

Working with Young Children with Special Needs

Tips and Guidelines

Start with Structure

Children with autism and other disabilities may have an inordinate need for structure and predictability. Increasing the overall organization and predictability of the child's environment and providing visual cues and implicit structure is vital when interacting with children with autism and many other children with developmental disabilities and language disorders.

Transitions may be difficult for many children. They cannot be avoided, but children can be supported so that transitions are not so difficult. Some reasons for this difficulty may include:

- The child does not want to stop a preferred activity/person
- The child may be afraid that he will “never” get to do that activity again
- The child may be unable to stop immediately and need preparation for change and to process the request.
- The child may know what to do, but likes the attention he gets for not complying
- The child has a pattern of protest to avoid a new activity or believes it is too hard.

Consider these issues

Physical layouts

- Use furniture and movable walls to visually separate one area from another (i.e. in a classroom or play area at home, if space allows)
- Locate the material in the areas associated with the activities that occurs there (i.e. toys in play area, clothing in area where the child dresses, etc.)
- Be aware of noise levels and allow for quiet space

Use of routines and schedules:

- What is happening today
- What is different and unusual today
- Sequence of events
- When finished and what is next

Transitions:

- Prepare the children for transitions by using the natural endings of certain activities. (*“The game is almost over” “One more push on the swing, then _____”*)
- Use chime, timer, song/music to signal upcoming transitions
- If a child does not want to leave a preferred activity/item, let him know when he can have access to it again. (You can use play dough during the break)
 - Avoid questions like ... *“Do you want to go now?”* if there is no option or choice.

Early Learning & Engagement

Being occupied vs engaged in activities (see handout)

Reinforcement

Why use it?

Reinforcement vs bribes....(see handout)