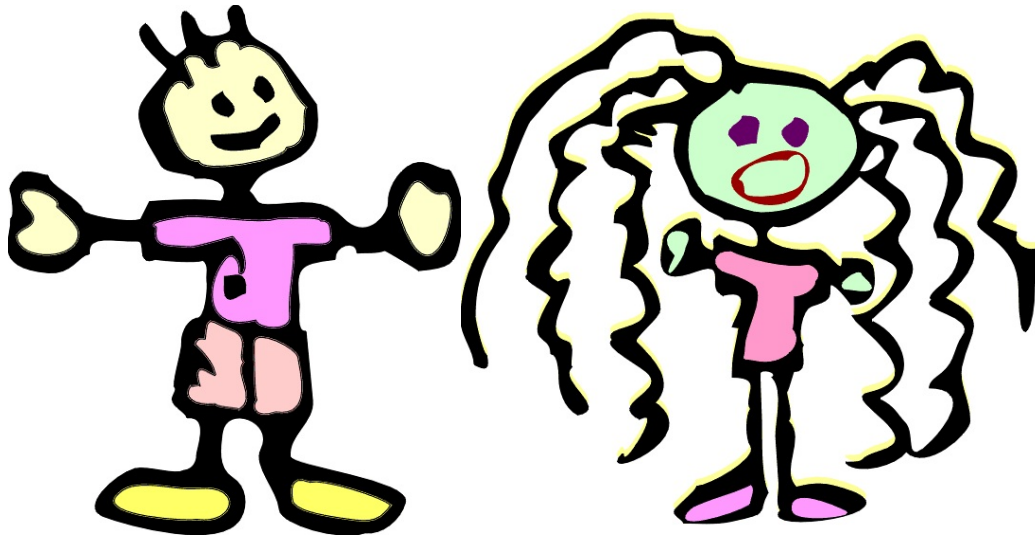


The Child with Autism Spectrum Disorder



A handbook for teachers,
paraprofessionals and school
administrators

2006



What is an Autism Spectrum Disorder?

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a lifelong neurological disability that affects a person's ability to communicate, understand language, play and socially interact with others. The first signs of ASD usually appear as developmental delays before age three. ASD is classified as a developmental disability because it interferes with the typical rate and patterns of childhood development and adversely affects a child's educational performance. People with ASD range from extremely capable to seriously impaired, causing it to be known as a "spectrum disorder".

Criteria for the diagnosis of an autism spectrum disorder consists of:

1. Impairment in social interaction
2. Impairment in communication
3. Restricted, repetitive, stereotyped patterns of behavior, and
4. Onset prior to age three

Characteristics

Every child with ASD is different, however, there are some common characteristics. It is important to remember that although many individuals with ASD share common characteristics, no two people with ASD experience the world or behave in the same way:

- ◆ Poorly developed social skills and unusual play with toys.
- ◆ Difficulty in using and understanding language.
- ◆ Over or under sensitivity to sound, sight, taste, touch, or smell.
- ◆ Repetitive behaviors such as spinning objects or rocking.
- ◆ Certain behaviors exhibited to stimulate the senses, such as switching a light on and off, self-talk/repeating phrases over and over, or humming loudly.
- ◆ Difficulty with changes to surroundings or routines.
- ◆ Very high levels of activity for long periods of time.
- ◆ Uneven skill development or "splinter skills". Some skills are normal or superior for their age while others show significant delay.
- ◆ Challenging behaviors such as aggression, self-injury or severe withdrawal.
- ◆ Problems with attention and resistance to change.



Causes

No one knows what causes ASD. Some scientists believe there is a biological cause that affects the working of the brain, but this has not been proven. It is possible there are many factors that could interact with one another which could cause different characteristics in each individual with ASD.

Parents do not cause autism spectrum disorders. No factors in a child's experiences or in parenting styles are responsible for ASD.

Facts

- ◆ Autism spectrum disorders occur four times more often in boys than girls.
- ◆ ASD affects 1 in 166 births according to the Centers for Disease Control.
- ◆ Families of all racial, ethnic, and social backgrounds all over in the world are affected.
- ◆ ASD may occur by itself, with mental retardation, or with other health problems.
- ◆ Less than 5 percent of individuals with ASD display the genius-like abilities like Dustin Hoffman portrayed in "*Rain Man*."

Treatment

Treatment and educational needs for children with autism spectrum disorders and related disabilities may vary depending on severity of the disorder and differences in philosophies relating to treatment. Treatment and educational needs should include:

- ◆ Early and accurate diagnosis increases the child's opportunity for positive development and success.
- ◆ Speech and occupational therapy may be included and require a cooperative effort between professionals and families.
- ◆ Generally, persons with autism spectrum disorder seem to make the best progress when they are in as normal a setting as possible and provided with individual support and therapy to meet their needs.
- ◆ By implementing treatment in all areas of life, progress in persons with ASD can be optimized.



Quality Educational Planning

Effective educational planning is crucial for children with ASD. Keep in mind that there are no perfect answers when looking at instructional methods to educate children with autism spectrum disorders. It is important to look at the individual child and build upon his or her unique strengths and capabilities to optimize his or her potential.

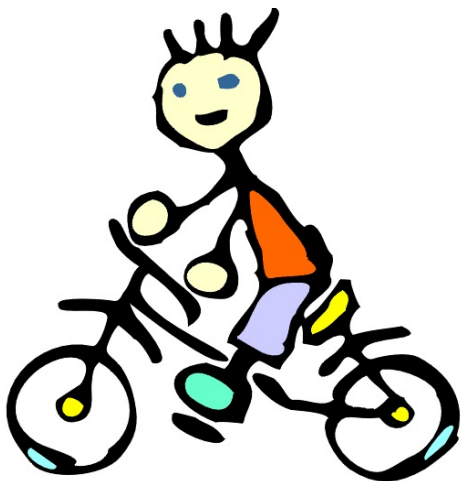
When developing Individualized Education Plan (IEP) goals, consider what is **most important** for the child to learn in order to:

- ◆ Be more independent
- ◆ Participate more fully with family, friends, and classmates
- ◆ Fully participate in highly motivating environments

Social Interactions and Friendships

Children with ASD need friends just like other children. Research shows that children with autism spectrum disorders learn more quickly with a peer modeling a skill. It is a good idea to educate peers either informally or in a more structured manner. They will need to be given information about ASD or why a child with ASD might exhibit certain behaviors. For example, the teacher may need to explain that a specific activity is difficult for the student, and identify what the peer can do to help. TEACCH has developed a program entitled *Understanding Friends* to help educate children about differences, and to foster empathy. It can be found at <http://www.teacch.com/undrstfr.htm>.

For children with ASD, developing and maintaining friendship may be one of the most important skills they learn. These skills will only be learned through developing real relationships with peers. These quality relationships can enhance and enrich the lives of all children.



Promoting Interaction Among Peers

1. Provide opportunities for meaningful contact with peers who have appropriate social behavior:

- Involve the student in shared learning arrangements
- Pair the student with buddies for walking down the hall, on the playground, and during other unstructured times
- Vary peer buddies across time and activities, to prevent dependence on one child.
- Peers may also be involved in providing individualized instruction
- Cross-age peer supports/buddies can be arranged by assigning an older student to assist the student with autism
- Pair students while attending special school events such as assemblies and clubs

2. Promote the occurrence of peer mediated learning by:

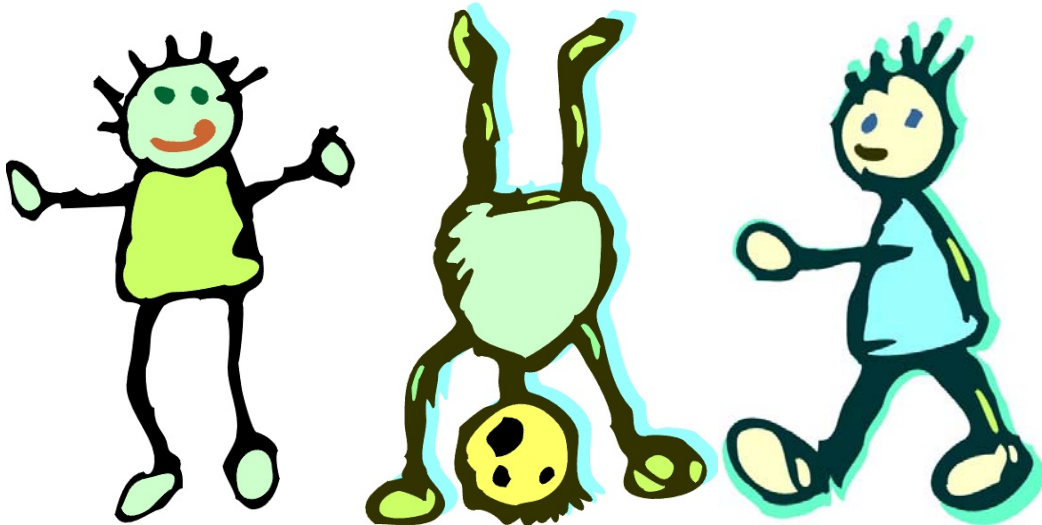
- Using yourself as a "magnet" to attract typical peers to the activity that the child with special needs has chosen or has indicated an interest for
- Having typical peers spontaneously model appropriate behavior
- Prompting the child with ASD to interact with peers and provide positive feedback when this occurs
- Teaching "scripts" for the child with ASD to learn and use during routine classroom activities

3. Use scaffolding to support or guide the child's behavior (help child to do just a little bit more than last time, continually improving)

- Use facial expressions, intonation and gestures
- Imitate the child's behavior
- Interpret the child's emotional state or intention
- Expand on the child's behavior or model a better behavior
- Give verbal and visual directions, ask a question or offer help

4. Coach peers to use scaffolding techniques

- Invite typical peers to interact with the child with autism spectrum disorder
- Guide typical peers to demonstrate appropriate behavior for the child with ASD to imitate
- Coach typical peers on interaction strategies



Tips for Teaching Students With ASD

- ◆ Plan for every possible situation. Planning ahead always expedites learning. For example, if a child is easily distracted, place his desk and chair away from bookshelves, toys, materials, other students, or papers that aren't a part of the lesson.
- ◆ Extended periods of down time provide many children the opportunity to fall back on inappropriate behaviors and activities.
- ◆ The individual with autism spectrum disorder may demonstrate exceptional skills but need help with organizational skills. Schedules, notebooks, and other visual supports can assist in this process.
- ◆ The student's schedule should be clearly articulated. Students should understand their individual role in larger group activities.
- ◆ Design the physical space and schedule to promote smooth transitions between activities and foster a sense of the school routine.
- ◆ Mark the opening and closing of each activity with a ritual (e.g. taking materials out and putting materials away).
- ◆ A student may need instruction and support to participate in recess. Recess is less structured with typically a lot of activity and noise.
- ◆ You will need to individualize the goals for the child with special needs and adapt the curriculum. The child with ASD may not be able to do every grade level activity and assignment - that's okay! Remember the child with ASD has an individualized program.
- ◆ Have high expectations and prevent learned helplessness.
- ◆ Many children have an immediate need for perfection or need to finish things. Students with autism spectrum disorder may not perform a skill until they are sure they have mastered it. Sometimes staff may need to structure ways to teach students that it is okay to be wrong or not to win.
- ◆ Do not assume that students with ASD will generalize learned tasks or always perform activities.
- ◆ It may seem that a child with autism spectrum disorder is ignoring you. Sometimes they just need more time to process what you have said. Wait 10-30 seconds before repeating an instruction or request.
- ◆ ***Most important, no single approach works best! Rather it is beneficial to consider multiple aspects of the situation.***



Instructional Approaches and Classroom Management

1. Use Visual Supports

Visually cued instruction compensates for a child's difficulty integrating social and language information and it uses the child's strengths in processing visual information. Visual cues can outline and organize expectations. Daily schedules, displays of activity sequences, and lists of work expectations clarify expectations and decrease the need for a child with autism to make social judgments or to follow social cues. Visual cues are also useful whenever the child is demonstrating difficulty responding to verbal language instruction. Because children with autism spectrum disorder are better able to attend to, process, and remember visual materials than language or social material, visually cued instruction decreases their reliance on verbal and social prompts, thus increasing independence.

- ◆ **Schedules:** The main function of visual schedules is to clarify the sequence of social events. Schedules specify where to go, what to do next, for how long, and are typically presented in linear order. Visual schedules can be made with photos, pictures, pictographs, or written language. Some schedules can be made with concrete objects. Schedules clarify expectations and can increase independence in solitary and social activities. Sample schedules include:
 - Daily schedules (i.e., the sequence of daily activities) & mini-schedules
 - Transitional objects (i.e., a specific object linked to an activity to prepare where to go)
 - Activity lists (i.e., sequence of game or activity substeps)
 - Play schedules (sequence of play activities)
 - Time boards (i.e., a visual representation of time in sequence or puzzle form)

- ◆ **Cue Cards:** The main function of cue cards is to remind the child what to do. They silently refocus a child's attention, thus making them less intrusive than other forms of prompts. Cue cards are handy in the classroom because they replace verbal or other social prompts. Cue cards can be particularly helpful in situations where a child is disorganized or upset/anxious. Individualized visual social "rule" cards (can be taped to desk or written on index cards and laminated as a visual reminder regarding appropriate social behaviors to exhibit.)

- ◆ **Social Stories:** Social stories are used to explain expected behavior, to prepare for a new situation, or to distinguish inappropriate behavior. A notebook of social stories that the student periodically “reads” is helpful. The complexity of information in a story should match a child’s language comprehension ability. For children who do not read, social stories can include illustrations.
- ◆ **Social Scripts:** The main function of social scripts is to clarify choices in situations. Social scripts are help to simplify social open-ended social situations by presenting limited options. Social scripts are different from schedules in that they provide more flexibility and the information shown on them should not be arranged in a linear fashion. Sample social scripts include:
 - Checklist of activities that will occur in random order
 - Story about an upcoming event that includes what-to-do options
 - Circular board of different solitary or social play choices
 - Play script: a visual depiction of play options within an open-ended activity that can be presented on a circular board or as a series of individual cards held together by a key ring

2. Provide a structured, predictable classroom environment

3. Provide positive praise

4. Use meaningful reinforcers

The student with ASD may not be motivated by common reinforcers. It is important to know what is reinforcing for each child.

5. Have a relaxation area.

At times, it may be necessary to have a calm, quiet, designated area where the student can go to relax.

6. Plan for transitions and prepare the student for change

7. Use concrete examples and hands-on activities when possible

This is especially important when teaching abstract ideas and conceptual thinking.

8. Consider sensory factors in instruction and environment such as:

- Visual distracters - position of teacher, items hanging from ceiling, glare from window, or other distracters that may affect attention.
- Auditory considerations - the general sound level, competition for child's attention (fans, several people talking at once, dogs barking, lights buzzing?)
- Vestibular issues- consider the student's need to move and exercise.

9. Avoid long strings of verbal information

Break down instructions and use visual aids if necessary.

10. Encourage independent effort

- Use visual aids to decrease the reliance on prompts from the teacher/teacher assistant.
- Be careful that the paraprofessional/teacher's aide is not always closely positioned next to the student; positioning that person away from the student may help to avoid dependency.
- Increase awareness of environmental cues.



Dealing With Challenging Behavior

Children with ASD may exhibit some unusual and challenging behaviors and do not always respond to the usual methods of discipline. It is often necessary to develop a systematic plan for changing behaviors. It is important that any behavior intervention plan is based on an understanding of the characteristics of ASD, as well as taking into consideration the strengths and needs of the individual student. Below are some different strategies for changing behavior.

1. Environmental Adaptations

You may find that a behavior occurs during a certain activity or during specific times such as transitions. Environmental accommodations can minimize the likelihood of the behavior. They may include the following:

- Examine the environment for sensory overload and decrease the stimulation if feasible. Incorporate sensory experiences that are calming for the student into the daily routine of the student (listening therapy, weights, fidget toys)
- Make changes in physical arrangements such as seating
- Schedule a calming down period or break time prior to difficult situations
- Alternate more difficult and demanding tasks with those that are easier and more enjoyable
- Provide choices
- Have a place where the student can go to relax



2. Positive Behavior Supports

Implementing positive behavior supports that emphasize the development of communication and positive behaviors in a predictable and rewarding environment can help to reduce the frequency and severity of problem behaviors.

- Remember that children with ASD have difficulty reading social cues. Social skills need to be taught for each situation.
- Provide opportunities for relaxation. This may be for brief 5-10 minute periods and can include activities such as looking at books in a quiet place, listening to music with headphones, playing with a favorite object, sitting quietly and looking out the window.
- Reinforce appropriate behavior and use reinforcers that are meaningful to the individual student.
- When the behavior is happening, try to divert the person's attention to another activity.

3. Reactive or Consequence-Based Interventions

It is always recommended that you implement positive behavior supports that focus on increasing student competence. Making the necessary accommodations to the physical setting, materials, and instruction will be the most successful in accomplish this. However, it is sometimes necessary to design a plan for the immediate reaction to a behavior in order to maintain safety. It is essential that everyone involved with the student is prepared to react to specific behaviors in a consistent way. There are three major types of reactive techniques:

- **Ignoring the behavior**-this may be appropriate for minor attention-seeking behaviors, but it is often difficult to implement in a classroom setting.
- **Redirection** is an important part of any behavior intervention plan. If a behavior is unacceptable, the student needs to know what is expected instead, and this needs to be communicated clearly.
- **Removal from the reinforcers** may involve removal from the situation. If a student is very anxious or upset, it may be necessary to leave the situation to calm down before redirection can take place. It may be helpful to incorporate strategies to help the child recognize when they are becoming anxious and teach them to remove themselves from the situation before they lose control of their behavior.



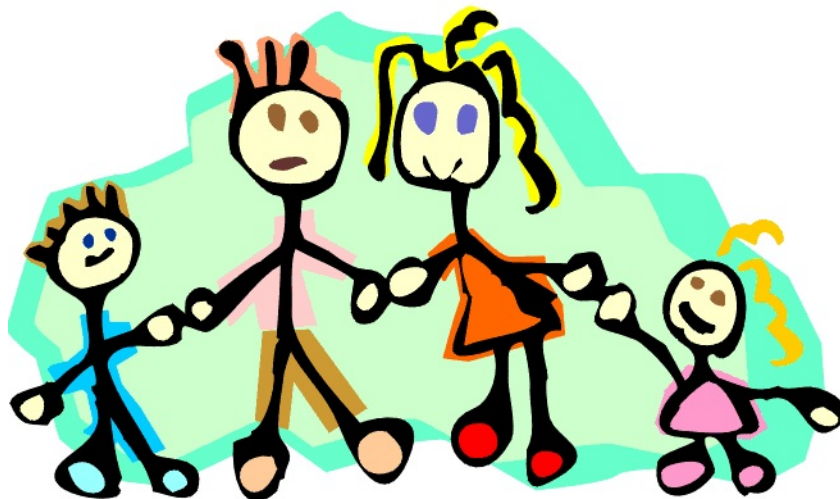
Dear Teacher,

I hope that this handbook helps you understand a little more about me and that you can use this to make things easier for me as your student.

Please remember these things:

- ✓ I respond better to and need hands-on activities and movement.
- ✓ I have a short attention span...I might need some breaks.
- ✓ I do better when you give me directions one step at a time.
- ✓ My behavior is better when the environment is structured around a routine I can depend on.
- ✓ I like to be told when I'm doing something right.
- ✓ I may not always be able to tell you if something is bothering me.
- ✓ Sometimes it's really hard for me to wait.
- ✓ I might need choices when I'm trying to problem solve.
- ✓ I like to interact with other kids and be a part of the group.

Thank you,
Your student with ASD




Examples of Visual Supports Cue Cards

If something is bothering you

Relax




1.  Move away

2.  Take 5 deep breaths

3.  Come back to the table


Share Time

No take




Can I have a turn?

wait a minute



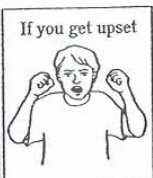
friend's turn




Kyle's turn

When you are upset


If you get upset



No crying

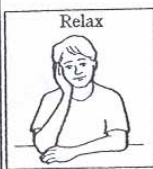


No hitting the table

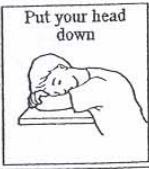


You need to


Relax




Put your head down




Have a quiet voice



No picking your nose







Use a tissue









Examples of Visual Supports

Rules




CLASSROOM RULES

	Be quiet
	Listen to the teacher
	Do your work
	Play nice with your friends


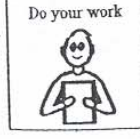

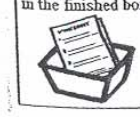
Bathroom Rules

	Go to the bathroom
	Use toilet paper to wipe
	Fix your pants
	Flush one time
	Wash your hands
	Dry your hands

Sean's job:

1. Sit in chair. 
2. Do job.
3. All done. 
4. Check schedule for next Center. 


Classroom Rules








Examples of Visual Supports

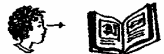
Social Stories


Listening to My Teacher Read a Story

 My teacher reads a story.





 I sit with friends.


 My mouth is quiet. My feet are still.



 I look at pictures.



 I listen to my teacher read.



Kyle



    Outdoor Play

 I do not push people.



  Pushing hurts.

  does not like pushing.


  I do not push friends.


 


*I can play on the slide, swings, boat, and in the sandbox.
I will keep my hands down and not push my friends.
When the whistle blows and it is time to line up,
I will walk and line up.
I will not push my friends.
If I push a friend, I cannot play outside---I will
have to go back inside the school*


 **Fridays** 


On Fridays I go to the elementary school early.


 I do not eat lunch when I get to school.

 We go to gym.

 We do some work.



 We have tutor buddies.


 Sometimes we have music.




 Then we eat lunch.

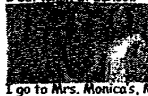
Ricky


My schedule for Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays

  I ride the bus to school

 I go to Mrs. Carol, Mrs. Laura, and Mrs. Karen's room.

   I eat lunch at school.

 I go to Mrs. Monica's, Mrs. Julie's, and Ms. Ellen's room

 I ride the bus home.

Resources

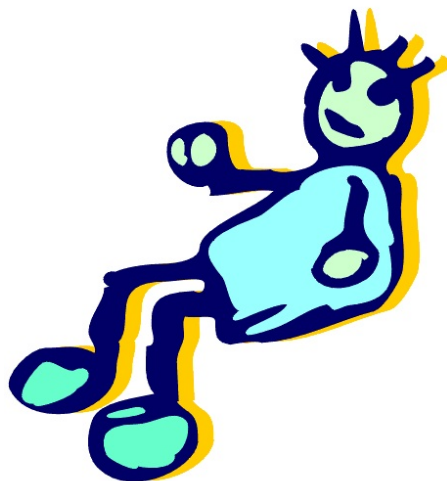
Solving Behavior Problems in Autism by Linda Hodgdon
QuirkRoberts Publishing: 1999
Troy, Michigan
Telephone: (248) 879-2598

The Center for Autism and Related Disabilities (CARD)
Florida State University
<http://autism.fsu.edu>

Teaching Students with Autism: A Guide for Educators
www.sasked.gov.sk.ca

Do-Watch-Listen-Say: Social and Communication Intervention for Children with Autism by Kathleen Ann Quill
Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co.: 2000
www.brookespublishing.com

Division TEACCH
Recommendations for Students with High Functioning Skills
www.unc.edu/depts/teacch/hfa.htm



Resources

Huron Intermediate School District maintains an informational website at www.hisd.k12.mi.us , select special student services, information about disabilities, and autism spectrum disorders.

The Huron Intermediate School District also maintains a lending library of books, video's, DVD's, kits and more addressing a wide range of topics and issues relative to autism spectrum disorder. All items are available for loan to staff and families within the HISD. Call (989) 269-9216 to request a catalog describing the resources available.

Professional development classes and inservices are available to staff in local districts and the families of students with autism spectrum disorders. Contact your HISD teacher consultant to schedule a training.



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