





So, You Have a Student Who Has

**AUTISM**

**Definitions, Strategies & Suggestions for How to Help Them  
to Succeed**

**Guide for classroom teachers and paraprofessionals**

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**Autism** is a neural-biological and a social-communication disorder affecting the way an individual's brain works, which impacts how the body functions. It disrupts the way a child learns and socializes. The cause of autism is still unknown, but there is a strong genetic component to autism. Autism is a spectrum disorder (ASD) that includes: autism, pervasive developmental disorder not otherwise specified (PDD-NOS), and Asperger Syndrome. The *core deficits of autism* are problems with *communication and socialization*.

People with autism range from nearly indistinguishable, to high functioning, to those who are profoundly impaired. Not all people with ASD have the same problems, or at least, they don't have all of the problems to the same degree. According to the United States Department of Education, ASD represent the fastest growing diagnosis within the disability category of Pervasive Developmental Disorders (PDD). Thus, more students with ASD will be found in every public school. At this time, 2010, approximately 1,500,000 people in the US have been diagnosed with an autism spectrum disorder.

The **Diagnostic Statistical Manual - IV (DSM-IV)**, which is used by physicians for making any medical diagnoses, provides five deficit areas to consider as diagnostic criteria for identifying individuals with ASD. Diagnostic Criteria for Autistic Disorder includes: A total of 6 (or more) items from (A), (B), and (C), with at least two from (A), and one each from (B) and (C)

**I A.** Qualitative impairment in social interaction, as manifested by at least two of the following:

1. Marked impairments in the use of multiple nonverbal behaviors such as eye-to-eye gaze, facial expression, body posture, and gestures to regulate social interaction.
2. Failure to develop peer relationships appropriate to developmental level.  
A lack of spontaneous seeking to share enjoyment, interests, or achievements with other people, (a lack of showing, bringing, or pointing out objects of interest to others).
3. Lack of social or emotional reciprocity ( Note: The description, it gives the following examples: not actively participating in simple social play or games, preferring solitary activities, or involving others in activities only as tools or "mechanical" aids ).

**B.** Qualitative impairments in communication as manifested by at least 1of the following:

1. Delay in or total lack of, the development of spoken language (not accompanied by an attempt to compensate through alternative modes of communication such as gesture or mime).
2. In individuals with adequate speech, marked impairment in the ability to initiate or sustain a conversation with others.
3. Stereotyped and repetitive use of language or idiosyncratic language.
4. Lack of varied, spontaneous make-believe play or social imitative play appropriate to their developmental level.

**C.** Restricted repetitive and stereotyped patterns of behavior, interests and activities, as manifested by at least 2 of the following:

1. Encompassing preoccupation with one or more stereotyped and restricted patterns of interest that are abnormal either in intensity or focus.
2. Apparently inflexible adherence to specific, nonfunctional routines or rituals
3. Stereotyped and repetitive motor mannerisms (e.g. hand or finger flapping or twisting, or complex whole-body movements)

## 4. Persistent preoccupation with parts of objects.

(II) Delays or abnormal functioning in at least one of the following areas, with onset prior to age 3 years:

- (A) Social interaction
- (B) Language as used in social communication
- (C) Symbolic or imaginative play

(III) The disturbance is not better accounted for by Rett's Disorder or Childhood Disintegrative Disorder (both degenerative disorders).

The **Florida State Department of Education** has given schools a list of **criteria** that a student must meet in order for that student to be considered for educational eligibility under Exceptional Student Education (ESE) **for Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)**. To meet eligibility criteria, there must be evidence of all of the following:

- An uneven developmental profile across the domains of language, social interaction, adaptive behavior, and/or cognitive skills.
- Impairment in social interaction evidenced by delayed, absent, or atypical ability to relate to people or the environment.
- Impairment in verbal and/or nonverbal language or social communication skills.
- Restricted repetitive and/or stereotyped patterns of behavior, interests, or activities.

*In Florida, a student may meet an educational exceptionality for ASD based on:*

- At least two documented and dated behavioral observations.
- A comprehensive social/developmental history addressing core features of autism spectrum disorder.
- A comprehensive psychological evaluation, including educational assessments (reading, spelling and math).
- A comprehensive speech/language evaluation (including a pragmatic assessment or completed checklist).
- Meeting the eligibility criteria as previously stated.
- Student demonstrates a need for special education.
- Medical information provided by a licensed physician shall be considered.

Students presenting with ASD based on a medical diagnosis may qualify for ESE services on an individual education plan (IEP) under pervasive development disorder (PDD), language impaired (LI), specific learning disability (SLD), other health impaired (OHI), or ASD if they have met FL department of education (DOE) criteria for this exceptionality. Students with an exceptionality of ASD will have varying degrees of difficulty and various combinations of problems associated with their autism/Asperger. However, when they are young, most will exhibit some degree of problems with: eye contact, joint attention (2 or more people paying attention to the same thing/topic at the same time), verbal turn-taking (reciprocal conversation) and sensory integration, and/or motor processing.

In Polk County Public Schools, students may be in a variety of settings all based on their individual education needs and the decisions of each student's IEP team. Those settings include:

- Regular Education Classrooms
- Regular Education Inclusion Classrooms with/without additional support
- Some time in a Regular Education Classroom and some in an ESE Resource Classroom
- ESE Resource Classroom
- Varying Exceptionality Classroom
- Self-contained Autism Classrooms

**The components of autism - An** individual on the autism spectrum will have varying degrees of difficulty with: communication; social skills, including social interaction; restricted repetitive thoughts, interests, or actions; and for most individuals on the autism spectrum, sensory integration problems. These students often have difficulty with executive functioning (they are unable to plan any plan or to foresee the consequences of their actions). Due to all of their problems with these skills, these students often have varying degrees of difficulty with their behavior. Some of the students on the spectrum will exhibit some or many of the stereotypical behaviors associated with autism, including:

- Resisting physical contact
- Using toys and other objects inappropriately
- Avoiding eye contact or looking sideways at a person
- Flapping hands/fingers in front of face or at sides
- Doing certain things over and over, (ritualistically)
- Doing certain tasks repetitively, ritualistically
- Turning in circles while standing or sitting
- Rocking back and forth or side-to-side
- Rapid darting or lunging movements
- Making sounds, mouth noises, or blowing saliva bubbles for self-stimulation
- Repeating/echoing words (echolalia can be immediate or delayed)
- Speaking in an abnormal tone/rhythm
- Responding inappropriately to simple commands
- Not responding to questions
- Talking only when it is very meaningful to the child
- Licking/smelling objects
- Unable to imitate peers in play
- Laughing/crying inappropriately
- Unable to accept any change to their routine
- Lining up objects in orderly fashion and getting upset if the order is disturbed
- Exhibiting low muscle tone, may slump, slouch, and lean in chair or on desk
- Toe-walking or awkward gait
- Clumsiness
- Poor fine motor skill development
- Poor attention span



**Asperger Syndrome** is included on the autism spectrum, but students with Asperger's have average to superior cognitive skills and do not usually have a significant delay in language development. They usually start talking at the same age as typically developing peers. Their biggest problem with communication is their difficulty understanding and using *pragmatic language* appropriately. These students may have some stereotypical behaviors and usually have varied degrees of impaired social skills. They also typically have varying degrees of problems with sensory integration.

**Communication** - Regardless of where the student with *ASD* falls on the autism continuum, communication is always a deficit area. *Communication deficits* may impact the ability to speak, listening and spoken language, pragmatic language, and overall language skills. Included in the communication deficit is having difficulty understanding (from mild to severe) the hidden curriculum.

These students are visual learners who learn best when they can see the information, including: use of signs, pictures, charts, graphs, and written language. Some students with ASD are nonverbal, functionally nonverbal (speak a few words, but have difficulty getting their needs met), echolalic, or hyper-verbal (overly talkative). *Echolalia* involves use of repetitive vocalizations (immediate or delayed – may include scripts from videos, movies, TV and sound very sophisticated). *Hyper-verbal* students may talk all the time, but be unable to get to the point, or to demonstrate understanding of concepts.

Speech is the most complex fine-motor movement we produce as human beings. There are 12 pairs of cranial nerves in your brain stem. It takes 6 pairs working together to innervate the muscles of the jaw, lips, tongue, face, neck, larynx and vocal folds in order for speech to be produced. A problem with any of these 6 cranial nerves can result in either a problem for the brain to plan the motor movements (*APRAXIA*) or a problem with the transmission of the signals necessary for speech (*DYSARTHRIA*). Apraxia, dysarthria, dislike for the feel of where their tongue is supposed to touch in their mouth to make speech sounds, and/or lack of motivation will result in making speech challenging and sometimes impossible for some students.

**Listening skills** are also referred to as receptive language. **Receptive language** is the ability to understand spoken and written communication as well as gestures. Most students with ASD have some to significant problems with auditory attention, auditory figure-ground (a child's ability to pay attention to the person speaking in the presence of background noise), auditory processing (what happens when your brain recognizes and interprets the sounds around you), and/or auditory memory (attention, listening, and short/long term recall of auditory information). Students with ASD often have problems with delayed auditory processing and need extra time to process auditory information. Auditory overload can result in auditory nerve fatigue so that auditory information is temporarily tuned out by the brain. Please consult with the student's speech-language pathologist and/or the ESE teacher to learn how to break down listening into individual components and then, reinforce each component.

Receptive language includes understanding **nonverbal communication** that creates or represents meaning from information gained by watching and understanding someone's body language

including posture (slouching, crossing your arms over your chest, or leaning on one hand), facial expressions, gestures (waving, pointing, or touching), tone of voice, volume of voice, and the understanding and use of personal space. The amount of information conveyed through just spoken or verbal communication, through vocal tone, volume, and other nonverbal means varies from situation to situation. One researcher, Albert Mehrabian [*Nonverbal Communication* (Chicago: Aldine-Atherton, 1972)] found that only about 7% of the emotional meaning of a message was communicated explicitly through speech. He found that roughly 38% of the information was communicated through use of the person's vocal tone and volume, while roughly 55% of information was communicated through nonverbal means including gestures, body language, and facial expressions.

**Spoken Language, also referred to as expressive language** is the ability to use speech and gestures and to follow the rules of speech and language to convey meaning. Understanding receptive language including nonverbal communication as well as understanding and using expressive language can create major challenges for a student with ASD. Students with ASD demonstrate a variety of difficulties using expressive language. Some students with ASD will:

- Repeat sounds and dialogue word for word from movies, videos, computer games, or conversations that are beyond the level of their understanding. Their ability to use sophisticated vocabulary often reflects superior memory rather than understanding of the rules of language.
- Memorize conversations or dialogue and use this in an attempt to communicate. Example: A student who feels sick might say, "Stick out your tongue and say "ah" to indicate that he/she doesn't feel well.
- Have difficulty making sense out of the concept of time, including: yesterday, today, tomorrow, clock time, and time management.
- Hear everything, so be careful of what you say within hearing distance of these students or you may hear them repeating you word for word.
- Have trouble with expressive language that directly relates to their problems with comprehension, including difficulty:
  - understanding and using pronouns
  - answering and/or asking WH questions
  - understanding more than 1 meaning for a word
  - generalizing what they have learned from one setting to another
  - understanding: "yes" or "no"

**Pragmatics** is the social use of language. Many if not most people with ASD have at least some problems with pragmatics. Pragmatics includes 3 major communication skills: using language for different purposes, changing language according to the listener's needs, and ability to follow rules.

**Using language** for different purposes, such as:

- Greetings (hello, goodbye)
- Informing (I'm going to sharpen my pencil)
- Demanding (Give me chocolate milk!)
- Promising (I will get you a cookie.)
- Requesting (Cookie, please.)

**Changing language** according to the listener's needs/situation:

- Talking differently to a peer than to a teacher
- Providing background information to an unfamiliar listener
- Speaking differently in the classroom than on the playground
- Understand the rules of conversation (turn taking, topic maintenance, persuasion, etc. Such as, I need to get someone's attention before I speak.)

**Following rules** includes understanding that other people have their own thoughts and feelings (theory of mind). Example: a teacher giving a "meaningful look" to students to be quiet and most students would know to stop talking.

Following rules includes:

- Understanding of the value of small talk
- Turn taking in conversation
- Topic introduction, maintenance, and change
- Topic repair when misunderstood
- Use of appropriate verbal and nonverbal signals
- Use of facial expressions and eye contact when engaged in conversations
- Ability to read non verbal cues or body language and get the "hints" used through nonverbal communication from eye gaze to body movements.
- Understanding the use of abstract, figurative language, inference (information that is not literal/factual), humor, sarcasm, and multiple meanings.
- Ability to process verbal information quickly to understand new concepts, to follow multi-step directions, to formulate a response, etc.
- Sequencing information or steps while talking to you or during a task
- Understanding proximity to another person. This refers to the distance or space we automatically use when standing or sitting near someone.

**Proximity or PERSONAL SPACE** - Research has resulted in the classification of 4 distinct interpersonal space zones. Also referred to as invisible space bubbles or boundaries, these zones mark our use of an invisible, comfortable, and socially acceptable distance of space between us and other people. These zones help us to know where to stand or sit in relationship to others. Being too close or too far away from others may make us feel more relaxed or more anxious. Standing or sitting too close to someone or touching someone who doesn't want to be touched is an invasion of their space bubble and of their privacy. Invading their space may lead to unexpected consequences such as the person yelling at you or complaining about you.

**The 4 zones & space bubble/boundary rules are:**

- 1. Intimate zone – 0" to 18"**
- 2. Personal zone – 18" to 3'**
- 3. Social zone – 4' to 12'**
- 4. Public zone - > 12'**

**Adjustable, Flexible Space Bubble Zones** - People change or adjust their space bubble from one zone to another depending on where they are, who they are with, and how well they know the people they are with. Sometimes, people have to accept less personal space or an invasion of their personal space if it can't be avoided, such as walking in crowded hallway, going to a concert, or attending a sporting event where seats are close together. Although invisible, a space

bubble boundary is real and it is important to treat other people's space bubbles with care and respect. Just as you would knock and wait to be invited into someone's home, you need to understand and to respect an individual's space bubble and zone. It is not polite to invade space zones without asking. If you wanted to sit closer to another student than might be acceptable, ask the person if you can sit there.



**The intimate zone** - you may get **very close (0-18")** with very good friends or family in certain situations and in certain places **IF** both of you want to get this close. In the intimate zone, there is **a good probability of touching**. In most instances, it is **NOT** appropriate to use the intimate zone in public settings such as school unless you are whispering or talking very quietly to a friend or family member. Hugging should be reserved for people we are very close to, such as our families. Usually, hugging is reserved for home, when getting in or out of the car, when you have done something that made your parents or friends proud, or when you have been hurt. Examples of getting into your intimate space zone in public may include: something very special happening such as doing great in a play, or if someone is very upset over something and may need a quick hug to feel better.



### No touch, no hug zone

**Personal zone** – Our personal zone is the distance we use when having a personal conversation with family, friends, teachers, or classmates (during class discussions, cooperative groupings, and having 1:1 conversations). We normally maintain a personal zone distance of 18" to 3' between us and them. One of the hidden rules of life is that we do not touch or hug people when in this zone. While it may be appropriate to hug your elementary school teacher, it is not socially appropriate to hug a middle school or high school teacher. It is also inappropriate to touch your peers because it makes them uncomfortable.



The **social space zone (4' to 12')** is the space bubble we use when walking near someone you are familiar with, but not real friendly with (called an acquaintance), walking near people you don't really know, walking through school hallways, sitting near and talking to people more formally at meetings, and waiting your turn with strangers in a line.

The **public space zone – 12' to 25'** away from people is the approximate distance between an audience and a speaker in a more formal setting such as listening to a public speaker. Public distance is also for situations where we are surrounded by strangers such as on a bus or train. On a bus, train, or airplane, we are forced to sit closer to people than we may feel comfortable with due to the placement of the seats. When people invade this distance, we might feel scared, threatened or unsafe.



**My Examples of how close I can get to others in the 4 zones include:**

1. **Intimate zone – 0" to 18"** \_\_\_\_\_
2. **Personal zone – 18" to 3'** \_\_\_\_\_
3. **Social zone – 4' to 12'** \_\_\_\_\_
4. **Public zone - > 12'** \_\_\_\_\_

These rules vary across and within cultures. An individual with pragmatic problems may say inappropriate or unrelated things during conversations, talk non-stop using circumlocution (talking all around the topic because they can't get to the point), and/or appear to be rude. Difficulty with pragmatics directly impacts a student's social acceptance. Peers may avoid having conversations with an individual with a pragmatic disorder, or consider the student to be "weird" and just avoid the student all together. Social isolation is a fact for these students and later in life, severe anxiety, depression, and even attempted suicide may become all too real for some people with ASD.

Besides the production of the fine-motor aspect of speech and pragmatics, students with ASD experience **many other communication problems including:**

- Working harder to focus and produce work
- Needing extra time to start or to complete tasks
- Difficulty generalizing knowledge from one setting to another
- Keeping up the pace of a classroom
- Requiring more breaks
- Being easily stressed
- Overwhelmed by too much sensory input
- Difficulty with organizational skills
- Often thinking from specific to general (neurotypicals - people with normal brain development & functioning think general to specific) so they often focus in on one or more details of something, but miss the big picture
- Having problems with auditory attention that may lead to problems with auditory memory
- Not understanding the point of small talk. (Their conversations are logical and have a purpose.)
- Having repetitive thoughts and talking about the same thing/things over and over
- Speaking in very formal or adult-like speech, but not understand everything they say
- Difficulty following directions
- Not being able to understand that others have feelings, and if they do understand, it's on a basic level such as happy, sad, or mad
- Difficulty predicting outcomes of their own actions or of characters in a story
- **Difficulty with** theory of mind (not understanding that other people have their own thoughts, different points of view, and feelings, so they often appear to be uncaring or rude to others). Example: a teacher giving a "meaningful look" to students to be quiet would most likely not be noticed or interpreted for its intent by a student with autism unless the student had been taught what that particular look meant.
- Use of facial expressions and eye contact – kids with ASD may stare at another person, or avoid making or maintaining eye contact, especially when close to another person because direct eye contact makes them feel uncomfortable. They often use their peripheral vision.
- Difficulty reading non-verbal cues or body language and thus, they don't get the "hints" we use every day through nonverbal communication from eye gaze to body movements, so they don't get the full message.
- Not understanding use of abstract, figurative language, inference (information that is not literal/factual), or multiple meanings - may not understand humor, sarcasm, etc.
- Needing extra processing or "wait" time in order to understand new concepts, to follow multi-step directions, to formulate a response, etc.
- Not understanding that there's a **hidden curriculum** which everyone seems to understand except for people, including those with ASD who have difficulty with social skills.

The *hidden curriculum* is information not directly taught, but information that we all assume that everyone knows. The hidden curriculum includes unstated "rules" or customs that change

depending on one's gender, culture, circumstances, and other variables. Inability to understand these rules makes the world confusing and causes people with ASD to feel isolated, weird, depressed, and even angry because they don't UNDERSTAND what they have done and why they can't fit in. All they get is that somehow they have committed another "social sin".

Example: A 1<sup>st</sup> grade student may say "Hi" to someone they know in the hallway and the individual is expected to respond with a, "Hi." However, if an adult stranger says, "HI" to someone outside of school, the hidden rule is to not respond at all, but to walk away. Thus, to the student with ASD, these 2 circumstances appear to be conflicting rules. Inability to understand the hidden curriculum negatively impacts their social skill development and negatively impacts them in all aspects of their lives, not just their education. Other hidden rules include:

- A student does not report other children to the teacher unless someone is in danger of getting hurt
- A student does not insist that other children follow the rules – that is the teacher's job
- You do not point out people's mistakes in a group
- You don't stand too close to people
- You change the formality of your words and the tone of your voice depending on who you are talking to
- Males do not look at each other in the restroom
- You can think whatever you want, but you are expected to not say those things all of the time
- Teachers don't all teach the same way or have the same rules for you to follow
- In a classroom, you are expected to organize yourself and your own materials, to follow the teacher's lead and to dress pretty much like your peers
- A quick trip to the library with parents has a different hidden curriculum (getting a book) than going to the same library with a group of friends (taking longer to socialize, but not too loudly and maybe to get a book).

When we are exposed to new situations, we hold back and watch others around us so we don't commit a social error. People with ASD are always walking on eggshells when it comes to social situations, never completely understanding how to act or what new social "sin" he/she may make during a given hour of the day. They are often incapable of stepping back to observe others (unless directly taught to do so, and, girls are more adept at this than boys), so they often commit social errors which to them may seem mortally embarrassing or they may be totally oblivious to having committed such errors. Students with ASD have difficulty understanding that there is a hidden curriculum. Thus, these kids may break many social and behavioral rules without understanding that they have done anything wrong. These social errors may quickly result in the student being labeled by his/her peers as naïve, rude, tactless, unkind, stupid, or just plain "weird." Unless someone points out the error and explains why his/her behavior was not appropriate and what to do/say in the specific situation, the student will continue to make the same social errors. Many social errors occur due to the lack of understanding of the hidden curriculum. These kids will gain better social understanding with practice that will be a life-long process since social learning never ends. Understanding the rules of basic social skills and being able to use and apply them across settings is critical to these kids. Their social appropriateness is what will make or break them as adults. However, they also need to be taught that learning use of specific rules cannot guarantee 100% successful relationships.

**Social skills including social interaction** - Social skills are VERY difficult for these kids to understand and to master. Thus, people with ASD are often viewed as naïve, rude, tactless, and/or blunt. They have difficulty with personal space so they don't know how close or far away to be next to other people. They often have anxiety that makes it difficult for them to look at another person's face, and they have difficulty reading nonverbal cues. The result of lack of eye contact and difficulty understanding nonverbal cues results in their missing out on a significant amount of information that we as neurotypicals convey to each other daily through our body language, facial expressions, tone and volume of our voices. These kids are literal, concrete thinkers. They interpret what is said very literally. Thus, many of them only learn what they can see and thus understand. Therefore, they also miss out on the whole concept of the hidden curriculum. These students need to be taught that while computers are comforting, using computers too much while avoiding interactions with people will further socially isolate them. They need to be taught a balance between using computers and engaging in social opportunities necessary for social growth.

**Restricted repetitive thoughts, interests, or actions** - Ritualistic, compulsive behaviors may be calming to students with ASD (allow some of these behaviors if they are not causing injury to the student or to others during appropriate times of the day). Many students, especially at a younger age, will insist on having things the same or doing things the same way. To assist with this:

- Always use a student-specific schedule
- Prepare the student ahead of time for any changes
- Use personal pragmatic stories) to prepare them ahead of time for changes
- Assign them a specific time during the day when they can talk to you about their favorite topic
- Use a visual – (a circle with the topic written in the center, answers given relative to the topic connected by a line to the circle, and answers off topic written way away from the circle without a line connecting them)
- When possible, incorporate the student's interests into your lesson

Kids on the ASD may have an **intense interest in a particular thing** (which changes over time) and become focused on it to the exclusion of all else. This restricted interest makes it difficult for them to listen to or talk about the interests of others. This “one track” interest, their lack of understanding of the hidden curriculum, and difficulty being able to generalize information from one situation to another, causes them to make the same mistakes again and again. All of this combines with their problems with understanding and use of language to cause them to become socially isolated. Their difficulties with social interaction and trying to fit in to a society that they clearly do not understand, can result in feelings of dread, severe anxiety, and physical symptoms, thus decreasing their self esteem and independence, while increasing their levels of isolation and stress.

Students with ASD have difficulty understanding emotions because the emotional part of the brain is “wired” differently causing them to tend to think in terms of what is logical, and emotions are not logical. Their own emotions may control their behavior unless they are taught strategies to use to deal with their inability to understand their feelings. Their social skills are often very immature compared to same-age peers. Due to their problems with social



understanding and social interaction, children with ASD often become anxious when faced with having to participate in social interactions, including in cooperative learning situations. Teachers and other adults in a school should watch students with ASD for signs of high anxiety (covering their ears, plugging ears, pulling/twisting their hair, increased rocking or other repetitive movements, squeezing their bodies with their arms, pushing their bodies into furniture to get maximum pressure, yelling, or screaming).

Students with ASD often misunderstand rules, especially social rules. However, given their rigid thought processes, they are often positive that they KNOW what is right, causing them to always want to do things the way that they perceive as correct. Their strong sense of the knowledge of these rules also results in them often appointing themselves as the class “cop”, where they proceed to tell everyone else, including (or sometimes especially) the teacher what to do and how to do it. Having such rigid thought processes, these students honestly believe that rules MUST be followed their way. Stress and anxiety increases in these students when their peers or teachers do not follow the rules they perceive them.

Their strong sense of right and wrong may result in their being brutally honest, such as saying to someone, “You have bad breath.” Do not set yourself up by making a rhetorical comment that you may not want the answer to, but that the student will probably respond to – EX: You say, “Oops, I guess I gave you the wrong page number. The student replies loudly, “You sure did!” If allowed to argue with their teachers without consequences, these students may also argue with a boss or co-workers, thus ending a job that they may otherwise be able to perform.

Since they do best with routines, their rigid adherence to rules become life-lines that they are unable to break due to their fear being totally unable to function. Signs of stress may include: rocking, head banging, increased repetitive movements, hyper- verbalizations (talking too fast and too much), refusal to perform or to continue a task, hands over ears, chewing on things, biting, hitting, kicking,

The social gap begins to get wider in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, increases in the upper elementary grades and dramatically increases as these kids start middle school. Many students wind up with no friends and don’t understand why. Some of these kids prefer to not have any friends due to their social anxieties, while others have actually asked the adults in their lives, “Can you get me a friend? Multiple problems with communication, social understanding and interaction, and rigid thinking, result in a lack of “common sense” as well as an increase in their level of stress and in their anxiety.

**Social skill strategies** - To make social gains, students with ASD must be directly taught through continued practice in meaningful, direct experiences (social stories/personal pragmatic stories, modeling, role-play) and have practiced a new social skill with various people in numerous settings and situations. If the skill is not performed correctly, the student needs immediate correction. Use peer support to facilitate success. Peers should be taught how to respond to the student who is having difficulty in social situations. Such assistance will help the student to become more socially appropriate. Due to their social ineptness, these kids are easier to “pick on”. Some of these students should never be alone and will need to be supervised during recess, lunch, walking through the hallways, at physical education (PE), etc. Repeated interactions with peers and adults will help to get social skills hard-wired into their memories.

Some of the skills that will need to be directly taught (teach each part of a key social skill) and applied in real school situations are:

- Sharing
- Turn-taking
- Use of politeness markers (please, thank you)
- Requesting
- How to play with others
- How to initiate a conversation
- How to act in a specific situation in public
- Don't talk with your mouth full
- How to join a conversation
- What personal space is and how to keep the appropriate personal space
- Cocktail party speech (using socially appropriate phrases in given situations)
- Good grooming
- Choice making
- Sequencing (Break tasks into workable steps needed to accomplish the task, giving the student examples as needed)
- Understanding part to whole relationships
- Learning that work = rewards
- Understanding that their choices have consequences and they **ARE** responsible for their own actions
- Understanding how to work and act effectively in a cooperative group
- Learning the difference between honesty and diplomacy
- Learning time management skills including prioritizing projects and meeting deadlines
- Learning how to recognize and how to deal with teasing
- Using personalized pragmatic stories (PPS) also referred to as social skills stories, to better understand a social situation
- Learning and using relaxation techniques

**Emotional Regulation** - (*Stress, Panic attacks, Anxiety, Anger*) – These students have higher than normal cortisol levels in their bodies that keeps them at a higher level of anxiety than for those of us who are neurotypicals. (Cortisol is a hormone that the brain releases when you are faced with a situation that may cause flight/fright.) The higher and more prolonged levels of cortisol in the bloodstream have been shown to have a negative impact on memory and cognitive performance.

**Emotional exhaustion** – The child with ASD is trying to learn the academics, consciously trying to learn and to understand the social curriculum, including the hidden curriculum, dealing with various adverse sensory input throughout their day, unexpected changes to their schedule, etc. all of which leaves the student mentally exhausted by the end of the day. There is seldom a time to relax, even at lunch time, which can be highly emotionally and stressful. Getting through a school day can be overwhelming for students on the autism spectrum. School gets more difficult as students get older, and the amount of work and homework can be overwhelming to the point of being paralyzing! Between their difficulty trying to get through a school day and the amount

of time a family must spend on homework (few students with ASD are self-sufficient enough to complete homework by themselves), these kids have little time to just be kids. As teachers, you may or may not be aware of the stress and exhaustion your student is experiencing. Often, the kids who are high functioning on the ASD, manage to hold it together pretty well at school, but collapse at home. Some of these students eventually get diagnosed with chronic stress and/or chronic depression.

**Sensory integration** – In those of us who do not have autism, information from our senses is received by our nerves and arrives in our brain in about 20 milliseconds, where it is analyzed and the new information is integrated within 100 - 200 milliseconds. In people with ASD, the brain analyzes and integrates this sensory stimulation at a much slower rate of about 310 milliseconds, resulting in children with ASD autism having difficulty (ranging from mild to severe) coping with sensory input. Some people with ASD are extremely sensitive to even daily sensory input (sights, sounds, taste, touch, & smells) that most people are able to deal with.

In children and adults with sensory processing issues (sometimes called **Sensory Processing Disorder (SPD)** or **Sensory Integration Dysfunction**), the brain has difficulty making sense of the sensory information, difficulty deciding what to focus on and what to filter out, and difficulty deciding how to respond appropriately to the information. This response may be a motor action, such as adjusting your posture to your teacher's voice, or it may be a cognitive response, such as being able to concentrate on your teacher's voice even though the kids are being noisy in the same room. People with sensory processing issues have to expend a lot of extra energy and thought in an attempt to make sense of their sensory world and in trying to formulate appropriate responses. Therefore they struggle with poor attention, low frustration tolerance, moodiness, anxiety, and sometimes depression. SPD is an umbrella term that encompasses several different types of disorders resulting from poor sensory integration.

Many students with autism have difficulty maintaining their level of sensory stimulation. Signs of problems with sensory processing or sensory stimulation may include hyper reactivity (over stimulated) to sensory stimuli or hypo-reactivity (Under stimulated) to sensory stimuli.

**Sights:** These kids can have either a hyper-reactive response or a hypo-active response to things they see as they are registered on their visual system and their overall ability to integrate sensory stimulation.

**Hyper-reactive to visual stimuli (over stimulated)      Hypo-reactive to visual stimuli (Under stimulated)**

Can't work under bright/florescent lights  
Looks at anything moving  
Uses fingers, hand, or squints to block things so they don't see too much  
Avoids busy/cluttered places  
Not aware that other people are near them  
Trouble with visual-tracking so may lose place on a page frequently  
Avoids eye contact

Loves bright, shiny, spinning objects  
can't find the desired person, place, or thing  
Unable to locate things in a picture/map, or (can't perceive figure-ground relationships)  
May respond by flapping, etc. when sees objects, people, or colors  
Difficulty distinguishing between similar shapes/letters (figure/ground)

Because a student with ASD is visually oriented, vision may be my first sense to become over stimulated. The fluorescent light may be too bright making the room pulsate and/or hurting their eyes. The pulsating light may bounce off everything and distort their vision making the space appear to be constantly changing. Window glare may be problematic. Too many items in the room (on walls, hanging from the ceiling, moving ceiling fans, objects on counters, tables, desks and the floor, as well as many bodies in constant motion, may make it difficult for a student with ASD to filter out the important visual stimuli and be able to focus on learning. The student may try to compensate by using their fists to create "tunnel vision". All this may impact their vestibular sense; to the point the student is unable to tell where his/her body is in space.

**Sounds:** These kids can have either a hyper-reactive response or a hypo-active response to sounds depending on the sensitivity of their auditory system and their overall ability to integrate sensory stimulation.

#### **Hyper-reactive sound registration**

Easily distracted by background noise  
Over-reacts to sounds  
May jump, scream, run, hit, scratch, cover ears, etc. when hears certain sounds especially loud unexpected ones (toilet vacuum cleaner, thunder, fire alarm)  
Tells others to be quiet  
Dislikes noisy places

#### **Hypo-reactive behavior to sound**

No response when their name is called  
Appears oblivious to sounds around them  
Makes various sounds including humming for self-stimulation  
May place self in danger by not reacting to sounds that may indicate danger  
Turns music, TV up loud  
May use loud self-talk to get through a task

People with ASD may hear things that you don't. Common daily noises such as the loud ticking of a clock can distract a student to the point that they cannot focus on anything else. The sound of a toilet flushing may so frighten a child that they scream, cry, or beg you to not flush! These students have great difficulty filtering out background noises. Sudden loud, unexpected noises (fire alarm, bells between classes, thunder, sirens) may cause a student with ASD to jump, run, cry, scream, etc.

**Taste/Gustatory and Smell/Olfactory:** Children with ASD can have either a hyper-reactive response or a hypo-active response to things they taste and smell depending on the sensitivity of their gustatory and olfactory systems and their overall ability to integrate sensory stimulation.

#### **Hyper-reactive gustatory & olfactory registration**

Eat a VERY limited diet  
Hyperactive gag reflex to smells/tastes  
Over reacts to offensive smells ("PEEW!")  
Problems with hygiene (can't stand having teeth brushed, can't tolerate smells of soap, shampoo, deodorant, chlorine in water, etc.)  
Avoids people of places with offensive odors

#### **Hypo-reactive behavior to tastes and smells**

Will eat anything they can find (including non food items (bark, glue, sand, etc.)  
Smells/sniffs people and objects  
Licks objects, their fingers, hands, etc.  
Can't tell if something smells/tastes "bad" so may ingest liquid soap, chemicals, etc.  
Little/no reaction to smells that others notice  
May prefer foods with strong smells/tastes (spicy, salty, bitter, sour, sweet)

Some students with ASD have difficulty eating different foods due to tastes they find unpleasant or even offensive. Some will eat only sweet foods, only salty foods, only meat, or almost anything as long as they can put catsup on it. They have a heightened sense of smell resulting in certain smells causing an overwhelming response of repulsion, nausea, or gagging. Offensive smells may include: perfume, aftershave, deodorant, certain shampoos, soap, chlorinated water, foods (fish, onions, broccoli, cabbage, yogurt, etc.) trash, hot tar, etc. The issues they have with smells and with taste limit (often severely) their food choices and causes them to want to avoid certain situations. The fish at the meat counter may trigger a gag reflex. The guy standing next to them may smell sweaty. The baby in the food cart may have a poopy diaper, and a clerk may be mopping up pickles on aisle 4. All of which places the olfactory system into overdrive, causing the person with ASD to become nauseous and wanting to flee the store.

**Touch/ Tactile:** Children with ASD may have either a hyper-reactive response or a hypo-active response to things they touch or feel depending on the sensitivity of their tactile system and their overall ability to integrate sensory stimulation. Please **be very aware** that a student on the autism spectrum may not feel pain at the level of a neurotypical. They may over react to a paper cut and not react to a broken leg. Thus, they often don't report pain because they don't feel it.

#### **Hyper-reactive tactile registration**

Defensive to being touched/hugged  
 Avoids tasks requiring use of adverse materials (finger-paint, water, play-doh, glue, foods, etc.)  
 Can't stand certain clothing pants, tags in clothes, belts, etc. (won't wear them/pulls at them)  
 Refuses to wear shoes  
 Can't tolerate having hair washed, teeth brushed or nails cut  
 Feels a hair on their face  
 Unable to eat certain foods due to their textures (meat is grainy, yogurt is slimy, etc.)  
 Unintentionally rough with pets  
 Avoids standing too close to anyone

#### **Hypo-reactive behavior to touch/feeling**

Always touching others  
 Oblivious to being touched  
 Craves deep pressure  
 Does not feel pain/feels pain minimally  
 May over-stuff food into mouth  
 May not notice messy face, hands, or twisted clothing  
 Chews on their clothing  
 Can't feel anything on their face (food drool, runny nose)  
 Constantly seeks input in/around their mouth  
 Overly ticklish

Some students with ASD have difficulty eating different with foods due to the texture of the food that they find unpleasant or even offensive. Some can tolerate foods only when served at a certain temperature (not too hot/cold). Some won't eat meat because it has a grainy texture – some may chew meat and chew and chew until the flavor is gone and then spit out what is left rather than to swallow it.

Some students with ASD can tolerate and may even crave firm pressure (touch), but light touch may be felt as painful. Some may feel like someone purposely hurt them when they accidentally bumped into them. Some cannot stand the feel of any clothing that is at all rough (jeans, etc.). Some can't have tags touching their skin. Some can't wear any pants that have a snug waist band or pants with long legs, while others may crave wearing snug clothing. Many of these kids can't tolerate the feel of certain textures on their hands such as glue, sand, sun screen, hand

lotion, or nail polish. Girls with severe sensory integration difficulties will not wear nail polish because they do not like the way it feels.

**Movement/Vestibular:** These kids can have either a hyper-reactive response or a hypo-active response to movement depending on the sensitivity of their vestibular system and their overall ability to integrate sensory stimulation.

**Hyper-reactive vestibular registration**  
**vestibular input**

Over reacts in response to engaging in movement activities  
 Trouble walking on various surfaces (rug, tile, pavement, grass, stones)  
 Walks along edge of room, holds on to railings or to an adult's hand  
 Acts unreasonably fearful of being picked up or of being moved while sitting in a chair  
 Easily disoriented if things in a room are changed or when having to go from a familiar to an unfamiliar place

**Hypo-reactive behavior to**

Constantly moving some body part  
 Rocking, spinning  
 Easily fatigues after engaging in activities  
 Movements are slow and labored  
 Very slow to move when told to do so

**Sensory overload** - due to constant bombardment from sensory input we take for granted. Students might find it difficult to tolerate:

- Bright fluorescent lights
- Sounds both from inside and outside the classroom
- Navigating noisy, crowded hallways and classrooms
- Smells – body odors, food, chemicals, etc.
- Sights – too many things posted in a room/hallways, too many people all walking and talking at the same time

A whole day of dealing with overwhelming sensory stimulation can send a student into sensory overload causing them to have a tantrum, meltdown, etc. Before this happens, watch for signs that they are becoming overloaded and provide them with sensory breaks and if necessary for the student, offer them sensory breaks.

Each of us has a unique set of sensory needs that must be met daily in order for us to stay focused and productive. The same is true for people with ASD. As these kids go throughout their day, the adults in their lives must help them to meet their need for sensory input. This can be done through the creation of a “sensory diet” (term coined by OT Patricia Wilbarger). A sensory diet is a personalized activity plan to help the student receive the sensory input he/she needs to stay focused throughout the day.

Generally, a child whose nervous system is on “high trigger/too wired” needs more calming input, while the child who is more “sluggish/too tired” needs more arousing input. Consult with your school’s occupational therapist (OT) to work together to develop a sensory diet for your

student. Helping the student to get on and use an appropriate sensory diet will help him/her to either calm down or perk up so he/she is better able to:

- Increase his/her tolerance to challenging or sensory avoiding stimulation
- Better regulate his/her alertness
- Better increase his/her ability to attend for longer periods
- Begin to limit sensory seeking behaviors
- Handle transitions smoother and with less stress

Try experimenting with **activities to help to desensitize the child**, such as:

- Experimenting with messy play and textures - foamy soap or shaving cream, (add sand for texture), finger paint, glitter glue, pudding, yogurt, cookie dough, dry beans, and rice, repotting indoor plants, clay, paste, sandpaper, etc.
- Playing a listening game - Sit with the child and try to identify the sounds you hear (the AC unit, birds, a door opening/closing, someone coughing, etc.) AND the source of the sound.
- Predicting and controlling sounds - For a child with auditory sensitivity, predicting and controlling sounds can be very helpful. Try giving the student some control by encouraging him/her to anticipate the sounds as you engage in noisy activities such as: popping a balloon, flushing a toilet, listening for a bell/buzzer, etc. and try moving from having them stay in the room covering their ears if needed, to working towards not having to cover their ears as you help to desensitize them to everyday sounds.
- Reducing visual stimulation by limiting excessive classroom visual aids or things hanging from ceilings – (a solid-color piece of cloth hung over a bookshelf reduces visual stimulation).
- Preferential seating away from auditory and visual distractions - Some children do best sitting in the back of the room so they can monitor what other kids are doing without constantly turning around. Work with the teacher to see which seat placement works best.
- Exploring smells with the student to see which ones he/she likes (some scents are calming (vanilla and rose) and some are alerting (peppermint, cinnamon, basil, and citrus))
- Trying foods with strong tastes (peppermint, grapefruit, sour gummy bear, or other strong-flavored food) to stimulate the mouth (of an under sensitive child) and to increase alertness.
- Asking parents to send in snacks that are crunchy, chewy, sweet, or sour. If the student is craving things in his/her mouth, you might suggest to the parents to offer seltzer water or carbonated mineral water (flavored with juice/lemon), to allow them to experience bubbles in their mouths. Work with the student to see if he/she prefers foods that are crunchy, chewy, smooth, sweet, sour, tart, etc. (pretzels from thin to thick, raw vegetables, string cheese sticks, granola bars (crunchy/chewy, etc.)

Once you know which activities are calming to a student and which are stimulating, work with your OT, members of your district's autism support team, and the student's parents to help create a **sensory diet** for the student. The purpose of the sensory diet is to provide the student with the right type of stimulation throughout the day to keep him/her level (not bouncing off the ceiling or falling asleep). Once you create a sensory diet, put it in writing for the student – letting them know when, where and how they can use sensory materials. NEVER force a child who is

unwilling to touch something, to listen to a certain adverse sound, or to eat/drink anything they find aversive. As the student changes, you will need to make changes to the sensory diet.

**Components of a Sensory Diet** may include:

- Heavy work – carry books from one area of the room to another or from one room to another, take chairs down or put them up, opening and holding doors open, washing a desk/table, pushing/pulling a book cart, push against the wall, power walk, playing tug-of-war, etc. Making a “sandwich” with the child by firmly pressing on his/her arms legs and back with pillows
- Wearing a filled backpack (not too heavy) during parts of his/her day
- Jumping - jumping jacks or hopscotch
- Providing firm pressure. Self hug, pressing back into the back of a chair, or use a weighted lap buddy, lap pad, or vest (CAUTION – do this only under supervision from an OT)
- Movement - swinging - try various types of swings and movements (including side to side), stretching, running in place, jumping jacks or lunges, stretching, climbing stairs
- Spinning – for younger kids, you can try a Sit n’ Spin or let them run in circles. For older students, use an office chair that spins.
- Playing quiet, calming or focusing background music in your class. Some students with ASD work better when the music has a *repetitive beat* to it.
- Providing frequent movement or other sensory breaks (an inflatable seat cushion for wiggling while remaining seated, offering the student a water bottle that contains a straw (straw drinking is calming, while ice water can be alerting) offering crunchy/chewy snacks throughout the day as needed
- Offering sensory tools for use in their hands (teach the students who are in inclusive classrooms how to hold the fidget quietly in their hand(s), manipulating the hand tool or fidget as needed without looking at it. (Koosh ball, stress ball, fat erasers, hair scrunchies, silly putty, etc.)

**Behavior** - Students with ASD may have difficulty controlling their behavior for a variety of reasons. With these kids, **ALL behavior is a form of communication**. Behaviors may result from:

- Lack of sufficient language
- An attempt to communicate frustration, confusion, or need for attention that may be demonstrated through head banging, hitting, running, etc.
- Ritualistic, stereotypical, compulsive behaviors that may be calming to them
- Being over stimulated by sensory stimulation
- Anxiety
- Misunderstanding what is expected of them
- Thinking that is *VERY* literal and concrete
- Lack of a social filter with little or no awareness of how others perceive their behavior
- Impulsivity

A student with ASD rarely has enough impulse control to maintain appropriate behavior throughout a whole day of school. These kids may not have enough language to express



themselves or they may have significant temper outbursts/melt-downs and be unable to use their language skills at that time. Use visual strategies to teach the student relaxation techniques and techniques to cope with difficult situations. Offer the student choices when that is possible. Having choices gives the student some feeling of control over a situation. If the student displays inappropriate behavior, wait until the student is calm and then as soon as possible, especially if it was a dangerous behavior or one that really impacted the student or other individuals, work with the student using a visual means of making sure the student understands:

- What he/she did
- How his/her actions affected him/her
- How his/her actions affected others
- Choices that would have been better
- Strategies to use to avoid this situation in the future

With an adult and the student using any visual strategy, especially comic strip conversations (for students with enough cognitive understanding) after a situation has occurred, the student will gain an understanding of his/her actions on himself and on others.

You cannot stop a behavior without offering a replacement behavior and even then, some behaviors (just like thumb sucking in neurotypicals) are difficult/impossible to shape/modify/change. Teach the kids how to communicate their needs through use of words (for verbal students), objects, pictures, or augmentative communication devices from simple to complex.

**Praise** the student when appropriate, with more frequent praise for younger students or when a student is first accomplishing a new skill. The praise should be age appropriate and specific to the task. Avoid using general praise such as, “Good job!” Tell the student what you are praising him/her for such as, “Good remembering to write your name on the paper.” “I really like the way you sat so quietly during the story.” “Super job remembering to use your words to ask for more ...” “You were very polite to Mr. Jones,” etc.

**Reinforcers:** provide reinforcers and reinforcement that will get the student to respond appropriately. To do this, the reinforcers must be meaningful to the student. With younger students and those who are more severely on the autism spectrum, those reinforcements are often food, computer and/or a favorite object (toy). Ask the parents what their kids will work for at home. Then, work with the student’s ESE teacher to put the student on a reinforcement schedule. Once the desired behavior is established, work with the ESE teacher to begin to fade the reinforcement. Some students may need/have a Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA) performed followed by writing and implementation of a Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP). Both of these would be done after receiving written parent permission. The FBA and BIP are done by trained ESE teachers including the student’s school based ESE teacher, area behavior support (ABST) teachers, the school psychologist, and the school speech-language pathologist (SLP) all with support from the student’s classroom teacher (s).

**3. Classroom strategies** to help students to control their own behaviors include:

1. Physical Structure and Organization
  - Physical structure

## 2. Teaching Strategies

- Communication
- Classroom learning and assessments
- Sensory
- Behavior

**Physical Structure and Organization** – The physical structure of the classroom is extremely important when students are very young and for those students with ASD who display more problems with sensory integration and more rigidity. Specially designed physical structure for classroom layout is essential in the self-contained ESE/ASD classrooms and is important for all classrooms. When setting up your classroom, keep in mind that you want to minimize both visual and auditory distractions. Even the ticking of a classroom clock can seem super loud to a child with ASD and it can be so distracting that it hinders his/her ability to work. If you have a student who is bothered by the fluorescent lights (they can't stop wiggling, place their hands over their ears due to the humming of the lights, etc.), place the student near a window and use the natural lighting.

For younger children or for those with an overactive sensory system, the classroom should not be too stimulating. Keep it uncluttered by minimizing the number of visual things in the room. Consider the physical placement of the child in the classroom and how it relates to his/ her responses to environmental stimulation. Always provide preferential seating to these kids. Seat them away from the air conditioner, from the door, and from any student who will be very distracting to them. Keep them close to the teacher and/or to responsible peers.

Every student needs to know he/she has a quiet and a safe area to go to as needed/or when directed. This is especially true of students on the autism spectrum. If the student needs sensory tools, keep a small number of these tools available to the student in this area at all times.

Depending on the sensory needs of the student, the following may be made available to the student:

- Bean bag chair
- Sit disk
- Video rocker
- A foam mat
- Hand Tools/fidgets (squishy balls, smelly pencil grips, smelly pencils, Play-doh/clay/putty, etc.)
- A CD player with 1 or 2 favorite CDs and headphones
- Earplugs
- Use of natural lighting for parts of the day
- Minimizing auditory distractions - (Try to minimize the use of or the effect of sounds from: fans/air conditioners, loudspeakers, several people talking at the same time, fire alarms, bells, etc.)
- Minimizing visual distractions – (Try to minimize the effects of offensive lighting, glare, reflections, too much posted around the room or hanging from the ceiling, other students walking around the room, the teacher pacing, etc.)

**Organization and Structure** - Students with ASD have varying degrees difficulty with organizational skills. Thus, many of them are dependent (fully to minimally) on adults and peers to help them to get through a day at school. Thus, as much as possible, provide a structured, predictable classroom environment for these students to help to increase their ability to function more independently in your classroom and to reduce their anxiety.

1. Learn to teach through using as many visual supports as possible. These kids are visual learners. Don't underestimate the importance of a daily schedule to these students. Most of us use some type of a daily schedule. Use of a daily schedule is important for these kids not only to know what the structure of their day will be, but so they can begin to internalize their schedule. They need to be taught how to use a daily schedule, and eventually, many will need to use how to use a planner. Use of a **visual daily schedule** (made specifically for some students, and often laminated so the student can remove or check off each subject as completed) cuts down on their anxiety about what is going to happen to them next, including anything new or different for the day.
2. Create and use a **staff zoning plan**. The staff zoning plan outlines the duties and responsibilities of each staff member, including related service providers such as the SLP or the OT. This plan states where every adult in the classroom is to be at any given time, thus assuring the supervision of all students at all times. The plan also assures that each student receives the type of support needed throughout the day. Finally, the zoning plan states which common activities the adults are responsible for throughout the day, including: getting the students off the bus, assisting with breakfast and lunch, setting up daily calendars and activities before the students arrive, etc.

Many students with ASD will also need to be directly taught (through pictures, diagrams, modeling and practice in several settings across the day) how to:

- Enter your classroom
- Greet staff and peers
- Unpack their backpack and where to put the contents (lunch, homework, school supplies)
- Organize their classroom materials and their personal materials (pencil cases work well for younger students)
- Set up and to use notebooks (divided with colored tabs into subject areas, completed assignments, homework to be done, completed homework, etc).
- Break long-term assignments down and how to schedule this on a calendar/planner
- Ask for help when REALLY needed
- Have a procedure for doing their homework, including knowing exactly where to turn it in
- Where and how to sit

Plan for and alert the student to transitions through use of a visual and/or vibrating timer, (a clock for older students) as well as visual and verbal reminders and a visual and verbal count down. Provide verbal and if necessary, object or picture warnings prior to transitions. Young children may need a picture schedule and transition through use of picture choices. Older children may use a written schedule accompanied by a verbal signal (Ex. "In 2 minutes, we'll be finished and then starting to math.") Specify when a task is complete using visual and verbal alerts like, "We're all finished with the science worksheet. It's time for math now."

Establish *consistent written classroom rules* and give the student a smaller copy of these rules. Put instructions in writing. If a student has more than 1 teacher, they should have a rule sheet for each teacher to help them to understand that different teachers have different classroom expectations. Use pictures for younger students and written words for older students. These rules and instructions should be placed in the student's notebook. Rules need to be written out for the student. They must be clearly defined and *applied consistently* across settings. Additional "rules" may need to be written and explained for the student depending on his/her understanding of the rules and "hidden rules".

Establish *consequences* and be prepared to enforce them. For each behavior, let the student know that there is a specific consequence. Put the behaviors and consequences in visual form (pictures, charts, words) and for over these with the student when he/she is calm. Provide a copy of the behaviors and consequences for the student to see as needed. This begins to teach the student that there's more than one way to deal with a situation. It also begins to teach the cause-and-effect idea those behaviors and consequences go hand-in-hand. The message that the student begins to learn is that he/she does have some control over every situation, and definitely has control over his/her behaviors.

*Free time* - usually, younger students and those who are older but functioning at a much lower level than their chronological age, do not know what to do with free time. Thus, teachers should have a couple of things planned for them and give the students a choice between 2 or 3 activities if the rest of the class gets "free time".

### ***Examples of Visual Schedules and Checklists:***

***A visual daily schedule*** for a younger student who can read:

8:15-8:30	Arrival/Unpack
8:30-8:50	Morning Work
8:50-9:25	Reading
9:25-10:15	Specials
10:15-10:30	Writing
10:35-11:05	Lunch
11:05-11:10	Break
11:10-12:10	Math
12:10-12:30	Math Centers
12:30-1:00	Science/Health/Social Studies
1:00-1:20	Recess
1:20-2:00	Reading Centers (Writing/Spelling/Phonics)
2:00-2:20	Social Skills
2:20-2:30	Pack up/Agendas
2:30	Dismissal

**In Task-Schedule** for morning arrival

1. Get my homework and my pencil out of my backpack.
2. Put my pencil on my desk.
3. Put my homework into the finished homework box.

4. Put my backpack into my cubby.
5. Sit in my chair.
6. Sit still without talking and wait for the teacher to give me directions.

**In Task-Schedule** for science for a 5<sup>th</sup> grade student:

1. Take out my yellow science book
2. Take out my spiral notebook
3. Listen to Miss \_\_\_\_\_ give instructions
4. Open the book to page \_\_\_\_\_
5. LEQ – look at the LEQ on the board.
6. Read the LEQ and write it into spiral notebook.
7. In notes, underline any subheading.
8. Turn to the next blank page in spiral
9. Write date and lab title
10. Write Materials & list the materials
11. Work with my group on lab
12. Use paper towels to clean up spills

**Checklists** can also be used along with in-task schedules to cue the student in what to do without constantly having to direct the student or having the student becoming dependent on adult prompting. The following are examples of checklists for students to refer to:

Checklist for Writing:

1. Name and Date
2. Read writing prompt on paper.
3. Underline topic sentence.
4. Write topic in box.
5. Brainstorm at least 5 things on the topic.
6. Circle 3 things to use in writing.
7. Write 3 things in main idea boxes.
8. Add comas (,)
9. Indent topic sentence at the beginning of the paragraph.

Reading/ Science worksheet

1. Name and Date
2. Read Directions.
3. Complete work
4. Put paper in basket.

Journal Checklist

- |                                     |                                       |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 1. Get out your journal             | 4. Wait for review                    |
| 2. Copy journal work from the board | 5. Get journal out                    |
| 3. Put journal up                   | 6. Go over journal answers with class |

Math Checklist

1. Get math book out.
2. Turn to page \_\_\_\_\_.
3. Put name and date on page.
4. Look at and listen to teacher for review.
5. Copy from the board.
6. Do problems \_\_\_\_\_.
7. Put paper in the basket.

AR Checklist

1. Get AR book from library/desk
2. Read the book twice
3. Take AR Test

Spelling Test

1. Put name and date on paper.
2. Number from 1 – 10.
3. Put pencil down when finished with test.
4. Wait quietly for paper to be picked up

Test

1. Put name and date on paper.
2. Listen for directions.
3. When finished, put pencil down.  
Wait for paper to be collected.

**Teaching Strategies:** To learn, people with ASD need direct instruction that makes sense to them and they must receive the instruction in several different settings (with numerous repetitions in each setting) for a new skill to establish and to carry over.

**Communication** - There are numerous strategies to use to assist students in increasing their ability to understand receptive language (including nonverbal communication) and to increase their ability to initiate and respond to communication. Consult with the school SLP for specific research-based strategies for your student. The following are general communication strategies that can be tried with a student:

- **Auditory:** Most students with ASD have some to significant problems with auditory attention, auditory figure-ground, auditory processing, and/or auditory memory (short/long term). These students may need longer to process auditory information and to be able to shift their attention from one auditory stimulus to another. Provide extra processing time, *pairing auditory with visual stimuli*. Reinforce all communication attempts.
- **Visual:** Many students with ASD need more time to shift their attention from one visual stimulus to another. Give them extra processing time and as much as possible, pair auditory with visual stimuli/cues. *THINK and USE VISUALS* (rules, schedules, routines, scripts, social skill stories, comic strip conversations (summarize a social situation), other personalized visual supports including ways for them to calm themselves.

**Classroom teaching strategies:**

- Give them a copy of their daily schedule
- Provide in-task-schedules as needed
- For younger students (or those who still need them) provide choice boards for activities, for food preferences, etc.
- Label objects in the room (pictures and words to help the student understand that everything in his/her environment has a name)
- Give them their own copy of *classroom rules* – explain the rules to them as often as needed

- Teach them how to use a color coding system for organizational and memory strategies (helps them to distinguish and to remember)
- Get them and keep them engaged – teach them to highlight, write a few words on sticky notes, color coded note cards, etc.
- TEACH them to use graphic organizers not only for writing, but to help them to organize their thoughts in a visual way
- Teach them how to use highlighters and highlighter tape to mark and to recall important information (use different colors for different recall, such as yellow is for the main idea, green is for supporting details, etc.)
- Teach older students how to use planners and how to use calendars for long-term assignments – (teach them how to break long term assignments into shorter portions, marking when each part is due on a monthly calendar)
- Provide them static visual displays for things they have difficulty recalling, such as a 3 digit multiplication problem – an example of this stays with the student for reference until the student has internalized the process
- Tell them and write out the purpose of an activity that they may not understand
- Working in groups is very difficult for these students – write down their “job” in a group, describing exactly that that job entails and exactly what they are to do or how to act.
- Teach study skills and *NEVER assume* the student knows something
- Teach them to summarize using highlighters and graphic organizers
- Use blue paper or a blue overlay to help to reduce glare from overhead lights
- Use comic strip conversations

Use Comic Strip conversations® (Gray, 1994) to teach conversational skills related to a specific social interaction/situation. A comic strip conversation is a drawn and written out like a comic strip, with the student labeling him/herself if possible. The object is to use the right side of their brain (visual) that other people have thoughts and how their affect others. Comic strip conversations are especially helpful in teaching a student with ASD more socially appropriate ways of problem solving, conflict resolution, and how to more appropriately let others know how they feel about something. A comic strip conversation consists of: describing the event that caused the problem, the thoughts (in bubble format), words, and feelings of the people involved, and a possible solution to the problem that may include how to avoid the situation from happening again.

## Comic Strip Conversation: Example



Tom called me kid because he didn't know my name, but wanted to play with me. The next time Tom or someone calls me "kid," I'll tell them my name and that I don't like to be called "kid." I'll apologize to Tom and tell him my name is A.J. I will also tell him I don't like being called "kid," and please don't call me that again.



**For nonverbal/minimally verbal students** - develop a functional communication system, identifying and instructing them in the use of augmentative and alternative communication systems. Teaching these kids a way to communicate is a **HIGH PRIORITY**. Augmentative and alternative communication systems (pictures, picture boards, simple devices that talk, or computerized communication devices) support the development of speech and language for these students as well as helping to reduce challenging behaviors. (Resources: the school SLP, and local augmentative assistive technology team (LAT)). In some cases, students with ASD need 1:1 support to assist with communication and behaviors. This support can be from the teacher, the speech-language pathologist, the OT, a classroom aide or paraprofessional, or another student. Peer mentors can be an invaluable assistance to these students with ASD as the peers get into 3<sup>rd</sup> grade and up.

**Classroom learning** - Suggestions (USING VISUALS) to facilitate understanding and learning:

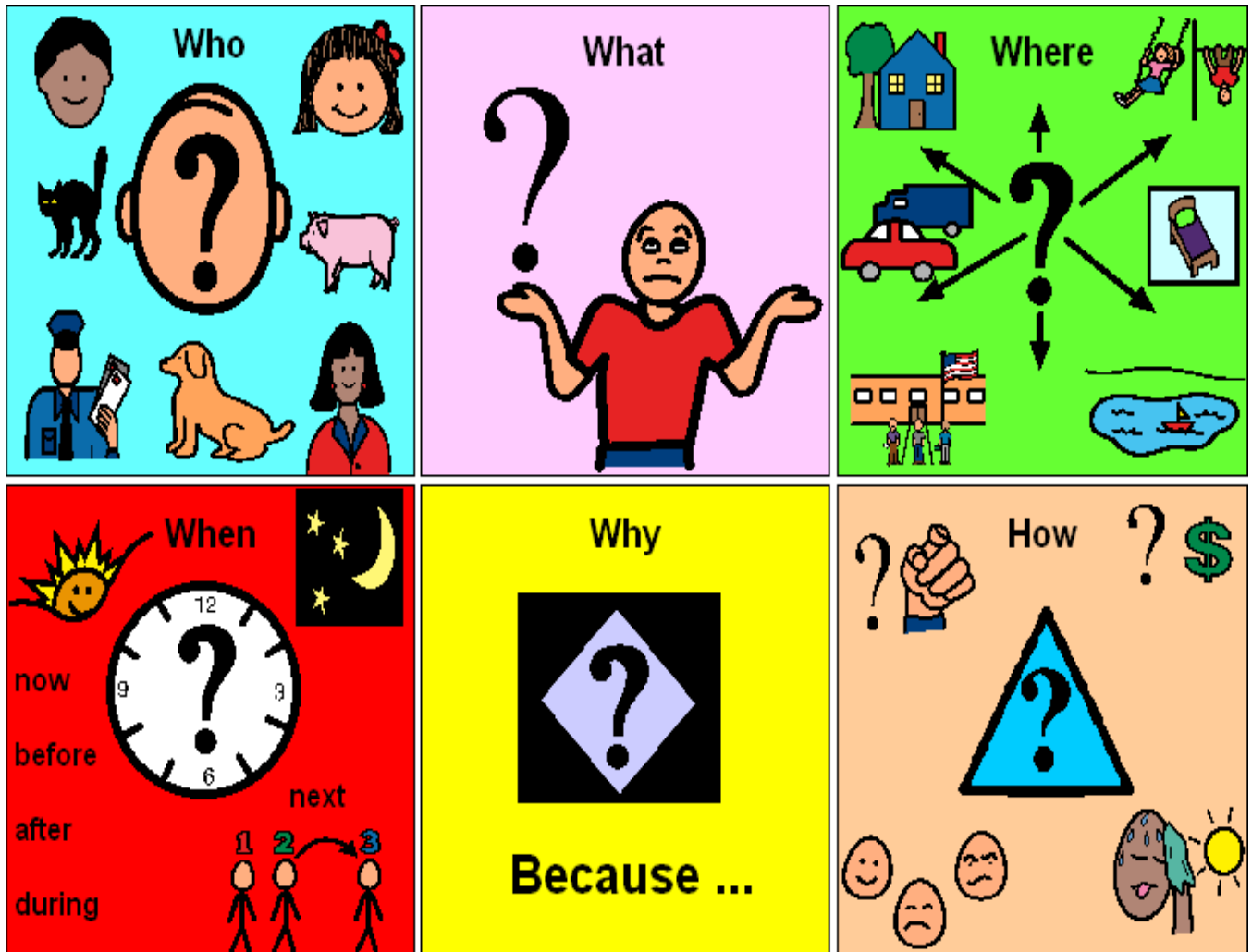
- Pair verbal instructions with alerting cues and visual cues.
- Giving directions - Establish eye contact before stating directions, and at times, encourage child to repeat directions back to you to demonstrate understanding
- Avoid lengthy verbal instructions – break them down into smaller steps
- Minimize what you say if the student is upset/angry – less language is better - use gestures and/or point to pictures
- Provide in-task schedules and task cards to allow students to self-check and self-correct if he/she is having difficulty understanding or following a sequence of instructions.
- Slow your speech down a little, using volume and tone to indicate important information
- Use specific, concrete language and speak in an age-appropriate manner.
- Don't use slang or sarcasm
- Set up specific situations to elicit communication
- Tell the student what to do vs. what not to do – Ex. “Stand still” vs. “Don't move.” Say, “Walk” instead of, “Don't run!”
- Pre-teach new vocabulary and concepts, relating it to things the student already knows prior to new instruction in order to increase understanding and to decrease anxiety
- Check often for understanding – ask in different ways and have student show or tell you
- Post lesson essential questions and concepts to allow the student to use his/her stronger visual part of the brain (right side) to help the student to use his/her visual memory
- Teach the student that when they hear you say certain words (auditory cues) that they **really** have to focus on you with their ears, eyes, and bodies because you are about to say something really important (Ex. “Listen up!” “You need to know...” “You need to remember...”)
- In middle and high school, alternate lecture with hands-on activities as much as possible
- Involve the student in the lesson to help to facilitate the student's ability to pay attention
- Use colors to help the student to more efficiently use his/her visual memory (a colored highlighter stick, colored overlay, or highlighters) to increase attention
- Use graphic organizers to help them to organize information – NOT just to help with written language
- Give visual examples with assignments – outlines, copies of over heads, extra books, etc
- May need to have written examples that the student keeps and refers to as needed

- Teach them to understand the verbal signals people use to indicate a change in topic
- Teach the “rules” of having a conversation (turn taking, initiating and maintaining a topic, changing a topic, eye contact, body posture, distance, etc.)
- Teach students how to ask peers for help.
- Directions that teach flexible thought patterns should be written and stay with the student. (Ex. If you have trouble or have a question, ask Mary, ask your peer buddy, or ask another person at your table or next to you in the other row. If no student can answer your question or fix your problem, ask the teacher for help.)
- Provide communication supports (written cue cards, index cards, sticky notes) to facilitate student independence (initiating conversations, asking for help).
- Break down multi-step instructions by numbering them. The brain can only keep 5 – 7 things or chunks of things in short term memory at any given time.
- Teach how to answer and how to ask WH questions
- Teach and reinforce conversational skills in small groups
- Teach rules and cues for turn-taking in conversations (when and how to reply, to interrupt, to change topic, etc.)
- Directly teach nonverbal expressions and what they mean
- Summarize - teach older students to use 1 or 2 sentence knowledge summaries
- NEVER talk about the student in front of the student
- Reduce homework assignments
- Provide time in a quiet area for completion of homework and class work
- Sit next to buddy so buddy can remind student to return to task or listen to lesson
- Use age appropriate materials

**Using visuals to Teach WH** - WH questions may be abstract and difficult to understand. For students having difficulty answering WH questions, the following method may help them to understand. Use the visual with 6 WH cards that have the word and pictures to help the students to “see” what the question is referring to. The WH cards may be used during centers or 1:1 with a student. You may find many ways of using the cards. The following is a suggested way of starting to use these materials:

1. **Start** by giving the student/students **2 WH cards**. You might try using the WHO and WHERE cards to start since these questions are more concrete and thus, easier to understand.
2. Initially, choose about 10 picture cards (depending on student’s level of understanding) that fit into these 2 categories and have the student(s) place each picture card on one of the WH cards.
3. Help the student to verbalize the rationale for why they placed a picture card on a question card, encourage answers in correct syntax (the correct order of words in a sentence).
4. Once the cards are correctly placed, model the target picture/word in a sentence, followed by asking the correct WH question.
  - a. Ex.: The little brown dog ate the cake. **Who** ate the cake? [Student answers, “The dog.”] Teacher expands on the sentence by saying, “Yes, the little brown dog ate the cake.”

- b. Ex.: The kids are on the beach. Where are the kids? [Student answers, "On beach."] Teacher expands by saying, "Yes, the kids are on the beach."
5. Still referring to the pictures and after modeling a sentence, ask the student(s) to use the target word in a sentence.
6. Continue using the same 2 WH cards until the student(s) are able to demonstrate their understanding of where to place the picture cards and are gaining a basic understanding of these 2 types of questions.
7. Remove the WHO picture and replace with the WHAT card. Keep the WHERE card. Follow steps 2-6.
8. Add the WHO card to the WHAT and WHERE cards – follow steps 2-6.
9. Add the WHY
10. Before teaching "WHEN" questions, the student needs to understand a basic concept of "Time" such as: morning, afternoon, night, later, etc.
11. "HOW" is the last type of question that students understand. How questions are more abstract and require more interpretive thinking.



**Social skills** need to be specifically taught. Ask the school SLP or ESE teacher for assistance in this, including assistance with writing and using **Personal Pragmatic Stories**. The following are examples of Personal Pragmatic Stories.

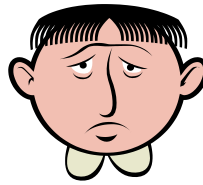
### ***My Job***



- When I am at school, my job is to do and to finish my school work.
  - When given an assignment, I **work and work**. I do not stop.
  - When I finish my work, I can put a check in a box on my assignment chart.
  - When I finish my work in the morning, I **will earn 5 minutes** to use at the end of the day to draw and/or to write in my black book or to read a story.
  - When I finish my afternoon work, I'll earn another 5 minutes. I will try to finish all of my work so that I can have 5-10 minutes at the end of the day to draw/write in my black book or to read.
- 
- 



### **Disappointed or Upset**

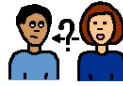


- People feel disappointed or upset when they don't get what they want.
- They may cry, frown, or yell when they are disappointed
- I feel disappointed when I want to write and draw about Mario Kart wii and Mrs. James tells me I have school work to do first because that is my job.
- When she says I need to do school work first, I need to calm down.
- I will take **3 deep breaths** and I will concentrate on doing my job, which is doing my school work.
- It is okay to feel disappointed or upset sometimes.
- Taking the deep breaths will help me to calm down.
- I will try to focus on my school work and get it done.
- When all of my work is finished for the day and I have earned my writing or reading time, I will feel happy again.



# Asking a Question in Class

ask a question



- ◆ Sometimes in class I have a question.
- ◆ When I want to ask a question, I raise my hand and wait until the teacher calls my name.
- ◆ When the teacher calls my name that means it is my turn to ask my question.

raise my hand



wait a minute

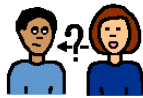


- ◆ I put my hand down and ask the teacher my question.

put my hand down



ask my question



- ◆ The teacher will do her best to answer my question and I will try to listen carefully

listen



to her answer.

I don't know



- ◆ Sometimes the teacher will not have an answer. That is OK too.
- ◆ I will try to wait patiently and quietly until my teacher calls on me to ask my question.

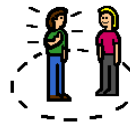
wait a minute



quiet



my turn



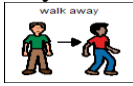
ask my question



### When I Feel Angry

**When I feel angry, I have choices. I can:**

1. Get away from the person who is making me mad. If I am at home, I can go to another room.



At school, I can ask to go to a quiet spot in my classroom.

2. Tell Mom, Dad, teachers, sisters, and kids that I feel angry. My voice can be upset, but I need to use nice words.
3. Ask to take a 5-minute break from an upsetting job or job that I do not like to do.

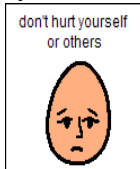


4. Squeeze and pound play dough or a squishy, soft fidget.



5. Count very slowly to 5 as I take 5 deep breaths and then blow each one slowly out.

When I feel angry, there are things that I can do and things that I cannot do! I cannot hit, kick, or hurt myself or others in any way!



When I remember to do some of these 5 things if I feel angry, I will start to feel better and not get so mad!



I will try to remember how to start to help myself by using my 5 choices.

**NOW I'M A TEENAGER** - Teenagers act differently than young kids. Teenagers like to talk to other teenagers about music, sports, what to do after school, their friends, and jobs. Sometimes they talk about school or something really important that is happening in the world.

There are some things teenagers do **NOT** do.

- Teenagers don't talk in a voice that sounds like a child.
- Teenagers don't try to change their voices to sound younger.
- Teenagers don't usually clap when they are excited. That is something younger kids do.
- Teenagers usually only clap at a sports game, a play they might go to see, or at a concert. They clap with the audience.

Now that I am a teenager I'm going to try to talk and act more like a teenager, not like a child. I will try to:

- ◆ Talk in a teenager voice
- ◆ Talk about music, sports, jobs, school, friends, or a really important event that I've seen on TV or heard other kids talking about
- ◆ I will clap when I am at a show or a sports game, not when I am excited in school

By acting more like my age as a teenager, people will know that I am growing up and that I am able to do more grown-up things in my life.

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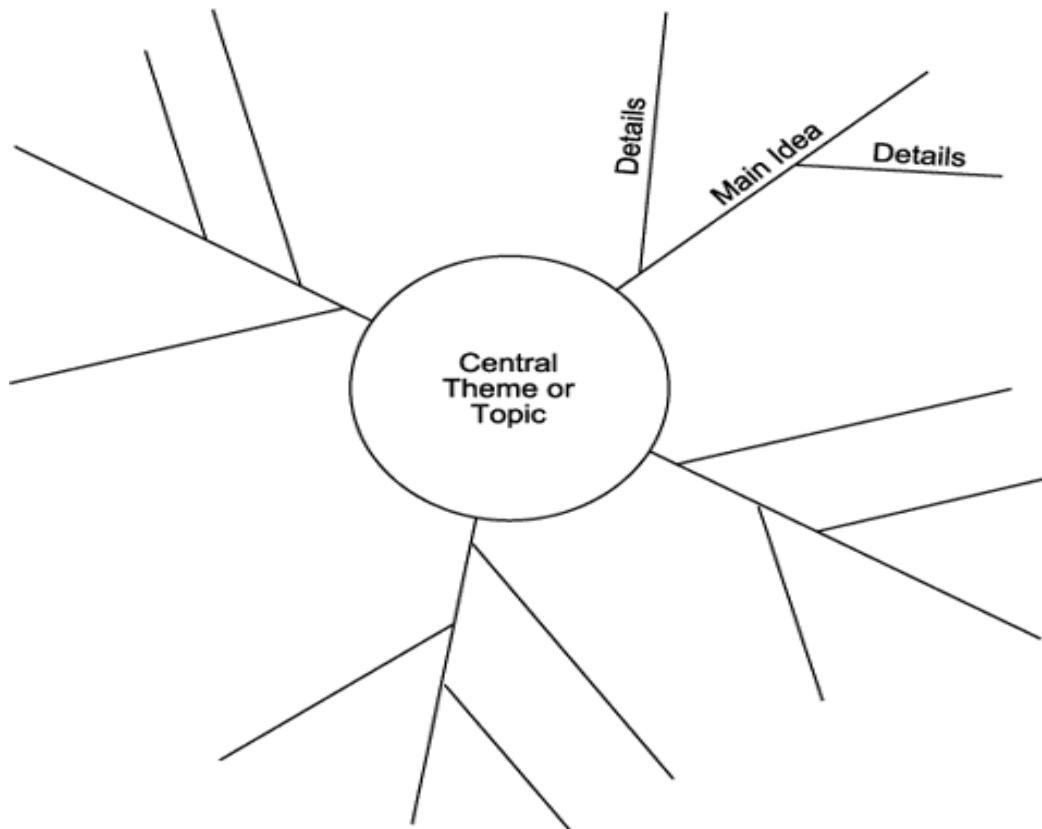
Another researched based way of teaching social skills is to ask your school if you can purchase *The Social Times*. Editor Kari Dunn Buron, Ms.Ed., creator of "The 5-Point Scale" written to help people with autism spectrum disorders understand emotions and social clues, provides critical information in an entertaining and understandable way through these mini social lessons. Teachers can consult online materials geared to the major topic of each issue. The Social Times consists of 9 colored, student-friendly mini lessons in 9 different booklet formats, each consisting of 8 pages. Each booklet targets a different social skill such as, Having a Conversation, Personal Space, and Handling Change. Published by the Autism Asperger Publishing Company, there are 10 sets of each pack in a box for \$51. These practical and innovative lessons are available through Autism Asperger Publishing Co.



<http://www.asperger.net>.

**Semantic mapping** is a visual strategy to help students to use prior knowledge to generate, visualize, structure, and classify ideas. Semantic analysis and semantic mapping helps students to organize their thoughts and to study in a way their brains are more likely to remember the information. It is an interactive process that is first done by the teacher with the whole class. After being modeled by the teacher numerous times, students may be able to start to use this process on their own. The steps involved in semantic mapping are:

- ▶ Write the concept word on the board
- ▶ Ask students to think of as many words as they can for the concept word
- ▶ Write the list on the board or overhead and have students copy it
- ▶ Have the students put the words into categories
- ▶ Use a visual image-centered diagram (mind map, graphic organizer) to visually represent the words (semantic connections between portions of information) linked to the central/key word or idea.
- ▶ The following is an example of a graphic organizer to assist a student in semantic mapping.





For students who have less language and/or are more comfortable using pictures for visual support, try giving them a visual way to help them to learn the process of semantic analysis. The following is a visual aid that may help support such students.

<p>Use your senses to help you to describe things.</p>	<p>It looks ...</p> 	<p>It smells ...</p> 	<p>I hear ...</p> 	<p>It feels ...</p> 	<p>It tastes ...</p> 
	<p>little, medium</p>  <p>big</p>	<p>delicious</p> 	<p>loud</p> 	<p>wet</p> 	<p>sweet</p> 
	<p>straight</p>  <p>curly</p> 	<p>good</p> 	<p>quiet</p> 	<p>sticky</p> 	<p>sour</p> 
	<p>hard</p>  <p>soft</p>  <p>bumpy</p> 	<p>bad!</p> 	<p>kids</p> 	<p>rough</p>  <p>smooth</p> 	<p>really good</p> 
	<p>pretty</p> 	<p>It smells like ...</p> 	<p>music</p>  <p>noise</p> 	<p>cold</p>  <p>hot</p>  <p>warm</p> 	<p>yucky</p> 

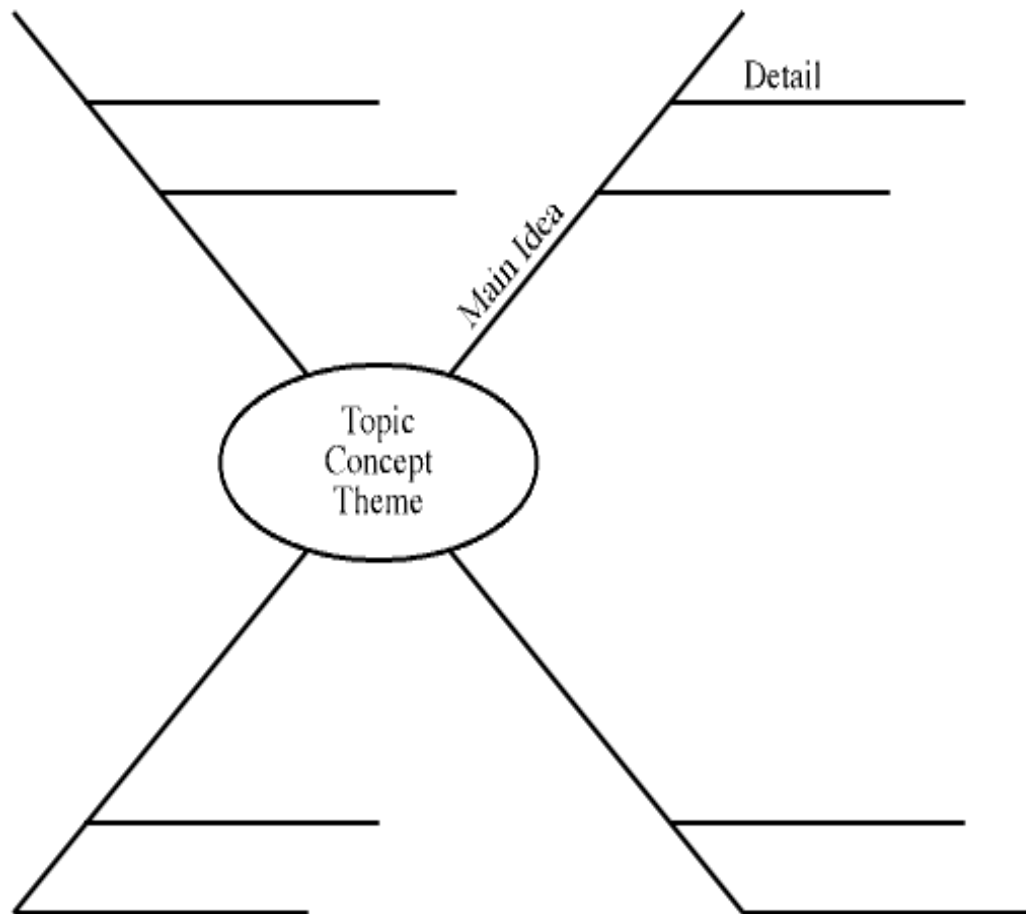
Students who have ASD will do better when taught through a wide variety of lesson structures, including:

- Lecture – BUT, not just lecture – these students are VISUAL learners – they need visual representations to learn, retain and recall information. To learn, students with ASD MUST have opportunities throughout each lesson to engage, to interact and to respond.
- Whole class discussions (make sure you call on them when you're pretty sure they can answer)
- Cooperative learning – Assign specific, written individual responsibilities during group work, with examples of what the student with ASD could say and do in his/her role
- Working with shoulder partners, and peer tutoring
- Providing them with notes and teaching them to highlight the important information
- Diagrams and Charts
- Personal White-Boards
- Computers for written language and to learn from approved software and web sites
- Maps, Globes, Atlas, GPS
- Brochures, tour books, travel literature, posters and postcards
- Pictures
- Demonstrations
- Models – looking at models, interacting with them, and creating them
- Drama – acting it out
- Stations, centers, and labs
- Provide older students with rubrics or written explanations and comments about rules, due dates for each multi-step part of a project and any other due dates

During **group discussions**, create a visual on the board or on paper to visually show the student how well he/she is doing in staying on topic.

- Draw a circle in the middle of the board/paper and write the topic in the circle. As each student gives his/her answer to what relates to that topic, write it near the circle if it is actually on topic and draw a line connecting the answer to the circle.
- When a student contributes an off-topic contribution, the teacher writes that answer in a different color far away from the center circle without a connecting line. The distance away from the center and the lack of a connecting line will visually alert the student that their answer did not pertain to the topic.
- The teacher then redirects the students' attention to the selected topic by pointing to the center circle, verbalizing the prompt, and again asking for ideas related to the chosen topic.

*{Student responds, BUT is off  
Topic – write the response away  
from the map and do NOT  
connect it with a line}*



**Classroom Assessments** - When possible, create assessments that don't rely heavily on essay or short answers. Many students with ASD perform better on assessments that contain fill in the blanks (using a word bank) or multiple choice questions. Highlight important words to help them to identify the necessary information. Higher functioning students often retain very detailed information that makes it difficult for them to retrieve just one piece of information needed to answer a question. To help the student to focus on the essential elements that will demonstrate their mastery of the information, the teacher may need to rewrite the question. For example, the class is given the following assignment: "Pick a biome and describe its location, geography, climate, plants, and animals. Identify one plant and animal adaptation that help it survive."

To help the student with ASD, the teacher instead hands the following to the student:

- a. The biome is \_\_\_\_\_
- b. The biome is located \_\_\_\_\_
- c. The geographical features of the biome are \_\_\_\_\_
- d. The average temperatures in this biome are \_\_\_\_\_
- e. The average rainfall in this biome is \_\_\_\_\_
- f. Some of the plants in this biome are \_\_\_\_\_
- g. Some of the animals in this biome are \_\_\_\_\_
- h. One plant is \_\_\_\_\_ and its adaptation is \_\_\_\_\_
- i. The adaptation helped it survive by \_\_\_\_\_
- j. One animal in this biome is \_\_\_\_\_ and its adaptation is \_\_\_\_\_
- k. The adaptation helped it to survive by \_\_\_\_\_

**Additional Strategies - Sensory** – If you have a student who gets angry, upset or anxious, try these calming strategies:

- Use of stress balls or age and classroom appropriate fidget while listening or doing seat work
- Allowing the child to complete an activity (or to reach a mutually agreed stopping point) before going on to the next activity
- Avoid rushing the child
- Heavy work (child carries a milk crate of books to the library) as soon as the child appears to start to escalate – this allows a “time away” AND provides calming deep pressure
- Playing classical music during seat work and other appropriate times
- Allowing the student to wear headphones or noise reduction ear plugs if bothered/distracted by background noises
- Having the student frequently look at his/her schedule to prepare for what comes next
- Providing sensory breaks in a quiet, comfortable area of the room
- Providing a tag-board divider, or a quiet area to allow child to complete difficult tasks

**Alerting/Focusing strategies:** to try with students who appear “tired” or unfocused:

- Allow the student to keep a water bottle (one with a straw is best) at his/her desk
- Allow snacking during seat work
- Allow gum-chewing or sucking on mints while listening/working
- Minimize visual distractions in the classroom
- Provide alternative seating such as therapy balls, round/wedge sit disks
- Provide frequent movement breaks (standing, walking around the edge of the room), stretching, wall push-ups, or action songs
- Provide defined boundaries, such as a carpet square for each child
- Provide weighted lap buddies or pads during part of seat work (check with OT)

**Behavioral Strategies and teaching self-management skills** - Students with ASD thrive on structure and routine. Predictability is like a life-line for them. Many of their behaviors result from inability to deal with change, problems with sensory integration, frustration, anxiety, fear,

and inability to express themselves appropriately. Behavior is a form of communication. We try to modify and control their environment when they are young, and to teach them skills including coping mechanisms as we gradually shape their reactions to their environments as they get older. Motivating these students is essential to getting them to engage in activities. Their motivation is strongly influenced by their interests, their sensory systems, learning history, learning style (usually more hands on and visual), and external motivators (incentives to get them to “buy into” and engage in a task). Send home a request to find out the student’s interests and preferred objects/activities. To help the student to feel that he/she is okay and able to work try:

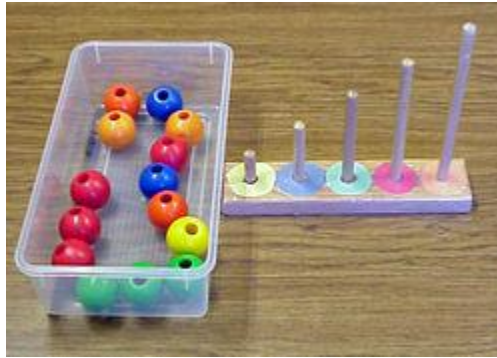
- Removing/minimizing environmental triggers as much as possible
- Minimizing stressful situations such as having to change in a locker room in front of peers
- Developing a predictable daily routine
- Developing a personalized schedule and go over it as often as needed until the student begins to internalize it
- Creating and using within-task-schedules as needed to assist a student in being more independent in starting and completing a part of a lesson or an entire subject (reading, math, etc.) with minimal adult support
- Making rules and expectations clear and giving them to the student in writing
- Incorporating the strengths and interests into daily plan
- Using timers (visual and vibrating) to assist children with transitions from one activity to the next especially with younger or more developmentally delayed students.
- Being proactive – have several activities ready; keep a favored fidget in your pocket; over plan; build in sensory breaks
- Providing opportunities for choice – both choice of activities and choices of behavior. The student is given options (including visual options if needed). These options can be ranked by using happy or sad faces to identify good from no so good choices.
- Identifying what motivates the student to work and use the favored topic in teaching
- Giving verbal praise when praise is deserved
- Varying tasks - Start with highly preferred tasks/activities that the student can be successful with and intersperse less preferred tasks/activities and more challenging activities during the day
- Not making the student erase something that he/she feels is finished – this often makes no sense to the student and results in frustration and a attitude of why should I do it again
- Having the student repeat work in a way that doesn’t undo what has already been done
- Allowing frequent position changes including laying or sitting on the floor during certain tasks
- Providing them with breaks to allow them to self-regulate their sensory systems and to improve their ability to attend and to focus. **Two types of “breaks” are suggested:** *sensory* (1-2 minute) and *stress* (5 minutes or longer) – both to help student to regroup and to focus to continue learning. Help the student to create a list of daily stress release activities that may include: remove self from noisy area, putting on headphones/earplugs, listening to soothing music (rhythmic works well), getting a drink of water, etc.
- Providing a visual strategy or group of strategies (that you have previously taught to the student) for them to refer to and to use when they start to become anxious, agitated, or overwhelmed.
- Using personal pragmatic stories or social-skill stories to shape a behavior

- Using Use comic strip conversations to help a student to understand the results of his/her actions on himself and on others
- Helping the student to create a plan of action – With assistance as needed, including visual supports, the student creates a plan of action to carry out his/her strategy to help him/he with the targeted problem. The strategy should include each steps that student needs to follow. The student then needs to practice this strategy with various people in various settings until the situation becomes internalized.
- Minimizing opportunities for impulsivity by managing the classroom and campus environment to the best of your ability. Use personal pragmatic stories (social skills stories), and practice appropriate behaviors. Provide scheduled sensory breaks, and for more cognitive able students, use 5-point scales and teach them to use replacement behaviors and self regulation.
- Teaching the kids how to communicate their needs through use of objects, pictures &/or words, or augmentative communication devices from simple to complex.
- Giving consequences as needed (consequences should have been previously put into writing for the student and reviewed with the student)
- Giving the student sufficient information:
  - What is going to happen
  - When something is happening
  - What are the choices
  - What is changing
  - Who is coming
  - What am I supposed to do
  - Who will help me if I need help?

**Teaching Self-Management through use of Work Systems** – a systematic and organized presentation of tasks for students to learn to work independently, without adult directions/prompts. Work systems can reflect any previously learned task. The point is for the student to be able to perform the tasks INDEPENDENTLY. A student's overall productivity will increase when he/she knows how much work there is to do, and what he/she can look forward to at the end of the tasks. Using and completing independent work systems teaches students with ASD how to following visual cues in various situations and environments. This also increases his/her overall independent functioning. When creating a work system for a student, the teacher needs to ask him/herself the following:

- **Exactly what do I want the student to do?** (e.g., sorting by colors; adding/subtracting 2 digit numbers, brushing teeth, etc.). The materials of the task define the task (putting rings on a stick with the rings located in a container on the left, and the stick standing upright on the right - again following the left to right sequence).
- **Give the student the exact materials you want him/her to work with.** If the student is to match 6 colors, give the student only 6 colors.
- The student needs to **independently recognize when he/she is finished** with a task. (Completing the task may indicate completion to the student. Otherwise, you can set a timer or use other visual cues such as a small red stop sign to indicate where to stop.)
- **What does the student get to do once he/she has completed the tasks?** Items such as physical reinforcers or highly desired activities will usually motivate a student to complete the tasks in a timely manner.

A teacher may give student 3 or more tasks to do as one work system. The tasks are presented to the student in a left to right sequence, with a finished basket/folder to the far right. Each task is labeled with two symbols: a color, shape, letter, or number. One of the labels is attached to the task with Velcro. The velcroed labels are removed and placed left –to- right in front of the student. The student matches his/her 1st label to the label of the tasks to his/her left, gets that task and begins to complete the task. Either the teacher or a paraprofessional monitors (and encourages as necessary) the student, but *does not* provide instruction during the task completion. The adult also collects data on the student’s rate of success to know when to change the activities. As the student completes each task, he/she puts it in the finished basket/folder. A simple task may be to match colored beads to colors at the bottom of a wooden stacker.



**Directly teaching these kids daily routines** (using visual supports) that we take for granted that they should know, including:

- How and when to request help
- When it is okay to get up from their chair
- How to request using the bathroom
- The toileting routine, including making sure clothes are pulled up before leaving the bathroom
- How to get a pencil if they need one
- How and where to hand in homework
- When and how to speak out loud in class
- How to make up missed work
- How to stand in a line
- How to walk in a line
- How to get through a cafeteria line
- How to throw trash away
- What “free” time means and what to do during this time
- How to prepare for change
- How to recognize their own anxiety and what strategies to use to decrease that anxiety.

**Techniques to help minimize/reduce anxiety/stress:**

- Being aware of the child’s sensory needs when developing classroom activities
- Providing frequent, positive reinforcement, including use of tangible reinforcers (food, stickers, use of a computer, ability to earn time to read, etc.)

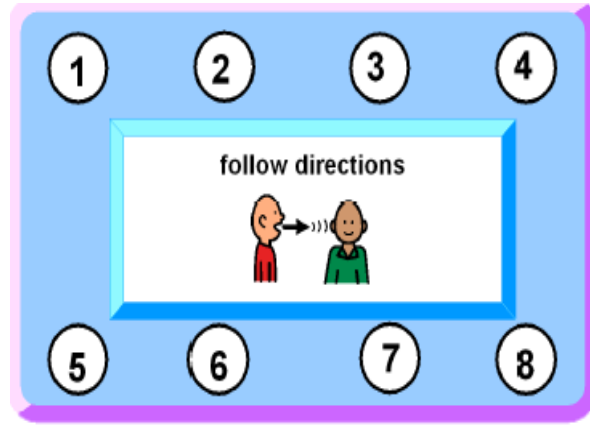
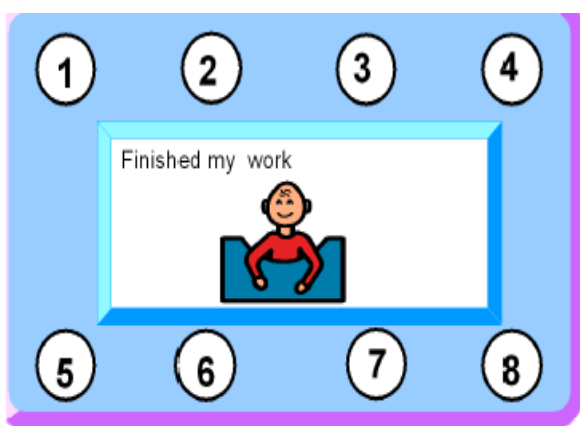
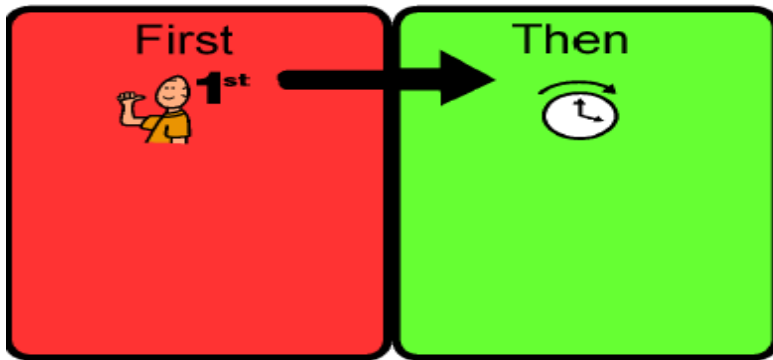
- Making sure the student knows who is a “safe person” to go to as needed
- Making sure they understand where their safe area of the room/school is, with tools to help student to re-regulate/calm
- Using prepared visual supports and sticky notes as needed
- Making sure they have the rules for each class in writing
- Approaching them from the front so they see you coming
- Speaking in a quiet soothing voice
- Praising young students and developmentally immature students for their good behavior; however, older, more cognitively able students should be expected to behave. The praise should be for specific accomplishments, not for their behavior.
- Providing a peer buddy/peer assistant
- Breaking long-term assignments down for them into manageable parts and show them on a calendar exactly what is due on a given day
- Listing tasks to be accomplished in a given day
- Using an anxiety point scale (teach them to recognize how they feel and what to do if their anxiety increases – practice these)
- Teaching and practicing relaxation strategies until they have been internalized
- Using social skills stories to explain what may cause stress and how the student can alleviate this stress – do it BEFORE the student has a melt down!
- Using task analysis – the teachers look at what the student is expected to do, then they look at their lesson. Given the content of the lesson, exactly what are you expecting the student to do? (Example: You write 2 sentences on the board every morning without capitalization or punctuation. You expect the students to write these sentences correctly in their notebooks. The student with ASD is very slow to get organized every morning, has difficulty copying from the board to his paper, and never gets started before everyone else in the class is finished. Analyze your task. If the task is to recognize and to correct capitalization and punctuation, does the student have to copy both sentences? Can you, a paraprofessional or a peer write/type the sentences and give them to the student to fix the capitalization and punctuation?)
- Noticing if your student is visibly upset or is becoming aggressive and NOT talking to the student or to asking questions at that time. Allow coping time – talking can make it worse. Use a picture and/or words to let the student know you are giving them time to settle down. If necessary, direct the child to a safe area of the room or if prearranged, to a safe area in another room where the child can decompress.
- Using a visual problem solving checklist or comic strip conversations to help the child to see and to understand their behavior and the impact of their behavior on others. They need to learn that they are responsible for their actions and that when they act inappropriately, there are immediate consequences.
- Unobtrusively reducing their written work, including homework when possible. Help the student prioritize homework assignments and activities and put it in writing. **PLEASE, BE AWARE** that since many students on the spectrum function according to rules, giving them the same amount of work as their peers may be in their mind a “rule” that they have to follow.

**Nonviolent Crisis Prevention Intervention (CPI)** Staff dealing with students who may demonstrate behaviors that are dangerous to themselves or others should look on the Polk



County School’s scheduler and sign up for a course in Nonviolent Crisis Prevention Intervention (CPI). **CPI’s approach to behavior management training is twofold:** First, it provides professional development and training to help staff to empower their students to make decisions to help manage their own behaviors by guiding an upset student to a calmer space. Second, when working with students who may exhibit challenging behaviors, staff are taught to recognize that their own behaviors affect the behaviors of these students. Strategies provided in the *Nonviolent Crisis Intervention*® training program allow staff to respond in a professional and appropriate way when presented with challenging behaviors.

The following are some **examples of visual supports** that may help students to better understand what is expected of them:




## ABC Rules


**A rule= not open for discussion. The adult rules and the student MUST do what the adult says.**

**B rules= rules that the student may discuss with adult. Room for some negotiation.**


**C rules= things that have to be done but it's the child's choice when it gets done.**

A


You must do what adult says.

B


We can talk about it!

C


You decide when it gets done!


**I need help**









**I'm okay**



### Behavior Check

	Sit
	Listen
	Work
	Hands on desk
	Feet on floor
	

1	2	3	4	5
<p style="color: red; font-weight: bold;">I am working for</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 100px; height: 60px; margin: 0 auto;"></div>				
6	7	8	9	10

My Problem Solving Chart for _____	
What is the Problem? 	
I feel 	
Others Feel 	
Good Choices _____ 	
Choices that aren't so good _____ 	
 <b>My goal is to stay calm</b>	
<b>Date:</b> _____	

**Prompt, reinforce, fade, monitor results, and record data** – The student’s IEP team will have identified target behaviors that they want to shape (through prompting, etc.) or to change. Members of the student’s team need to work together to select prompts and reinforcements that will be likely to produce the desired behavior. Parents, previous teachers, current teachers, and students themselves can provide information to help you to decide which reinforcers the student is likely to work for.

A **prompt** is additional information to support a cue. A prompt is given to students by adults or peers to help the student to perform a desired behavior/ skill. We prompt because students with ASD often have difficulty associating natural cues with specific behaviors. Cues are a stimulus, event, or object that signals a specific response or behavior such as a growling stomach is a natural cue to get something to eat, a full bladder is a natural cue to go to the restroom, and a peer saying “Hi or hey!” is a natural cue to give a social response.

We prompt these students as needed (visual and at times visual and verbal, or gestural) to provide additional information. Once the teacher has given the student a cue wait about 10-15 seconds for a student response to allow extra processing time, and if there is no response, re-prompt at a higher level of prompting. Reinforce the desired behavior through praise or if needed, through a tangible, motivating reward. Begin to fade prompts as soon as the desired behavior is actually established. Fading is the process of gradually reducing both the level and the type of prompt and by giving more subtle reinforcement.

Monitoring and recording data accurately is essential to know if the student is making the expected gains. If the student is not making progress, return to a stronger more desirable prompt when necessary. Students with ASD may not retain the “learning” from day to day or from one setting to another so they may know something one day and not the next. At these times, it is OK to give a previous, stronger level of prompting until the child demonstrates ability to do the task proficiently again. Quickly move to a lesser prompt as soon as you can. Ask the ESE teacher, the ABST, your school psychologist or a member of the district’s ASD Support Team for help as needed until you are comfortable with this technique. The following is an example of prompting hierarchy:

- **Prompt to get the student to perform a behavior** - when teaching a new skill, you may have to prompt from most to least; however ALWAYS start with what you think is the least amount of prompting for any given student. Once a student is able to demonstrate ability to use a skill in more than one setting, prompts should be provided from least to most.
- **Levels of prompting from most to least are:**
  6. Hand-over-hand physical assistance to complete a task
  5. Physical prompt to the elbow or hand
  4. Model the behavior for the student to imitate (including verbal modeling)
  3. Verbal
  2. Gestural (point)
  1. Positional – arranging the environment to achieve the desired response, such as placing the stimulus near the student

**Give the student time (10 – 15 seconds) to respond**

- **Reinforce the appropriate behavior** to encourage the child to do the task again
- **Re-prompt at a different level** if the student fails to respond to the prompt
- Once the student has established the target behavior in more than one setting, begin to fade the prompts or the student will become prompt dependent.
- **Monitor and record results**, including the level of prompts given to let the IEP team know how the student is progressing.

**Data collection** is necessary to ensure accurate measurement of student progress. Accurate data collection ensures that as teachers and paraprofessional are carrying out instruction with fidelity. Fidelity of instruction means that instruction was provided the way it was designed to be delivered and with consistency. Data collection allows us to determine how effective the instruction has been and to make any necessary modifications to the instruction. Data may be collected hourly, daily, or weekly depending on the needs of the student. Data collection is necessary for accountability. Data may be collected by any adult who is working with the

student by using a group data sheet, individual data sheet, skills acquisition sheet, behavior tracking sheet, work system data sheet, toileting data sheet, etc.

**Sample forms for data collection:**

Child's name: \_\_\_\_\_

Skill observed: \_\_\_\_\_

Criterion for completing skill: \_\_\_\_\_

Date																
<b>Session</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
Skill completed? (Indicate with "+" for yes and a "-" for no)																

Student: _____	Date: _____	Observer: _____		
<b>Reaches for it</b>	<b>Picks it out from a group</b>	<b>Resists giving it back</b>	<b>Plays with it or uses it 5 – 15 min.</b>	<b>Rank preference</b>

**Student Support Staff** may include a classroom teacher(s), ESE teacher(s), speech-language pathologist (SLP), registered occupational therapist (OTR), certified occupational therapy assistant (COA), registered physical therapist (RPT), behavioral therapist/specialist, school psychologist, guidance counselor, paraprofessional, and members of the Polk County Autism Support Team. While not support staff, the parent(s) are important members of the child's overall team, which may also include other school paraprofessional and custodians.

Support staff will assist the student with a variety of strategies such as:

- Organizational strategies (some strategies will be taught to the student and others to the staff (Ex. all teachers write HWK assignments in same section of a board.))
- Communication strategies (may include low-tech visual communication supports or communication devices)
- Calming strategies
- Strategies to assist with sensory regulation

**Paraprofessional-teacher partnership** - Building and maintaining a paraprofessional-teacher partnership requires open communication between the paraprofessional and the teacher. It takes time and trust to build such a partnership. The best paraprofessional-teacher partnerships result in happier staff and better instruction and success for the students. To start the process, roles and responsibilities of all classroom staff should be clarified at the beginning of the year (or as soon as a paraprofessional is assigned to a classroom or to a student). When there is confusion about who is to do something, it is important for the team to discuss this together. It requires commitment by each team member to on-going problem solving rather than giving up when things get tough.

Paraprofessionals work under the supervision of teachers or other professionals who have the ultimate responsibility of the design, implementation, and evaluation of instructional programs and of the student's progress. The paraprofessional can assist with carrying out instruction developed by the teacher, but cannot design instruction. For example, the classroom teacher designs a lesson for a small reading group where your student goes to read. Some days, the paraprofessional may teach from a teacher-developed lesson, while other days, the classroom teacher teaches the group.

Under most circumstances, a paraprofessional assigned to a classroom to assist a student(s) with special needs, should be seen as support for all students. They may be asked by the teacher to move throughout the classroom to help all the students rather than to hover over the student with the IEP. This gives all students in the class a chance to receive extra instruction and support. Legally, a paraprofessional cannot create new/alternative instruction without direction from the teacher/other certified personnel, implement ideas without teacher direction, or take complete responsibility for any students.

Teachers need to discuss the student's IEP with the paraprofessional who is to be working with a specific student. The paraprofessional needs to understand what specific goals and objectives the student has, what accommodations the student needs to be able to access the curriculum, and any other specific needs the student may have. To facilitate student independence, the paraprofessional needs to learn how to help the student to do as much as possible without adult support. When possible, the paraprofessional can facilitate asking or encouraging another student (shoulder partner, peer buddy) to assist the student in a given activity.

The paraprofessional should be monitoring the student's performance in a given task and notifying the teacher when the student is able to be more successful with less adult assistance. If a student can be successful in the classroom through use of peer supports, the role of the paraprofessional changes. For some students the paraprofessional will continue to be necessary.

However, their direct interaction with the student should lessen over time as natural supports and accommodations are developed and the student learns the classroom routines.

**Responsibilities of the Paraprofessional** - the paraprofessional should function as an extra pair of hands to assist in the classroom. This includes assisting with such things as:

- Leading small group instruction designed by the teacher
- Gathering or creating (under teacher supervision) materials
- Adapting lessons under the teacher's supervision
- Assisting students in their personal care (toileting, hand washing, eating, etc.)
- Helping to facilitate interactions between students and between the student and adults
- Demonstrating appropriate responses to student-initiated interactions
- Assisting in teaching peers and adults how to help to facilitate communication with a student (after you have been coached by the SLP, ESE, and/or classroom teacher)
- Fostering independence and self-advocacy by providing appropriate wait time, prompting appropriately, reviewing data with the teacher, and reinforcing the student
- Collecting data on student performance as directed by the teacher
- Reinforcing teacher-directed instruction and activities
- Providing one-on-one or small group assistance to students (do things with the student and not for the student).
- Taking the student to a quiet area of the room or to a quiet room to complete work or to take a quiz or a test
- Making sure the student has your expectations in visual form (pictures/words)
- Assisting with classroom and behavior management
- Supervising students in non-structured activities (lunch, walking in hallways, etc.)
- Assisting students as they navigate the campus
- Coordinating visual aids and communication systems
- Monitoring behavior management systems: logs, points, tokens, praise
- Keeping working files up-to-date
- Modeling appropriate problem solving and conflict resolution techniques
- Participating in training as required to support the implementation of recommended interventions such as: Picture Exchange Communication System and assistive technology
- Demonstrating patience and understanding towards students
- Developing and maintaining a positive rapport with students by treating them respectfully and fairly
- Assisting the student with managing his/her behaviors which requires knowing if there is a plan in place to address these behaviors. Not all behaviors are "bad". Behaviors include, getting off task, difficulty following directions, blurting out in class, etc., as well as socially unacceptable behaviors (hitting, spitting, kicking, etc.). An ESE teacher or the classroom teacher should inform you if such a plan exists and explain it to you. You will be told what is expected of you in supporting positive student behavior. You also need to be informed of what to do if the student displays inappropriate behavior.
- Making sure the student knows exactly when homework assignments are due (by writing in his/her planner or on a calendar that belongs to the student) and how and where to turn those assignments in.

- Communicating daily with classroom teachers
- Maintaining effective and collaborative relationships with staff
- Referring all requests for information to appropriate personnel
- Making sure you know on a daily basis where you are supposed to be, which student(s) you will be working with and what is expected of you that day
- Work towards helping them to be as independent as possible
- Keeping your expectations of all students high.
- Try not to take things these students or do personally

**Paraprofessional Performance-Based Competencies:**

- Understanding child growth and development
- Being aware of how to best use educational materials to facilitate student learning
- Understanding and abiding by policies regarding student confidentiality
- Adhering to school and county policies applicable to paraprofessional-educators
- Understanding basic characteristics of students with Autism Spectrum Disorder
- Acquiring a basic knowledge of Individual Education Plans
- Ability to follow the teacher's directives to instruct the student
- Ability to monitor or under teacher's directive, to instruct small groups or the whole class as needed
- Being positive
- Being flexible
- Being aware of what is and isn't working
- Being willing to learn and to make changes

**CONFIDENTIALITY** is of the **UPMOST importance**. Information regarding a specific student, including handicapping condition or reason for placement in a specific program may NEVER be released to any person other than the parent or another member of that student's IEP team (teachers, SLP, OT, PT, mental health counselor, psychologist). Information (verbal or written) about the student cannot be released to any outside agency without the parent signing a Release of Information Form. This information would then be provided by a staff member at the school as designated by the building principal. Information regarded as confidential includes:

- Student's Exceptionality
- Test scores/IQ scores
- Health Concerns
- Behavior
- Progress

Parents should establish a primary relationship with the classroom teacher, not with the paraprofessional. This relationship needs to be established and encouraged by the teacher(s). It is the teacher(s) who are directly responsible for meeting the needs of the student as specified on the IEP. If the paraprofessional is the primary person to communicate with the parents, misunderstandings may occur regarding who is in charge. The paraprofessional is there to support the teacher in helping the student's needs be met. The administrator, the teacher, the paraprofessional, and the parents should all know what the responsibilities of the paraprofessional are. Everyone on the team needs to know who will train, supervise, and



evaluate the paraprofessional. It is ultimately the building administrators who actually evaluate the performance of the paraprofessional in their schools.

The student's team needs to have a daily plan and contingency plan for when the student is unable (for any reason) to comply with doing the first planned activity. Classroom staff are often interdependent, especially in pre-K and in the lower elementary grades. As one person's roles and responsibilities shift there is a ripple effect on others.

**IEP** - stands for *Individualized Education Plan*. Before an IEP can be written, the student must be eligible for special education. By federal law, a multidisciplinary team must determine that (1) he/she's a child with a disability and (2) he/she requires special education and related services to benefit from the general education program. The IEP is a written document developed for each public school child who is eligible for special education. The IEP is created through a team effort and reviewed at least annually.

An IEP is a legally binding document that spells out exactly what special education services a student will receive and why. It includes the student's exceptionality, services such therapies, (speech-language, occupational, physical), academic and behavioral goals, a behavior plan if needed, percentage of time in regular education, classroom placement, and progress reports from teachers and therapists. The *individualized* part of IEP allows the plan to be specifically tailored to a student's special needs (academic, behavioral, social-emotional, adaptive skills, etc.).

IF a student's IEP says:

- *Reduced paper-pencil tasks* – The teacher is to reduce the amount of the assignment or reduce the amount of written work he/she is expecting the student to produce. The student needs to some way demonstrate his/her understanding of the subject matter, which can at times be through oral presentation, a chart/graph, or creating some type of visual project through drawing, creating a diorama, etc. The teacher may be able to turn *some* short answer questions into multiple choices or fill in the blank. Remember, you are reducing the assignment length and looking for the student to produce quality rather than quantity in assignments.
- Note taking paper or *provide copy of notes* - You either need to get note taking paper from your ESE teacher, have the paraprofessional make a copy another student's notes, or have the paraprofessional take notes for the student. You can also provide the student with any copies of outlines, power points, etc. that you may have, and teach the student to highlight what is important. This method also helps the student to focus on the lesson.
- *Additional time for assignment completion* – the amount of time will be specified on the IEP. PLEASE remember that you may be only one of the student's teachers.

The members of that student's IEP team put accommodations on the IEP so that the student will be better able to demonstrate his/her true knowledge about a given subject without becoming overwhelmed to the point of frustration or anger by attempting to comply with completing the amount of work given to them. These students work at a slower pace than neurotypical students. While they may be capable of completing all of the work in one class, they are often unable to sustain their attention or energy level to complete all of the work that a typical peer is expected to complete throughout a school day.

**Additional Information for paraprofessional and teachers:**

The following is a very brief summary of: **Ten Things Every Child with Autism Wishes You Knew** by Ellen Notbohm .

- 1 All behavior is a form of communication.
- 2 Never assume anything. Please remember to distinguish between *won't* (I choose not to) and *can't* (I am not able to).
- 3 My sensory perceptions are disordered. (Sensory integration may be the most important thing to try to help the student to deal with. If the student's sensory system is overloaded, he/she will be unable to focus or to work effectively and may demonstrate many behaviors.)
- 4 Provide me a break to allow for self-regulation *before* I need it.
- 5 Tell me what you want me to do in the positive rather than the imperative.
- 6 Keep your expectations reasonable.
- 7 Help me transition between activities.
- 8 Don't make a bad situation worse. Try to identify what triggers my meltdowns
- 9 Criticize gently. Please focus and build on what I can do rather than what I can't do.
- 10 Offer real choices – and only real choices. Don't offer me a choice or ask a "Do you want...?" question unless are willing to accept no for an answer.

**Bullying** – Bullying and social exclusion are common experiences for many people (children and adults) with and without disabilities. However, students with ASD who lack social understanding and social skills (they don't "read" the nonverbal social cues or sarcasm in someone's voice) of a society are at increased risk for bullying. A child with ASD may think that because a peer is nice to them one day, they are "best friends." They don't understand that some of their peers may purposely set them up because they like to see their reactions in given situations. Their naivety, and not fully understanding cause and effect or consequences makes them easy to manipulate and vulnerable to getting themselves into trouble. Students with high-functioning autism or Asperger's may be particularly vulnerable to bullying since they are usually in general education classrooms. Thus, these kids may become easy targets for bullies. Bullying can have devastating effects on students and their families. It is up to the adults who work with these students to educate other adults and the students in the class/school to make sure these students with ASD are not targeted for bullying. Praise classmates when they treat these students with compassion. Create cooperative learning situations where all students can share his/her proficiencies. Establish a "buddy system" in each class, and make sure these students never walk alone between classes.

***Instructional Materials for Students in separate classes may include:*****SONDAY SYSTEMS - *Let's Play and Learn, and Sunday Systems 1 and 2***

- ***Let's Play and Learn*** meets all of the State and Federal requirements of an early intervention and reading readiness program for preschool through kindergarten and as an intervention program for struggling students who need additional pre-reading skills. This program includes prepared lesson plans with eight levels of instruction designed to match developmental levels of preschool and kindergarten students. Each level begins with a list of goals and ends with a list of benchmarks that should be met before moving to the next level. Included are: **Alphabet, Shapes & Numbers Books, Manipulatives & 20 color-coded Card Decks of shapes,**

letter/sounds, and colors. Activities taught include: phonological awareness (rhyme, onset sounds, and closure), rapid naming (shapes, colors, numbers and letters), alphabet, shapes, colors, patterns, numbers and counting, vocabulary (location and descriptive words), and pre-writing and printing, picture and listening comprehension, letter names and sounds.

- **Sonday1®** is an Orton-Gillingham based multisensory structured phonics, reading, writing, and spelling program that guides beginning reading instruction, reading intervention, and English Language Learners (ELL), by utilizing phonetics and emphasizing visual, auditory and kinesthetic learning styles. Instruction begins by focusing on the structure of language and gradually moves towards reading. The program provides students with immediate feedback and a predictable sequence that integrates reading, writing and spelling. The student is directly taught reading, handwriting and written expression as one logical body of knowledge.
- **Sonday 2®** is a continuation of Sonday System 1® that guides instruction for Intermediate Reading, Reading Intervention, and English Language Learners (ELL). Sonday 2® focuses on: syllable division, prefixes, suffixes, roots and the rules that govern them, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension.

## PCI READING PROG

- **LVL 1 PRINT** - a scientifically research-based curriculum created to teach students with developmental disabilities, autism, and significant learning disabilities to read. Level 1 teaches 140 basic sight words from the Dolch and Fry lists and real-world words through a comprehensive system of repetition, hands-on practice, controlled-vocabulary reading, and high-interest activities. Students progress from reading individual words to 8-12 word sentences. Level 1 continuously reviews previously learned words, promoting short- and long-term retention. The program is designed for nonreaders age 5 – adult. Level 1 includes 28 books, ranging from 8 - 12 pages. By the end of Level 1, nonreaders will have progressed to 4
- **PCI READING PROG LVL 2** - The reading program follows a 5-step lesson cycle based on visual discrimination, designed to teach students to automatically recognize and correctly pronounce one word at a time. Level 2 teaches additional sight words and real-world life words (nouns and verbs), advancing students from a 1.0 reading level to a 2.0-2.5 reading level. Students are also introduced to wrapped text, common inflectional endings, such as -s, -ing, and -ed, and compound words.
- **PCI Environmental Print Series** is an integrated language arts curriculum, designed for verbal and nonverbal students who have significant cognitive disabilities. However, it may also be used with students with less severe cognitive abilities who have been unsuccessful with phonics or sight-words-based reading programs. This program integrates forms of environmental print such as road signs and indoor signs into the story lines of books about adolescent characters.
- **Environmental Print Level One** teaches 48 signs (Streets and Roads , Restaurants, Community Places , and Work Places)

**Touch Math** – was created to teach students in Pre-K, Kindergarten, First, Second and Third Grades, Special Education, and for Intervention. This multisensory program uses Touch Points

to engage students in learning. Students are taught how to touch the numbers one through nine with their pencils. They count forward and backwards touching each number at specific points. Each number has that many touch points. The number eight has eight touch points for an example. After the students are taught to use the touch points for each number, they can be taught how to add, subtract, and multiply.



**STAR Autism Program** is a research-based applied behavior analysis (ABA) curriculum that teaches children with autism the critical skills identified by the 2001 National Research Council. The ABA instructional methods of discrete trial training, pivotal response training and functional routines form the instructional base of this program. The STAR Program includes detailed lesson plans, teaching materials, data systems, and a curriculum-based assessment for teaching in the six curricular areas of receptive language, expressive language, spontaneous language, functional routines, academics, and play & social skills. STAR is broken down into three levels as follows:

- **Level I** – for students who have difficulty following simple commands, have little/ no language, demonstrate inappropriate behaviors when asked to do a simple task, and/or do not interact well with other students. Level 1 teaches students to: understand basic language concepts, begin to use verbal language to request desires, to follow simple routines, to leave an activity area, circle time, or snack time, and to begin to participate in independent constructive play.
- **Level II I** - for students who can follow some simple commands, but have difficulty with 2-step commands or more complex requests; for students using only one word (or picture) to make requests/desires; for students who understand simple nouns; for those who engage in only solitary activities; and for those who can follow a simple routine. Level 2 teaches students to: follow 2-step commands, to use multiple words to make requests, to use simple verbs, to learn the names of other children, to play interactively, to identify numbers, letters, and a few sight words, and to answer "wh" questions.

- **Level III** - for students able to use two or more words (or pictures) to communicate; who can label objects, identify numbers, letters, and a few sight words, and who are able to follow most classroom routines with verbal directions or picture schedule. Level 3, teach students to: expand vocabulary and phrase length, use prepositions and pronouns, read more functional sight words, write with dictation and from memory, read a simple story, tell time, add and subtract one-digit numbers, follow more complex routines such as computer use, transition between locations and large group activities in and out of the classroom, participate in school routines such as music, PE, lunch, and recess, and to engage in activities with peers.

### Some common terms you may encounter:

**ADA** or Americans with Disabilities Act - Federal legislative giving civil rights protections to individuals with disabilities.

**Adaptations** - Modifications to the curriculum, including support systems, environments, & teaching strategies.

**Adaptive behavior** - Ability to adjust to new environments, tasks, objects, & people, & to apply new skills to new situations.

**Antecedent behavior** - An observable behavior occurring prior to a response and associated with that behavioral response.

**Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA)** - A method of teaching designed to analyze and change behavior in a precisely measurable and accountable manner (behavior modification).

**Aspergers syndrome** - A pervasive developmental disorder marked by obsessive interests, impaired social interactions, average to above-average intelligence, gross-motor clumsiness, and communication deviance.

**Assistive device** - Any device or piece of equipment that aids a person to participate in an activity or to increase their level of independence.

**Attention** - The ability to concentrate on a task.

**Attention span (attending)** - The amount of time one is able to concentrate on a task.

**Auditory** - Relating to hearing.

**Augmentative/alternative communication (AAC)** - Compensatory technique (gestures, photographs, manual sign, a board, chart, device, or computer) to enhance communication for individuals with severe expressive communication disorders.

**Autism** - A developmental disability caused by a neurological dysfunction. One of five disorders found under the umbrella name of pervasive developmental disorders. The disorder severely impairs behavior, social interactions, and language.

**Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD)** includes autism, Asperger Syndrome and Pervasive Development Disorder.

**Baseline** - A student's current level of educational performance in a particular activity/a starting point

**Behavior** - Observable actions and responses to the environment.

**Behavior Intervention Plan** - A plan developed by the Individual Education Plan (IEP) team as a support for students with behavior issues.

**Certified Occupational Therapy Assistant (COTA)** - An assistant who works with a child to achieve fine motor skills.

**Cognition or cognitive skills** - The neurological process involved in knowing, thinking, reasoning, and solving problems.

**Communication** - An interactive process that conveys information and ideas from one person to another. Communication is a social skill that has the potential for influencing others and gaining some control over one's environment.

**Confidentiality** - A legal and ethical practice, where professionals may not disclose or discuss information regarding a client, student, or patient, including the diagnostic and treatment services without the express written consent of the student, client, patient, or family.

**Criterion/Criteria** - A specific, detailed explanation of how the observer will know when the student has achieved the objective; the expected level of achievement.

**Cue** - An auditory, visual, gestural, or physical prompting; a perceived signal for action.

**Data** - Measurable information collected and organized for analysis and to be used in making decisions.

**DSM IV Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders** - (1994)the most commonly used classification system for abnormal behaviors and mental disorders.

**Echolalia** - The repetition of speech produced by self or others.

**Engaged** - The ability to remain focused and interactive with (or responsive to) a person or object.

**Extinction** - The process of discontinuing reinforcement to reduce a response.

**Generalize** - ability to learn a skill or a rule in one situation and be able to use or apply it to other similar but different situations.

**Goals** - What a student is going to learn during the school year. Goals are observable and measurable.

**Hierarchy of prompts** - A term used to define the level of prompts or assistance given to an individual. When the term "hierarchy" is used, it is specifying the order of the level from most assistance to minimal.

**Hyperactivity** - A specific nervous system based difficulty, which makes it hard for a person to control muscle (motor) behavior.

**Intervention** - Planned strategies and activities that modify a maladaptive behavior or state of being and facilitate growth and change.

**Joint attention** - When a child and adult coordinate their attention about an object of mutual interest. This involves shifting their attention from each other to an object and back.

**Least restrictive environment** - A legal term from Part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) that expresses that children with disabilities must be educated to the maximum extent appropriate with children who are not disabled.

**Level of assistance** - A combination of verbal, visual, gestural, and physical prompts/cues that are specific to each student's learning needs.

**Natural cue** - An object or event that is always present or always occurs as part of the natural environment that triggers a response or action. For example, a full laundry basket is a signal that it is time to do the laundry.

**Objectives** - The smaller steps or skills the child needs to learn before she/she can accomplish a goal.

**Occupational therapy (OT)** - Services that help the child develop fine motor skills needed for daily living and academic success.

**Perseveration** - The repetition of a word, thought, or action without the ability to stop or move on. For example, when a person steps through the door, then rocks back and forth, unable to follow through with the other foot.

**Personalized Pragmatic Story** – a social skills story written for a specific student to help him/her to understand a social situation.

**Pervasive developmental disorder (PDD)** - A defined category of disability that involves problems in social interaction, verbal and nonverbal communication. PDD includes autism, childhood disintegrative disorder, Rett Syndrome, Asperger's syndrome, and PDD-not otherwise specified.

**Picture exchange communication system (PECS)** - A communication system developed by the Delaware Autistic Program that uses pictures to facilitate communication and emphasizes independence for child initiation of communication.

**Pragmatics** - The practical aspects of using language to communicate in a natural context, including rules about eye contact between speaker and listener, how close to stand, taking turns, selecting topics of conversation, and other requirements to ensure that communication occurs.

**Present level of performance** - Information that includes the student's strengths, needs, and instructional level.

**Prompt** - Input that encourages a child to perform a movement or activity. See "cue."

**Proprioceptive** - Stimuli from the nerve receptors located in the muscles, tendons, and inner ear that provide a sense of the position of one's body in space.

**Receptive language** - The ability to understand spoken and written communication as well as gestures.

**Reinforcement** - Providing strengthening consequences that, when given immediately following a desired response, increases the likelihood that the behavior will occur again.

**Related services** - Services that enable a child to benefit from special education. Related services include speech, occupational, and physical therapies, as well as transportation.

**Response** - An action or behavior that is triggered by a preceding cue or stimulus (object, action, or event).

**Sensory ability** - The ability to process sensations, such as touch, sound, light, smell, and movement.

**Sensory integration** - The neurological process that organizes sensation from one's own body and from the environment and enables one to use the body effectively in the environment.

**Social cognition** - The thinking, understanding, and reasoning skills involved in or required for social interactions; knowing about others and their perspectives.

**Social skills** - Appropriate behaviors necessary for living and interacting with others.

**Social skill story** - A story written by parents or professionals to describe social situations that are difficult and/or confusing for children with autism. Each story identifies and describes relevant social cues and desired responses to a target situation and is written with consideration of a child's abilities and learning style. A systematic approach to social stories was developed by Carol Gray.

**Specially designed instruction (SDI)** - Special methods, equipment, materials, and adaptations needed for a student to be successful in school and achieve IEP goals.

**Stereotypic behavior** - Constantly repeated meaningless gestures or movements such as hand flapping - common in autism and in self-stimulatory behaviors.

**Stimulus** - A physical object or environmental event that may have an effect upon the behavior of a person. Some stimuli are internal (earache pain), while others are external (a smile from another

**Task analysis** (a breaking down of specific skills into smaller steps) and mass recordings of an isolated task)

**Transition cue** - An object that serves as a reminder of the targeted destination. A 3" x 5" card with a drawing of the gym serves as a reminder to continue moving to the gym.

**Vestibular** - Pertaining to the sensory system located in the inner ear that allows that body to maintain balance and enjoy participating in movement such as swinging and roughhousing.

**Visual adaptations/visual support systems** - Written schedules, lists, charts, picture sequences, and other visuals that convey meaningful information in a permanent format for later reference. Visual adaptations allow the person with autism to function more independently without constant verbal directions. These visual adaptations serve the same person).purpose for those with autism as a hearing aid and sign language serge for the person who is deaf. A person who is blind gets information from reading Braille or from an interpreter.

**Visual motor** - The skill required to carry out a task such as putting a puzzle piece into a puzzle or a key into a keyhole.

**Work system** - The visual organization of directions, materials, and environments to clarify expectations. This clear visual organization promotes independence from another person providing verbal cues and prompts.



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## Web sites

[http://www.aane.org/asperger\\_resources/articles/teens/accomodations\\_high\\_school\\_student.html](http://www.aane.org/asperger_resources/articles/teens/accomodations_high_school_student.html)

## Asperger's Association of New England

- <http://www.aspergersyndrome.org/Articles/Specially-Designed-Instructions-for-Educators>
- <http://www.autismclassroom.com/home>
- <http://www.autism4teachers.com/autism4teachers>
- <http://www.autisminspiration.com/>
- <http://www.autismsocialstories.com/behavior/>
- <http://www.autism-society.org/>
- [http://www.autismvoice.com/blog/\\_archives/2006/8/7/2208249.html](http://www.autismvoice.com/blog/_archives/2006/8/7/2208249.html)
- <http://www.buildingblox.net/taskideaspg1.html>
- <http://www.ccoenet/social/skillslist.htm> *Social Skills for Middle School Students*
- [www.speakingofspeech.com](http://www.speakingofspeech.com)
- <http://www.pcieducation.com/reading/> (PCI and Touch Math)
- <http://www.starautismprogram.com/star-autism-program> (STAR Program)
- <http://www.toolsforeducators.com/>
- [http://webster.frsd.k12.nj.us/autistic/Social%20Stories/1social\\_stories.htm](http://webster.frsd.k12.nj.us/autistic/Social%20Stories/1social_stories.htm)
- <http://www.winsorlearning.com/site/instructional-materials/> ( Sunday)
- <http://www.worksheetlibrary.com/subjects/graphicorganizers/persuasion/>



