



Basics: What Most Students with ASD Need

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Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders are served in a multitude of settings in our school systems. Without a doubt, finding the perfect mix between needed supports and the least restrictive environment is a real challenge.

What we have learned over the past 70+ years about working with children on the spectrum has helped us to develop structures and interventions that promote success and independence. With that in mind, what supports do ALL students with ASD need to make optimal gains academically, socially and behaviorally?

First and foremost, students with ASD must have an effective communication system in order to access and participate in educational and social settings. Frequently, those of us in the field think of systems that support the expressive need that the students we serve have and fail to address the need to differentiate the way we communicate with them. ASD is often invisible to others, we perceive that an individual with ASD has their senses intact and therefore they function in a typical manner. Years of experience and the personal accounts those with ASD tell us of the sensory differences they experience and that while their senses are intact, how that information is processed may be so different that the interpretation the brain makes and the response that is solicited, is remarkably different that those with more

typical neurology. Communication is a two way street, make sure you pave both lanes!

Second, structure, structure, structure. Providing an environment that is structured and predictable reduces anxiety and increases productivity. By the same token, it is critical that we understand the difference between being structured and being rigid. Structure provides supports that promote independence and success; rigidity promotes directives and hampers the development of independence. Situations with less supervision have a need for additional structure. So, what do we mean by structure? Structure is applied to many facets of the learning environment. For example, physically structuring our classroom contributes to the success of the individuals in that environment. Providing clear boundaries, minimizing distractions by eliminating unnecessary visual and auditory stimulation and developing organizational structures all support students ability to work independently and have success. Structuring activities, tasks and assignments communicates to students the expectations, helps to establish and maintain attention and helps to increase the meaning of work being completed. Mesibov, Shea and Schopler identified three components of visual structure:

Visual Instructions: Shares information regarding where to begin and the sequence that is to be followed to successfully complete the task.

Visual Organization: Provides information in an accessible way as to how that environment is to be arranged.

Visual Clarity: Creates an emphasis on the critical components of the task.

Clearly, by the work cited above a critical component to effective programs for most with ASD include a visual component. The ability to hold information in the "minds eye" is one of the areas that traditionally have not been strength for most with ASD. In order to hold information still, it is imperative that we provide that information in a visual way that is accessible. Visual supports take many forms; they include schedules, work systems, power cards, social narratives, self-monitoring strategies, reinforcement charts and a multitude of other systems. **Think VISUALLY, communicate VISUALLY, support VISUALLY!**

Hurth, J., Shaw, E., Izeman, S., Whaley, K., & Rogers, S. (1999). Areas of agreement about effective practices among programs serving young children with autism spectrum disorders. *Infants and Young Children*, 12, 17-26.

<http://www.iidc.indiana.edu/styles/iidc/defiles/IRCA/Structured%20Teaching%20Strategies%20Article%201.pdf>

Mesibov, G., Shea, V., & Schopler, E. (2005). *The TEACCH approach to autism spectrum disorders*. New York: Plenum Press.

MARCH TRAININGS

Tri-State ASD Webinar Series: Essential Elements for Every Class

March 4: 3:00-3:45 CST; 4:00-4:45 CST

Link to register: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/N7GJLFY>

Direct link to our website:

www.KansasASD.com

www.TASNBehaviorSupports.com

TIPS FROM THE CORNER:

With spring right around the corner prepare yourself for the change in energy your students bring to your classroom. That energy surge, in whatever form it takes, is a function of longer days and lots more sunlight, says Michael Smolensky, PhD, University of Texas-Houston School of Public Health. Equip yourself with strategies to help your students stay focused on learning.

Incorporate new ways for students to demonstrate understanding of instructional material using **action responses**. Use hand signals such as thumbs up/thumbs down to indicate yes/no or agree/disagree or hand placement to indicate level of understanding (high-forehead, OK-neck, low-elbows). Teach students facial expressions for answers such as smile/frown to equal yes/no responses. Require students to use touch stimulus "point to" to engage in written text. Create activities for students to act out a story, vocabulary term, concept, or process.

Require all students to respond simultaneously using **written responses** on white boards or response cards. Make responses fairly short, have students put pencils/markers down to indicate they are finished, and require all students to show answers following a teacher signal.

Providing students with a high number of opportunities to answer or actively respond to academic requests promotes good behavior in students with even the most resistant behavior problems. (Lane, Menzies, Bruhn, & Crnabori, 2011). Some experts recommend the optimal schedule for students to respond is four to six responses from each student per minute (Council for Exceptional Children, 1987; Gunter, Hummel, & Venn, 1998). Refer to January Tips for suggested strategies for verbal responses or find other tips at http://explicitinstruction.org/?page_id=92

