Children with Special Needs: Autism Spectrum Disorders

Autism is an “umbrella” term used to describe a group of multifaceted developmental brain disorders known as Pervasive Developmental Disorders (PDD). The other pervasive developmental disorders are PDD-NOS (Pervasive Developmental Disorder – Not Otherwise Specified), Asperger's Syndrome, Rett Syndrome and Childhood Disintegrative Disorder. Most parents and professionals refer to these groups as Autism Spectrum Disorders.

Children with autism have difficulties learning naturally from their environment, which is how most children without disabilities learn. A child with autism may show little interest in the world or people around him or her. While all children with autism are capable of learning and developing, they may still always have differences in their behavior and cognition.

Some behavioral symptoms of autism include:

- Differences in the onset of developmental skills.
- Irregular responses to sensations, such as sight, hearing, touch, balance, smell, taste and reaction to pain.
- Stereotypical behaviors such as engaging in repetitive body motions or repetitive movements with objects.
- Differences in relating to people, objects or events.
- Difficulties in regulating their emotional responses
- Acting rigid or inflexible
- Displaying feelings of anxieties with new or different situations.
Implications for the classroom — It is important to understand that no two children with autism are alike, just as no two children without disabilities are alike. These strategies have been shown to be effective with many children with autism, but certainly not all. Individualization should always be the overriding thought when creating strategies and plans for instruction.

### Treatment plan using applied behavior analysis (ABA) behavior principals.

ABA uses behavioral principles such as positive reinforcement, to teach children skills in a planned, systematic manner. Receiving repeated opportunities across the day with different people gives lots of practice new skills.

### Creating a consistent and predictable classroom schedule.

Some children with autism can often experience anxiety over unpredictability. Posting a visual schedule of activities can help alleviate anxiety, which in turn can support their access to learning.

### Use of classroom pictures to help sequence activities and steps within activities.

Children with autism often have difficulty sequencing events as well as steps within activities. Providing visual pictures cues for children during classroom transitions, work time, unstructured playtime and even outside, can help them add some structure to activities.

### Teaching concrete social skills.

Children with autism often do not learn from their environment and can often have difficulty learning how to enter play and make friends. Creating time for children with autism to be taught explicit skills on all aspects of social play skills, entering play and maintaining play with classroom peers.

### RESOURCES:

**Families for Effective Autism Treatment:**

[http://www.featwa.org/aboutautism.html](http://www.featwa.org/aboutautism.html)

**Autism Speaks:**

[http://www.autismspeaks.org/](http://www.autismspeaks.org/)