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Feature Article

Top 5 Best Practices in a Daycare Setting

As school board professionals who specialize in the area of autism, we frequently provide recommendations for teachers and aides who work with this population in the classroom. Having said that, there are a growing number of students with ASD who attend school daycare, outside regular hours, and increasingly so. As a result of these rising numbers, it has become a recurring practice for us to also consult with daycare staff to support the functioning of students with ASD in the afterschool environment. Here are the top 5 best practices we recommend in the daycare setting:

Use of visual supports

Similar to using visual schedules with students during their school day, this practice needs to extend into the daycare setting. You can post a visual schedule on the wall for the student to see as soon as they walk into daycare, where it can be reviewed with an adult. It can depict the sequence of activities that the student will be following for the duration of his stay in the daycare room. Additional visual tools can include visual cues to clean up or line up, mini-schedules to depict the sequence of a task or activity, or even a hand washing sequence strip.

Set up a structured play/leisure area

A daycare setting can, inevitably, lend itself to being less structured by nature than a classroom. It is left up to most students to navigate around the room, find a friend to play with, or initiate their own play activity independently. This can often be very challenging for a student with ASD given their need for a predictable and structured environment. Therefore, we suggest that you establish and prepare beforehand, an individual play or leisure area for the student, where the beginning and end of the activity is made clear to them. It is important that the student be able to complete the activity independently, with minimal prompting. This can be in the form of a structured mini-obstacle course, with a clear sequence, or even a set of two or three baskets filled with their favorite toys and games, numbered in a sequence they can follow.

Organize play activities with peers to encourage socialization

Social interaction and spontaneous and reciprocal play are often a challenge for most students with ASD. Therefore, we suggest that play needs to be structured externally, by the adults working in daycare, in order to teach social skills to these students. You can set up and organize a board game or play activity involving the student with ASD and one or two other peers, all the while, supervising and coaching the kids through the interaction. These can be wonderful moments to teach students the skills of waiting, turn-taking, and interacting positively with peers.

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Feature Article Continued

Use of positive behavior supports for challenging students

For those students with ASD who display more challenging and oppositional behaviors, additional supports which enhance motivation and compliance can be useful. You can implement an incentive system, whereby the student earns a reward of their choice if they complete a certain activity or make an effort to play appropriately with peers. You can also insert choice boards around the daycare room, where you pre-select toys or games that you depict through pictos on a choice board, and then have the student choose what they would like to play with.

Establish a behavior plan

Unfortunately, some students may be more prone to having meltdowns or becoming physically aggressive during their time in daycare. If this is known of the student, we recommend taking preventative measures by establishing a behavior plan with the consultation of the resource team and school board professionals. In this plan, all adults working with the student during daycare hours agree to use the same language and approach with the student should a meltdown occur. For example, you may decide that once escalation of behavior starts, you will: (1) guide the student to an agreed-upon calming area or room, 2) have them use their calming strategies (breathing, relaxation) using a visual script, 3) give the student a reasonable amount of time to calm down, 4) redirect them to their previous activity once they are calm and ready. Consistency and follow through among all adults is the key to a successful behavior plan.

Teacher Tip

Planned Ignoring

Planned ignoring of negative behaviour and selecting issues to target with children with challenging behaviour is key. Planned ignoring is a great strategy to help make sure you are not accidentally reinforcing negative attention seeking behaviour. However, planned ignoring does not actually mean ignoring the behaviour and walking away, as obviously safety is priority. It means avoiding commenting on behaviour, making eye contact or giving the child a disapproving look. It may also mean removing items that might be of danger of being thrown or even removing the child from a specific area. Once the child has moved on from the negative attention seeking behaviour and is engaging in something more productive, praise and recognition for the new positive behaviour is the best way to teach the child that only appropriate behaviours will get attention. This will in turn help diminish negative attention-seeking behaviours.

WWW

This website offers an Early Childcare Provider's Guide to Managing Challenging Behaviors with intervention strategies and positive behavioral supports.

Although the tools are designed specifically for early childcare, many of the strategies can be used throughout elementary school and daycare settings. Please follow this link to access the toolkit filled with useful information, resources & visuals <http://bit.ly/ToolkitECPG>



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Our team is composed of professionals with a variety of specializations. Designated as a Centre of Excellence within the province, our mandate is to assist LBPSB schools in the implementation of best practices for the inclusion of students with ASD and to 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 augmenting their capacity to meet a wide range of needs in the classroom. We do this through direct intervention, coaching, consulting, professional development, and the sharing of materials.

We're on the web! <http://coeasd.lbpsb.qc.ca>

Try This!

Social stories are a great tool to help teach routines and expected behaviour in the day-care setting.

Creating social stories using the *Social Stories Creator and Library* app by Touch Autism is quick and easy. Using this app you can customize social stories to the student's specific needs and developmental levels. The stories can include sounds, pictures, and text that can then be printed. Other enticing features of this app are that you can record voices, upload your own photographs, or access a bank of stock images included. The versatility of this app enables educators to ensure that social stories and cues are tailored to meet the unique needs and learning styles of each student.



Read All About It

Autism and Early Years Practice

by Kate Wall

SAGE, Nov. 18, 2009

This book is a guide for professionals, teachers, and parents on how to work with young children who have autism or who may appear on the autistic spectrum during the early years of development. It includes practical and easy to follow suggestions on how to include young children with autism (0-8 years of age) in general education settings based on case studies and research on autism in children. This book also identifies key texts to encourage further reading and discussion.

Student Artistic Expression

***Brave Child* - Poem by Tyrell Duhaney:**

Some children never take strings, since they eventually become knots, grown in a fatalistic pot.

But a Brave Child, takes two strings and encourages them, to become knots to magically ravel into a kite, and soar where fear, cannot be.

Imagination climbs the kite's strings, holding faith's hand, and they watch their daughter *hope* become the luster, as the sun's new ray.