

# PEER MEDIATION

## **What is the Peer Mediation**

In peer mediated social interaction interventions, normally developing children are selected and trained to improve social interaction of children with autism. The peers can work one-on-one with a student with autism or within small groups. The social activities and interactions occur in natural settings such as during a group project in a classroom.

Peer mediation was initially used with withdrawn preschool children. It has more recently been successfully used with students with autism and mental disabilities.

Peer mediated interactions are important because simply having access to socially active peers or social environments does not guarantee that interactions will occur between the student with autism and his or her peers. Inclusion alone is often unsuccessful for three main reasons. First, disruptive behavior does not decrease until the student with autism learns to initiate social interactions on his or her own. Secondly, many children with autism are unable to attend to relevant social cues and need direct instruction and prompts to do so. Peers can be better at fulfilling this need as they are more natural role models and may be better accepted than adults. Finally, children with autism rarely initiate social interactions and have a tendency to end or greatly reduce interactions due to a lack of responsiveness and other behaviors such as inappropriate play, noncompliance, use of little language, and stereotype. Peer mediated interventions serve to more purposefully and systematically promote successful social interactions between children with autism and their non-disabled peers.

## **Pros and Cons**

Advantages of peer mediation include:

- Use natural social interaction environments
- Use typical social interaction behaviors of socially competent peers to ensure appropriate modeling and teaching
- Easy and time efficient
- Increase levels of initiations and responses from the student with autism and his or her peers that have lasting effects

Disadvantages of peer mediation include:

- Prompts are sometimes necessary
- Not enough evidence of generalization and maintenance of interactions

## **Typical Steps of Interaction**

1. Peer establishes eye contact (e.g. say student's name, touch shoulder, etc.)
2. Peer establishes a joint focus of attention (e.g. look at same toy)
3. Peer describes his or her own play and that of others
4. Peer prompts requests (e.g. "Do you want the car? Say yes.")
5. Acknowledges all forms of communication
6. Responds to speech of others by imitating
7. Expands and restate comments
8. Requests clarification as needed
9. Redirects play activity as needed

## **Tips on Using**

- Teach peers to acknowledge and discuss the behaviors of student with autism to help increase awareness and understanding
- Encourage brief interaction initially and gradually expand
- Initially focus on activity rather than on interaction to allow children to become familiar with one another
- Emphasize similarities among all students
- Teach peers how to obtain answers (e.g. using communication choice boards)
- Teach socially competent peers to interact with student with autism and incorporate untrained peers into the activity
- Use dyads or triads
- Emphasize turn taking behaviors

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\*Adapted from Simpson et. al (1997). Social Skills for Students with Autism-2<sup>nd</sup> Edition

## **For More Information**

Please visit one of the following websites:

<http://www.peer.ca>