

BEST-PRACTICE STRATEGIES for WORKING with STUDENTS on the AUTISM SPECTRUM and ALL STUDENTS

This booklet includes strategies that are often effective for children on the spectrum. Strategies for supporting the needs of children with autism are Best Practices for all children, so they can be employed in all classrooms. The following strategies have been categorized by their main area of contribution including: [Communication](#) (p. 2,) [Engagement](#) (pp. 3-10,) [Regulation](#) (pp. 10-11,) [Storytelling](#) (p. 12,) and [Teacher and Police Training](#) (pp. 12-14.)

- Children on the spectrum often have difficulty with spoken language. Therefore, visual and kinesthetic approaches to learning are often effective.
- While students in regular classrooms may not have extreme difficulty with auditory learning, many are stronger visually or kinesthetically so strategies for people with ASD are often helpful for all students.

This document has been reviewed by:

Carol Amberg, Gouverneur, New York; teacher of English literature and writing, retired

Don Mesibov whose brother, Gary Mesibov, has been a pioneer in the field of autism

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PREFACE

Oliver Wendell Holmes once said, “All generalizations are false, including this one.” This is particularly true when speaking of people on the spectrum. A frequently expressed truism by people in the field is: “To know one person with autism is to know one person with autism.” Therefore, one cannot generalize when speaking of people on the spectrum; one can only identify the characteristics that are more likely to be present in someone who is on the spectrum. With this in mind the following “Strategies” are offered as a guide.

NOTE: All of these recommended strategies were proposed by an expert in the field of autism for the book Mesibov, Schopler, and TEACCH: Changing the World for Parents, and People with Autism. For each of these 40 strategies there is a detailed discussion which can be found in the book and the page numbers are referenced. However, much of that information is also included on the pages of this booklet.

Communication

Behavioral Problems are Methods of Communication

Building on the child's interests and understanding what the child's behaviors communicate.

PERSON: Laura Grofer Klinger, PhD: teach executive director since 2010; associate professor, UNC School of Medicine, Department of Psychiatry.

EXAMPLE: A student may be ripping up papers at his desk; if you look at his environment, you may see that the student only rips when he doesn't know what to do. See p. 217

Scripts

Using scripts to prepare people with ASD for Speaking with Others

PERSON: Kelly Trier, Cedar Rapids, Iowa; TEACCH certified advanced level trainer; autism consultant, retired.

EXAMPLE: I made out a script for him, and it went something like this: "Hi, this is James. I am at a bowling alley, and I need a ride. If no one answers, then hang up, wait five minutes, and call again." The first time we rehearsed, he read the entire script including "If no one answers, then hang up, wait five minutes, and call again." I had to add quotation marks around the words he was to speak. People with ASD tend to be literal. It amazed me that all we had to do to make this work for this young man was to move the quotations to what he was supposed to say and highlight those words, and he was able to make the call himself. He just needed the script of what to say in the situation and needed it printed out with quotes to help him to follow it. See pp. 111, 112

Teaching Social Skills

Use of peer to peer coaching to teach social skills.

PERSON: Kelli Bielang, Kalamazoo County Michigan, TEACCH certified advanced consultant; engagement specialist.

EXAMPLE: I set aside time in my classes to help students learn social skills; having a sense of humor is a part of having social skills. I find that peer-to-peer coaching is more productive than what I could do. I don't know what's in the mind of a twelve-year-old, but other twelve-year-olds do. I provide the lead with a question—it could be "Why is this joke funny?"—or I provide them with social situations to learn, and then, having provided a hypothetical situation, I let the partners discuss it.

In a high school classroom, a student might tell jokes in a monotone voice. With this and other aspects of socializing, I will provide the lead but let the teaching and learning occur through the peer-to-peer discussions. Also, I use areas of interest to bring peers together; perhaps two students share an interest in SpongeBob. See p. 122

Engagement

Be Firm; Be Structured

Be firm and provide structure; I was often reluctant to provide my child with the structure he required until a tutor told me there was too much chaos. Focus on visuals; don't bombard children with language.

PERSON: Alice Wertheimer, parent of a child with autism:

EXAMPLE: The tutor was firm with David, whereas I was often reluctant to provide him with the structure he required. The tutor worked on language development. She focused on the visual. "It is most important," she told us, "not to bombard him with language." Use visuals—signs like a stop sign instead of telling him to stop doing something. See p. 58

Build on What the Child Likes

By using what the student likes, gradually modify it to move the child into the areas you'd like them to progress to.

PERSON: Keith Lovett, Director of Autism Independent UK

EXAMPLE: "Use what kids like, and gradually modify it to move the child into areas you want the child to progress to." For instance, Keith explains, "If the child likes mushy stuff, like dough, let him play with dough but then show him how to make pancakes, and gradually, you may encourage him to wash some of the dishes so he can use them again to make more pancakes. The end result is the food or snack.

"If a child isn't using something in a positive way, don't extinguish their interest; change it slowly and make use of it. So if a child likes to play with string or water, find constructive ways they can use it. Always answer the questions the child may have before they ask them. For instance:

What am I doing? How long do I do it for? What do I do when I am finished?" See p. 105

Discrete Trial Teaching

PERSON: Jennifer Townsend, Educational Consultant, Wisconsin, Universal Access

Consulting; author of "Think Differently: An Educator's Approach to What Works," and other books about autism.

EXAMPLE: Discrete trial teaching, without consideration [of] the prompt hierarchy and intentionality for transference of skill into naturally occurring routines, can lead to prompt dependency. Discrete trial teaching is good, but prompt dependency is not.

Discrete trial teaching involves breaking skills down into smaller components and teaching those smaller subskills individually. Repeated practice of skills is conducted, and teachers may incorporate prompting procedures, as necessary. Correct responses are followed by reinforcement procedures to facilitate the learning process.

What is a discrete trial?

A discrete trial is a single cycle of instruction that may be repeated several times until a skill is mastered. A discrete trial consists of five main parts: (1) an initial instruction (example: “Touch your nose.”); (2) a prompt or cue given by the teacher to help the child respond correctly (example: teacher points to child’s nose); (3) a response given by the child (example: child touches their nose); (4) an appropriate consequence, such as correct responses receiving a reward designed to motivate the child to respond correctly again in the future (example: “Nice job touching your nose,” teacher gives child praise, “good job”); (5) a pause between consecutive trials, waiting one to five seconds before beginning the next trial (Florida Atlantic University; contact information: website: www.coe.fau.edu/card/). See p. 215

Engaging Trainees

Engage people to set up for their training as part of their training.

PERSON: Cathy Pratt, Indiana Director , Indiana Resource Center for Autism, Indiana Institute on Disability and Community, Indiana University.

EXAMPLE: We used to spend weekends setting up classrooms. A lot of trainees would ask us, “How did you set it up, and why did you set it up that way?” So we shifted the setting-up of classrooms to Monday and Tuesday, and as part of their training, the trainees would set up the classrooms on those days under our coaching, and then we would bring the students in for the last three days instead of all five as we had previously been doing. See p. 110

Everything has its Place

Foster the organizational idea of “putting items back where they belong” by using a tangible, visual, and relatable example. “Everything has a place; once you find it, keep it.”

PERSON: Cory Shulman, Head of the Autism Center, Hebrew University Jerusalem,

EXAMPLE: We used to spend weekends setting up classrooms. A lot of trainees would ask us, “How did you set it up, and why did you set it up that way?” So we shifted the setting-up of classrooms to Monday and Tuesday, and as part of their training, the trainees would set up the classrooms on those days under our coaching, and then we would bring the students in for the last three days instead of all five as we had previously been doing. See p. 94

Flexibility – A Step at a Time

PERSON: Brigitta Karlson, Sweden, Metodutvecklare, educator, supervisor.

EXAMPLE: Here is an example of a step-at-a-time process for helping clients to be more flexible: In the morning, if their routine is to make the bed, go to the bathroom, then shower, you might change it by changing one thing: bathroom, shower, make bed. Just one change in the schedule. Small steps. See p. 180

Calendars, Post-its, Organizational Strategies

PERSON: David Moser, a high performing adult on the spectrum.

EXAMPLE: Some of my little quirks and foibles:

For all my perfectionist tendencies, I can be personally disorganized. I can go through the day on a stream of consciousness, perhaps getting lost in my exhaustive music collection and without regard for appointments or commitments. I need my day planner and my Microsoft Outlook calendar. This is my brain helping me keep up with my appointments.

Post-its are the greatest invention. I live my life by Post-it notes. I can take out my wallet in a store or pharmacy, and I can refer to my Post-it notes. See p. 69

Good Practice Guidance

PERSON: David Preece, England, associate professor in autism, University of Northampton

EXAMPLE: TEACCH principles have long been a given in the UK and many other countries. For example, in the UK's Department for Education and Skills (2002) publication "ASD: Good Practice Guidance—Pointers to Good Practice," many of the indicators of good practice are derived from TEACCH:

- Account has been taken of the need to create a low-distraction workplace within the classroom setting (for example, the creation of a workstation-style area) and a clearly defined space for personal equipment and belongings.
- Clear signs/symbols/photographs are in evidence in school communal areas and subject bases.
- The school has taken account of the vulnerability of some children with ASD to environmental distraction in terms of acoustics, smells, and lighting (for example, use of daylight tubes in classrooms).
- Teachers provide visual clues for the child in the form of timetables, key subject words, and language.
- Lesson plans are written up in such a way that a child can check where they are up to.
- Visual timetables are placed at the right height for the child. See pp. 110, 111

Hub and Spokes Model

PERSON: Laurie Sperry, Colorado, Director and Founder, Autism Forensics and Criminal Investigation Clinic, Autism Services and Programs

EXAMPLE: I used the same concept that was used to set up the TEACCH centers throughout North Carolina: a hub-and-spoke model. I set up regional centers within school districts throughout the state of Hawaii. Teachers would come to the centers for internships, just as they used to come to our summer TEACCH trainings. Then they would go back to their classrooms and set up a program there. Gary and I

talked a lot about building sustainable capacity. This was also how TEACCH spread through the United States. See p. 186

Left to Right System

Set up a structured “left to right” work system to bring about organization in the student’s tasks.

PERSON: Jennifer Townsend, Educational Consultant, Wisconsin, Universal Access Consulting; author of “Think Differently: An Educator’s Approach to What Works,” and other books about autism.

EXAMPLE: Reading is left to right, so a work system should be the same. I remember Gary’s passion when saying, “It has to be left to right.” So you start at the left, where you set up the work and where the person can see how many tasks he has to accomplish. In the middle put what you are working on. The least amount of prompting takes place in the middle. Students work as independently as possible. A structured system can be set up anywhere: in a phone, portfolio, binder, folder, device, Google Calendar, bookshelf. You can set it up anywhere.

Sometimes we set up a strategy spontaneously. A student dropped his backpack on the floor, and everything was a mess. I set up a hook for his backpack. I set up three baskets: one for a lunch box, one for his school materials, and one for trash. Now when he comes home, he takes his lunch box to the kitchen and throws out his trash and then starts his work system. The family thought I was a miracle worker. See p. 102

Organizing Tools

Individualize schedules and work stations.

PERSON: Kelly Trier, Cedar Rapids, Iowa; TEACCH certified advanced level trainer; autism consultant, retired.

EXAMPLE: The most impactful strategies for most of my students are the individualized schedule and the work system. These two strategies can be adapted in so many ways for whatever a child’s needs are. I have had the opportunity to help put together everything from a carry-and-use schedule to a check-off printed schedule to a texture-flip-book schedule for a visually impaired student. What these two levels of structure provide [are] a way to know what is happening in your day and, for each location you are transitioning to, it provides clarification on these four questions that often are hard for people with autism to understand:

- what they have to do
- how much they have to do
- when they’ll be finished
- what comes next

See p. 113

Plan with Precision; Show Actual Pictures

Avoid doing anything that could be upsetting or cause uncertainty by planning with precision.

PERSON: Keith Lovett, Director of Autism Independent UK, Quoting Gary Mesibov.

EXAMPLE: Gary would say, “If you are going to do something or go somewhere, you need to plan it with precision. For example, show pictures of the house, then the places you might walk or a picture of the car you will drive in (or of the keys for the car), then the store that is your destination. But think this through, because once you share it, you need to stick to it. If the picture of the store has green curtains, but the curtains are now red, the child with autism may get upset or confused.” See p. 106

Positive Behavior Intervention

Changing the dynamic from a punishment to a positive paradigm.

PERSON: Laurie Sperry, Colorado, Director and Founder, Autism Forensics and Criminal Investigation Clinic, Autism Services and Program

EXAMPLE: In 2019 Laurie Sperry spent a month in Namibia helping teachers structure their classrooms. Namibia is a diamond-mining town—well resourced, however.” According to Laurie, “They wanted to learn a lot more about dealing with students with disabilities in their own classrooms. We helped them work in their own classrooms using positive behavior intervention supports to change the dynamic from a punishment to a positive paradigm. We worked with teachers on positive interventions and student learning. First, use strategies to prevent problems. When problems do occur, let’s step back and see what we can do to avoid the same situations happening again.” See p. 149

Resources Need Not be Fancy

PERSON: Laurie Sperry, Colorado, Director and Founder, Autism Forensics and Criminal Investigation Clinic, Autism Services and Programs

EXAMPLE: Gary would emphasize that resources didn’t have to be fancy, didn’t have to come from Kinko’s or a specialty store; they could be a paper and pencil with stick-figure drawings to illustrate points to the students. “You don’t need access to beautiful visuals,” Gary would emphasize. We used straw mats on the floor, using different colored mats to physically structure the environment, letting students know what activities happened and where. We used visual schedules and work systems that we drew by hand to let students know what was going to happen and when and what was expected of them. See p. 166

Role Playing

Building a foundation of social interaction “do’s and don’ts” by acting out various situations

PERSON: Kathy Lord, Professor of Psychiatry and Education at UCLA

EXAMPLE: Gary set up social groups in Chapel Hill, which I replicated in Greensboro. These social groups would meet regularly, sometimes weekly. They would include people with autism along with graduate students and with friends and/or staff. There would be ten to a group. The groups of ten would often break into smaller groups, and each would act out a social situation—what to do and what not to do. It was fun, particularly when a few people would act out what not to do. They might act out a situation involving appropriate etiquette at the dinner table or how much food you should take when filling your plates or whether to reach across someone when wanting salt or pepper. We would pick out typical situations that might cause people with autism difficulty. See p. 92

Routines

Offer Support

Students on the Spectrum rely on routine so take this into account and be cautious of changing the routine.

PERSON: Brigitta Karlson, Sweden, Metodutvecklare, educator, supervisor.

EXAMPLE: Brigitte offers these anecdotes:, I have a stepson, eight years old, with high functioning autism. There is a sausage that comes in two sizes. The name of the big sausage is Bullens hot dog, and the smaller sausage, Bullens Lager hot dog. My son had always had the smaller sausage, and it fit perfectly on the bun he would have with it. He went to a party where they served the larger of the two sized sausages. He wouldn't eat it because it extended beyond the outer edges of the bun, and he needed it to be the same size.

Also, my son is very particular about foods. The meat has to be on the left side of the plate, the potatoes on the right side, for example. He is not comfortable going to school if his jacket is cold. It has to be warmed up. See p. 181

Shapes Rather than Visuals

Be aware that for many people on the spectrum they can more easily work with shapes they can manipulate than visual images; in other words, they can be more tactile than visual.

PERSON: Eric Schopler

EXAMPLE: The Cow Puzzle; In the early 1960's, in order to educate people about the differences in brain function that made people with autism unique, Eric began developing ideas for his dissertation. He utilized the cow puzzle to demonstrate how significantly different people with autism's learning styles can be from other people's.

Here's the cow puzzle story as told by Eric during an interview Brenda Denzler conducted with him on December 17, 2001, in Carrboro, North Carolina, in Eric's TEACCH office: In the 1960's I had worked up this dissertation proposal when I noticed that the kids were touching and smelling things more than they would use their distance receptors of vision and audition, and, so I thought, it would be neat to show that in a dissertation. Nobody's done that. And, uh, I worked out these little gadgets where I would compare

visual interest with tactile interest for the same object. So, on the visual side I'd have, let's say, some puppets rotating on a disk. And on the tactile side I'd have the same puppets inside of a bag. They could only explore tactilely.

The Cow Puzzle

The cow puzzle is one of the things I used in my dissertation research to show that children with autism use near-receptor systems like touch over distance-receptor systems like vision. I had a neighbor draw a picture of a cow, and then I cut it into equal rectangular pieces so that you could only put it back together right by using visual cues. Then I made another puzzle with different, interconnecting shapes for all of the pieces, like a traditional puzzle. But when this one was put together, the visual image was scrambled.

Children who were not autistic had trouble with the scrambled puzzle but did well with the cow puzzle because they were using the visual images on the pieces as guides for putting them together. The autistic kids, though, paid less attention to the visual image and used their sense of touch to figure out how to fit the pieces together, so they had trouble with the cow puzzle but did the scrambled puzzle much faster than the other kids. See p. 23

“Structured Teaching”

PERSON: Vickie Shea, TEACCH Trainer; co-author with Eric Schopler and Gary Mesibov

“The TEACCH Approach to Autism Spectrum Disorders.”

EXAMPLE: Structured Teaching: “Structure” within the TEACCH program refers to the active organization and direction of the physical environment and sequence of activities. Structure is essential to the functioning of individuals with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) because of their major difficulties with conceptual and organizational skills (Mesibov, Shea, and Schopler 2005). Physical structure, schedules, work systems, and visual structure combine to provide structure that is tailored to the individual. (Preece and Howley 2003). The components of Structured Teaching are the principles of TEACCH.

As defined by Marie Howley, England, these are:

1. Ongoing assessment of needs to develop individualized interventions
2. Developing independence through meaningful teaching and learning
3. Building on strengths and interests of students with autism
4. Making use of visual strengths by providing individualized visual structure

An example is that if a parent is having difficulty with a child's behavior from the time school lets out until dinnertime, a structured-teaching strategy might be to suggest something the parent could do to engage the child during those hours. The specific activity would depend on what the parent knows about the child's interests. See page 114; see also definition p. 283

Teaching Independence through use of an Assessment Instrument

PERSON: Nathalie Plante, Quebec, Canada , Special Education at University of Quebec in Montreal; TEACCH certified advanced consultant.

EXAMPLE: This is an assessment tool that takes sixty to ninety minutes. It will be easier for professionals to use. It will first identify what the child can understand: pictures, words (verbal and/or written), objects, pictograms.

Sometimes we can show a child an empty juice box, and he might understand it is snack time. Maybe we can show the child a figurine or a book to let him understand he is about to go home. The teacher or parent must be near the child to help the child become independent more quickly. But we have to be careful with our prompting. If a child doesn't know how to do something independently, we have to be careful not to provide too much help. See p.156

Strategies for Classrooms and Conferences

PERSON: Susan Moreno, Founder and CEO of MAAP Services for Autism; author; lecturer; parent of child with ASD. FE 1975 when daughter was diagnosed at age 2.

EXAMPLE: At our conferences we have stickers for people with autism: a red sticker means 'Don't approach me'; a yellow sticker, 'Approach me with caution'/'I may not want to shake hands'; and a green sticker, 'OK to approach me.' Susan adds that there are rules at her conferences, including "no strong perfume," "no smoking," and "no touching or handshakes." We also have panels that include people with autism. See p.108

Teaching Independence using "Progress Strips" and other approaches.

PERSON: Toni Flowers, Indiana, teacher, author, 1989 Autism Society of America Teacher of the Year

EXAMPLE: From the very beginning, we stress working independently. We have strips with every student's name, and we label them "in progress" or "independent." We monitor to see when they are ready to move into independent workstations.

Examples—Can they:

- complete an almost-finished puzzle?
- take paper/pencil tests?
- put beads on pipe cleaners?
- do fine-motor activities?
- do housekeeping tasks, such as folding a basket of scarves in a pile?
- fold or sort socks and put [them] in the "finished" basket? See p.103

Three Approaches: Counting, First This, Write Things Down

Use countdown times.

Use “First this, and then.”

Also, write things down.

PERSON: Joanne Quinn, parent of a child with autism, and trainer, Rhode Island

EXAMPLE: Two strategies immediately brought a change in Patrick’s behavior, so if nothing else, a parent should 1) use countdown times and 2) “first this and then.” The “first” might be to “finish homework,” and the “then” would be the treat, which could be food or a chance to play something he likes. If nothing else it instantly takes the chaos out of your life.

Training for parents must start with: What is autism, and why are interventions important?

If I asked Patrick questions, he didn’t throw tantrums, but he would walk away from me. I had to write things down: “What are three things you did in school today?” Like many who [have] ASD, Patrick is not auditory. He would ask me, “Mom, can you write more of those stories?”

I would write “What is Halloween?” “What is...?”

Patrick is now mayor of East Greenwich, Rhode Island. See page 56

Use Real Examples.

PERSON: Nathalie Plante, Quebec, Canada , Special Education at University of Quebec in Montreal; TEACCH certified advanced consultant.

EXAMPLE: Kids about five with autism had many needs. Many were hyperactive and couldn’t sit still for a minute. We tried to make schedules for them with pictorials, but these were too abstract for them. They needed objects. For example, instead of just seeing a picture of a pencil, they needed to be shown or handed an actual pencil. The first thing we made was a physical structure for them. Providing a schedule worked for some of them, but not all. We saw the need to organize and prepare for increased diagnoses. p.109

What, How Long, and When

Make it clear what the child is doing, how long they are doing it for, and what they are to do when they are finished to bring constructiveness in a task/interest.

PERSON: Keith Lovett, Director of Autism Independent UK.

EXAMPLE: Work from the schedule with line drawing, tactile, pictures and or written et cetera. So [the answer to] “What am I doing?” might be matching pieces into pairs from a group of pieces, randomly

displayed. “How long do I do it for?” Until all the pieces are gone, until all the pieces are off the table and matched. “What am I going to do when I am finished?” You will get the piece of fruit that you like, or you will get to play with a piece of string for five minutes, or you will... Keep things very simple, try to answer questions before they are asked. See p. 105.

Regulation

Avoid Overstimulation

PERSON: Alice Wertheimer, parent of a child with autism:

EXAMPLE: The tutor told us that while the amount of chaos in the house was OK and typical for most children, it was overstimulating for a child with autism. For example, tons of toys and videos covered the floor as the tutor entered our home, and she immediately said, “This is too much stimulation. We’ll set up a timer for your toddler, and then when the time is up, we’ll move on to just one other activity, and we’ll focus on one thing at a time.” We had been doing what most parents do: leaving out on the floor all kinds of toys, some that make noise and some a child can move around. See p. 58

Coregulation

Participate in coregulation with the student to deal with a difficult or frustrating situation.

PERSON: Svanhílor (Svani) Svavarsdóttir, Iceland and Arizona; special education speech pathologist; TEACCH advanced certified consultant; grandmother of four children with autism.

EXAMPLE: See p. 104

Redirection

PERSON: Alice Wertheimer, parent of a child with autism:

EXAMPLE: Redirect him to positive things. For instance, if he has free time when you fear he might do something unacceptable, move him toward a game he likes or encourage him to do something by himself that you know he likes to do. See p. 58

Senses In, Distorted Senses Out

PERSON: Toni Flowers, Indiana, teacher, author, 1989 Autism Society of America Teacher of the Year

EXAMPLE: As I learned how sensory issues could affect all five senses or any combination, I was able to look at my students with a fresh eye. I realized that if what came in through the sense was distorted, then a

person's reaction to such stimuli would also be distorted. It was another awakening moment for me. See p. 187

Turning Down Lights; Remaining Calm: Teachers and Police

PERSON: Melissa Srekovic, North Carolina and Michigan, associate professor education department, University of Michigan, Flint.

EXAMPLE: In the classroom I would turn the lights down, and I learned to be quiet at times of possible stress. I would speak in short sentences, stay calm, and model the behavior I expected from my students. So I tell police to give people with ASD space, use visuals or things in writing.

The three major strategies I recommend, which work effectively with most people but particularly young children or people with ASD, are:

- (1) time—allow it
- (2) space—provide it
- (3) communicate effectively using visuals and written words without reliance on auditory communications.

I suggest that police have sensory bags with items like communication cards, sunglasses to block out light. Some departments are starting to use them. Melissa also expresses concern that some schools or individual teachers use police as a threat, and this engenders more mistrust.

Storytelling

Centers of Excellence

PERSON: Laurie Sperry, Colorado, Director and Founder, Autism Forensics and Criminal Investigation Clinic, Autism Services and Programs.

EXAMPLE: I created a center of excellence and used the hub and spokes process I had learned in Chapel Hill. You establish a center of excellence and bring people in, train them, and have them go back to their own center with consultation and support from the center of excellence; you build additional sites in rural, remote, underserved areas supported by the center of excellence.

Everything was about trying to build capacity: teaching other people to go back to their own areas and use TEACCH principles. See p. 151

Operating Systems

PERSON: Sam Brassington, Perth, Australia, special needs educator and leader, TEACCH certified practitioner

EXAMPLE: The saying that “autism is not a processing error; it is just a different operating system” was one of the things I recall Gary saying. It sums up so well the philosophy of TEACCH and respecting the culture of autism. See p. 150

Teacher and Police Training

Police Tactics that May Not Achieve the Desired Results

PERSON: Dennis Debbaudt: Port Lucie, Florida; managing partner, Debbaudt Legacy Productions, LLC.

EXAMPLE: Because most people on the spectrum do not have strong auditory skills and have limited social skills, it makes them susceptible to misunderstandings when confronted by the police. As an example, a police officer might ask a person with ASD, “When did you turn fifteen?” and the response might be “On my birthday.” I would ask police colleagues, “If you got this answer, what would you think?” Of course they would think, “This is a smart-ass.”

Standard police tactics often are frightening to people with ASD or lead to misunderstandings—tactics such as getting in the face of a suspect, putting a spit hood over the face of a suspect to prevent them from biting or spitting, or telling someone they can go home if they just say what the police want to hear.

How police handle a first encounter with someone with autism is critical since most mistakes arise in the immediate reaction phase. That’s when violence may occur. p. 202

Police Training to Achieve Positive Results

PERSON: Melissa Srekovic, North Carolina and Michigan, associate professor education department, University of Michigan, Flint.

EXAMPLE: My efforts to improve situations involving people with ASD and the criminal justice system include having reached out to the local police chief and asking, “Would you like training for your police officers?” Since then I have worked with the Law Enforcement Officers Regional Training Commission in Flint, Michigan, which serves sixty agencies.

Officers have loved the training. They are very curious and ask lots of questions. I tell them when they want advice, “We are here to help.” Also, we hosted Officer Friendly Day this past April at the University of Michigan–Flint. We offered lots of activities, a fun day, and a chance for people with ASD to speak with officers or listen to them read stories. Next year we will offer a simulated traffic stop so autistic individuals can practice what to do if they get pulled over.

There was a recent episode where an ASD person didn’t move quickly enough for officers as he exited from his car and searched for his identification card, and the situation escalated. Creating opportunities for autistic individuals to learn and practice what to do when pulled over can help create safer interactions during a traffic stop.

Judge Taylor was asked during a videotaped question-and-answer session whether it is a clever idea for a person with ASD to carry an ID card. She says that it is but that they should not leave it in the glove compartment or behind the visor, where it can be threatening to a police officer if they see the driver reaching for it. Instead, leave it on the dashboard or somewhere out in the open. See pp. 207, 208

Teacher Training Ideas

PERSON: Katie Bozarth, Washington DC, TEACCH certified practitioner; instructional support teacher.

EXAMPLE: As the instructional support teacher, I ask teachers to:

- look at physical boundaries in the classroom
- think about the different types of individual schedules your students might use to independently transition throughout the school day (objects for concrete learners, pictures, pictures and words, words)
- consider parent training—what is transferable that we do from the classroom to the home such as schedules, visual supports, materials
- view all behaviors as communication—what is the student trying to tell you?
- keep an open mind and try to look at the situation through the autism lens See p. 119

Teacher training task for understanding

PERSON: Katie Bozarth, Washington DC, TEACCH certified practitioner; instructional support teacher.

EXAMPLE: When I meet with teachers, we work together to structure tasks that will address each of their students' IEP goals. I have an exercise where I will put an unclear task in front of them and ask them to complete the task. When the teachers struggle to complete the task because they are unsure of the purpose, I ask them to imagine what this is like for our autistic learners. See p. 119

Things to Avoid.

PERSON: Keith Lovett, Director of Autism Independent UK.

EXAMPLE: Gary would also say, “You don't really understand autism if you do two or more things with the student at the same time. It can contribute to overload and be confusing.” He pointed out that it is necessary to avoid

- touching the child
- putting your eyes close to the child's and making eye contact
- trying to explain or instruct through speaking, or
- having too many things going on at the same time; too much distraction

Gary urges people to “Keep a low profile with distractions at a minimum; take one thing at a time; use visuals. Some classes even will have windows blacked out to limit distractions.” See p. 107

<https://tinyurl.com/mpp9kyju>



We are a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization performing a public service in support of people with autism and their families. There is no fee for our services.

Email: Institutelce@gmail.com to inquire about how we can support.