



AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDERS NETWORK NEWS

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What is a Sensory Diet?

A sensory diet is a prescribed combination of activities and environmental accommodations that are designed to meet an individual's sensory needs. It is geared at helping a person be alert and adaptable, in order to function at the best of his/her abilities in his/her environment.

On a short term level, a sensory diet for a student with ASD aims at: facilitating an optimal level of alertness throughout the day, preventing uncomfortable reactions to sensory input, decreasing self-stimulatory behaviors, as well as facilitating attention in class and during interactions, concentration during sedentary (seat) work and overall productivity. On a long term level, it helps the student understand his/her sensory needs, supports behavioral self-regulation, and improves quality of life. It may also assist in improving the organization of the nervous system of the individual.

A sensory diet may include: a formal schedule of sensory based activities (e.g.: implementing movement breaks, including whole body actions/heavy work for its calming and grounding effect, at specific times throughout the day), specific activities embedded throughout daily routine (e.g.: performing stomp walk during transitions, wearing a deep pressure vest in class, using a weighted lap animal during circle time), environmental adaptations/accommodations (e.g.: setting up a calming corner in class), suggestions for leisure activities (e.g.: swimming, Jungle Gym) and for interactions (e.g.: approaching students with tactile defensiveness from the front). Intensity and duration of activities making up a sensory diet must be appropriate and carefully monitored.

When planning a sensory diet for a student, the occupational therapist takes an accurate history of classroom behavior, through questionnaire and observation of the student in different settings in school, develops activity routines for specific hard points during the day, instructs caregivers (teachers, aides) to recognize signs of inappropriate alertness/arousal, how to implement activities and generally interact with the student with respect to his/her individual sensory issues. Note that the impact of different sensory inputs on behavior, interaction, communication, play and learning may change from day to day. Therefore, sensory activities need to be adjusted accordingly. THERE IS NO RECIPE that works all the time. Ongoing team communication and collaboration, as well as consultation support from your occupational therapist, is the key to success when implementing a sensory diet at school. It is also important to recognize that a sensory diet doesn't always work. Therefore using it in conjunction with other treatment methods, including behavioral considerations and plan, might prove itself beneficial.

Joëlle Hadaya,
Occupational Therapist

Communication Corner



"A child is like a
 butterfly in the wind,
 Some can fly higher
 than others,
 But each one flies
 the best it can.
 Why compare one
 against the other?
 Each one is special,
 Each one is different,
 Each one is beautiful!"

unknown

Students with ASD often have difficulty retrieving and reporting information from one context to another. As a result a student may not be able to communicate about his/her day at school once he is at home. Likewise, teachers may want a student to write and/or talk about a week-end activity during class time. Communication books are an excellent way to foster this important communication skill. Many parents report that they want to be able to either involve their child in conversation about their day or refer to the child's day at school. The following ideas should get you started.

Take time at the end of the day to review the day's activities.

Many templates that use Picture Communication Symbols™ are available for use. Students can circle or stamp the activities that they did during the day. The review should not be a "test" at the end of the day to see what they remembered. Tell your student what they did in a reassuring voice. As

your students become familiar with the routine they can take the lead.

Create a Picture Diary.

Many schools have digital cameras available for use in the classroom. Take a picture of your student while participating in an activity. Write a short caption under the picture. These pictures can be glued into scrapbooks or placed in a special binder. Encourage two-way communication by having a parent send in a picture from home.

Collect "scraps" from activities.

During an art activity place "scraps" such as a crayon, pastel, or piece of material from the activity in a small zip-lock bag and send it home in the special communication scrapbook or binder. Have a parent write down exactly what their child has said and send it back to school with a "scrap" such as a picture or wrapper from a food eaten at home.

Teacher Tips

Every teacher knows that in any classroom group, different students will cope with stress in different ways! This is especially true with children on the Autism Spectrum. These coping mechanisms may appear quite different from the rest of the class, and may seem to be a sign of inattention – scribbling or holding a fidget toy, for example, or hand-flapping or finger flicking. While it may seem that these activities might interfere with learning, it is a good idea not to discourage them, as the child may then be forced to seek another (probably less helpful) strategy for coping with stress.



For more information please refer to the book, "You're Going to Love this Kid", ch.5 "Creating a Comfortable Classroom", P. Kluth, Paul H. Brookes Publishing Company, 2003.

Behaviour Strategies

The use of "time-out" to reduce negative behaviours in a student can be a very effective tool, but only if used appropriately.

First, it should be decided by all adults concerned which negative behaviours would be targeted to have "time-out" as a consequence. This will help to build consistency regardless of the person intervening with the student.

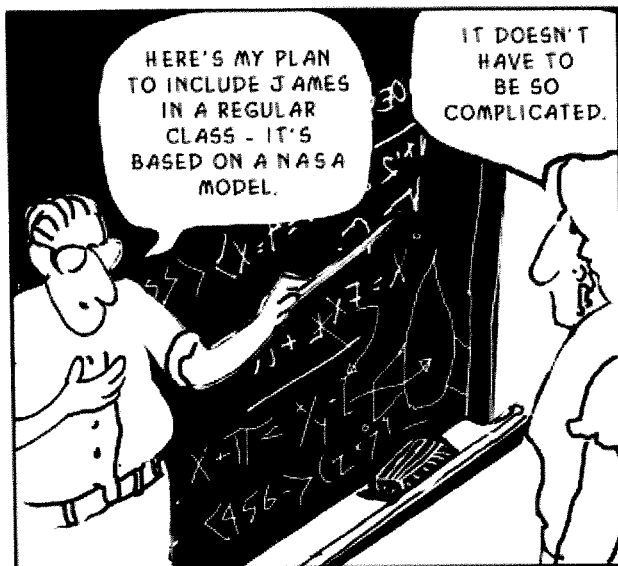
Second, a specific "time-out" location should be designated in the school, whether it is a particular place, a chair, or even in proximity of the "act", where the student will consistently be taken by any intervener.

Third, each time one of these negative behaviours occurs, the time-out should be given immediately, regardless of the student's location or activity at the time.

Fourth, the duration of the time-out should last no longer than 2-3 minutes, with no adult attention given to the student during that period. Anything longer than this, especially for younger students, will become meaningless.

When the student is first put in time-out, the adult should say: "You are in time-out because...". When the student is taken out of time-out, the adult should sit with them and go over alternative and more positive ways of behaving in future situations.

Top Shelf



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FRANK LEARNS THAT INCLUSION DOESN'T HAVE TO BE ROCKET SCIENCE.

“Cassidy’s First Day of School” is a delightful story that is not only a useful tool to ease that transition into a new school year but it can be used with the entire class to help with sensitization. This lovely illustrated book can be purchased from a member of the ASD Team for the reasonable price of \$12.00. Copies are limited so don’t wait to reserve a copy for yourself or school.

“When My Autism Gets Too Big” by Kari Dunn Buron has been rewritten as “When My Worries Get Too Big” Copies of both these books are available for use through the ASD Library. The book is most effective when accompanied by The Incredible 5 Point Scale, also available. The story and scale are effective tools to help students acknowledge the stressors they may face in their environment. The objective of this 5 point scale is to introduce a name for the problem as well as a calming sequence for explosive behaviour. (This is all based on ideas from Yale’s research regarding OCD in Children.)

“That kid shows no joint attention.”

Joint attention refers to the act of sharing an awareness of objects and events with other people. This includes children’s ability to direct others to pay attention to what they are attending to by alternating their eye gaze, or pointing, as well as the ability to respond to similar bids of attention from others. For example, an infant who wants to listen to music might elicit his mother’s eye contact, and then slowly shift his gaze towards the musical toy and repeat this behaviour until his mother activates the toy. An im-

pairment in joint attention is one of the most common social deficits related to a diagnosis of an autism spectrum disorder. It is important to note that joint attention has been found to be fundamental in the development of expressive and receptive language skills, symbolic play and the development of empathy. It has also been found that with intervention, joint attention can improve.

Try This! The Number Concept Grid

This simple grid is very effective in teaching children to recognize numbers, number words, and number concepts. Simply follow the progression: First teach “one” (numeral, word, and dot). Tell the child that they are matching the word “one”, the number 1, one dot, etc. The blank space is used for a manipulative and it is important to have a variety of manipulatives available to show that one “thing” can be anything. Place one crayon, one pencil, one eraser, etc on the blank space to demonstrate “one”. When the child is able to select and/or name all the components of “one”, move to “two”. Repeat the process for “two”.

Once the child has learned the components of both numbers, then you can ask them to discriminate between the two numbers, for example; give me the word “one”, give me the word “two”, give me the number “one”, give me the number “two”, give me one dot, give me two dots.

When the child is able to do this, the real test is then to present the child with, for instance, a bag of pennies and ask them to give you two pennies. Generalize to a wide variety of items. When the child is confidently discriminating between “one” and “two”, move on to “three”, “four”, etc.

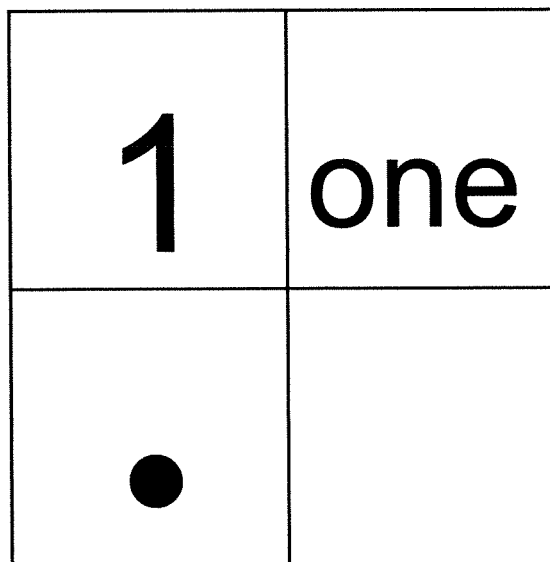
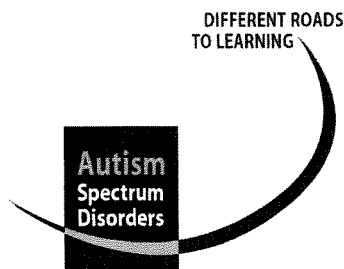


Diagram by Patricia Assouad



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Coming Soon!

The Miriam Foundation Curriculum for 2006-07 is ready. They offer inexpensive evening sessions on topics that include Diagnosis and Etiology of ASDs, Future Planning: Transitions from Childhood to Adult, Interventions, Challenging Behaviour and Medical Views. Training programs this year include the TEACCH Model and Non-Violent Crisis Intervention.

The main event coming soon is the Spring Conference. World renowned Dr. Rita Jordan and Dr. Michael Powers will be presenting "Strategies for Engagement, Intervention and Education across the Autism Spectrum". This is an event not to be missed! Teachers may want to use their professional development fund for this opportunity.

More information can be found at www.goldlearningcentre.com

Our team is comprised of many professionals with a variety of specializations. Designated as a Centre of Excellence within the province, our mandate is to assist schools in the implementation of best practices for the inclusion of students with an ASD and serve as a resource to the other English school boards in Quebec. Our team provides assistance to students and families and works to support educational personnel in developing their capacity to meet a wide range of needs in the classroom. We do this through direct intervention, coaching, professional development, and the sharing of materials.

WELCOME !

It is with pleasure we would like to welcome the newest members to our team, Ceri Howe and Katie Cohene

We're on the web!

Autism Spectrum Disorders
Network

WWW

Autism Speaks is raising large amounts of money to be directed into Autism Research, but is also endeavoring to "get the word out" about ASD.

This site includes a list of Walk Far for Autism Research events (across Canada and the US), as well as the fantastic documentary "Autism Every Day" produced by Lauren Thierry, a parent of children with Autism. This film had been featured on Good Morning America this past summer.

The film can be viewed at:

Hot Off the Press

Town & Country -August 2006

The August 2006 issue of Town and Country Magazine profiles Autism Speaks co-founders Bob and Suzanne Wright in an article entitled "Autism's Angels." In the article, the Wrights discuss their reasons for founding Autism Speaks and the organization's mission. A number of prominent autism advocates are also profiled, including Autism Speaks board member Laura Slatkin and her husband Harry Slatkin, creators of the New York Center for Autism (NYCA) charter school, and Jim and Marilyn Simons, founders of the Simons Foundation. The article can be read online at: <http://www.autismspeaks.org/>

"Thank you to Nicole Guy, Lester B Pearson Career Advisor and students from Pierrefonds Comprehensive High School for preparing this newsletter for distribution."

