

Supporting Preschool Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

ONE HOUR TRAINING



THE NURTURE
— NETWORK —

INTRODUCTION

This one-hour training is designed to help preschool teachers in public school settings develop a deeper understanding of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and how to support children with ASD effectively. Teachers will learn about the characteristics of preschoolers with ASD, research-based educational strategies, curricular adaptations, and assistive technologies that can enhance participation and learning.

Learning Objectives:

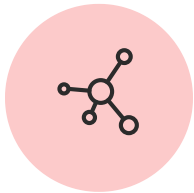
1. Participants will recognize common characteristics of autism spectrum disorder (ASD) in preschool-aged children and understand how these traits may impact learning and social interactions.
2. Participants will apply evidence-based strategies to create an inclusive and supportive learning environment for children with ASD.
3. Participants will demonstrate effective communication techniques tailored to support preschoolers with ASD, including the use of visual supports and alternative communication methods.
4. Participants will learn how to facilitate peer interactions and social-emotional growth in children with ASD through structured play and modeling.
5. Participants will explore ways to partner with families to ensure continuity of care and support between home and school settings.
6. Participants will develop techniques to modify classroom routines and transitions to better support the needs of children with ASD.

Materials Needed:

- Printed training manual
- Pen/Pencil
- Access to online resources (optional)

What is Autism Spectrum Disorder?

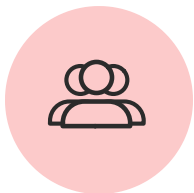
Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a complex neurodevelopmental condition that affects communication, social interaction, and behavior.



It is classified as a "spectrum" disorder because the severity of symptoms and the specific challenges individuals face can vary widely.



Some children with ASD may have limited verbal communication, while others may speak fluently but struggle with social nuances.



Common features of ASD include difficulty understanding and responding to social cues, repetitive behaviors, and strong preferences for routines.



The exact cause of ASD remains unclear, but research suggests that genetic and environmental factors contribute to its development.



Early identification and intervention play a critical role in supporting children with ASD by providing structured learning experiences that enhance communication, social skills, and adaptive behaviors.

Characteristics of Preschool Children with ASD

Strengths

Many preschool children with ASD demonstrate strong visual learning abilities, meaning they can process and retain information better when presented with pictures, diagrams, or demonstrations. This strength makes tools like picture schedules and social stories highly effective. Children with ASD often show a high degree of focus on preferred activities, such as building structures, solving puzzles, or engaging with specific topics of interest. This deep engagement can be leveraged in the classroom by incorporating their interests into learning activities. Some children with ASD excel in structured environments, thriving on predictable routines and clearly defined expectations, which can help them feel more secure and engaged in learning.

Areas That Need Attention

While children with ASD have unique strengths, they also face significant challenges that require targeted support. Social interaction difficulties are common, with children often struggling to initiate or sustain peer relationships. They may not instinctively understand nonverbal cues, such as facial expressions or tone of voice, making social situations confusing. Many children with ASD also experience sensory sensitivities, reacting strongly to loud noises, bright lights, or certain textures, which can lead to distress or difficulty concentrating in the classroom. Communication barriers can make it difficult for some children to express their needs, leading to frustration and potential behavioral challenges. Repetitive behaviors, such as hand-flapping, rocking, or lining up objects, may interfere with learning, while challenges with transitioning between activities can cause anxiety and resistance.

Effective Educational Strategies

1

Use of Visual Supports

Visual supports are highly effective in helping children with ASD process information and understand classroom expectations. Picture schedules, for example, provide a structured visual representation of the day's activities, reducing anxiety and helping children transition smoothly between tasks. Social stories, which use pictures and simple text to explain social situations ("How to Ask a Friend to Play"), can teach essential social skills in a way that children with ASD can easily grasp. Labeling classroom areas and materials with visual cues can enhance organization and independence.

2

Structured Learning Environment

Children with ASD often struggle with unpredictable situations, making a structured classroom environment essential. Predictability helps them feel secure, reducing anxiety and increasing engagement. Teachers can create structure by maintaining consistent daily routines, using clear and simple instructions, and minimizing unexpected changes. Having designated areas for different activities (reading corner, sensory station, play area) can help children understand classroom expectations. Visual timers can be used to signal transitions, allowing children to prepare mentally for upcoming changes in activities.

Effective Educational Strategies

3

Explicit Social Skills Instruction

Since social interactions do not always come naturally to children with ASD, direct instruction in social skills is crucial. Teachers can use role-playing exercises to model appropriate interactions, such as taking turns, making eye contact, or expressing emotions. Peer buddy programs can also be beneficial, pairing children with ASD with socially competent peers who can model appropriate behavior. Group activities that encourage cooperation, such as building projects or group storytelling, provide structured opportunities for practicing social skills in a supportive setting.

4

Sensory-Friendly Approaches

A sensory-friendly classroom can significantly enhance learning for children with ASD. Teachers should observe each child's sensory preferences and adjust the environment accordingly. For example, noise-canceling headphones can help children who are sensitive to loud sounds, while textured seating options (such as wobble cushions) can provide sensory input that helps with focus. Providing "quiet corners" where children can take breaks from sensory overload can prevent meltdowns and promote self-regulation.

Effective Educational Strategies

5

Positive Behavior Support

Positive behavior support (PBS) strategies focus on reinforcing desirable behaviors while minimizing challenging ones. Instead of punishing behaviors such as outbursts or self-stimulation (hand-flapping), educators should identify the underlying cause (frustration, sensory overload) and address it proactively. Reward systems, such as sticker charts or token boards, can encourage positive behaviors, and teaching replacement behaviors (using a communication board instead of crying) helps children develop appropriate self-regulation skills.



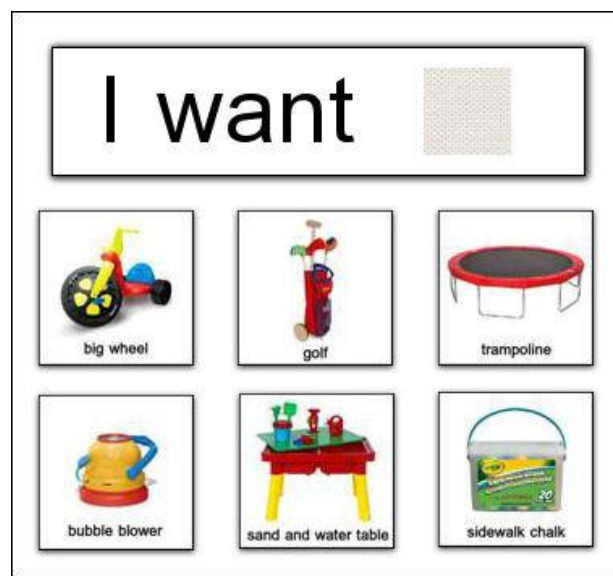
Curricular Adaptations and Modifications

Individualized Instruction

Since children with ASD learn in different ways, instruction should be individualized based on their strengths and needs. Some children benefit from hands-on activities, while others may prefer technology-based learning. Differentiated instruction, such as offering choices between drawing, building, or using manipulatives to complete an assignment, allows each child to engage with the curriculum in a way that suits them best.

Modified Communication Methods

Many children with ASD struggle with verbal communication, so alternative communication methods are essential. The Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) allows children to express themselves using picture cards, reducing frustration and enhancing independence. Some children benefit from sign language, while others may use speech-generating devices or communication apps to convey their thoughts.



Curricular Adaptations and Modifications

Flexible Grouping Strategies

Grouping children based on their social comfort level can increase participation and reduce anxiety. Some children with ASD may prefer working in pairs rather than large groups, while others may need additional teacher support during group activities. Rotating peer partners can help children practice interacting with different classmates in a structured manner.

Adjusting Sensory Input

Minimizing distractions and adjusting sensory input can improve focus and engagement. Teachers can dim bright classroom lights, use soft background music, or provide fidget tools to help children self-regulate. Allowing movement breaks throughout the day can also support sensory needs and improve learning outcomes.

Assistive Tools to Support Participation



SPEECH-GENERATING DEVICES (SGDS)

For children with limited verbal communication, SGDs such as GoTalk or iPad-based apps like Proloquo2Go can help them express their thoughts. These devices provide a voice output when the child selects pictures or words, allowing them to participate in conversations and classroom discussions.



VISUAL TIMERS AND SCHEDULES

Visual timers provide a visual representation of time passing, helping children anticipate transitions. Digital or physical picture schedules also aid in organizing the day's activities, reducing stress and increasing independence.



NOISE-CANCELING HEADPHONES

Many children with ASD are sensitive to sounds, making noise-canceling headphones a useful tool in the classroom. These can help reduce auditory distractions, allowing children to focus on tasks without being overwhelmed by background noise.



ADAPTIVE SEATING

Flexible seating options, such as wiggle cushions or weighted lap pads, can help children who struggle with staying seated for long periods. These provide sensory input that promotes self-regulation and focus.

By implementing the strategies and tools discussed in this training, preschool teachers can create an inclusive learning environment that meets the needs of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder. Supporting these children requires a combination of structure, individualized instruction, sensory accommodations, and assistive technology.



Additional Resources

To further support preschool children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), the following resources provide valuable insights, strategies, and tools for educators and caregivers:

Books & Guides

- "The Out-of-Sync Child" by Carol Kranowitz – A guide to understanding sensory processing challenges often associated with ASD.
- "Uniquely Human: A Different Way of Seeing Autism" by Barry M. Prizant – Offers a strengths-based perspective on autism.
- "Engaging Autism" by Stanley Greenspan & Serena Wieder – Discusses the Floortime approach to early childhood development.

Websites & Organizations

- Autism Speaks (www.autismspeaks.org) – Provides information, toolkits, and research on autism support.
- National Professional Development Center on Autism Spectrum Disorder (autismpdc.fpg.unc.edu) – Offers evidence-based practices and training resources.
- The Autism Society (www.autism-society.org) – Connects educators and families with resources for supporting children with ASD.

Visual Supports & Teaching Tools

- Boardmaker (www.goboardmaker.com) – A tool for creating visual schedules and communication boards.
- Do2Learn (www.do2learn.com) – Provides free printable social stories, behavior charts, and educational activities.

Sources:

1. Bredekamp, S. (2019). *Effective practices in early childhood education: Building a foundation* (5th Ed.). Boston: Pearson. ISBN-13: 978013804966-9 [EPEC]
2. Lord, C., Elsabbagh, M., Baird, G., & Veenstra-VanderWeele, J. (2018). *Autism spectrum disorder*. The Lancet, 392(10146), 508-520.
3. National Research Council. (2001). *Educating children with autism*. National Academies Press.
4. Parette, H. P., & Blum, C. (2013). *Instructional technology in early childhood: Teaching in the digital age*. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes. ISBN: 9781598572452 [ITEC]

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One Hour Training

Page 1 of 1

Name: _____ Date of Birth: _____
Last Four SSN: _____ Date Completed: _____

Multiple Choice

1. What is a key characteristic of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)?

- A) It only affects speech development
- B) It is a uniform condition with the same symptoms in all individuals
- C) It affects communication, social interaction, and behavior
- D) It is caused solely by parenting style

2. Which of the following is an effective educational strategy for supporting preschool children with ASD?

- A) Using only verbal instructions for all activities
- B) Encouraging unstructured play without guidance
- C) Using visual supports like picture schedules and social stories
- D) Changing the classroom routine frequently

3. Why is a structured learning environment important for children with ASD?

- A) It helps reduce anxiety and increases engagement
- B) It forces children to behave in a specific way
- C) It removes the need for any modifications or accommodations
- D) It discourages children from interacting with peers

4. What is an example of an assistive tool that helps children with ASD manage sensory sensitivities?

- A) Flashing lights for better focus
- B) Noise-canceling headphones to reduce auditory distractions
- C) Loud classroom music to increase engagement
- D) Brightly colored walls to stimulate learning

5. How can teachers support social skill development in preschool children with ASD?

- A) Ignore social difficulties and let children figure it out on their own
- B) Use peer buddy programs and role-playing exercises
- C) Discourage group activities to reduce stress
- D) Avoid giving direct instruction on social interactions

Completed trainings can be submitted to: connect@thenurture.net
