicate clearly - Speak at a reasonable speed and volume. It might be helpful to use short sentences. Use gestures, pictures, and facial expressions to help communicate. Speak literally – do not use confusing figures of speech (He may truthfully tell you, "the sky" if you ask "What's up?")
- Give feedback - If your friend with autism is doing something inappropriate, it's OK to tell him nicely. Just be sure to also tell him what the right thing to do is because he may not know.
- Take time to say 'hi' whenever you see him. Even when you're in a hurry and pass him in the hall, just saying 'hi' is nice.
- Be persistent and patient - Remember that your friend with autism may take more time to respond than other people. It doesn't necessarily mean he isn't interested

Understand

- Remember sensory sensitivity - Your friend may be very uncomfortable in certain situations or places (crowds, noisy areas, etc.). Ask if he is OK. Sometimes he may need a break.
- Find out what his special interests or abilities are and then try to find ways to let him use them.
- Ask questions – Ask a teacher or aide if you're confused about something he is doing. There is a reason kids do things. If you figure it out, you might be able to help him.
- Ask someone at your school for the "Autism Basics" and the "Asperger's Basics" brochures from Autism Speaks.
- If your friend with autism is 'freaking out,' it's probably because he is trying to communicate something, not because he's just being weird. Something might really be bothering him or he might be afraid or frustrated and unable to communicate about it. Try to understand. Ask a teacher or another adult for help.

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Respect

- Accept his or her differences and respect strengths just as you would for any friend.
- Don't be afraid - Your friend is just a kid like you who needs a little help.
- Stand up for him - If you see someone teasing or bullying a friend with autism, take a stand and tell the person that it's not cool. Don't tease. Sometimes he may not understand the teasing or sometimes he may thing you are being friendly when you really are not. If other kids tease him, pull them aside and tell them to stop. If you are concerned he is being bullied, tell a teacher or an aide.
- Be helpful, but don't be too helpful. If you're too helpful, it may make him feel more different. Let him try to do it first by himself, then help out if he needs it. Ask him to do things with you, but don't just explain it to him; show him what to do so he can imitate you.
- Say something to him when he does good things. You can cheer, give 'high-fives' or just tell him 'great work.' He likes to be complimented, just like you do.
- It's OK to get frustrated with him sometimes or to want to play alone or with somebody else. If he won't leave you alone after you've asked him nicely, tell a teacher or another adult who can help you.
- Find something to like, a special skill to admire or a special interest he has. Some kids with autism are great with math, spelling, or computers or they have a great memory for the class schedule. Who knows? Maybe he will help you!

Information adapted from How To Be a Friend to Someone With Autism, by Peter Faustino and Ideas from the FRIEND Program about being a friend to a person with autism, by the Southwest Autism Research and Resource Center (SARRC)'s FRIEND Program.

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BUS DRIVERS AND TRANSPORTATION SUPERVISORS

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Bus Drivers / Transportation Supervisors

Many students with autism start and end their day on the bus. Their transportation circumstances can vary considerably. Routing issues are important, but accommodations for the child's sensory, behavioral, medical or organizational needs should also be considered. It may be necessary for a student with autism to be routed on a smaller bus and/or have an aide assigned to ride the bus with them. If the student is riding on a full bus, other supports may be necessary.

Understanding autism, as well as the strengths and needs of a specific student with autism, is important for the transportation department when they are planning for the child, as well as the drivers and aides who may transport him.

Please familiarize yourself with the Autism Basics and Asperger's Basics handouts provided in this kit. If you haven't received one, ask whether there is an "About Me" information sheet available for the student in question.

Things to think about:

- Be aware of the characteristics of autism as well as the student's specific needs. It can be helpful in avoiding or managing upsetting situations.
- Student's with autism may have impaired judgment, sensory issues or significant fears that might cause unexpected behaviors – for example, a lack of respect for traffic may cause him to dart into the street, or a dog on the sidewalk might cause him to refuse to get off of the bus - know what to do to avoid or manage particular needs.
- Be mindful that students with autism often have communication challenges; ask for guidelines for communication from his family or special education staff. It may be necessary to give him extra time to respond to a question or you may need to use an alternative communication device or strategy such as pictures to communicate.
- The student's need for routine may result in anxiety (and behavior) if changes are made to the bus route, there is a substitute driver, seat changes, etc. Reduce the student's anxiety by communicating with the with him in advance, using visuals wherever possible.
- For a child with medical issues such as seizures, it is important to develop a protocol for safety and management with the family and school nurse.
- Students with autism are not socially savvy; therefore, if a student is being bullied or tortured quietly, he is likely to react or respond – but may not do so in a way that seems appropriate or is easy to recognize. Consider the student's communication difficulties and make every attempt to fully understand the situation before reaching judgment regarding fault or behavior.
- Transitions are difficult for some students – this may result in trouble getting on or off the bus.
- Many students with autism like predictability and have good long-term memory – It's even possible that a student might be able to assist a new or substitute driver with the route.

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Strategies for Success

- Adjust the route - shorten, or use preferential pickup/drop off situations (for example, consider picking up and dropping off at a calmer entrance side of the school, earlier or later than the rush of students, etc).
- Consider whether an aide is needed to support the student on the bus either on a temporary or ongoing basis.
- Be calm and positive. Model appropriate behavior for the student with autism as well as other students by greeting him, saying goodbye, etc.
- Reinforce the behaviors you wish to see with behavior-specific praise (e.g. "I like the way you went straight to your seat and buckled up!")
- Use the "About Me" information about the student to get to know relevant facts about his likes, fears, needs, etc. Ask the school team for specific information regarding safety and impulsivity.
- Visual schedules can be helpful for helping the student establish a routine and managing his behavior. Following is a generic example, but a custom schedule can easily be made using a digital camera to take a picture of each step or action.

  1. Wait at the bus stop
  2. Get on the bus
  3. Sit down
  4. Buckle my seat belt
  5. Ride quietly to school
  6. Get off the bus

- Provide written rules or pictures of expectations of bus behavior for the student, the school staff, and parents so they can provide additional support (for example, if there is no eating on the bus, the student's family needs to know not to send the child out the door with a bagel).
- Work with the school team to suggest social narratives or rule cards that might help a student understand a rule or expectation (for example, why sitting too close is annoying to another rider, why a bus may be late, or what traffic is). For a student who might have trouble understanding subtle social cues, help the school team provide 'Unwritten rules for the bus' and input on what the social conventions are on a particular route (for example, seniors sit in the back)
- Give positive directions; minimize the use of 'don't' and 'stop.' 'Please sit in your seat' can be more effective than 'Don't stand up.' This lets the student know exactly what you would like him to do.
- Allow a student who may be overwhelmed by noise on the bus to use earplugs or music or headphones.
- Allow the student to use hands on sensory items, such as a squeeze toy.
- Consider assigning peer buddies to support and shield a vulnerable student from bullying. School staff may be helpful in finding a way to pair students.
- For a student with particularly challenging behavior, work with the school team to develop a positive behavior support plan specific to behavior on the bus.

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CUSTODIAL STAFF

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Custodial Staff

Please familiarize yourself with the "Autism Basics" and "Asperger's Basics" handouts provided in this kit. If you haven't received them, ask whether there are "About Me" information sheets available for the students with autism in your school.

Things to think about

- Be aware of the characteristics of autism as well as the student's specific needs. It can be helpful in avoiding or managing upsetting situations.
- Know who the students with special needs are.
- Be aware of the communication, social and behavioral challenges students with autism may have. Some children may have impaired judgment or be at risk of running away; alert school staff if you see something that makes you concerned.
- Be alert that the smell of cleaning supplies or the sound of a vacuum cleaner might cause a student with autism to be overwhelmed because he may process scents or noises differently from his peers. Ask the school team to help you know what to do to avoid or manage the needs of a particular student.
- Be aware of the social vulnerability of students with autism. They are frequently victims of bullying. Inform other staff if you observe situations that make you concerned.

Strategies for Success

- Be calm and positive. Model appropriate behavior for the student with autism as well as other students, by greeting him by name.
- Be aware of communication and social concerns that might make communicating with a student with autism difficult. Be prepared to wait for a response, whether it is an action or verbal answer.
- Give positive directions. Minimize the use of 'don't' and 'stop.'

'- Please stay on the sidewalk' can be more effective than 'don't walk on the grass' for a student who might not hear the 'don't' or for one who isn't sure where the acceptable place to walk may be. This lets the student know exactly what you would like him to do.

- Use the "About Me" information about the student to get to know relevant facts about his likes, fears, needs, etc. Ask the school team for specific information about safety and impulsivity.
- If you are having difficulties with behavior or interacting with a student with autism, ask the school team for help.

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GENERAL EDUCATION AND SPECIAL AREA TEACHERS

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General Education & Special Area Teachers
(including Physical Education, Music, Art, Library)

The school team should support teachers in the general education setting to help them understand and provide effective supports and interventions for their students with autism. Communication among IEP team members, including the student's family, will help general education teachers recognize areas of strength and need and be prepared to support a student with autism in a way that benefits the student, as well as the remainder of the class. Inclusion and mainstreaming are not the same as dropping a child into a classroom like any other student - planning, coordination, collaboration and supports will be necessary to build a positive experience for all involved. It may be necessary to start with small but successful periods of inclusion, and build on these opportunities as the student with autism gains competence and confidence in varying settings.

Expect to be successful, but also understand that you may need to adjust your definition of success along the way. Celebrate small victories.

Knowing the characteristics of autism and the particular qualities of a student will allow for appropriate planning on his behalf. Be prepared to adjust your expectations - for example, in an art class, it might be appropriate to provide pre- cut samples for a project to a student with fine motor challenges, while also expecting that student who may happen to have a great memory and/or love of color to be the class advisor on color combinations.

Activities that are often challenging for students with autism include:

- Multi-step directions and activities
- Following verbal directions
- Organization skills and following the schedule
- For younger students, circle time, since it generally means sitting, listening to auditory information and verbal output
- For older students, classroom lectures that require sitting, listening to auditory information for long periods of time
- Centers time for younger students or independent work for older students, since this involves academic tasks, sometimes-unclear expectations, following directions
- Free play for younger students, because it involves social skills, co-operative play and verbal skills with very little structure
- Group instruction
- Assemblies, music and PE classes for students with sensory issues.

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Strategies for Success:

- Be calm and positive. Model appropriate behavior for the student with autism, as well as for other students, by greeting him and engaging him in a respectful way.
- Be aware of the characteristics of autism and general strategies - for quick reference reminders use the "Autism Basics" and "Asperger's Basics" handouts included in this kit.
- Use the "About Me" information sheet to get to know relevant facts about each particular student's likes, fears, needs, etc. Ask specific questions regarding safety and impulsivity. If you haven't received one, ask the school team whether there is an "About Me" information sheet available for each student with autism in your classroom.
- Promote a welcoming environment, and provide opportunities for your student (and others!) to develop social interaction skills and extended learning
- Teach understanding and acceptance—see the Resources section of this kit for suggested reading, including books and programs to use with the students,
  1. Pair the student with peers who are positive role models
  2. Allow times for students to work in pairs and/or small groups
  3. Be aware that students with autism can become isolated within the classroom (interaction only occurring between an aide and student) and be on the lookout to prevent it by working with the students and the paraprofessional to support social exchange among peers
- Students with autism are not socially savvy; therefore, if a student is being bullied or tortured quietly, he is likely to react or respond – but may not do so in a way that seems appropriate or is easy to recognize. Consider the student's communication difficulties and make every attempt to fully understand the situation before reaching judgment regarding fault or behavior.
- Ensure that organization, communication and sensory issues are addressed (see General Strategies and Classroom Checklist)
- Establish clear routines and habits to support regular activities and transitions. Alert the student to changes in routine, staffing, etc., in advance, whenever possible.
- Consider seating - situate the student for optimal attention to instruction or sensory needs
- Pay particular attention to the general strategies outlined for supporting communication and organization (simple directions, wait-time for processing verbal requests or directions, visual schedules, prompts and cues, etc.)
- Be tuned into sensory issues that may effect the student in your particular class (for example, echoing locker rooms and loud, fast activity can make P.E. over-stimulating and overwhelming)
- Provide written rules or pictures of expectations of behavior in the classroom, including 'unwritten' conventions if necessary. Work with the student's team to incorporate social narratives to help a student understand a rule or expectation. Learners with autism often increase compliance if they understand why a rule exists (for example, It is important to remain quiet - no noise or talking - while the teacher is speaking. If it is noisy, the students will not be able to hear her.).

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- Use descriptive praise to build desired behaviors (for example, 'I like the way you put your trash in the trash can!')
- Give positive directions; minimize the use of 'don't' and 'stop.' 'Please sit in your seat' can be more effective than 'Don't stand up.' This lets the student know exactly what you would like him to do.
- Consider needs/supports for class presentations (for example, cue cards, visual supports or a power point presentation for a child with impaired expressive language skills), field trips, etc.
- Utilize teacher training on multi-modal instruction! Find ways to teach and reinforce by expecting your student to learn not only by hearing, but also seeing (pictures, maps, diagrams, patterns), doing (movement and hands on activities), saying (repeat after me…) and even singing.
- Collaborate with the student's special education staff to modify curriculum, supports such as visuals, communication access, organizational tools, and directly teach study skills (note taking, time management, etc.)
- Make sure that activities such as field trips, class presentations, assemblies, and plays are addressed ahead of time. Think about ways the student can be included and discuss and plan for them with the support team.
  1. Field Trips: use a social narrative to describe to the student where the trip is, who he will be with, what will occur and the schedule for the day. When possible include pictures (websites and Google Images are great resources)
  2. Assemblies/ Plays/Presentations: prepare the student ahead of time with materials and social narratives; be attuned to sensory issues; be creative such as offering the student an opportunity to be "producer" with a run down of the program and the ability to sit off to the side away from other students and out of the noise.

In addressing curricular issues and making academic modifications or accommodations, keep the following suggestions in mind. These might be adjustments made by the general education teacher or in collaboration with a student's special education teacher or paraprofessional. For a student participating in an inclusive setting, the more he is able to follow along and participate in the activities of the classroom in real time, the better he can access the curriculum as well as the social objectives being targeted by inclusion.

- Define core curriculum objectives and concentrate on those—for some students this may be as simple as one or two basic components within a unit
- Concentrate on teaching less content, but teach to mastery and where appropriate, fluency
- Make sure the student and support staff have classroom materials ahead of time
- Pre-teach relevant new vocabulary and key concepts, concentrating on those that build and repeat throughout the curriculum
- Make the information presented by the teacher accessible to the student: know the amount of verbal information the student can process, consider ways to break the information into manageable parts, highlighting key points, providing outlines, study notes, etc.
- Use visuals wherever possible—to organize, improve comprehension and assess
- Review information
- Recognize that functional academic skills—note taking, test taking, true/false, organizing information, etc. may need to be taught and reinforced directly, separately from subject area content

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- Consider homework - establish a method for recording assignments, present defined expectations, consider whether accommodations or more time is needed
- Consider long term projects - support managing a timeline for due dates, chunk the assignment into smaller parts with a completion schedule and checklists
- In assessing, reduce expectations of performance in areas of difficulty for the student - to test concept knowledge, replace essays with multiple choice or fill in the blank questions with word banks or replace paragraphs with webs that show relationships, etc,
- Teach and test regularly and in small chunks: check for comprehension
- Consider allowing more time or an alternate setting for testing
- Review, repeat and move on when the student demonstrates proficiency
- If the student has difficulty learning a concept or skill, re-think how material is being presented
- Supply study guides ahead of tests
- Pre warn the student and paraprofessional when you give a pop quiz

Reading

- Students are likely to have difficulty comprehending material, predicting events, and reading between the lines/inferring from the text.
- Be aware of a high proportion of students with high functioning autism who are adept at encoding and word calling, but may have significant issues with comprehension. Some students may be diagnosed with hyperlexia.
- Provide summaries or pre-exposure to a new reading book prior to its initiation. Identify the story line, plot, main characters and setting - with visuals as possible.
- Provide specific structure to questions when expecting an answer for comprehension. Use multiple choice, cloze sentences (a portion of text with certain words removed) with a word bank, or starter responses. Whereas it might be very difficult to answer "John, how did the wolf find grandmother's house?", a student with autism might show comprehension when asked, "John, the wolf found grandmother's house by crossing the river and _____"?
- When giving choices, know how many choices are appropriate. Some may be able to pick from four choices, some from only two. Reducing the number of choices is a simple way of making a task simpler for the student, while still expecting independence.

Writing

- Recognize that writing involves expressive language skills, word retrieval, organization of thoughts and fine motor skills, all of which are often challenges for students with autism. Strategies to support each of these areas of need may be needed.
- Use visuals to prompt language - pictures, word banks, etc.
- Begin with cloze sentences (a portion of text with certain words removed) or sentence starters.

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- Actively teach brainstorming, developing descriptive vocabulary, etc.
- Use template organization tools for all writing assignments—webs, outlines, etc. The student will need specific instruction on how to use these tools, and consistent and repeated use of the same tools is likely to result in greater independence and success.
- Provide significant structure and direction for the assignment.
- Consider using keyboarding, dictation and computer graphic organizer programs to support your student. Consider an AlphaSmart or other traveling keyboard that can be used across settings.
- Look for content rather than length of a written piece, knowing that writing may need to be evaluated by alternate methods than those used for the class in general. For example, rather than expecting the three paragraphs assigned, consider whether the student responded to the questions and the content objectives of the assignment.

Social Studies

If a student with autism has an interest in this area, he might become the class's resident expert on a certain topic, such as Egypt or modes of transportation. This might be a chance to allow this student to shine, and provide a motivational opportunity by using his particular area of interest to motivate flexibility or learning new subject matter. Additional suggested strategies for those who might need assistance to grasp subject matter:

- Use timelines, maps and visuals to support concepts
- Use videos (check out YouTube) to bring to life past events
- Teach idioms and analogies
- Act or role play

Science

As in other subjects, if a student with autism has a particular interest he might become the class's expert on the solar system, dinosaurs or rocks. Build confidence and interest in learning by celebrating this strength, while stretching flexibility and interest in other areas. Strategies and considerations:

- Support hands on activities
- Be aware of impulsivity and safety concerns
- Define rules for lab work
- Whenever possible, point out relationships between science concepts and real life experiences

Math

Although some students with autism excel in mathematical ability, and others might have an affinity for the rote aspects of memorizing math facts and functions, the language of math and associated abstract concepts can be difficult for many students with autism. Recognizing that this area often represents great variability in skill levels means that instruction is likely to need great individualization—a student who can perform double digit

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multiplication in his head may have great difficulty with the concepts of negative numbers or measurement. Word problems in particular are a notable area of struggle. Use the student's areas of strength to build his self-confidence and motivation to working on areas of challenge.

- Break math down into specific parts, using visuals and manipulatives.
- Use strategies such as TOUCHMATH® to support computation.
- Students with autism often learn the patterns involved in a skill, rather than the concepts, so beware of over-learning - a child who spends months learning how to add and months learning how to subtract, may then take months to learn to look for the sign on a mixed addition/subtraction page.
- For skills that require precise learning and execution, use errorless teaching strategies that ensure correct development of a skill from the start, as corrective teaching is generally less effective and unlearning bad habits can be very difficult for students with autism.

Physical Education

- Be aware of motor, timing, language and attention issues that might affect a student's performance and interest, and make appropriate accommodations.
- Echoing locker rooms, whistles, and students running and shouting might be overwhelming to your student with autism's senses.
- Recognize that while a student may not be able to keep up with the pace of learning and activity of the whole class, he still might be able be able to learn components of a sport or activity that will offer a valuable social outlet or exercise opportunity.
- Break tasks into small scaffolded components and celebrate successes - a student who learns how to shoot hoops has gained a valuable skill in turn-taking and an opportunity for social interaction with peers, even if he has not mastered the ability to participate in a 5 on 5 game
- Solicit the assistance of special education staff to provide training in appropriate locker room behavior, social conventions regarding privacy, etc. using social narratives, etc.

Music

Many people with autism have musical strengths, which can be celebrated, used to reinforce, motivate, and teach. A sense of rhythm and interest in music can be used to motivate a child to participate in an activity. Since music is processed in a different area of the brain than language, some individuals with limited language ability are able to sing, and song can be used to teach concepts or aid in memory development.

However, it is worth noting that the issues with timing, processing and motor planning often make choral responding - singing or reciting with a group - very difficult. It has been noted that if a student with autism initiates the choral (such as the Pledge of Allegiance) he can be successful, whereas the timing required for joining in can impede this ability.

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Art

Strong visual skills, a heightened sense of visual perception or a unique perspective can often result in significant artistic ability in some people with autism. Others might take a special interest in color, and be the class expert on color combinations and the application of the principles of the color wheel.

Because of sensory/tactile issues, some students may have a difficult time with art class or certain art projects (e.g. clay on the hands, odors from materials, etc).

Computers and Technology

Even a very young child with autism can show great affinity for technology, being able to immediately find the 'on' button on any TV, computer or tablet he encounters. Visual acuity and varied ways of storing/accessing information and creating thought processes often make people with autism adept at computer utilization and programming, stereo operation, film making, etc. A student with autism may be a great asset in developing technological resources, but his communication challenges may prevent him from being able to explain how something works. Use a student's problem- solving and technical expertise to make other tasks easier (replace handwriting with typing, produce a video instead of writing a paper) or to motivate attention to other areas of learning being targeted.

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LUNCH AND RECESS AIDES

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Lunch/Recess Aides

Lunch is a critical time for a child with autism to have experienced staff support - particularly those who are trained in supporting social interactions and helping a child become more independent. Recess and lunch are typically the least structured times of a student's day, and therefore, the most difficult for a child with organization, communication and social challenges. The support required during these times ranges from the practice of negotiating cafeteria tables, busy lunch lines and ordering (fast, with 67 hungry kids just behind you!) and figuring out how to keep busy and have fun on an expansive playground with no set rules. In addition to the organizational and sensory issues, this is a time where deficits in communication and social ability become readily apparent and exceptionally painful.

- Familiarize yourself with the "Autism Basics" and "Asperger's Basics" handouts provided in this kit.
- Be aware of the characteristics of autism as well as the student's specific needs. It can be helpful in avoiding or managing upsetting situations. Some children may be at risk of wandering or running away. A door buzzer, fire alarm, certain odors or a school bell might represent a sensory assault - know what to do to avoid or manage particular needs.
- If you haven't received one, ask whether there is an "About Me" information sheet available for the students with autism you will be supervising. It is important to understand the individual student's likes, fears, needs and abilities.
- Be aware of communication, social and behavioral challenges students with autism may have. Ask his special education team for help with communication challenges.
- It may be necessary to wait for a response to a question, use an alternative communication device or a communication strategy such as picture exchange.
- Support the student's need to develop daily living skills, and promote as much ability and independence as possible (for example, let him get his napkin, teach him to enter his meal code in the cafeteria computer, etc.).
- Explore opportunities for school staff to think creatively - recess can be a great time for a push-in intervention from the speech pathologist or occupational therapist, who could model strategies and set up games that daily staff (and peers) could continue on days when they do not provide direct therapy.
- Be tuned into the strategies modeled by the student's trained support staff and ask for their help with areas of concern.
- Friendly greetings, acceptance and patience can help to make the child feel comfortable in the school and small responsibilities can help him to feel like a contributing member of the community - celebrate successes!
- Be calm and positive. Model appropriate behavior for the student with autism as well as other students by greeting him by name and engaging in appropriate conversation. Peers are more likely to engage students with autism if they know how the student communicates.
- Create a quiet spot, if necessary, for mellow activities or a less hectic lunchtime.

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- Ask familiar staff to practice or help troubleshoot skills outside of the chaos of scheduled times - start the lunch line routine five minutes before others arrive, ask the OT to teach techniques for learning to swing independently, etc. – as the student becomes more successful, build skills toward independence.
- If necessary, use a visual menu for making choices in the cafeteria.
- Reduce the number of choices or make a choice and practice ordering (with necessary visual supports, etc) earlier in the day.
- Visual schedules can be helpful in establishing and perpetuating routines, ensuring compliance (such as putting the tray and silverware in the appropriate places) and managing behavior. Following is an example of a schedule that could be created with or without photos.

  1. Clearing My Lunch
  2. Put my plate, silverware and trash on my tray
  3. Walk carefully with the tray to cleanup area
  4. Toss trash (only!) into trashcan
  5. Put my silverware in the gray tub
  6. Place my plates on the counter
  7. Stack my tray in the cubby
  8. Give myself a sticker!

- Visual prompts and cues can be used to help a child make choices or know how to initiate or respond (for example, cue card 'I would like pizza please').
- Seek help in learning how to create structured settings - organizing a game of follow the leader, setting up Uno at a lunch table, etc. Use the child's existing skills and interests to motivate him to participate, since the social demands are enough for him to work on.
- Set up and explain rules of playground games. If the playground is too much for a student, designate a quieter area for board games or cards with a peer.
- Use descriptive praise to build desired behaviors (e.g. "I like the way you put the ball back where it belongs")
- Give positive directions. Minimize use of 'don't' and 'stop.' For example, instead of 'Don't stand in the hallway' try 'Please sit at your lunch table' for a student who might not hear the 'don't' – or for one who isn't sure where the acceptable place to sit might be. This lets the student know exactly what you would like him to do.
- Give peers the opportunity to be a lunch buddy (this often works better than assigning a buddy, as it selects students who are motivated to take on this role) to support and shield a vulnerable student - it may be helpful to have support from other members of the school team in finding a way to pair students in the absence of volunteers. Aim to engage more than one 'lunch buddy' to allow for abscenses.
- Be aware of the vulnerability of students with autism and the propensity for them to be victims of bullying behaviors.

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- Students with autism are not socially savvy; therefore, if a student is being bullied or tortured quietly, he is likely to react or respond – buy may not do so in a way that seems appropriate or is easy to recognize. Consider the student's communication difficulties and make every attempt to fully understand the situation before reaching judgment regarding fault or behavior.
- Work with the school team to create social narratives to help a student understand a rule or expectation (for example, why sitting too close is annoying to another student, bathroom etiquette and hand washing, etc.).
- Work with the school team to provide written or visual supports for 'Unwritten rules for the cafeteria or recess' and input on social conventions.
- Help peers support the student with autism, in a respectful way, in adhering to social conventions by modeling and/or directly instructing them.

For a student with particularly challenging behavior, work with the school team to develop and employ an element of the positive behavior support plan specific to the needs at lunch/recess. Ask the team for help troubleshooting or implementing the plans.

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OFFICE STAFF

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Office Staff

A school's administrative staff often represents a consistent and welcoming community within the school. Administrative staff can provide an excellent opportunity for students with autism to practice social interactions and perform small tasks and jobs that make them feel like a valued member of the school community.

Please familiarize yourself with the "Autism Basics" and "Asperger's Basics" handouts provided in this kit. If you haven't received one, ask whether there are "About Me" information sheets available for the students with autism in your school.

- Be aware of the characteristics of autism as well as the student's specific needs. It can be helpful in avoiding or managing upsetting situations - know the communication, social and behavioral needs and abilities of each student.
- Be aware of communication challenges. Ask his special education staff for guidelines for communication, knowing that you may need to wait for a response to a question you ask the student or use an alternative communication device or strategy such as picture exchange.
- Take note of the strategies modeled by the student's trained support staff.
- Friendly greetings, acceptance and patience can help make the student feel comfortable in the school. Giving the student errands or small responsibilities in the office can help him feel like a contributing member of the community - celebrate successes!
- Once a routine has been broken down into steps and effectively taught, most students with autism will consistently and reliably perform - and then become a dependable assistant.

Strategies:

- Be calm and positive. Model appropriate behavior for the student with autism as well as other students by greeting him by name and engaging in appropriate conversation whenever possible.
- Use the "About Me" information sheet to get to know relevant facts about each particular student's likes, fears, needs, etc.
- Visual schedules can be helpful in establishing and perpetuating routines, ensuring compliance (such as putting the attendance records in the appropriate box) and managing behavior.
- The student's school team may be helpful in providing social narratives to help a student understand a rule or expectation (for example, "It is important to say good morning to Mrs. Smith. Saying hello is being friendly. It makes others happy when you are friendly.")
- Visual prompts or cue cards can be used to help a child make choices, or know how to initiate or respond.
- Use descriptive praise to build desired behaviors (for example, "It was great that you put the attendance sheet in the mailbox!")

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- Give positive directions. Minimize the use of 'don't' and 'stop.'
- 'Please walk' can be more effective than 'don't run' for a student who might not hear the 'don't' or for one who may interpret the direction literally or as too abstract and isn't sure whether they are meant to stand still or walk. This lets the student know exactly what you would like him to do.
- Remember to create strategies to include all students on all school correspondence. Many students who do not have a homeroom like the other classes miss school picture day, yearbooks, information on extracurricular activities, etc. because papers do not go home.
- Support school announcements over the intercom with written notes home for students who might have trouble processing - or recalling - information.
- Be aware of the social vulnerability of students with autism. They are frequently victims of bullying. Inform the school team if you observe situations that make you concerned.

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PARAPROFESSIONALS

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ParaProfessionals

Whether they are assigned as a 1:1 aide or to a special needs classroom paraprofessionals are in a unique position to effect great changes in the lives and function of their students. They can help set the tone for the student's place in the school community.

It is likely that little training with respect to autism spectrum disorders has been given to prepare for this role. Since the primary responsibility of a paraprofessional is viewed as supporting the student, IEP meetings and other opportunities for learning about the abilities and needs of a student, and strategies that might be effective in supporting him, often occur without the paraprofessional's involvement.

Paraprofessionals should have knowledge of the characteristics of autism in general, and the assigned student in particular. Know his learning style, preferences, needs and strengths. The information contained in this kit for all of the specific school community members will be helpful for paraprofessionals, as they often accompany the student in his interactions throughout the school. If support is provided at lunch, then be aware of the sensory and communication needs—and strategies to employ—during lunch. Implementation of the behavior support plan and sensory strategies are likely to fall primarily in the paraprofessional's hands, as may academic modifications or supports.

Of all the individuals who support a student over the course of a school day, the student is likely to become most dependent on a 1:1. As independence is always the ultimate goal, a successful paraprofessional will maintain the mindset of trying to work himself out of a job; otherwise, there is the risk of developing the 'Velcro aide' syndrome (overly attached) and creating a prompt and personnel-dependent student. Remember to strive towards raising expectations and promoting independence in the student at whatever level he is capable of handling.

Strategies:

- Be calm, positive. Model appropriate behavior for the student with autism as well as other students by greeting him by name, saying goodbye, etc.
- Be proactive about learning about the student.
- Ask questions, request to take part in meetings and trainings, familiarize yourself with his IEP document and know the strategies to be used, etc.
- Become expert in understanding and supporting his communication challenges; solicit guidelines for communication from his special education staff, knowing that wait time for a response to a question, use of an alternative communication device or communication strategy such as picture exchange might be necessary
- Use **"About Me"** information about the students to get to know relevant facts about each particular student's likes, fears, needs, etc.
- Carve out a quiet spot in the school, if necessary, for when the student needs time to regroup.
- Be creative about finding opportunities to practice or troubleshoot skills outside of the chaos of scheduled times - bus loading, lunch line, locker room, etc. and work on building skills toward independence.
- Recognize that the paraprofessional's actions, attitude and responses can help - or hinder - the growth and behavior of the student
- As the student becomes more independent, the IEP team might decide to alter the level of intervention - such as replacing a 1:1 pairing with a classroom aide situation. To test and practice increasing a student's level of independence use the "Invisible Aide" strategy section that follows.

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Invisible Aide Game By Sonia Dickson-Bracks

OVERVIEW

PURPOSE: To assess specific areas/issues related to independence, organization, social confidence, and self advocacy; to initiate fading of one-to-one aide support

GUIDELINES: Initially, game should be implemented during one class period per day, starting with the easiest period. A Class Period = the moment the student steps out of previous class until he leaves the target class. The student and staff will de-brief on the game (review and discuss what occurred) during their individual daily session. Based on this evaluation, they will determine whether to repeat the same period the following day, or target a different period. Once all periods have been assessed, plan and determine next steps for further assessment or program development and implementation.

PLANNING THE GAME

Together the student and staff determine which period would be the best to pretend the student is alone (not accompanied by the aide). This is based on comfort in the specific setting (classroom, teacher, students and subject). The student and staff should also develop specific gestural cues in order to provide a "time out" from the game. (See Exceptions to the Rules)

Once plan and period are determined, the staff will notify the teacher (in advance) of this plan. As an option toward promoting self-advocacy, the student and staff can decide if the student should notify the teacher.

RULES OF THE GAME

Once the game begins, both student and staff will make every effort to act/pretend as if the staff is not present. That is, the student will not seek assistance from the aide, nor will the aide offer assistance. The student may rely on natural supports (peers, teacher) as appropriate to the setting. Neither will engage in conversation with one another. The staff try to stay out of the student's line of sight (i.e., stay behind the student while walking and when seated in the classroom). Exceptions to "the rules of the game" should only occur when the pre-determined cues are used.

EXCEPTIONS TO THE RULES ("Time out" prompts & gestural cues)

- "I need help": The student feels he needs help and wants a "time out" from the game (e.g., he makes eye contact with the staff and touches his own nose).
- "Are you okay? Do you need help?": The staff is observing signs of stress that are of relatively significant concern (e.g., he touches the student on the shoulder and when student turns around, he rubs his forehead);
- "Are you sure you want help? Remember the game is on": The student has initiated conversation or indicated he wants help but did NOT use the pre-determined cue. This may be because he forgot the game was on or just out of habit. The staff in turn will provide a "reminder" cue that means "are you sure you want help? Remember the game is on" (e.g., he rubs his hands together). At that point, the student should make a conscious decision to either use the "I need help cue" or acknowledge (nodding) that he forgot or doesn't need help. However, if he doesn't use the cue but appears distressed, the staff should provide assistance.

DOCUMENTATION

Staff will document observations throughout the game. The completed form will be used during debriefing at the end of each day. (See Invisible Aide - Observation Form).

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Invisible Aide – Observation Form

DATE: _____ TARGET PERIOD/SUBJECT: _____ _____

RATIONALE (Period Selection): _____

_____

(Comfort: Classroom, teacher, students and subject).

REVIEWED "TIME OUT" CUES: _____ TEACHER NOTIFIED BY: _____ _____

OBSERVATION START TIME:_____ END TIME: _____

TRANSITION FROM LAST TO TARGET PERIOD:_____

_____

OBSERVATIONS DURING TARGET PERIOD: (Record on separate sheet)

OVERALL INDEPENDENCE RATING (1 – 3): _____

ORGANIZATION RATING (1 – 3): _____ Was student organized during class activity? Describe/Explain:

_____

_____

Did student record homework, other work to complete, etc., based on assignment from teacher?
Record assignments here:

_____

_____

SELF-ADVOCACY RATING (1 – 3): _____ Did student seek assistance from teacher or peers when needed? Describe/Explain:

_____

_____

SOCIAL CONFIDENCE RATING (1 – 3): _____ Did student appear confident/comfortable during observation? Did student exhibit signs of discomfort? Describe/Explain:

_____

_____GAME RULES:

ADHERENCE/EXCEPTIONS **If exceptions required, record circumstances:

Student Initiated (Describe): _____

Staff Initiated (Describe):_____

Were cues utilized? YES / NO Reason (Explain): _____

Outcome (Describe): _____

If rules changes or altered, record reasons for change or exceptions:_____

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The Ten Commandments of Paraprofessional Support

1. Thou shalt know well both your students and the disabilities they manifest.
2. Thou shalt learn to take your students' perspectives, and realize that they have significant difficulty taking yours.
3. Thou shalt always look beyond your student's behaviors to determine the functions that those behaviors serve.
4. Thou shalt be neither blinded by your by your students' strengths, nor hold them to standards they cannot meet.
5. Thou shalt master the art of rendering the appropriate degree of support for your students' level of skill development and behavior.
6. Thou shalt exercise vigilance in fading back prompts and promoting competence and independence in your students.
7. Thou shalt be proactive both in seeking out information to help your students, and in preparing and implementing the support that they need to be successful.
8. Thou shalt neither usurp the teachers' role, nor be albatrosses around their necks.
9. Thou shalt leave your egos at the school house door!
10. Thou shalt perform your duties mindfully, responsibly and respectfully at all times.

Source: How to Be a Para Pro
by Diane Twachtman-Cullen

How to Be a Para Pro http://www.starfishpress.com/products/parapro.html offers further reinforcement of these specific areas, as well as vignettes and troubleshooting suggestions, or see other educational/social support options in Resources

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ATHLETIC COACHES

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Athletic Team Coaches

Many students with autism are able to participate in school team sports and are a great asset to their teams. The amount of support required to make this happen will vary greatly from student to student. Some people with autism have great skills in learning rules and keeping track of statistics and may make great scorekeepers or coach's assistants. Some may be good at individual sports such as track, cross country, or swimming, as they do not require the student to keep track of a ball and other team members on the field while processing auditory and visual information from various sources at the same time. Others may be able to participate in team sports.

Consider the possibility of enrolling a student's family member to support the student if an aide is not provided. They are often thrilled to have their student involved and are eager to help. A fellow team member might be paired with the student to provide "buddy" support. A family member might be willing to "shadow" the student on the cross-country course or supervise the student during "down time" at a sporting event.

The support required during practices and sporting events will range from practicing organizing equipment and the steps involved in preparing for an event, and preparing for bus trips to unfamiliar places for away events. With planning, and the support of the student's family and school team, these challenges can be overcome.

Being part of an athletic team is a meaningful way for the student with autism to "belong." It might also be a time where deficits in communication and social ability become readily apparent and exceptionally painful. The team coach will set the tone for how peers treat the student athlete with autism.

- Familiarize yourself with the **"Autism Basics"** and **"Asperger's Basics"** handouts provided in this kit.
- Be aware of the characteristics of autism as well as the student's specific needs. It can be helpful in avoiding or managing upsetting situations.
- If you haven't received one, ask whether there is an **"About Me"** information sheet available for the students with autism you will be supervising. It is important to understand the individual student's likes, fears, needs and abilities.
- Be aware of communication, social and behavioral challenges students with autism may have. Ask his special education team for help with communication challenges.
- It may be necessary to wait for a response to a question, use an alternative communication device or a communication strategy such as picture exchange.
- Support the student's need to develop daily living skills, and promote as much ability and independence as possible (for example, let him get sports equipment, teach him the steps to warm up before an event and cool down afterward, etc.).
- Be tuned into the strategies modeled by the student's trained support staff and ask for their help with areas of concern.

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- Be calm and positive. Model appropriate behavior for the athlete with autism as well as his teammates by greeting him by name and engaging in appropriate conversation. Peers are more likely to engage students with autism if they know how the student communicates.
- Create a quiet spot, if necessary, on the team bus, up front near adults for the student with autism.
- Friendly greetings, acceptance and patience can help to make the child feel comfortable on the team and small responsibilities can help him to feel like a contributing member of the team - celebrate successes!
- Ask familiar staff to practice or help troubleshoot skills outside of the chaos of practice times – he can start the getting ready for practice five minutes before others arrive, ask the OT to teach techniques for learning to kick a ball, throw, catch, take off from starting blocks, etc. – as the student becomes more successful, build skills toward independence.
- Visual schedules can be helpful in establishing and perpetuating routines, ensuring compliance and managing behavior. A paraprofessional or family member may be helpful in preparing visual schedules if necessary.
- Use descriptive praise to build desired behaviors (e.g. "I like the way you put the ball back where it belongs")
- Be aware of the vulnerability of students with autism and the propensity for them to be victims of bullying behaviors, especially in areas with limited supervision.
- Students with autism are not socially savvy; therefore, if a student is being bullied or tortured quietly, he is likely to react or respond – buy may not do so in a way that seems appropriate or is easy to recognize. Consider the athlete with autism's communication difficulties and make every attempt to fully understand the situation before reaching judgment regarding fault or behavior.
- Work with the school team to provide written or visual supports for 'Unwritten rules for the locker room, team bus or bleachers." Enroll teammates to help.
- Help teammates support the student with autism, in a respectful way, in adhering to social conventions by modeling and/or directly instructing them.

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SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION, PRINCIPALS, INTERDISCIPLINARY TEAM MEMBERS

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School Administration, Principals, & Interdisciplinary Team Members

An inclusive-minded, informed administration sets the stage for a successful inclusive school. When school administrators and principals have a positive attitude about their students with special needs, their attitudes establish expectations and the tone for the entire school staff and students. This tone can have a profound effect on the potential outcome for the student and on the entire student body developing a lifelong consideration for people with special needs.

Knowing the benefits of inclusion, to the students with exceptional needs as well as the typical student population is helpful in developing this perspective. Keep this information in perspective, as the wishes of the family and the needs of the student might mean that inclusion might start with five minutes a day and build from there with increasing competence and confidence. Anticipate success, but know that your definition of what that looks like may change over time.

For inclusion to be successful, being informed and prepared is essential for a positive experience for everyone involved. Administrative staff will need to know the characteristics of autism, and the particulars of each specific student, in making decisions about classroom and staffing assignments, training and support for the team and programming for the student. Untrained or ineffective staff supports can aggravate a challenging situation or cause increased anxiety and difficulty for a student, impeding his success. Be informed about whether a student's needs are being met, and listen to the concerns of the family and other staff members, knowing that 'good teaching' for a typical student might be the wrong approach for a student with the complex needs of autism.

In many schools, the school psychologist or case manager will be the gatekeeper for referrals and special education services. This coordinator should be aware of the characteristics of autism, as well as the greater risk of co-morbid emotional and behavioral disorders in students with autism that might benefit from surveillance and targeted treatment. Students with autism may experience aggression, self-injury, depression, anxiety, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), and tics, but children and youth with autism often do not receive targeted treatments for these issues since parents and school personnel may not recognize them as separate or treatable disorders. Symptom overlaps, varying presentations and cognitive factors may make separating out diagnoses difficult. Presently there are no screening tools for these other disorders in individuals with autism.

Other educational challenges, such as dyslexia, vision problems, and auditory processing disorders can occur in students with autism, without the usual cues suggesting assessment (for example, a student with limited verbal ability is not likely to say "mommy, I can't see the blackboard.") Concerns raised by IEP team members should be considered in the context of this lack of cues. Effective assessments and accurate diagnoses will ensure appropriate intervention planning.

Since school administrators are often called in to challenging situations, it is important to be involved in and knowledgeable about a child's positive behavior support plan **(PBS)(insert link here)** and the strategies in place for that student. Respecting the needs of the student and embracing the mindset that behavior is communication are essential at times when intervention is necessary.

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Considerations related to staffing, planning and training

- Provide introductory and on-going staff training and awareness, ranging from raising the skill levels of special education staff, to supporting general education teachers, specials providers, bus drivers, lunch aides, etc. in their understanding and knowledge of autism and their students. The Appendix and sections from this tool kit will be helpful.
- Support the exchange of information and promote collaboration among departments and staff, to support each student across settings. When the team collaborates to share success and trouble shoot problems, everyone benefits.
- Include 1:1 or classroom paraprofessionals in trainings, IEP meetings, related therapies (speech, OT, etc.) sessions and positive behavior support planning and evaluation; they often spend more time with a student with autism, across settings, than any other staff in the school. They can provide valuable knowledge about the student and ensure effective implementation of programs.
- Promote opportunities for regular team meetings and open communication.
- Be proactive - support the IEP team in developing positive behavior plans with an emphasis on providing supports and interventions necessary to AVOID behaviors. See the Resources and Appendix sections of this kit for information on PBS.
- Encourage the school staff to think creatively - recess can be an ideal time for a push-in intervention from the speech pathologist or occupational therapist, who even once a week could model strategies and set up games staff (and peers) could continue over the rest of the week.
- Meet frequently with the student's IEP team to see if the PBSP is working and that it is being implemented across all environments. Support your staffs efforts in using Classroom Checklist, Reinforcement Strategies and Data Collection.

Considerations related to the individual student

- Prepare in advance for transitions. Invite the student to view a new classroom or school prior to the first day so that he has time to take in the new surroundings (and staff, if possible) without overwhelming sensory stimuli.
- Get personal. Friendly greetings and a sense of acceptance can help to make a student feel comfortable in the school. Encourage the use of the "About Me" information sheet in the Resources section of this kit so the student's family or someone who knows the student well can provide helpful information. Use it to get to know relevant facts about each particular student's likes, fears, needs, etc.
- Learn something about each student to form a personal connection, and celebrate successes with behavior specific praise (for example, "I like how you are walking in the hall so quietly!")
- Be mindful of a student's communication challenges; ask the student's special education staff to give you guidelines for communication. Understand that you may need to give the student additional time to respond to a question or he may need to use an alternative communication device or communication strategy such as picture exchange.

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- Be cognizant of the student's need to develop living skills, and promote opportunities for inclusion in the school community and steps toward independence as possible.
- Allow opportunities for staff to practice skills outside of the chaos of certain situations so that the student can develop a skill without all the confounding sensory and social issues (for example, allow a child to go early to dress for P.E. in a quiet locker room or to practice using a tray or ordering lunch a few minutes before classmates arrive, with the goal of eventually being able to generalize these skills to the regular time schedule when possible).
- When planning fire drills, etc., know that they can be extremely anxiety provoking for a student with autism. Warning these students and staff in advance will go a long way in helping the students manage the noise and change in routine the fire drill triggers.

Considerations relating to students with autism and their typical peers

- Be aware of the vulnerability of students with autism and their propensity to be victims of bullying - proactively build a school culture where bullying is not acceptable through awareness building, peer sensitivity, strategies and procedures.
- Students with autism are not socially savvy; therefore, if a student is being bullied or tortured quietly, he is likely to react or respond – but may not do so in a way that seems appropriate or is easy to recognize. Consider the student's communication difficulties and make every attempt to fully understand the situation before reaching judgment regarding fault or behavior. Recognize that the stress of a difficult situation may make it even more difficult for the student with autism to express himself and that his desire for peer attention may make him reluctant to report or confirm bullying behavior.
- Ensure that students with autism are part of the school community and informed of school events and opportunities - this is often overlooked for students in specialized classrooms who might not participate in homeroom. For students with autism it would be helpful if emails or memos were sent home to the child's family if announcements are made during school regarding important school information; students with autism may not go home and let their family know of announcements that they have heard in school.
- Promote opportunities for social interaction and development - find ways to include students with autism in school productions, extra curricular activities and clubs.
- Consider peer groups for social skills trainings, and peer buddies to support and shield a vulnerable student.
- Provide peer supports and training.

Considerations relating to the student with autism's family

- Be considerate of the family's needs and expectations. Be sure to include them in all meetings and discussions involving the student.
- Be respectful to family members when meeting as a team. If everyone is using a formal title, such as Mrs. or Mr., do not refer to him or her as "the mom" or "the dad."

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Considerations relating to behavior problems and incidents

- In many schools, when a student exhibits a maladaptive behavior that is seen as aggressive, dangerous or refractory to other interventions, the principal, case manager or another administrator is called in to the situation. In these instances, it is essential to remember that behavior is a means of communication, and not necessarily an overt desire to inflame or harm others. It is rare that an extreme behavior just occurs one day. More often an extreme behavior occurs when there is a pattern of inappropriate supports and interventions and the student builds up frustration over time. If called in to assist:
- Be familiar with the details of the student's positive behavior support plan.
- Remain calm.
- Take care not to embarrass or reprimand the child immediately and in view of others.
- When adressing the student, use limited verbal directions. Less can be more.
- Excessive talking and agitated adults can escalate a situation and overwhelm the student and impede his ability to understand and comply with directions or communicate to his best ability. A few minutes of quiet followed by short, simple sentences can help everyone.
- Use established guidelines for communication and be prepared to wait for a response.
- Give choices to help engage the student and de-escalate his sense of being pushed around (for example, 'Do you want to talk about this in the nurse's office or in my office?').
- Use written input/visual choices/cartooning/social narratives to investigate the student's perspective, feelings and interpretation and to teach why his actions were unacceptable.
- Sending the message to the student that the team is working to understand his perspective and trying to figure out why he exhibited maladaptive behavior (and then following up by instituting appropriate supports and preventive measures) may be more helpful to changing the student's behavior than a consequence such as suspension. Remember that the goal is to halt the behavior and prevent it from occurring in the future.
- Obtain the facts relating to the situation from a variety of sources, remembering to gather information on the behavior, as well as the events and conditions leading up to the behavior (especially sensory issues that are often not considered) and the consequences typically employed for similar behaviors that have occurred previously (responses or inadvertent rewards for maladaptive behaviors can increase, rather than reduce, them).
- Recognize and consider that interventions and strategies currently in use, even if well-intentioned, may be contributing to the development of the behavior.
- Take care in interacting with the student's family, who generally dread reports of behavior. Remember that this happened at school, and while the child is their responsibility, the conditions that led to the behavior were outside of their control. Be mindful of their perspective and insights in working as a team in understanding the underlying cause of the behavior and developing a plan for promoting effective replacement behavior.

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SCHOOL NURSES

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School Nurses

It is important to be aware of any medications or additional health issues that a student has - or may be inclined to have, such as those described in the Other Challenges section. Be aware of multiple medications and co-morbid conditions - physical or psychological.

In addition to traditional medical care, some families may follow the advice of physicians and alternative medicine providers who follow less conventional approaches to treat the underlying medical issues or symptoms of autism; these can range from dietary supplements or acupuncture to chelation of heavy metals. To better understand some of these approaches, visit the Autism Research Institute website.

Many students with autism have other health needs, as well as the illnesses, bumps and bruises that all children experience. The nurse's office should be a safe and supportive place for students with special needs, but effective interaction will require some understanding of the individual student.

- Awareness of the characteristics of autism as well as the specifics of a student can be helpful in avoiding or managing upsetting situations; some children may be at risk of running away; a door buzzer, fire alarm or school bell might represent a sensory assault - know what to do to avoid or manage the needs of a particular student.
- Be mindful of a student's communication challenges; ask for guidelines for communication from his special education staff, knowing that wait time for a response to a question, use of an alternative communication device or strategy such as picture exchange might be necessary.
- Since a trip to the nurse's office may not be an everyday occurrence, it is often helpful to get to know the student prior to an emergency situation; spend time in his day, invite him to visit the nurse's office, etc. so that injury or illness is not aggravated by fear of the unknown.
- Understand the student's medical needs, and converse with the family and/or physician with respect to special interventions or medications
- Many children with autism are on medications or special diets; even if these are not taken during the school day, it might be helpful to know what those medications are and what side effects are possible; be aware that the medical team/family may wish to keep other caregivers (teachers, aides) blind to changes in medication in order to keep their observations of the effects of interventions unbiased.
- Consider using a questionnaire so that this information is available in the case of side effects or an emergency.
- Remember that behavior is communication - consider injury, pain, etc. if a child has a significant new behavior.

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Strategies:

- Be calm and positive. Model appropriate behavior for the student with autism as well as other students by greeting him, etc.
- Use the "About Me" information about the student to get to know relevant facts about his likes, fears, needs, etc.
- Allow a student with autism the support of a familiar aide or caregiver while in the nurse's care, as this should offer better access to communication, increased compliance and reduced anxiety (for example, the aide might ask the student to open his mouth - and then you can look in).
- Getting a child to take medication can be challenging - ask the student's family about strategies they have used successfully at home; other strategies that have been used successfully are visual schedules, social stories, or reward systems to promote compliance with taking medication.
- Use a **visual pain scale** so that a student can give an accurate indication of the severity of the pain, and pictures so that he can point to where the pain is felt.
- Use visual supports and examples where possible (for example, "open your mouth" might be replaced with "do this" and appropriate modeling)

- Allow students a place where they can keep things like a change of clothes to independently manage situations that require medical intervention such as soiling.

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SCHOOL SECURITY

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School Security

All too often there are news reports about the misinterpretation of a person with autism's behavior resulting in the use of excessive force and physical harm. It is critical that security staff - and ideally the local first responders - are knowledgeable about who the individuals with autism in the community are, and are familiar with the characteristics of autism. A student with autism might not respond to his name, or to a specific command to do or stop doing something.

Understanding the issues with communication, anxiety, unreasonable fears, and sensory issues, as well as lack of appropriate fear and a tendency for some individuals with autism to wander or run away (elope) is critical to successful and safe support.

An information piece, **available here** was developed as a wallet card, specifically to inform first responders about an interaction with an individual with autism. Additional information, including training videos and materials in many languages, is available at **Dennis Debbaudt's Autism Risk & Safety Management**.

Please also familiarize yourself with the **"Autism Basics"** and **"Asperger's Basics"** handouts provided in this kit. If you haven't received them, ask whether there are **"About Me"** information sheets available for each of the students with autism in your school. The **"About Me"** information sheets will include a photograph to help you identify the student and important information on the individual student's specific like, needs, fears, communication and or behavioral challenges. Ask the school team for specific information about safety and impulsivity.

- Be aware of the social vulnerability of students with autism. They are frequently victims of bullying. Inform the school team if you observe situations that make you concerned.
- Students with autism are not socially savvy. Therefore, if a student is being bullied or tortured quietly, he is likely to react or respond – but may not do so in a way that seems appropriate or is easy to recognize. Consider the student's communication difficulties and make every attempt to fully understand the situation before reaching judgment regarding fault or behavior.
- Model appropriate behavior for the student with autism, as well as his peers, by greeting him by name and engaging him in appropriate conversation when possible. Establishing a relationship with a student may make easier to help him and others in an emergency situation.
- Be aware of communication and social concerns that might make communicating with a student with autism difficult. Be prepared to wait for a response, whether it is an action or verbal answer and bear in mind that anxiety may further impede the student with autism's ability to communicate in a stressful situation.
- Give positive directions. Minimize the use of 'don't' and 'stop' when possible. 'Please stay on the sidewalk' can be more effective than 'don't walk on the grass' for a student who might not hear the 'don't' or for one who isn't sure where the acceptable place to walk may be. This lets the student know exactly what you would like him to do.
- If you are having difficulties with behavior or interacting with a student with autism, ask the school team for help.

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From: Debbaudt Legacy Productions' On Scene Autism Information Card

The person you are interacting with:

Communication:

- May be non verbal or have limited verbal skills
- May not respond to your commands or questions
- May repeat your words or phrases; your body language and emotional reactions
- May have difficulty expressing needs

Behavior:

- May display tantrums or extreme distress for no apparent reason
- May laugh, giggle or ignore your presence
- May be extremely sensitive to lights, sounds or touch
- May display a lack of eye contact
- May have no fear of real danger
- May appear insensitive to pain
- May exhibit self-stimulating behavior: hand flapping, body rocking or attachment to objects

In Security Situations:

- May not understand rights or warnings
- May become anxious in new situations
- May not understand consequences of their actions
- If verbal, may produce false confession or misleading statements

Tips for Interactions with Persons with Autism:

- Display calming body language; give person extra personal space
- Use simple language
- Speak slowly; repeat and rephrase question
- Use concrete terms and ideas; avoid slang
- Allow extra time for response
- Give praise and encouragement
- Exercise caution
- Person may have seizure disorders and low muscle tone
- Given time and space, person may deescalate their behavior
- Seek advice from others on the scene who know the person with autism.

Debbaudt, D. and Legacy, D. On Scene Autism Information Card. Debbaudt Legacy Productions. Port Saint Lucie , Florida - Waterford , Michigan . 2004.

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Educating Students with Autism

The Rights of the Student with Autism

- A Child's Right to Public Education
- Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)
- Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)
- Special Education Services

Instructional Methods in Teaching Students with Autism

- Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA)
- Additional Teaching Methods Often Used with Students with Autism
  1. Discrete Trial Teaching (DTT)/ Lovaas Model
  2. Floortime or Difference Relationship Model (DIR)
  3. Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS)
  4. Pivotal Response Treatment (PRT)
  5. Relationship Development Intervention (RDI)
  6. Social Communication/Emotional Regulation/Transactional Support (SCERTS)
  7. Training and Education of Autistic and Related Communication Handicapped Children (TEACCH)
  8. Verbal Behavior (VB)

Therapies Used for Students with Autism

- Occupational Therapy, Physical Therapy, Sensory Integration Therapy,
- Speech Language Therapy

The Team Approach to Educating Students with Autism

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The Rights of the Student with Autism

A Child's Right to Public Education

Every child has the right to a free appropriate education. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) enacted in 1975, mandates a public education for all eligible children and the school's responsibility for providing the supports and services that will allow this to happen. IDEA was most recently revised in 2004 (and, in fact, renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act, but most people still refer to it as IDEA). The law mandates that the state provide an eligible child with a free appropriate public education that meets his unique individual needs. IDEA specifies that children with various disabilities, including autism, be entitled to early intervention services and special education. The IDEA legislation has established an important team approach and a role for parents as equal partners in the planning for an individual child, and promotes an education in the least restrictive environment.

In addition to the IDEA stipulations, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) sets forth, as a civil right, protections and provisions for equal access to education for anyone with a disability. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 is another civil rights law that prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability in programs and activities, public and private, that receive federal financial assistance. Generally, the individuals protected by these laws include anyone with a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more life activities.

Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)

IDEA provides for a "free appropriate public education" for all children with disabilities. Each child is entitled to an education that is tailored to his special needs and a placement that will allow him to make reasonable educational progress, at no cost to his family.

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

IDEA provides that students with disabilities are entitled to experience the "least restrictive environment." School districts are required to educate students with disabilities in regular classrooms with non-disabled peers, in the school they would attend if not disabled, to the maximum extent appropriate, supported with the aids and services required to make this possible. This does not mean that every student has to be in a general education classroom. The objective is to place students in as natural a learning environment as possible, within their home community, as much as possible. The members of the IEP team - considering a variety of issues - make this decision and the LRE for a student may change over time.

Participation of students with autism in the general education environment is often called mainstreaming or inclusion. Inclusion does not mean placing a student with autism in general education just like a typical learner; a variety of supports are provided to create a successful environment and experience for everyone involved. Careful planning and training are essential to provide the right modifications and accommodations. Supports

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might include a specially trained classroom or one-on-one paraprofessional, altering testing environments or expectations, adapting curriculum, visual supports or adaptive equipment, etc. The special education department should support general education staff and others in the school community who interact with students with autism.

Philosophies about inclusion vary considerably, among school districts, staff and parents of students with and without special needs. IDEA provides for a team approach to planning and placement decisions so that the objectives of all members of the team can be considered.

Not all parents will feel that a mainstream environment will meets the needs of their student with autism, nor will all students will be ready for full inclusion, all of the time. Anxiety and sensory issues related to inclusion may mean that the student should start with small and successful increments, and build to longer periods of increasing participation in the general education environment.

The less restrictive a student's setting, the greater the opportunities for a child with autism to interact with the school population outside the special education environment - this means support staff, general education and special area teachers, office staff, custodians and most importantly, peers, who are not necessarily knowledgeable about autism. Autism Speaks has created this tool kit to provide better understanding, perspective and strategies so that every member of the school community can feel empowered and benefit.

Special Education Services

Special education services pick up where early intervention services for young children leave off, at age 3, and continue through age 21 for students who qualify. The school district generally provides these services through the special education department, based on an assessment and planning process that includes a team of experts and intervention providers and the child's parents.

The document that spells out the student's needs and how they will be met is the Individualized Education Program (IEP). The IEP describes a student's strengths and weaknesses, sets measureable goals and objectives for the student, and provides details about the supports and accommodations that will be used to meet them.

For students who do not qualify for special education services, but still have a disability that requires support, accommodations or protections afforded under the Rehabilitation Act are developed through a school team and often compiled in a document that is referred to as a Section 504 Plan.

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Instructional Methods in teaching students with autism

Educating students with autism is usually an intensive undertaking, involving a team of professionals and many hours each week of different instruction and therapies to address a student's behavioral, developmental, social and/or academic needs. Students with autism often require explicit teaching across a variety of settings to generalize skills.

Most school classrooms incorporate elements of several established approaches. It is important for schools to evaluate prospective interventions for a student on an individualized basis, as well as keep in mind the need to use evidence-based methods and strategies. No single intervention has been proven effective for every individual with autism.

Some of the intensive interventions developed for autism and employed in home programs and special education are listed below For more in- depth information and links related to therapeutic interventions, please consult the Resources section of this kit, Autism Speaks resources page and the National Education Association's The Puzzle of Autism.

Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA)

ABA is the name of the systematic approach to the assessment and evaluation of behavior, and the application of interventions that alter behavior.

The principles of analyzing behavior to understand its function, controlling the environment and interactions prior to a behavior (antecedents) and adjusting responses (consequences), and using positive reinforcement (rewarding what you want to see) are all ABA techniques that are often used in shaping behavior in individuals with autism. Many programs use the principles of ABA as a primary teaching method, or as a way of promoting positive and adaptive behavior.

Additional teaching methods often used with students with autism?

Discrete Trial Teaching (DTT) or the Lovaas Model:

Named for its pioneer (ABA-based) Teacher-directed DTT targets skills and behaviors based on an established curriculum. Each skill is broken down into small steps, and taught using prompts, which are gradually eliminated as the steps are mastered. The child is given repeated opportunities to learn and practice each step in a variety of settings. Each time the child achieves the desired result, he receives positive reinforcement, such as verbal praise or something that he finds to be highly motivating.

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Floortime, or Difference Relationship Model (DIR):

The premise of Floortime is that an adult can help a child expand his circles of communication by meeting him at his developmental level and building on his strengths. Therapy is often incorporated into play activities – on the floor – and focuses on developing interest in the world, communication and emotional thinking by following the child's lead.

Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS):

The PECS system allows children with little or no verbal ability to communicate using pictures. An adult helps the child build a vocabulary and articulate desires, observations or feelings by using pictures consistently. It starts with teaching the child to exchange a picture for an object. Eventually, the individual learns to distinguish between pictures and symbols and use these to form sentences. Although PECS is based on visual tools, verbal reinforcement is a major component and verbal communication is encouraged.

Pivotal Response Treatment (PRT)

(ABA-based) PRT is a child-directed intervention that focuses on critical, or "pivotal," behaviors that affect a wide range of behaviors. The primary pivotal behaviors are motivation and child's initiations of communications with others. The goal of PRT is to produce positive changes in the pivotal behaviors, leading to improvement in communication, play and social behaviors and the child's ability to monitor his own behavior. Child-directed intervention

Relationship Development Intervention (RDI)

RDI seeks to improve the individual's long-term quality of life by helping him improve social skills, adaptability and self-awareness through a systematic approach to building emotional, social and relational skills.

Social Communication/Emotional Regulation/Transactional Support (SCERTS)

SCERTS uses practices from other approaches (PRT, TEACCH, Floortime and RDI), and promotes child-initiated communication in everyday activities and the ability to learn and spontaneously apply functional and relevant skills in a variety of settings and with a variety of partners. The SCERTS model favors having children learn with and from peers who provide good social and language models in inclusive settings as much as possible.

Training and Education of Autistic and Related Communication Handicapped Children (TEACCH)

TEACCH is a special education program using Structured Teaching, a process designed to capitalize on the relative strength and preference for processing information visually in individuals with autism, while taking into account the recognized difficulties. Individualized assessment and planning is used to create a highly structured environment (organized with visual supports) to help the individual map out activities and work independently.

Verbal Behavior (VB)

(ABA-based) VB employs specific behavioral research on the development of language and is designed to motivate a child to learn language by developing a connection between a word and its value.

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Therapies Used For Students with Autism

Many students will be eligible the following services, usually termed Related Services on the IEP. Since difficulties in these areas affect so much of a student's life and function, coordination with these service providers and the rest of the team is critical to build and generalize targeted skills across settings. While these services are often provided as pull-out therapies, they may be more effective provided in more natural settings as both therapy for the student with autism and training opportunities for the school community (e.g. conversational speech goals might be targeted during a student's lunch period, when daily support staff and peers could be trained in techniques to be used on a daily basis to achieve objectives much faster and more naturally.)

Students with autism often require supports in the home and community, so coordination of care and comprehensive wrap around services are often needed.

Occupational Therapy (OT)

A Certified Occupational Therapist, (OT) brings together cognitive, physical and motor skills to enable the individual to gain independence and participate more fully in life. For a student with autism, the focus may be on appropriate play, fine motor and basic social and life skills such as handwriting, independent dressing, feeding, grooming and use of the toilet. The OT can recommend strategies for learning key tasks to practice in various settings.

Physical Therapy (PT)

A Certified Physical Therapist (PT), focuses on problems with movement that cause functional limitations. Students with autism frequently have challenges with motor skills such as sitting, walking, running and jumping, and PT can also address poor muscle tone, balance and coordination. An evaluation establishes the abilities and developmental level of the child, and activities or supports are designed to target areas of need.

Sensory Integration Therapy (SI)

(SI) therapy addresses disruptions in the way an individual's brain processes sensory input, developing strategies to help process these senses in a more productive way. A sensory integration-trained OT or PT begins with an evaluation, and then uses research-based strategies to plan an individualized program for the child, matching sensory stimulation with physical movement to improve how the brain processes and organizes sensory information.

Speech-Language Therapy (SLT)

Certified Speech-Language Pathologists (SLP) use a variety of techniques to address a range of challenges for children with autism. SLT is designed to address the mechanics of speech and the meaning and social value of language. For students unable to speak, SLT includes training in other forms of communication, or oral exercises to promote better control of the mouth. For those who seem to talk incessantly about a certain topic, SLT might work on expanding the conversational repertoire, or reading social cues and adjusting conversation to the needs of the listener. An SLT program begins with an evaluation by an SLP and therapy may be conducted one-on-one, in a small group or in classroom/natural settings.

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Assistive Technologies Used For Students with Autism

Assistive Technology (AT) is any item, piece of equipment, or product system that is used by a person with a disability to perform specific tasks, improve functional capabilities and become more independent. Assistive technology for students with autism is constantly evolving and can redefine what is possible for students with a wide range of cognitive, physical or sensory disabilities.

Smart phones and Apple iDevices (iPad, iTouch, iPhone) have become increasingly popular because of the wide variety of applications ('apps') available to support a wide variety of needs. It is important to look carefully at the student's needs in advance of putting devices and apps in use. Different apps will be used for different purposes, including communication, literacy, development, modeling and motivation and organization.

According to Vicki Clark MS, CCC-SLP, many students with autism will use an Apple iDevice to "find something they can control on which to focus their attention and drown out all of the confusing input around them."

"Beyond simply a distraction or calming device, the iPad has application in teaching skills, just like the computer has in the past. There are apps for teaching reading, apps for teaching social skills, apps for teaching vocabulary and apps for communication. Careful selection can give children a doorway to improved comprehension, expression and skill-development."

For students with severe communication difficulties, a specialized speech generating device or a device with a speech-generating app may be highly effective.

According to Clark, "Specific needs of the child need to be the main deciding factor on purchasing any technology. When deciding on technology options, teams must consider the individual needs of the child (including sensory, physical, social and communicative issues) partner characteristics and needs, and the environmental demands."

The Autism Speaks Autism Apps Library (http://www.autismspeaks.org/autism-apps) provides a list of recommended apps to consider for teaching communication, language, reading, math, functional skills, behavioral intervention, organization, and social skills.

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The Team Approach to Educating Students with Autism

Each member of the team brings a unique perspective and set of observations and skills, all of which are helpful in assisting a student with complex and variable needs. It is important to employ the knowledge and perspective of the family, since they offer another valuable and longitudinal view. Just as the symptoms of autism vary across children, so will the knowledge bases and coping skills of the parents and siblings. Parents can contribute information and a history of successful (and unsuccessful) strategies, and may also benefit from information on strategies and successes at school that can help to extend learning into the home setting. A positive and collaborative relationship with the family is beneficial to everyone.

Supports that work in a specific classroom can be shared with other teachers or support staff, to promote the behavioral, communication and social growth being targeted. Community based personnel, such as a private psychologist, vocational-rehabilitation counselor or wraparound service coordinator, can offer information, resource options and perspective to support the team's efforts.

Share what works and problem-solve what does not with the entire team. Repetition and reinforcement across settings help to generalize skills and build competence faster, resulting in success for the staff as well as the student. Reassess the effectiveness of interventions, collecting and analyzing data. See Data Collection.

Thinking of each student as an individual is critical in providing appropriate support and growth. For example, while compassionate peers who want to help develop his speaking ability may support a young child with autism, peers or educators who are not familiar with his specific challenges may not provide a high-functioning, verbally proficient adolescent the same compassionate allowances. What represents perfect support for a first grader is likely to be grossly out of place for a high school student, so it is important to support the development of age appropriate interests and raise expectations towards independence and peer-level behavior as much as possible.

Establish appropriate expectations for growth and competence. Support the student in his learning and help him build skills and independence. It is often the well-meaning tendency for support staff to take on the everyday tasks for a student with autism - to speak for the student, tie his shoes, walk him to class, turn in his paper. While this might keep the student on pace with the activities of the surrounding class and seem supportive at the time, in the long run the student has not learned to perform the activities of daily life for himself. Building competencies requires patience, setting priorities and establishing small goals to reach the desired outcome. Ensure that the mindset of the team is committed to teaching, as opposed to care giving, and expect to be surprised, impressed and rewarded by all that a student can do.

Meet the student where he is. For each of the skill areas that need to be addressed with a student with autism, develop an understanding of the individual's current ability, and build from that level. This approach applies to social and communication issues as well as academics. Understand where a student is and problem solve what is impeding progress from that point, then develop the teachable, scaffolding steps that will help him move forward.

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Motivation is critical to attention and learning. Know what motivates a particular student, being aware that this may be very different from what motivates a typical child. Use his interests to focus attention to a less interesting or non-preferred activity (e.g. for a student who is dislikes word problems but loves dinosaurs, create word problems that add triceratops or multiply the food requirements of a brachiosaurus) and embed preferred activities as naturally as possible. As a student becomes familiar and more competent with new skills, confidence, interest and motivation increase.

As a student with autism works to change behaviors or learn difficult skills, it is essential that the reward for this effort be substantial enough for him to extend this effort. In many instances, even if there is something inherently motivating about a task or activity, it is necessary to shape behavior by making small changes at a time and **utilizing reinforcement strategies** - social reinforcement (such as praise or a high five), as well as concrete reinforcement (such as a favorite activity, toy or food item). The reward for learning a new skill or decreasing a maladaptive behavior needs to have more value than the reinforcement for not developing the replacement behavior. Token economy systems can be extremely effective and reinforcement can be faded over time to decreasing frequency or more naturalistic social rewards. See **Positive Behavior Support** and **Reinforcement Strategies**.

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Supporting Learning in the Student with Autism

Supporting Communication

- Receptive Language Support & Success Story
- Expressive Language Support & Success Story

Improving Social Interaction & Development

- Considerations in Addressing Social Skills
- Specific Strategies for Supporting Social Skill Development & Success Stories

Ideas Preventing Behavior

Positive Behavior Support

Supporting Organizational Skills

Supporting Sensory Needs

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Supporting Communication

Communication encompasses a broad range of challenges for individuals with autism, from intake and processing of information, verbal or representational output, to reading and writing skills. Picking up on non-verbal cues, body language and subtle intent, intonation, and interpretation are also difficult for individuals with autism.

Since all students with autism, by definition of their diagnosis, have communication and social deficits, the services of a trained speech pathologist will be an integral part of their program and planning team. For children without language, the speech pathologist should assist in formulating plans and supports for alternate modes of communication, such as sign language, PECs or augmentative devices. For students with emerging language, building on receptive and expressive language skills will be ongoing, and for those with high verbal skills working on the more subtle aspects of pragmatics and conversational reciprocity will be the focus. Speech pathologists can be instrumental in helping to drive the social, as well as language components of interaction, since these are often so intertwined. However, the development of communication skills in a student with autism cannot be the sole responsibility of the speech pathologist. Communication regarding wants and needs, as well as social interactions, occurs throughout the day and across settings, and the entire school team will be involved.

While some students are predominantly auditory learners, many tend to be visual learners, meaning they understand or retain what they see more effectively than what they hear. Visual supports are often helpful since they provide extra processing time.

Supporting Receptive Language Skills

Receptive Language is the ability to understand what is said or written.

- Make sure you have the student's attention before you deliver an instruction or ask a question.
- Consider the student's processing challenges and timing (for example, begin an instruction with the student's name - this increases the likelihood that he may be attending by the time you deliver the direction)
- Avoid complex verbal directions, information and discussion. Keep instructions short or give information in chunks.
- Give positive directions to allow for incomplete language processing.
- Minimize the use of 'don't' and 'stop.' (For example, 'Please stay on the sidewalk' can be much more effective than 'Don't walk on the grass' for a student who might not hear the 'don't'—or for one who isn't sure where the acceptable place to walk might be.) This lets the student know exactly what you want him to do.
- Allow 'wait time' (be prepared to wait for a response, whether it is an action or answer). Avoid immediately repeating an instruction or inquiry. Sometimes it is helpful to think of a student with auditory processing challenges like a computer - when it is processing, hitting the command again does not make it go any faster, but rather sends it back to the beginning to start the process all over again!

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- Model and shape correct responses to build understanding (for example, for a younger child, to teach the meaning of 'stop': run on the playground holding hands with the student, say 'stop'; stop yourself and the student; repeat until you can fade the handholding and then fade the modeling)
- Supplement verbal information with pictures, visual schedules, gestures, visual examples, written directions. For example:

- Do not reprimand a student for "not listening or responding" as it only serves to highlight his challenges.

Supporting Expressive Language

Expressive Language is spoken language as well as any communicative output such as picture exchange, written language, etc.

- Take responsibility for finding a way to access the student's need for communication. Many people with autism have word retrieval issues - even if they know an answer, they may not be able to come up with the words. Offer visual supports, cue cards, multiple choice options, etc.

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A Success Story:

A teacher once told me, "I have reviewed the information on the states many times and Peter still does not know what the capitals are, and I have reduced the amount of states he needs to know." I asked, "Well, how do you ask him?" She said, "I say, what is the capital of X? and he either does not know or gives the same answer, Washington, DC."

So I printed out a large map of the states, wrote down the capitals on stickers, and gave Peter three at a time. He was able to put every capital in the right state with the exception of mixing up Springfield and Madison.

The teacher was dumfounded and Peter was thrilled and smiled!

- Use visual supports to prompt language or give choices. (for example, if you are teaching a child to ask for help, have a cue card available at all times, and prompt its use whenever it is time for him to request help. This can be used by the student instead of spoken language, or as a support for developing language and teaching when it might be appropriate to use this phrase.

- Teach and use scripts - words, pictures, etc. for communication needs or exchanges (for example, 'I like... What do you like?' 'I like….. ') Use cue cards and fade over time as the student develops an understanding of how to use the phrase or the pattern of the exchange.
- Teach the student to communicate or say 'I don't know' to reduce the anxiety associated with not being able to answer a question. Later teach the student how to ask for additional information (Who? What? Where? When?, etc.)
- Add visual supports to the environment as needed (for example, label 'IN' and 'OUT' boxes).
- Teach students to look for and use visual supports that already exist in the environment: calendars, signs, door numbers, name placards, drawer labels, the display on a cash register and body language.
- Use a communication board, PECs, pictures or sign language to support or provide communication options for students with low verbal output.

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A Success Story:

A teacher asked for a behavior intervention for non-compliance at snack.

She explained that Miles always requested the same snack, but when it was given he got upset and threw it. When I asked what the choices were the teacher stated, "They are always the same: pretzels, apples or graham crackers." I asked if she always says them in that order and she said yes. I exclaimed, "Well he always chooses graham crackers, right?" She said, "Yes how did you know?" Due to short term memory issues, that is the only label Miles could remember.

I printed three pictures from Google images, cut them out, put them in front of Miles, and asked what he wanted for snack. He chose the picture of pretzels, repeated it verbally, and then happily ate what was given to him.

No need for a behavior intervention — just access to communication!

- If your student has been provided with an augmentative or alternative communication device, learn how to use it too. These devices can range considerably in terms of sophistication, with some offering either written or speech output. Ask the student's special education staff or tech support for programming specific to his needs and help guide them to communication options that will be helpful.
- Sing! Musical processing occurs separately from language processing, and singing can be used to promote both receptive and expressive skills (for example, for younger children, 'The fork goes on the left, the fork goes on the left, hi ho the dairy- o, the fork goes on the left!') as well as motivation.

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- Provide verbal prompts or models with care, knowing that these can sometimes cause pronoun confusion and challenges due to perspective taking (for example, from the child's perspective, when a teacher says "I want a cookie" does that mean that the teacher wants a cookie or is prompting him to say 'I want a cookie'?)
- Be aware of echolalia, in which a student repeats phrases he has heard before. Sometimes this is seemingly self-stimulatory behavior, but many individuals with autism also use functional echolalia to comment, inform or request (see below).
- Always look for a student's communicative intent (for example, if a child often reverses pronouns or employs functional echolalia, then "Does your head hurt?" might be his way of telling you that his head hurts).
- For a student who is inclined to use echolalia, try to model language (and visual supports and social narratives) using language forms that would be appropriate when the student uses it so that pronoun reversals do not occur (for example, when creating a visual for a child with frequent headaches, one might use a picture of a person holding his head and the words "My head hurts.")
- Address the language of emotions - the communication of thoughts, feelings and emotional states for all individuals with autism. The challenges they face may cause ongoing anxiety and stress. Provide an outlet for their emotions. Otherwise they may communicate their feelings through behavior or shutting down. Helping the student put a label on an emotion can sometimes help modulate the intensity of it. He may be calmed by seeing that you recognize what he is trying to convey. (for example, "I can see that you are angry.") Use cartoons and visual supports to build emotional fluency.

- Whenever possible, teach self advocacy and negotiation skills
- Many students with autism have a favorite topic or special area of interest that may interfere with schoolwork or social interaction. To shape the student's expectations and to minimize the impact of this obsession:
  1. Provide scheduled opportunities to discuss this topic.
  2. If appropriate, use a visual schedule.
  3. Establish boundaries (when it is, or is not, appropriate to discuss this topic).
  4. Set a timer to establish duration.
  5. Support strategies for expanding to other topics
  6. Reinforce the student for talking about other subjects or the absence of the topic.

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Improving Social Interaction & Development

Supporting social interaction is an important piece of the student's educational plan. Student's with autism often have the desire to interact with others, but do not have the skills to engage appropriately or may be overwhelmed by the process. Some students are painfully aware of their social deficits and will avoid interactions even though they desperately want to connect with others. Others will engage in attention seeking behavior to connect with others until they build the skills they need to interact.

Social development represents a range of skills, including timing and attention, sensory integration and communication, that can be built and layered to improve social competence. Building competence will result in further interest and interaction.

Sometimes, the mere unpredictability and noise of the presence of others can be disconcerting. Working through the sensory issues is the first place to begin, such as with a young child still learning to develop parallel play. A student's social ability builds on skills of imitation and reciprocity. Even a child with significant receptive and expressive language challenges can work on social referencing and paying attention to the behaviors of those around him. Without understanding the words of the teacher's directive, he can learn that when the class stands to salute the flag, he stands and salutes too!

Social challenges in autism are bidirectional. This means that they may manifest as deficits (a lack of social initiation) or excesses (a one-sided conversation in a highly verbal student with Asperger's Syndrome). In both instances, the need for support and teaching is real. Appropriate social behavior requires social understanding. Some people with autism appear highly social, initiating social interaction but lacking reciprocity, being one-sided and overbearing. People with high functioning autism and Asperger's Syndrome often suffer the pain of rejection and loneliness because they lack the necessary skills to reciprocate.

Considerations in Addressing Social Skills

- Extend a feeling of welcome to your classroom, lunchroom, or gym and model for the other students that the student with autism is a valued part of the group.
- Get to know the student and meet him where he currently is in terms of both social skills and interests, and be ready to work from there. Reciprocity, the give and take of an interaction, is a critical social skill necessary for developing a relationship. Typical individuals build strong relationships on reciprocity and socially demand it. Relationships are not based only on one-sided giving. You come to expect a friend to call you back, return a favor, etc. To create true reciprocity, it is important to engage a student on his terms and interests, not just expect him to engage on yours.
- Appropriate social behavior requires social understanding; be aware of the need to build foundations and scaffold skills in appropriate developmental sequence, expecting growth through supports, practice and direct teaching.

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- Be aware that free play, recess and other unstructured times are the most difficult times for children with autism; think about how to impose structure on activities; this also applies to older students, though with needs for age appropriate supports and structure.
- Focus on social development in areas where the student shows interest and competence - not where language, fine motor or other challenges will create an overwhelming experience.
- A student with autism is likely to have anxiety surrounding social situations, which can result in avoidance or inappropriate behaviors. Building competence may reduce this anxiety.
- Students with autism often have a difficult time maintaining eye contact. Insisting on eye contact can cause additional stress. It is often best to begin with requiring the student to direct his body toward the talking partner. After significant practice in social situations and increased comfort level, eye contact may develop naturally or can be targeted more directly.
- Social challenges, while very real in each instance, will be very different for individuals along the autism spectrum. A student with limited verbal ability or word retrieval issues might have trouble contributing to a conversation. An extremely verbal and single-minded student might have trouble allowing a conversational partner to get a word in. It is generally not effective to pair students with disparate needs in social skills classes or speech groups, as it becomes even more challenging for the needs of either of them to be met and progress is impeded.
- Students with autism, especially more verbal students who perform well academically and do not have consistent adult supports, can be the target of teasing and bullying. They often do not "pick up" on non-verbal cues such as tone of voice or the hidden intention of a request or comment. They often go along with the teasing and/or bullying because they do not identify that it has a negative intent. The desire to make friends, and their difficulty doing so, means they often encounter peers with dishonest intentions. Be on the lookout for this and respond quickly if teasing and bullying become an issue.
- Many people with autism are very logical and will play according to the rules always. If the rule is that basketballs are not allowed on the playground during recess, a student may become agitated when a special activity for PE includes basketballs on the playground. Similarly, he may not understand special circumstances in game play such as penalty shots, and his insistence on following the rules as he has learned them may become problematic.
- Generalization and flexible thinking are often challenging for students with autism. So, for example, playing dodge ball is usually not a wise idea: you are asking the child to understand that the ball can be thrown at other children, but not adults, and only during this game -confusing!

Strategies for Supporting Social Skill Development

- Reinforce what the student does well socially - use behavior-specific praise (and concrete reinforcement if needed) to shape pro-social behavior.
- Model social interaction, turn taking and reciprocity.
- Teach imitation, motor as well as verbal.

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- Teach context clues and referencing those around you (for example, 'if everyone else is standing, you should be too!').
- Break social skills into small component parts, and teach these skills through supported interactions. Use visuals as appropriate.
- Celebrate strengths and use these to your advantage. Many students with autism have a good sense of humor, a love of or affinity for music, strong rote memorization skills, or a heightened sense of color or visual perspective. Use these to motivate interest in social interactions or give a student a chance to shine and be viewed as competent and interesting.

A Success Story:

A student with a great interest in numbers but not sports was kept occupied at the basketball net with a peer by shooting from sequential numbers chalked on the floor. After several sessions of this activity, he got off the school bus one day and asked to "shoot hoops with Jason!"

- Identify peers who model strong social skills and pair the student with them. Provide peers with strategies for eliciting communication or other targeted objectives, but be careful not to turn the peer into a teacher - strive to keep peer interactions as natural as possible.
- Create small lunch groups, perhaps with structured activities or topic boxes. (The group to pulls a topic out of a box and discusses things related to this topic, such as 'The most recent movie I saw was…' This can be helpful for students who tend to talk about the same things all the time since it provides supports and motivation and the benefit of a visual reminder of what the topic is.)
- Focus on social learning during activities that are not otherwise challenging for the child (for example, conversational turn-taking may not occur if a child with poor fine motor skills is being asked to converse while cutting.)
- Support peers and student with structured social situations. Define expectations of behavior in advance. (For example, first teach the necessary skill, such as how to play Uno, in isolation, and then introduce it in a social setting with peers.)
- Provide structured activities during recess. If there is a group of students playing YuGiOh each lunchtime, consider teaching YuGiOh to the student with autism who likes to play cards.
- During group activities define the student's role and responsibilities within the group. Assign a role or help him mediate with peers as to what he should do (for example, ' Sallie is the note taker today.') Rotate roles to build flexibility and broaden skills.
- If you leave it up to the class to pick groups/ partners, students with special needs are sometimes chosen last, causing unnecessary humiliation.
- Educate peers, establish learning teams or circles of friends to build a supportive community.

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A Success Story:

What a circle of friends can do:
Andrew has Asperger Syndrome, and the kids on his school bus have been teaching him to call other kids vulgar names. Andrew has no idea what the words mean, but likes the attention he is getting from his peers. Hannah, a girl from his Circle told the teasers to stop it, but they wouldn't. She made Andrew's Circle facilitator aware of the situation. Adults at the school then dealt with the kids who were teasing. Also, both Andrew's parents and his resource teacher were made aware of the situation so they could teach him how to identify when he was being made fun of and strategies to use to deal with the problem.

(from "With Open Arm"s, p 85)

- Use video modeling to teach appropriate social behavior - see Model Me Kids
- Teach empathy and reciprocity. To engage in a social interaction, a person needs to be able to take another's perspective and adjust the interaction accordingly. While their challenges may distort their expressions of empathy, people with autism often do have capacity for empathy. This can be taught by making a student aware - and providing appropriate vocabulary - through commentary and awareness of feelings, emotional states, recognition of others' facial expressions and non verbal cues.
- Use social narratives and social cartooning as tools in describing and defining social rules and expectations.
- Develop listening and attending skills and teach ways to show others that he is listening.
- Teach a highly verbal student to recognize how, when and how much to talk about himself or his interests. Directly teach the skills relating to what topics to talk about with others, being aware of a conversational partner's likes and dislikes and reading from their body language and facial expressions.
- Teach social boundaries—things you should not talk about (or whom you might talk to about sensitive subjects) and maintaining personal space (an arm's length is often used as a measurable distance for conversation.)
- A social narrative example from the social narrative bank at Kansas Autism Spectrum Disorder:

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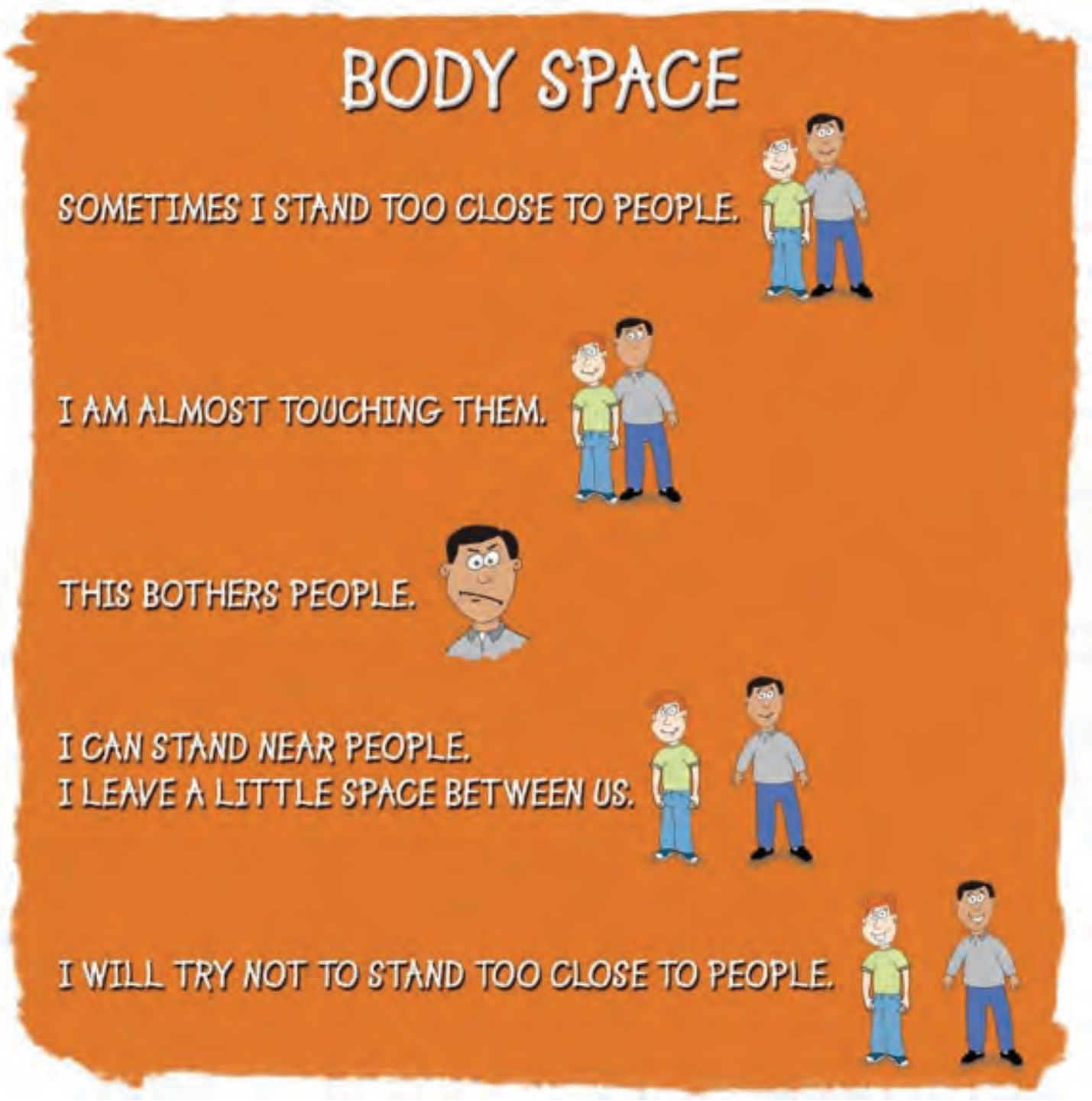

- Teach Relationship Circles to assist in understanding social rules and boundaries, and how these vary based on how well you know someone. Source: With Open Arms, p 67-70, by James Stanfield.
- For older students, it is important to learn about the changes that take place in their bodies and appropriate hygiene as they grow, and communication supports and visuals should be used to help explain and teach. They will need to be taught when and with whom it is appropriate to discuss these changes.

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Ideas for Preventing Behavior

- Recognize behavior as communication. Try to understand the communicative intent of the behavior and teach the student appropriate ways to communicate, and give them positive reinforcement when they are successful.
- Establish a classroom behavior plan for all students to promote expected behaviors.
- Develop an individualized Positive Behavior Support Plan for each student with autism.
- Provide behavior specific feedback and ample praise and reinforcement.
- Catch your students being good and reward! (For example, 'It was wonderful how nicely you walked in the hall and stayed in line. Give me a high five!')
- Provide organization and support transitions.
- Communicate expectations, use daily and short term schedules, warn of changes to routines or personnel, prepare the student for unexpected events such as fire drills, field trips or field day, substitutes, etc.
- Offer choices and provide the student some control - within reason (for example, 'Which one should we work on first, math or reading?' or 'Do you want to do 10 math problems, or 15 math problems?') Even if the student does not have a true choice, he can feel that he has some input and is not directed throughout every step of his day.
- Consider sensory needs and interventions.
- Respect the student's personal space - and teach him to recognize and respect the personal space of others.
- Provide a home base or safe place where the student feels safe and can regroup, calm down, or escape overwhelming situations or sensory overload such as a separate room, a tent or corner within a classroom, or a particular teacher's or administrator's classroom or office. Proactively teach the student how and when to use this strategy, using visual supports or cue cards as needed.
- Practice flexibility and self-monitoring - start this when the student IS calm and help to provide a framework for what 'calm and ready to participate' actually is.
- Utilize breaks as a way to return to a calm state or as a reward for 'good working', but be watchful of how and when breaks are given. Providing a break in the middle of an outburst during a less-preferred activity may help to build that negative behavior, since it becomes a strategy for the student (for example, 'If I scream, I get to avoid math and sit on the bean bag!'). Teach the student to request a break before he acts out, using an appropriate visual cue, whether that is raising his hand and asking or using a visual aide like the one below.

- Provide communication options and seek to give the student an opportunity to express emotions, confusion or his perspective.

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- Teach contingencies and waiting strategies.
  Out and About offers a variety of simple strategies such as:
  1. Countdown (5, 4, 3, 2, 1)
  2. First, Then
  3. A "WAIT" cue card that can be implemented in a variety of settings
- Teach and provide the student with a list of strategies for calming when anxious, stressed or angry

When I am Stressed, I can:

- *Take deep Breaths*
- *Count to 10*
- *Repeat a positive message*
- *Squeeze a ball*
- *Ask for help*
- *Ask to take a break*
- *Ask permission to go to room 10*

- Use a system that reinforces the student for exhibiting desired behaviors, especially rewarding those behaviors that replace disruptive behaviors.
- Be aware of, and work to avoid, known triggers and antecedents that may result in frustration, overload, anxiety or maladaptive behaviors. Make a list and share it, so the student's entire team is aware of these possible triggers.
- While they are occurring, ignore 'attention seeking behaviors' (use 'extinction') as much as possible, since remarking on or otherwise addressing the behavior often delivers the desired attention, even if the response is negative. Use redirection strategies instead. Teach alternative behaviors (for example, how to get someone's attention with a gentle tap on the shoulder) at another time.
- Know the student's learning style and ensure modifications/ accommodations are sufficient and appropriate so as to increase competence and motivation and minimize frustration.
- Use video modeling to show desired behaviors, or to compare or evaluate with the student his behavior in a targeted situation (i.e. 'this is the way your classmates walk in the hall. This is how you walk in the hall. What might you be able to do to differently? How can we support you in attaining this goal?')
- Evaluate behaviors that need to be changed, considering the factors in place before the behavior occurred, the details of the behavior itself, and the events that followed—talk to others to gain their perspective, and develop an understanding of the function of the behavior (what purpose did it serve?) so that a replacement behavior or strategy might be developed. Enlist the support of behavior specialists in analyzing behaviors that need addressing.

Often the most obvious piece of behavior management is the positive behavior support plan, where many of these suggested strategies are identified in specific for the student; the analysis of behavior is described, and the steps to preventing undesirable behavior and promoting positive behavior and development of the individual are outlined. For a student with behaviors that impede learning (his or that of those around him), IDEA requires a positive behavior support plan developed by the team as part of an IEP. A trained behavior analyst should be involved in evaluating the student's behavior as well as developing the support plan. Training those who are responsible for implementation and the ongoing monitoring of the effectiveness of the plan are two areas that sometimes fall by the wayside in a busy school environment, but these are essential to the plan's success. Recognizing that needs and circumstances change, it is important that the plan be reevaluated and revised as needed.

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Positive Behavior Support

According to the Association of Positive Behavior Support, Positive Behavior Support (PBS) is a set of research-based strategies used to increase quality of life and decrease problem behavior by teaching new skills and making changes in a person's environment. Positive behavior support combines:

- **Valued outcomes** that are considered effective when interventions result in increases in an individual's success and personal satisfaction, and the enhancement of positive social interactions across work, academic, recreational, and community settings.
- **Behavioral and biomedical science:** Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) research demonstrates the importance of analyzing the interaction between behavior and environment, and recognizing that behavior is purposeful and can be influenced by environmental factors that can be changed. Biomedical science shows that information relating to an individual's psychiatric state and knowledge of other biological factors might help professionals understand the interaction between physiological and environmental factors that influence behavior.
- **Validated procedures** that use best practices and ongoing evaluation, using data collected to evaluate outcomes (program evaluation measures, qualitative research, surveys, rating scales, interviews, correlational analyses, direct observation, and self-report information).
- **Systems change to enhance quality of life and reduce problem behaviors,** recognizing that effective implementation of a plan will require that issues of resource allocation, staff development, team building and collaboration, and the appropriateness to the implementation team be considered and addressed in the development of the plan.

According to Northern Arizona University, Institute for Human Development Positive Behavior Support is an approach to helping people improve their difficult behavior that is based on four things:

- An **understanding** that people (even caregivers) do not control others, but seek to support others in their own behavior change process;
- A **belief** that there is a reason behind most difficult behavior, that people with difficult behavior should be treated with compassion and respect, and that they are entitled to lives of quality as well as effective services;
- The **application** of a large and growing body of knowledge about how to better understand people and make humane changes in their lives that can reduce the occurrence of difficult behavior; and
- A **conviction** to continually move away from coercion - the use of unpleasant events to manage behavior.

For more information consult:

Northern Arizona University's description of the mindset and framework for developing supports that are effective and positive (also in Spanish).

Association of Positive Behavior Support: which offers fact sheets on PBS Practices, PBS examples and case studies, and suggested readings.

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Supporting Organizational Skills

Between the executive function deficits (short term memory, attention, sequencing, etc.) and the language and social challenges of autism, keeping pace with the world around becomes extremely challenging. If a student is having a hard time processing sensory information, he may be distracted from organizing his thoughts and work.

Strict routines provide some order to the chaos a student with autism experiences. Predictability will reduce his anxiety. Unexpected changes to routines can cause significant distress and behaviors.

Organizers and schedules can help reduce anxiety and increase. Just as a busy teacher or business person might use a planner or smart phone to organize important dates and times, and a To DO list to stay on track, a visual schedule helps establish routines and keep the student focused, productive and informed of what is coming next.

- Provide a schedule of daily activities. Depending on the needs of the student, this can be photos, symbols or written information. Provide information on what is happening, in what order, and any changes to the regular routine (for example, a substitute teacher, assembly, field trip, or fire drill).

Sample Daily Schedule (Middle School Student)

Starting Bell	Subject	Where	Materials I Need	Ending Bell
8:10	Homeroom	Room 117		8:15
8:15	SRA Reading	Room 117	Purple SRA Books	8:59
9:04	English	Room 117	Spelling Book yellow folder	9:48
9:53	Science	Room 117		10:37
10:37	Nutrition	Outside	Snack	10:52
10:57	Social Science	Room 117	11:41	
11:46	Math	Room 117	Purple Folder	12:30
12:30	Lunch	Outside	Lunch OR Wallet	1:05
1:10	Reading	Library	Book	1:25
1:25	PE	Locker Room/Outside		2:10
2:15	Elective			3:00

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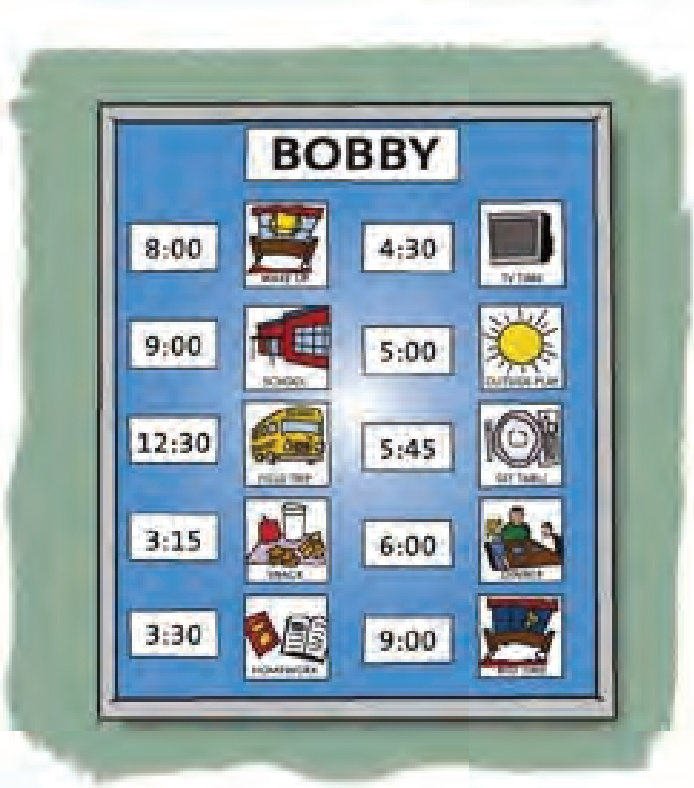
A sample visual schedule for a kindergarten student using Velcro pictures:



- Some students need more detail, such as the sequences of activities within a period.
  For example:
  Period 2 Reading:

  1. reading group, pages 22-25

  2. comprehension questions

  3. silent reading at my desk

- The simplest visual schedule format—readily available in any situation with paper and writing instrument:

  1. _____

  2. _____

  3. _____

- Create 'to do' lists and checklists for completing tasks or assignments.
- Streamline and teach to mastery, creating supports that can be generalized across activities (for example, Get worksheet. Take out a pencil. Write name on paper. Write date. Read directions)
- A student will need to be taught to reference his schedule, checking off activities as they are completed, and eventually using it to build independence for managing time and activities.

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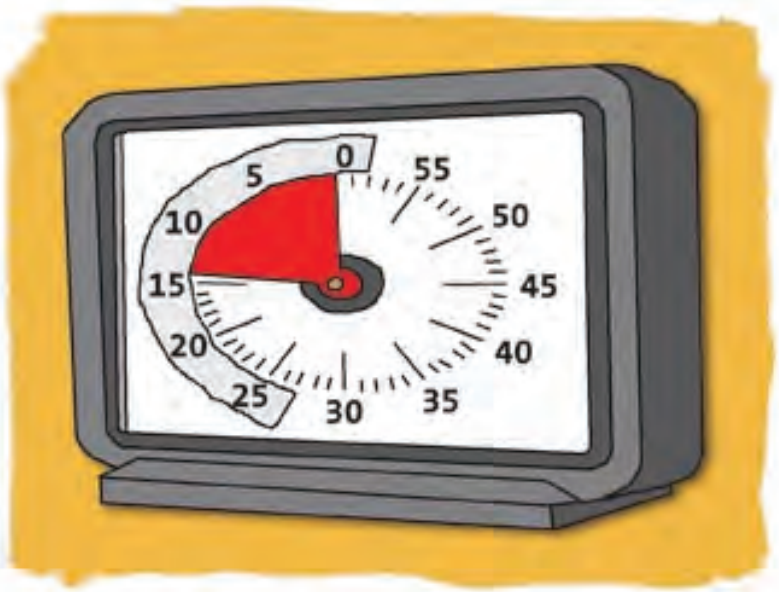
Organizing materials, time and activities

- Use binder organizers, color-coded folders by subject or teacher, etc.
- Use labeled desk organizers (divide the desk into areas, work to complete, text books, pencils/pens etc.) and classroom supports (for example, label the 'homework in' bin).
- Manage time and deadlines using tools like time organizers, visual calendars, tablets (such as iPads), smart phones, computers, countdown timers (www.Timetimer.com) or watches with alarms. Break long assignments into chunks and assign time frames for completing each chunk.



The TimeTimer™ shows how much time remains in an activity

- Schedule a regular (weekly?) time to clean and organize the workspace and update planners.
- Create organization for group activities and provide help or strategies for identifying the student's role within the group and his responsibilities.
- Create visual schedules for specific tasks and routines.
- Use schedules to prepare for transitions and teach flexibility and problem solving.
- Warn the student of changes in routine or upcoming transitions (e.g. 'in five minutes we need to clean up the paints and go to reading groups').
- Use social narratives to prepare for novel events - field trips, fire drills, assemblies etc.
- Organize problem solving, teaching step-by-step strategies to organize thoughts for problem solving, sequencing, etc.
- Work on flexibility and handling changes in very small steps, using visual supports and rewards, so that the student learns to control his anxiety because of these previous successes.

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Supporting Sensory Needs

Sensory integration provides a foundation for more complex learning and behavior. For most of us, effective sensory integration occurs automatically. For many people with autism, the process demands effort and attention with no guarantee of accuracy.

Sensory challenges can affect the student's ability to take in information, respond to requests, participate in social situations, write, participate in sports, and maintain a calm and ready to work state. Research is still exploring the impact and factors associated with sensory challenges in autism. Some research, anecdotal observations and personal accounts from people with autism have provided important insights.

Either through internal imbalances, or in response to environmental sensations, the sensory and emotional regulation of a person with autism can become overwhelmed and result in anxiety and distress. Working to maintain a 'modulated state' is an effective strategy for maximizing his ability to learn, maintain focus and reduce reactive behavior.

A trained occupational or physical therapist can provide help with sensory modulation (appropriate responses in relation to incoming sensations) and treatment for sensory dysfunction using evidence-based practices. If a student is suspected of having sensory integration issues, trained personnel should evaluate his needs.

The student's school team can be trained to use fun, play-based activities that support the student's needs and can be integrated throughout his program.

- Be aware of possible sensory issues and alter the environment where possible (for example, minimizing exposure to loud noises, using low odor dry erase markers, selective seating arrangements) to reduce their impact on a child's function.
- A sound sensitive student might find a gym teacher's whistle assaulting and the echoes of a busy locker room disturbing - pairing the student with a teacher not inclined to use a whistle, and allowing him to dress when the locker room is empty, might greatly improve the student's tolerance of, and interest in, Physical Education class.
- Some students find standing close to others difficult, so this would need to be addressed when deciding where to place a student in line when moving around the school or sitting in the cafeteria or classroom
- Students with autism may have difficulty looking at you and listening simultaneously (taking in information from auditory and visual modalities at the same time). From a social modeling aspect it is important to gain eye contact before speaking, but expect that a student might avert his eyes but still be listening.
- Highly decorated classrooms can be visually over-stimulating and distracting for some students.
- Some students may need to transition earlier than other students or may require a few minutes to unwind after walking in a noisy hallway.

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- Typical classroom occasions such as singing the happy birthday song or participating in less structured, noisy activities such as lunch, assemblies and indoor PE classes can put a child with sensory issues into distress mode. It might be helpful to allow the student an "out" in these instances, such as being the person responsible for getting napkins during a birthday celebration (allowing the child to walk to the cafeteria while the rest of the class sings) or being a behind the scenes 'production manager' for a assemblies.

- Use the sensory integration techniques recommended by the student's therapist, recognizing that certain sensory input is simulating, while other input can be calming. Be sure to understand which activities should be used at what times.
- The trained therapist should help to create a program to teach the student to recognize his emotional and sensory arousal levels and needs, and over time build self-monitoring and self-delivery of the appropriate sensory input or strategies for modulation.
- Use visual supports in teaching the student how to recognize his arousal state as well as his emotions. Provide options about what he might do to return to a 'ready to work' state.

There is much that can be done to help alter the environment and provide supports that will make the world a less overwhelming place for a student with autism.

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Web, Print & Video Resources

For additional books, websites, videos, and more, visit our Resource Library on the Autism Speaks website.

For comprehensive collections of publications related to autism and interventions, visit these publishers:

- Autism Asperger Publishing Company www.aapcpublishing.net
- Future Horizons, Inc. www.futurehorizons-autism.com
- Inclusion Press www.inclusion.com
- Jessica Kingsley Publishers www.jkp.com

Books

(For certain selections websites are listed where additional resources, books by the same author, on-line supports or downloads, information on associated curriculum and videos, etc. are available.)

Asperger's Syndrome

- *An Educator's Guide to Asperger Syndrome,*
  (Organization for Autism Research, 2005)
  Guidelines for inclusive classrooms, elementary through high school. Request or download free.
  www.researchautism.org

- *Asperger's and Girls*
  By Tony Attwood, Temple Grandin, Teresa Bolick and others
  (Future Horizons, Inc, 2006)
  www.tonyattwood.com.au/

- *The Complete Guide to Asperger's Syndrome*
  By Tony Attwood (Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2006)
  Diagnosis, behavioral patterns and practical strategies and supports.
  www.tonyattwood.com.au/

- *The OASIS Guide to Asperger Syndrome:*
  Completely Revised and Updated: Advice, Support, Insight and Inspiration
  By Patricia Bashe and Barbara Kirby (Crown, 2005)
  www.aspergersyndrome.org

- *Perfect Targets; Asperger Syndrome and Bullying;*
  Practical Solutions for Surviving the Social World
  By Rebekah Heinrichs (Autism Asperger Publishing Company, 2003)

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Inclusion and Social Supports

- *All My Life's a Circle; Using the Tools: Circles, MAPS & PATHS*
  By M. Falvey, M. Forest, J. Pearpoint & R. Rosenberg (Inclusion Press, 2003) Inclusion supports and guides for person-centered planning. Tools for transition planning.
  www.inclusion.com
- *Do-Watch-Listen-Say: Social and Communication Intervention for Children with Autism*
  By Kathleen Ann Quill (Paul H. Brookes, 2000)
  www.brookespublishing.com
- *Incorporating Social Goals in the Classroom:*
  A Guide for Teachers and Parents of Children with High-Functioning Autism and Asperger Syndrome
  By Rebecca A. Moyes (Jessica Kingsley, 2001)
  Outlines social deficits, and offers strategies and lesson plans.
- *Out and About, Preparing Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders to Participate in Their Communities*
  By Jill Hudson, Amy Bixler Coffin (Autism Asperger Publishing Company, 2007)
  Easy to read, practical explanations and examples of simple and effective strategies.
- *Power Cards: Using Special Interests to Motivate Children and Youth with Asperger Syndrome and Autism*
  By Elisa Gagnon (Autism Asperger Publishing Company, 2001)
- *Skillstreaming in Early Childhood; New Strategies and Perspectives for Teach Prosocial Skills*
  Skillstreaming the Elementary School Child; New Strategies and Perspectives for Teaching Prosocial Skills
  Skillstreaming the Adolescent; New Strategies and Perspectives for Teaching Prosocial Skills
  By Dr. Ellen McGinnis, Dr. Arnold P. Goldstein (Research Press, various)
  www.skillstreaming.com
- *Social Relationships and Peer Support, Second Edition*
  By Rachel Janney, Ph.D. and Martha E. Snell (Brookes Publishing, 2006)
- *The Hidden Curriculum: Practical Solutions for Understanding Unstated Rules in Social Situations*
  By Brenda Smith Myles, Melissa L. Trautman, and Ronda L. Schelevan
  (Autism Aspergers Publishing Company, 2004)
- *The New Social Stories: Illustrated Edition*
  By Carol Gray (Future Horizons, 2000)
  www.thegraycenter.org
- Article: *Toward a Behavior of Reciprocity*
  By Morton Ann Gernsbacher
  http://psych.wisc.edu/lang/MGcover.html
- *With Open Arms; Creating School Communities of Support for Kids with Social Challenges Using Circle of Friends, Extracurricular Activities, and Learning Teams*
  By Mary Schleider, M.S. (Autism Aspergers Publishing Company, 2007)
  www.schoolswithopenarms.com
- *You're Going to Love This Kid: Teaching Students with Autism in the Inclusive Classroom*
  By Paula Kluth, Ph.D. (Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2003)
  www.paulakluth.com

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Educational Interventions and Strategies

- *1001 Great Ideas for Teaching and Raising Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder*
  By Veronica Zysk and Ellen Notbohm (Future Horizons, 2004)
  www.ellennotbohm.com

- *Activity Schedules for Children with Autism: Teaching Independent Behavior*
  By Lynn E. McClannahan and Patricia J. Krantz, Ph.D. (Woodbine House, 1999)

- *An Educator's Guide to Autism*
  (Organization for Autism Research, 2004)
  Guidelines for inclusive classrooms, elementary through high school. Request or download free.
  www.researchautism.org

- *How to be a Para Pro; A Comprehensive Training Manual for Paraprofessionals*
  By Diane Twachtman-Cullen
  (Starfish Specialty Press, 2006)
  www.starfishpress.com

- *Solving Behavior Problems in Autism*
  By Linda Hodgdon (Quirk Roberts Publishing, 1999)
  www.usevisualstrategies.com

- *Strategies at Hand; Quick and Handy Strategies for Working with Students on the Autism Spectrum*
  By Robin D. Brewer, Ed.D. and Tracy G. Mueller, Ph.D.
  (Autism Asperger Publishing Company, 2008)

- *Teach Me Language: A Language Manual for Children with Autism, Asperger's Syndrome and Related Developmental Disorders*
  By Sabrina K. Freeman, Lorelei Dake and Isaac Tamir
  (Skf Books, 1997)

- *Ten Things Your Student with Autism Wishes You Knew*
  By Ellen Notbohm (Future Horizons, 2006)
  www.ellennotbohm.com
  Article version has also been translated into Spanish, available by request through website.

- *The Puzzle of Autism: What Educators Need to Know*
  National Education Association strategic intervention guide that can be downloaded from the NEA website.
  www.nea.org/home/18459.htm

- *Visual Strategies for Improving Communication; Practical Supports for School and Home*
  By Linda Hodgdon (Quirk Roberts Publishing, 1995)
  www.usevisualstrategies.com
  Also available in Spanish: Estrategias Visuales para Mejorar la Comunicación

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Perspective from Individuals with Autism

- *Born On A Blue Day, A Memoir of Asperger's and an Extraordinary Mind*
  By Daniel Tammet (Simon & Schuster Adult Publishing Group, 2007)
  www.optimnem.co.uk
- *Nobody Nowhere: The Extraordinary Autobiography of an Autistic*
  By Donna Williams (Avon, 1994)
- *Pretending to Be Normal: Living with Asperger's Syndrome*
  By Liane Holliday Willey (Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 1999)
- *The Autism Answer Book*
  By William Stillman
  www.williamstillman.com
- *Thinking in Pictures, Expanded Edition: My Life with Autism*
  By Temple Grandin (Vintage, 2006)
  www.templegrandin.com

Sensory Issues

- *Answers to Questions Teachers Ask About Sensory Integration*
  By Jane Koomar, Carol Kranowitz and others (Future Horizons, 2001)
  www.sensoryresources.com
- *How Does Your Engine Run? A Leader's Guide to The Alert Program for Self- Regulation*
  Mary Sue Williams and Sherry Shellenberger (TherapyWorksInc, 1996)
  www.alertprogram.com
- *Just take a Bite: Easy, Effective Answers to Food Aversions and Eating Challenges*
  By Lori Ernsperger and Tania Stegen-Hanson (Future Horizons, 2004)
- *Playing, Laughing and Learning with Children on the Autism Spectrum: A Practical Resource of Play Ideas for Parents and Carers*
  By Julia Moor (Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2002)
- *Raising a Sensory Smart Child: The Definitive Handbook for Helping Your Child with Sensory Integration Issues*
  By Lindsey Biel and Nancy Peske (Penguin, 2005)
  www.sensorysmarts.com
- *The Out-of-Sync Child: Recognizing and Coping with Sensory Integrations Dysfunctions*
  By Carol Kranowitz (Perigee Trade, 1998)
  www.out-of-sync-child.com
  Publications available in multiple languages.

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Specific Issues

- *A Guide for Transition to Adulthood*
  (Organization for Autism Research, 2006) Request or download free.
  www.researchautism.org

- *Family Life and Sexual Health (F.L.A.S.H.) curriculum*
  Printed curriculum or download options, including lesson plans for special education.
  www.kingcounty.gov/healthservices/health/personal/famplan/educators/FLASH.aspx

- *Girls Growing Up on the Autism Spectrum;*
  What Parents and Professionals Should Know about the Pre-teen and Teenage Years
  By Shana Nichols
  (Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2008)

- *Girls Under the Umbrella of Autism Spectrum Disorders;*
  Practical Solutions for Addressing Everyday Challenges
  By Lori Ernsperger, Ph.D. and Danielle Wendel
  (Autism Asperger Publishing Company, 2007)

- *Gray's Guide to Bullying (Spring 2004 Jenison Autism Journal)*
  By Carol Gray
  www.thegraycenter.org

- *How Well Does Your IEP Measure Up? Quality Indicators for Effective Service Delivery*
  By Diane Twachtman-Cullen PhD and Jennifer Twachtman-Reilly
  www.starfishpress.com

- *Toilet Training for Individuals with Autism and Related Disorders*
  By Maria Wheeler
  (Future Horizons, 2004)

- *Sexuality Education for Children and Adolescents with Developmental Disabilities.*
  By DiAnn L Baxley and Anna Zendell
  (Florida Developmental Disabilities Council, 2005)

- *Wrightslaw: From Emotions to Advocacy - The Special Education Survival Guide, 2nd Edition*
  By Pam Wright and Pete Wright
  (Harbor House Law Press, 2007)
  www.wrightslaw.com

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Books for Students with Autism, Siblings, Peers

- *A is for Autism, F is for Friend: A Kid's Book for Making Friends with a Child Who Has Autism*
  By Joanna Keating-Velasco (Autism Asperger Publishing Company, 2007)
  www.aisforautism.net
- *Different Like Me: My Book of Autism Heroes*
  By Jennifer Elder (Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2006)
- *Do You Understand Me? My Life, My Thoughts, My Autism Spectrum Disorder*
  By Sofie Koborg Brosen (Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2006)
- *Everybody is Different: A Book for Young People who have Brothers or Sisters with Autism*
  By Fiona Bleach (Autism Asperger Publishing Company, 2002)
- *Join In and Play (Learning to Get Along); Listen and Learn; etc.*
  By Cheri J. Meiners (Free Spirit Publishing, various)
  www.freespirit.com
- *My Friend with Autism: A Coloring Book for Peers and Siblings*
  By Beverly Bishop (Future Horizons, 2003)
- *Taking Care of Myself: A Hygiene, Puberty and Personal Curriculum for Young People with Autism (Illustrated)*
  By Mary Wrobel (Future Horizons, 2003)
- *The Autism Acceptance Book; Being a Friend to Someone with Autism By Ellen Sabin*
  (Watering Can Press, 2006)
  www.wateringcanpress.com
- *The Mind That's Mine*
  By Melvin D. Levine, Carl Swartz, Melissa Wakely (All Kinds of Minds, 1997)
  www.allkindsofminds.org
- *The Sixth Sense II*
  By Carol Gray (Future Horizons, 2002)
  www.thegraycenter.org
- *The Social Skills Picture Book; Teaching Play, Emotion and Communication to Children with Autism*
  By Jed Baker, Ph.D. (Future Horizons, 2001)
  www.jedbaker.com
- *The Social Skills Picture Book for High School and Beyond*
  By Dr. Jed Baker (Future Horizons, 2006)
  www.jedbaker.com
- *Trevor, Trevor*
  By Diane-Twachtman-Cullen
  www.starfishpress.com
- *What did you say? What did you mean? An illustrated guide to understanding metaphors*
  By Jude Welton (Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2003)
- *Wings of Epoh*
  By Gerda Weissman Klein (FableVision/SARRC, 2008)
  www.fablevision.com

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Additional Helpful Websites

- **Association for Positive Behavior Support**
  Research information, application strategies, information on school-wide PBS programs, fact sheet summaries of PBS practices and a section on autism. Case study examples.
  www.apbs.org
- **Autism Internet Modules (AIM)**
  Free interactive empirically-based training modules on autism topics.
  Presented in small increments with pre/post testing.
  www.autisminternetmodules.org
- **Autism Research Institute**
  www.autism.com
- **Autism Society of America**
  www.Autism-Society.org
- **Autism Speaks**
  - Glossary – from 100 Day Kit
  - Resource Guide
  - Resource Library
  - Spanish Language Resources
  - Video Glossary

  www.AutismSpeaks.org
- **Dennis Debbaudt's Autism Risk & Safety Management**
  Information & Resources for Law Enforcement, First Responders, Parents, Educators and Care Providers
  www.autismriskmanagement.com
- **Do2Learn**
  Easy to use and downloadable resources including social games, organizational tools, picture cards, etc.
  www.do2learn.com
- **James Stanfield**
  Curriculum and videos for work, social and life skills, conflict management and sex/relationship education.
  www.stanfield.com
- **Kansas Autism Spectrum Disorders**
  Free examples and banks of visual strategies, social narratives and power cards, and podcasts of speakers such as Linda Hodgdon and Paula Kluth.
  http://kansasasd.com
- **Mayer-Johnson**
  Boardmaker software and other products, as well as web-based trainings, for making symbol-based communication and educational materials.
  www.mayer-johnson.com
- **My IEP ToolKit™**
  This simple, easy-to-use system helps you gather and organize your paperwork so you can use it to advocate for your child.
  http://organized4kids.com/my-iep-toolkit/
- **National Professional Development Center on Autism Spectrum Disorders**
  http://autismpdc.fpg.unc.edu
- **Pyramid Educational Consultants**
  Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS)
  www.pecs.com
- **Silver Lining Multimedia**
  Picture This photo software and other tools and supports for visual learners.
  www.silverliningmm.com
- **The SPD Foundation**
  Information on sensory processing disorder.
  www.spdfoundation.net

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Videos/DVDs

- *ASD Video Glossary*
  Autism Speaks' glossary of terms commonly associated with the diagnosis and features of autism.
- *Autism Everyday link to short version*
  A poignant view of the challenges of raising a child with autism.
- *Autism, the Musical*
  Documentary film about children with autism, their families and their promise.
  www.autismthemusical.com
- *Children with Autism: One Teacher's Perspective*
  Documentary profiling a teacher's experience and views from middle school students with autism. Free on-line.
  www.modelmekids.com/autism-documentary.html
- **FRIEND** (Fostering Relationships in Early Network Development) Program Awareness and strategy tool and related materials designed to help peers support a classmate with autism, developed by the Southwest Autism Research & Resource Center (SARRC).
  www.autismcenter.org
- *Including Samuel*
  Documentary film about including children with disabilities; free 12-minute trailer on the website.
  www.includingsamuel.com
- **Model Me Kids: Videos for Modeling Social Skills**
  A collection of videos and social skills training tools.
  www.modelmekids.com
- *Normal People Scare Me: A Film About Autism*
  From a young film maker with autism.
  www.normalfilms.com
- **Skillstreaming**
  Prosocial skill programs staff training videos
  www.skillstreaming.com
- *SOULS: Beneath and Beyond Autism*
  Beautiful black and white photos and a message that there is more to individuals with autism than first impressions might reveal.
  http://anatomicallycorrect.org/soulsbeneathbeyondautism.htm
- *Storymovies*
  Carol Gray's Social Stories TM acted out by real children, parents and teachers.
  www.storymovies.com
- *The Visual Strategies Workshop*
  5 video set filmed live at a presentation of Linda Hodgdon's popular workshop.
  www.usevisualstrategies.com/P-video1.html
- *Understanding Asperger Syndrome: A Professor's Guide*
  12-minute video for use by college students to educate professors and teaching staff about the disorder. Free viewing.
  www.researchautism.org/resources/AspergerDVDSeries.asp
- *Wings of Epoh*
  Video, book and curriculum designed to teach social understanding and acceptance of differences.
  http://shop.wingsofepoh.org
- *Writing Social Stories with Carol Gray–DVD and Booklet*
  http://thegraycenter.org/social-stories/how-to-write-social-stories
- *Carol Gray's three hour social stories workshop.*
  www.thegraycenter.org

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AUTISM SPEAKS®
It's time to listen.

Have more questions or need assistance?
Please contact the Autism Response Team for
Information, Resources and Tools.

TOLL FREE: 888-AUTISM2 (288-4762)

EN ESPANOL: 888-772-9050

Email: FAMILYSERVICES@AUTISMSPEAKS.ORG

WWW.AUTISMSPEAKS.ORG

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Our Mission

At Autism Speaks, our goal is to change the future for all who struggle with autism spectrum disorders.

We are dedicated to funding global biomedical research into the causes, prevention, treatments, and cure for autism; to raising public awareness about autism and its effects on individuals, families, and society; and to bringing hope to all who deal with the hardships of this disorder. We are committed to raising the funds necessary to support these goals.

Autism Speaks aims to bring the autism community together as one strong voice to urge the government and private sector to listen to our concerns and take action to address this urgent global health crisis. It is our firm belief that, working together, we will find the missing pieces of the puzzle.

AUTISM SPEAKS®

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