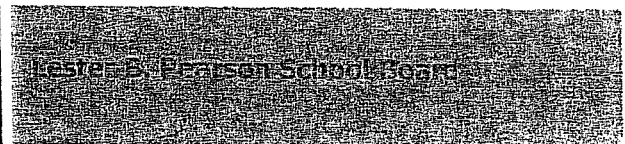


Autism Spectrum Disorder Newsletter
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Welcoming the Student to the
Class Community

All students with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) have a triad of difficulties in communication, social skills, and flexibility in thinking and behavior. As individuals, these students also have a range of strengths and challenges. Some students fit in more easily than others with the peer group and can manage social demands of the school setting. Others may experience stress or anxiety and exhibit behavior which makes their differences and struggles more apparent.

Sensitizing peers to both the differences and shared qualities of a student with an ASD not only promotes belonging and opportunities for social growth of the student with a disability, but also provides important learning for the peer group. Here are some tips on how to approach sensitization and nurture peer support:

"Everyone belongs in our class and is working on what they need to learn."
Adult modeling and incidental comments are the most powerful tools to teach accepting attitudes and promote understanding.

"Why does he do that?"
Acknowledging differences and answering children's questions in a factual way create a sense of safe, open discussion. This can be done in way to preserve a student's dignity, such as explaining that a student is upset and is still learning a better way to let us know.

"Let's read this book about a special child."
Direct instruction through children's literature is another approach to promoting student discussion and understanding of disabilities. Both differences and the ways the child is the same or shines are important to stress in structured discussion. Check the reference list on the ASD website for books, such as "Ian's Walk", which can be borrowed from the ASD Library.

"You can help him by ..."
When opportunities to interact are set up, from prompting a greeting to working with a partner on an assignment, students may need some coaching on specific ways to be helpful. Suggesting comments or scripts to a peer helper will help avoid "mothering" or "bossing" a student with a challenging disability.

"It isn't fair!"
When students question why the expectations or rules seem different, you can redirect attention to their own tasks or behavior. Validate their feelings of concern if something has been taken or broken. Explain accommodations whenever possible. Keep in mind Richard Lavoie's perspective: responding to every student the same way is equal, but responding to every student based on individual needs is FAIR.

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QUOTE
"Autism is not a label; it is a signpost. The diagnosis of an autistic spectrum disorder should be seen as a signpost to direct staff to the areas which need to be understood, but knowledge of the individual is crucial."
Rita Jordan

**Occupational therapy
Corner**
Individuals with autism/PDD may have difficulty with registration and interpretation of sensory information. A lot of children with

autism are under or over responsive to sensory input. Hypersensitivity to touch and auditory input appear to be the most commonly sighted items. Some can hear the refrigerator of the next door's apartment. Some report that certain clothing textures feel like sandpaper. In the case of students who tend to overreact to auditory input and cover their ears when they hear loud noises, cry or get disorganized in noisy situations, these are a few tips to try. Forewarn the child of any loud noises that may occur (e.g.: bell, fire alarm). Use "Hush-ups" (tennis ball on legs of chairs) or rugs/carpets in the classroom to decrease noise level. Organize seating in order for the students to be far from ventilators, heater, doorway, open window, etc... Allow the student to wear headphones/ear plugs when noise level is high (e.g.: assembly, recess, bus) and during independent work, if needed. Try to speak in a low pitch voice in class, and to whisper when talking directly to the student.

In the next issue, we'll talk about what to do when a student tends to over react to touch.

Center of Excellence

Three ASD team members attended the Geneva Center's Annual Autism Summer Training Institute for two days in Toronto.

Andrew Bennett and Holly Barlow were trained in the Autism Diagnostic Observation Scale in late August.

Many of our personnel attended Tony Attwood's conference on September 24th and 25th on developing friendships and diagnosing ASD.

Q. What is generalization?

A Expansion of a student's capability of performance

beyond those conditions set for initial acquisition (i.e. at home and at school or in the classroom and in the gymnasium).

Next time: What is modeling?

Library

We have been accumulating many new books. The following are new ones that are available to you by contacting one of the ASD Team members.

- 1) *Views from Our Shoes*
- 2) *Asperger Syndrome & Adolescence: Helping Preteens and Teens Get Ready for the Real World*
- 3) *Indoor & Outdoor Survival Signs*
- 4) *You're Going to Love this Kid: Teaching Students with Autism in the Inclusive Classroom*
- 5) *Life Skills for Special Children*

Speech and Language Tip of the Month

Many children with ASD do not initiate interactions or language. Here are some "Communicative Temptations" to try with your students who are in the early stages of communication.

- Blow up a balloon and slowly deflate it. Hand the deflated balloon up to your mouth and wait.
- Open a jar of bubbles, blow bubbles, then close the jar tightly. Hand the closed jar to the child and wait.
- Initiate a familiar or an unfamiliar social game with the child until the child expresses pleasure, then stop the game and wait.
- Wave and say "bye" to a toy upon removing it from

the play area. Repeat this for a second and third toy, and do nothing when removing a fourth toy. These four trials should be interspersed throughout other interactions, rather than be presented in a series.

- At first, the student may need a verbal model. Give the model and wait for imitation. Keep the model to one to two words depending on the language level of your student (E.g. "more", "open", "more balloon", "open bubbles"). Continue the activity and try again without a model. Remember **WAIT** and **LOOK EXPECTANTLY!** Give the student a chance to initiate first.

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Questions or requests to the Center of Excellence from other school boards should be directed to Karen Zey.