



HAVE A STUDENT WITH AUTISM?...HOLD ONTO YOUR SOCKS!

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Most students arrive at school ready to learn. Students with autism are different, in that they often do not arrive ready to learn. A practical way to sort this out to enable you to provide immediate support in the classroom to students with ASD is to think in terms of internal and external organization of incoming information, neither of which just happen for students with ASD, but need to be directly supported.

Internal organization is about what goes on inside the body – sensory, emotional and movement regulation - all areas that can cause difficulty as the autistic neurology does not allow for automatic regulation, meaning students are in varying states of dysregulation. A sensory diet targeted to support specific dysregulation in a student will support internal organization across the board – sensory, emotional and movement. It is best to get a sensory evaluation and sensory diet prescription from an Occupational Therapist well versed in sensory regulation. (Endow, 2011)

In the meantime, please know that a huge practical help is simply allowing more time and space for students with autism.

Just having increased time will help the student's system get "caught up" with all the incoming sensory information they need to process. Having increased space throughout the day can be in terms of less than typically expected interactions (both in number and complexity) and more down time or break time from the busy activities requiring constant demand across the school day. Breaks allow for internal reorganization so a student can come back and reengage in the learning process.

External organization is making sense of one's surroundings. Again, the autism neurology does not allow this to occur automatically, so we often need to support this organization in our students with ASD. One of the biggest helps here is the use of an interactive visual schedule that shows what is happening just now and what happens next. There are many types of visual schedules, so choose one that matches the needs of your student at this point in time. Practically speaking, use the same sort of visual schedule that your student used last year. As you get to know the student, you can change and adapt the visual schedule as the student grows and matures and has changing needs. (Endow, 2011)

While you provide these basic supports to help your student with ASD organize himself to be ready to learn, keep in mind that along the way he will likely need to have several ways to communicate (even if verbal), many kinds of visual supports, a high degree of predictability, sameness and routine, and most of all, a teacher who is on his side, having high positive regard, presuming competence and invested in a genuine relationship.

On hard days, when all else fails – be kind. Always err on the side of the relationship. Everything else can be figured out. It won't all happen in one day. Autism is hard. But hold onto your socks – because the rewards are phenomenal and have been known to blow teacher's socks off!

Endow, J. (2011). Practical Strategies for Stabilizing Students With Classic Autism to Be Ready to Learn: Getting to Go. Shawnee Mission, KS: Autism Asperger Publishing Company.

TIPS FROM THE CORNER:

As you welcome your new class for the 2013-2014 school year it's really important to welcome the parents/family into your classroom as well. Research shows that the presence of strong family and community ties made it much more likely that those students would make significant math and reading gains. Family engagement is more than the "social". Having parents come to school for the ice cream social or picnic is great but it really does not constitute family engagement. Engagement requires having parents be equal partners in the planning and supporting of the educational process for their child.

Learning at home is the most important family engagement activity there is and does not occur without careful planning and good communication. Families that feel they are in a partnership with the school and teacher are much more likely to support what is going on at school.

Meaningful two-way communication is critical for families to support you as the teacher.

SEPTEMBER TRAININGS

September 8 3:30-4:45

Webinar Series: Introduction to Autism Spectrum Disorders

Link to register: <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/TASN-ATBS-web01>.

September 27 8:30-9:30

ADT Webinar: Talking to Parents about Autism Spectrum Disorders

Link to register: <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/KMSXJDZ>

Direct link to our website:

www.KansasASD.com

www.TASNBehaviorSupports.com

Often times the communication is only one directional, with the family being given information periodically from the school without any solicitation for return communication. Look at how you are talking with families and evaluate if there is opportunity for return communication each time. Children with parents that are involved in the process have higher test scores, attend school at higher rates, have higher grades, are more likely to enroll in higher education work, and develop realistic plans for their futures. Two groups in Kansas that are dedicated to assisting schools and families in this educational support endeavors are Kansas Parent Information Resource Center at www.kipirc.org and Families Together at www.familiestogetherinc.org. These groups will help support family engagement in school as well as serve as a resource to both schools and the family.

