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Number 459

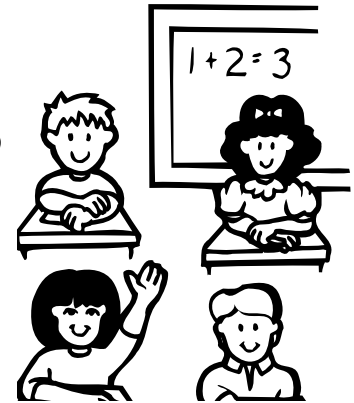


Inclusion Made Easier

by Lindsey Wegner, M.S., CCC-SLP

For many students with autism, maintaining academic success within a general classroom can be very difficult due to their deficits in communication. Some students receive more specialized education with a modified curriculum in order to help them in the area of communication.

One main goal of special education should always be to mainstream every student as much as possible in the "least restrictive environment." Least restrictive environment (LRE) means that a student with a disability should have the opportunity to be educated with non-disabled peers to the greatest extent appropriate – the goal being to provide the child with more opportunities to practice communication in functional settings. Most students require learning in multiple settings in order to help them understand social expectations.



It is the Speech-Language Pathologist's (SLP) goal to help students gain and maintain communication competence and, therefore, be a valuable resource in helping serve students with autism in the best setting appropriate for their academic and social success. When speaking with other teachers, SLPs should clearly convey the expectations for their student's communication. Be aware that teachers have a lot on their plate, and asking them to incorporate more things throughout their school day can be overwhelming.

Below are a few suggestions for SLPs:

- Ask the classroom teacher about the strategies that already work with his/her other students. It is an easier transition for the special education students if the strategies already implemented in the mainstream classroom can be used with multiple students.
- Have a list of ideas ready to present to the teacher that are working for the special education student in their current classroom. This way the teacher will be more informed about the student. Provide the teacher with multiple strategies to help the child communicate and foster his/her success within the classroom.
- Provide suggestions for strategies that may work based on the students' current goals. Help the teacher problem solve ahead of time in order to be proactive with the students' communication.
- Help the teacher understand that as an SLP, your ultimate goal for each individual student is to use his/her communicative language often and be as independent as possible.

When writing students' Individual Education Program (IEP), keep in mind that you are attempting to create ideal conditions in order for the students to thrive in their educational environment. Write goals that will help increase the students' interaction between peers and adults. Clearly define the role of each IEP team member in the student's education plan, especially who is responsible for helping the student reach a particular goal, as well as the data tracking for that goal. A few examples might include:

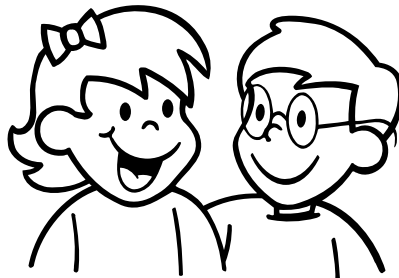
- The student will increase his/her attempts at initiating conversation with peers and adults through nonverbal and/or verbal interactions.
- The student will use his/her communication abilities to answer/ask questions at his/her development level in classroom activities and lessons.
- The student will use his/her communication abilities to transition smoothly between classroom lessons and activities.

Often, transitioning from a special education classroom to a general education setting can create multiple levels of stress for students with autism and their teachers. Hopefully by implementing some of these suggestions, facing these challenges may be a little easier.

Resources

"Helping Students with ASD Adapt to the Mainstream," by Emily Rubin. American Speech-Language Association (ASHA), June 2016 issue of The ASHA Leader.

"The Pros and Cons of Mainstream Classrooms for Children with Autism," Heath Central. Retrieved November 2, 2016.
<http://www.healthcentral.com/autism/c/1443/172151/mainstream-classrooms-children/>



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