FAPE FOR STUDENTS WITH ASPERGER SYNDROME: ESSENTIAL LANGUAGE, BEHAVIOR, AND SOCIAL STRATEGIES

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I. ASPERGER SYNDROME AND THE AUTISM SPECTRUM

A. Autism, Asperger Syndrome, and Pervasive Developmental Disorder-Not Otherwise Specified

1. **Deficits in language skills**

2. **Deficits in social interaction skills**

3. **Excesses in stereotypic behaviors (insistence on sameness, rigidity in routine, self-stimulatory behaviors, odd reactions to sensory stimuli)**

4. **Onset prior to 36 months of age**

B. The Growing Number of Kids

1. **Incidence in the general population**

   a. 1 in 100 children over the age of 8 yrs. (CDC studies)

   b. Reasons for the increase; multiple genes likely involved

2. **Gender**

   c. Autism – M : F
   ___:___

   b. Asperger Syndrome – M : F
   ___:___

II. CREATING PROGRAMS THAT PROVIDE FOR FAPE

A. Seven Critical Components

1. Staff and parent training

a. The imperative to train general education staff

b. The need for updated training of special education staff

c. The advantages of combined staff/parent training

d. Essential content

- Characteristics of AS across the areas of language skills, social interaction skills, stereotypic behavior, motor skills, learning issues
    - Literal interpretation of language
    - Deficits in abstract and social language
    - Lack of perspective-taking (mind-blindness; lack of theory of mind)
    - Difficulty shifting focus/attention
    - Intense need for routine
    - Fixation on topics of interest
    - Overall lack of social skills; incidental learning not a strength
    - Fine motor difficulties/resistance to handwriting
- Classroom strategies that address these areas
- Behavior management strategies specific to the needs of kids with Asperger Syndrome
- Co-occurrence with other mental health conditions (e.g., ADHD, anxiety, depression)

2. Early evaluation and intervention

a. Infant/toddler programs

b. Preschool programs

c. The early identification debate

If infants and toddlers lack a number of the developmental milestones listed below, an Autism or Asperger Disorder checklist may be required to provide for early special education classification and intervention.

4 months	Present	Not Present
▪ Reciprocal smile (smiling when smiled at)	____	____
▪ Reaction to sound or movement	____	____
▪ Interest in/reaching for faces	____	____
6 months		
▪ Babbling	____	____
▪ Crying when unhappy	____	____
9 months		
▪ Reaching for and releasing objects	____	____
▪ Laughing when socially engaged	____	____
▪ Early imitation		
➢ Facial imitation	____	____
➢ Motor imitation (e.g., waving bye-bye)	____	____
➢ Simple verbal imitation (single consonants/vowels)	____	____
12 months		
▪ Early interactive play (e.g., peek-a-boo)	____	____
▪ Gesturing to indicate desires/needs (e.g., reaching up, pointing)	____	____
▪ One-syllable consonant/vowel combinations (ma, da, ba)	____	____
15 months		
▪ Joint attention (pointing in order to direct an adult's attention; visually tracking when others point)	____	____
▪ Two-syllable words (mama, dada, baba)	____	____
24 months		
▪ Interest in same-age children; early imaginative play	____	____
▪ Object permanence (finding out-of-sight objects)	____	____
▪ Using about 50 words; simple two-word sentences	____	____
36 months		
▪ Describing past events	____	____
▪ Answering simple "wh" questions (who, what, when, where)	____	____
▪ Interest in same-age children; interest in sharing; naming friends	____	____

3 Adapted from: Easter Seals Autism Awareness

d. Appropriate evaluation instruments for qualification and

classification in special education (using Autism checklists for kids with Asperger Syndrome will result in *false negatives)*

- Autism
    - Autism Diagnostic Observation Schedule (ADOS) – modules 1 and 2 for younger/less verbal students
    - Autism Behavior Checklist (ABC)
    - Childhood Autism Rating Scale (CARS)
    - Gilliam Autism Rating Scale (GARS)
- Asperger Syndrome
    - Autism Diagnostic Observation Schedule (ADOS) – modules 3 and 4 for older/more verbal students
    - Gilliam Asperger Disorder Scale (GADS)
    - Asperger Syndrome Diagnostic Scale
    - Social Communication Questionnaire (formerly called the ADI Screener/based on the ADI-R)

3. Systematic social skills instruction with appropriate curricula

a. Direct Instruction format, with modeling and role-play components

b. Peer involvement in social skills training

c. Peer buddy system and peer coaching

d. Reinforcement system

e. Critical areas (each area includes *examples* of skills, not an exhaustive list)

- Classroom skills – asking for help, listening skills, staying on-topic

- Relationship-building skills – taking turns, joining a group, social reciprocity, showing empathy

- Body language skills – physical proximity, touching, eye contact

- Coping skills – taking "no" for an answer, handling teasing, coping with changes in routine

  Example: Changes in Routine/It's Not What I Thought Would Happen Skill

  1. Stop
  2. Take a deep breath
  3. Count to 5
  4. Say "OK"
  5. Follow the direction

- Employment skills – asking questions, taking feedback, disagreeing politely

- Self-regulation skills – coping skills, reading the environment, waiting to talk, general waiting skill, self-calming, identifying and labeling internal states

f. Curricula – Skillstreaming (Goldstein), Social Skills Picture Book (Baker), Social Skills Training (Baker), Preparing for Life (Baker), Social Stories (Gray), ACCEPTS (Walker)

g. Logistical planning

- Coordinating the team effort – resource staff, school psychologist, speech/language pathologist

- Choosing one goal at a time for the whole team to address

- Providing small group instruction 3-4 times per week

- One instructional period per week with each team member (services coordinated; time demands on staff decreased; generalization of skills enhanced across staff, location, materials, etc.)

4. Speech/language interventions

a. Social language – joint/shared attention, imitation skills, "wh" questions, conversation skills (e.g., greetings, opening skills, topic maintenance, topic turn-taking, reciprocity, closing skills etc.)

b. Abstract language – idioms, humor, deductive skills, inference, etc.

c. Coordinating speech/language and social skills goals

5. Behavioral interventions

a. Accommodations as preventive steps

b. Self-regulation skills as replacement behaviors

c. Other social skills goals and objectives

d. Clearly defined reinforcement system

e. Clearly defined reductive procedures

f. Anti-bullying policies and vigilant monitoring of high-risk populations

6. Explicit, evolving classroom accommodations

a. Written work – keyboarding for written assignments, written work reduction, allowing peers to take notes

b. Physical setting – seating preferences, cubicles, dividers, sensory issues interview

c. Designated contact person in all school and community settings

d. Maps of school, neighborhood, community

e. Visual strategies – written and visual schedules, start and stop cues, examples of completed work

f. Organizational strategies – lists, planners, calendars, notebooks, color-coded folder/files, study skills

g. Instructional strategies – inductive teaching (as opposed to deductive), direct instruction strategies, work examples

h. Modified schedules – extra time to complete assignments, modified class schedules, early class dismissal to avoid crowded halls

i. Transition strategies – prepare for changes in routine, verbal and visual transition cues, transition warnings (timers)

j. Exceptions as part of the rules (Adapted from: Powers, 2002)

Example: <u>Class Rules</u>

- Do what the teachers says
- Stay in your seat
  - *Exception(s):*
- Raise your hand to talk
  - *Exception(s):*
- Keep hands, feet, and objects to self
- Do your work

7. Utilizing and developing areas of intense interest

a. Using the tools at hand and capitalizing on strengths

b. Dr. Temple Grandin: "Let's say that a child loves trains – that's a common fixation. Well, read a book about trains, do math problems with trains, read about the history of the railroad. In other words, if a kid loves trains, you can somehow drag a train into just about every subject in school to get him motivated to study it. Fixations are tremendous motivators. Look at someone like Mme. Curie, who discovered radium; she certainly was fixated on what she was doing. A little bit of fixation gets things done." Interview with Medscape Psychiatry and Mental Health magazine, 10/2005

c. School clubs

d. Academic and behavioral motivation

e. Community mentors for students

f. Job sampling

B. Avoiding Due Process Issues

1. **Realize that this is the fastest-growing group in your system.**

2. **Keep the lines of communication open.**

3. **Remember that social interaction skills are more critical to long-term success and job retention than academic achievement**

4. **Begin the training process with general education staff, special education staff, related services staff, parents, and paraeducators.**

5. **Purchase social skills materials.**

6. **Invite parents and older students to programming forums.**

7. **Provide accommodations *specific to* the needs of students with AS.**

8. **Identify kids early.**

9. **Be flexible with preschool programming.**

10. **Retain your sense of humor (as you always do!).**

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