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Ensure the Successful Inclusion of a Child with Asperger Syndrome in the General Education Classroom

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Children with Asperger syndrome (AS) have a variety of issues that must be addressed on a daily basis. Because these children tend to be high-functioning, many are placed in general education classrooms in order to receive the best education possible. Teachers working with

children with AS may not be aware of how to provide the best inclusive environment. The following are strategies and tips that can be incorporated to help these children adjust and become successful in the general education classroom.

- 1. Establish a schedule early on, and be consistent with it.** Children with AS find comfort in knowing exactly what will happen next. By providing these students with a very consistent schedule that has little variance, you increase their sense of security, making them better able to function appropriately in the classroom and feel successful about their work (Attwood, 1998; Brownell, 2001; Myles & Simpson, 1998).
- 2. Provide a visual representation of the daily schedule.** Posting a chart in the classroom that displays the schedule and routines for the day only adds to this security by allowing the child to determine what will occur next so that she has a better transition to the next activity.
- 3. Write notes in advance for the child if the schedule is going to change for a special event.** Let the child know what the change will be and when it will occur because variation in the routine can lead to stress and anxiety, which can cause outbursts and tantrums. As stated previously, providing advanced notice of alterations in the schedule allows the child time to transition and prepare himself for the change in schedule. In addition, because many children with AS tend to process auditory information less efficiently, written notes allow the child another avenue to obtain and understand the message (Attwood, 1998; Barnhill, 2001a; Council for Exceptional Children [CEC], 2002; Myles & Simpson, 1998).
- 4. Provide visual cue cards to use during instruction and teaching.** Due to the difficulty children with AS have in processing auditory input, visual cues of what is being taught could help them be more successful in taking in the new information and remembering it. They may still require more time to process all the information; however, by providing instruction both verbally and visually, you offer students with AS a better opportunity to learn the material (Barnhill, 2001a; Myles & Simpson, 1998).
- 5. Set clear expectations and boundaries, and post them on the wall.** Once again, providing a visual representation of what is expected so that the child can refer to it as needed provides security and increased opportunities for comprehension of the material, both of which will increase productivity in the classroom (Attwood, 1998; Barnhill, 2001a; Myles & Simpson, 1998).
- 6. Provide verbal and written instructions for the child.** When giving the class instructions or directions for an assignment or activity, provide written instructions that coincide with your verbal instructions for the child with AS. The instructions can be in picture form as well as in words to further aid in comprehension and success (Barnhill, 2001a).
- 7. Ask questions to check the child's understanding of the instructions you have just given, or ask him to verbalize the instructions back to you to clarify understanding.** Many times, children with AS appear as though they fully comprehend what is being asked of them or what they have read because of their "professor-like" responses to questions; however, these may mask the fact that their comprehension is truly lacking. By probing further, you can ask more pointed questions or have the child verbalize in her own words, not repeating your exact phrases, what is expected (Barnhill, 2001a; Myles & Simpson, 1998).
- 8. Use a timer to limit perseveration/echolalia/singing.** Establish the routine that as soon as the timer goes off, the child returns to the previous activity. Some children with AS will begin to perseverate on objects or ideas or participate in other behaviors that can hinder academic development during the school day. Providing a time limit will help curb such behaviors so that academic progress can be made. You must establish the routine that as soon as the child begins to exhibit a certain inappropriate behavior, the timer is set for a certain amount of time. The child must

then be taught that as soon as the timer rings, she must rejoin the rest of the class in the current activity. As time progresses, the time limit should be reduced so that less and less time is actually being spent on such behaviors (Grandin, 2001).

9. Allow the child to earn “free time” in the child’s chosen area of interest, such as art or computers, for completing work. Children with AS tend to have an area of intense interest that can consume their conversations and activities. Using this interest to motivate the child can help him learn to be productive in his work while still having time to concentrate on his area of interest (Brownell, 2001; CEC, 2002; Grandin, 2001).

10. Teach the other children how to interact appropriately with the child with Asperger syndrome in both academic and social settings. Children can be very supportive and accepting of people with disabilities and differences when they are taught to have such compassion and are shown how to work and play with those individuals. In order for the child with AS to be fully accepted in the classroom, the other children in the classroom have to be taught how to interact and accept her. Through role-playing, modeling, and discussions, successful friendships and interactions can take place and even add to the successfulness of inclusion.

11. Model and role-play social situations incorporating appropriate behaviors. Continually working on general socially accepted behavior helps children with AS begin to internalize the behaviors that are expected of them in society. By watching both good and bad examples of behaviors that occur in various social situations, these children can learn to make better choices in their behavior (Barnhill, 2001b).

12. Teach specific socially appropriate phrases to use in certain situations.

By providing a written script that the child can use in various situations and allowing her to practice her reactions in role-playing activities, you make it more likely for the child to be successful socially. During such social events where the child is expected to act as taught, prompting may be necessary to remind her how to act until she has had ample opportunities to practice the skill in a real-life situation (CEC, 2002).

13. Provide social skills practice and role-playing for any upcoming social events. Students with AS need to have opportunities to act out certain situations so they can prepare for them socially. Because children with AS have poor social judgment, repetitive practice prior to the event will provide them with the knowledge they need to respond appropriately. However, because transfer to different situations may be difficult to achieve, these children must have several opportunities to practice these socially appropriate behaviors in a variety of contexts (Barnhill, 2001b).

14. Provide a social skills notebook with stories of correct and incorrect social behaviors that the child can use as a guide and reference. This notebook can be used to prompt the child as to what behaviors are considered appropriate or not appropriate in various social situations. Providing weekly opportunities to read through the stories in a notebook, continuing to stress socially appropriate behaviors, and practicing how to use them in real-life situations will enhance the student’s social successfulness (CEC, 2002).

15. Provide visual cue cards of expected social behaviors, and place them in areas where those behaviors are expected. Visual cue cards can be used as prompts of expected behaviors of the child in various settings. Through role-playing and modeling, students are first introduced to the behaviors. By including visual cue cards in this role-playing, you help the child with AS learn to use those visual cues to help him remember



what behavior he should exhibit in the classroom and school environments. However, children must be taught *how* to use these cards. They cannot simply be posted in the room in hopes that the child will understand what their purpose is. They must be shown how to use them and be allowed time to practice using them (CEC, 2002).

16. **Write down what behavior the child is exhibiting and what behavior he or she *should be* exhibiting.** For example, “You are drawing on your paper. A better choice would be to work on writing your story.” Once again, providing written responses instead of verbal ones may help the child with AS better understand what is being asked of her. Connecting these messages to visual pictures may also be beneficial (Grandin, 2001).

17. **Have the child complete this same activity with his own behavior.** After the child has been exposed to the method previ-

ously described, he can then begin doing it himself with or without prompting. Writing the message to himself and posting it in his notebook or on his desk may help him internalize and remember the expected behavior.

18. **Begin discussing with the child how others view his acting out.** Children with AS have difficulty understanding how to initiate or maintain social interactions. They do not realize what effect their acting out has on those around them. You should therefore begin discussing these issues with the children early in order to facilitate a better understanding of the social consequences of their behaviors (CEC, 2002).

19. **Provide a safe place in which the child can retreat when she becomes overstimulated or has difficulty adjusting to a new activity or environment.** This base could occupy a corner of the classroom where the child can be in a dark, quiet place with little or no stimulation in order to

calm down. Once the child feels secure and in control of her body, she can join the class again (CEC, 2002; Grandin, 2001).

20.

Be very patient and ready to teach both academic and social skills over and over again.

Children with AS need a teacher who will remain calm when the situation escalates. When the teacher begins to get frustrated and tense, the same feelings will tend to heighten in the child. However, dealing calmly with the situation will allow the child to calm down more quickly. In addition, being aware that the child with AS will need a great deal of practice and repetition of newly taught skills in order to be successful will help you better prepare for what you will need to do to help that child be successful.

Persons interested in submitting material for 20 Ways To . . . should contact Robin H. Lock, College of Education, Box 41071, Texas Tech University, Lubbock, TX 76409-1701.

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