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Classroom Recommendations for Kids with AS

Submitted by Craig on Fri, 09/17/2010 - 08:43.

Classroom Recommendations for Children on the Autism Spectrum

Part of my job as the lead evaluator for a non-profit organization is to come up with practical recommendations that teachers can use to successfully include children with developmental and physical disabilities within their daily routines and activities. After all, that's what the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) is all about. As educators, it is our responsibility to develop and implement functional and measurable goals for children with disabilities, so that they can find success alongside their typically developing peers. However, if children are going to meet those goals (outlined in their IEP), we must first make some basic recommendations in the child's evaluation report to help us get there.

Many children on the spectrum may need to improve in the following areas (though it is imperative to note that each child on the spectrum presents differently):

1. improve their ability to play with toys appropriately, functionally, and purposefully for age-appropriate lengths of time
2. increase their attention span for activities that are unstructured (i.e. self-selected) an structured (adult-directed)
3. improve their social language skills (i.e. attending to a speaker, following verbal directions, etc.)
4. improve their ability to initiate and engage peers in social play, and to help sustain those interactions in play
5. improve receptive language skills (i.e. ability to follow single and multi-step directions consistently in a variety of settings, and their ability to understand yes/no questions
6. improve expressive language skills (i.e. expressing wants and needs, combining words in phrases and sentences, etc.)
7. Improve the ability to process and interpret sensory information, and to act on that information in a meaningful way within the child's learning environment

When working with children with disabilities, there are always skills that the family and other caregivers could benefit from learning to assist in the child's development and participation in everyday routines. The following strategies may be helpful in working with children on the spectrum:

1. Break difficult tasks into smaller steps. You do the first step, allowing the child to complete the second step. As the child becomes more independent, increase the demands (start with basic one-step directions)
2. Model for the child how to play with toys appropriately. Once the child learns how to play with one toy appropriately, move on to another toy of interest. Increase the child's interest in toys as he becomes more independent in his play.
3. When giving the child a verbal direction, prompt him to give you eye contact, so you know that he is focusing on you, the speaker. Kneel down and get eye level with the child, if possible.
4. Provide the child with opportunities to engage in sensory input activities to facilitate regulation and attention (i.e. movement such as climbing, running & jumping, heavy work/deep pressure, pressure to the joints, messy play, singing, etc.)
5. Build fine motor, visual motor, and bilateral coordination skills by providing lots of opportunities to play with manipulatives and other tasks that require the child to use both hands together. Use arts and crafts activities to practice pre-writing and cutting skills.
6. Model appropriate grasps on writing utensils.

If necessary, the child may benefit from assistive technology devices, which may support the child's participation in everyday routines and activities through either verbal interaction, non-verbal interaction, or a combination of the two:

1. Provide the child with objects to assist him in expressing himself when communicating with peers and adults, and when making choices in a variety of settings and social situations. Also, explore communication devices (e.g. switches), which may help the child make choices and help him participate in activities with peers and adults.
2. Explore opportunities and access to therapeutic/sensory equipment to enhance learning performance as needed. Suggestions may include a pressure vest, special seat cushion, fidget toys, etc.

In the following weeks, I will be talking about additional strategies parents and teachers can use to help children successfully participate in both structured and unstructured activities (at home and at school). I will also provide you with pictures of the various strategies, in conjunction with the written descriptions.

Stay tuned and have a great week!

-Craig

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Comments

Great suggestions!

Sat, 09/18/2010 - 09:33 — lawilcox

Craig,

These are excellent suggestions for parents, teachers and therapists to consider. Finding the LRE for each child can be a challenge, but it is oh-so-important in the life of that child! Thanks for helping us along the way.

~Leigh Attaway Wilcox

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Fri, 09/24/2010 - 21:03 — angie

Excellent suggestions, Craig!

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