



## SPN103: Teaching Young Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder Handout

### Welcome to SPN103

This course presents recommended practices and activities for welcoming a child with autism spectrum disorder into the group preschool setting. Included is guidance for designing and implementing a developmentally appropriate, safe, effective program, including strategies for preparing the child and his family for the new environment.

### Course Objectives:

By taking notes on the handout and successfully answering assessment questions, participants will meet the following objectives as a result of taking this course:

- Identify commonly accepted characteristics of children with autism
- Identify effective strategies for preparing the classroom for a child with autism
- Identify strategies for making transitions between activities
- Define people-first language
- Demonstrate an understanding of recommended practices for guiding children with autism
- Identify strategies for helping children with autism feel a sense of value and belonging
- Identify strategies for responding to or managing various behaviors or actions of children with autism
- Demonstrate an understanding of strategies for promoting positive communication with parents

### References:

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### About the Text

The content of this course is excerpted from *Teaching Young Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder*, by Clarissa Willis, published by and [available through Gryphon House](#). This course features content from two chapters: "Chapter 3: Planning for Success: Setting Up a Proactive Preschool Environment" and "Chapter 10 We're All in This Together: Teaming Up With Families," in addition to the author's brief introduction from the book. These two areas are presented together in order to examine ways in which early childhood professionals can impact the whole environment for a child with autism, from classroom to home and everywhere in between.

### Introduction

*Use the space provided to record important information from the course.*

## Planning for Success: Setting Up a Proactive Preschool Environment

### I Know Children with Autism Learn Differently, but What Can I Do about It?

*The best way to prepare to teach a child with autism is to get to:*

Below are some questions you should ask before the child arrives at school:

- What does she like to eat? Are there certain foods that she will not eat or that will cause her to react in a certain way?
- What particular interests does she have?
- Does she have a particular attachment to a certain object, toy, or activity?
- How does she communicate with others?

- What might cause her to become upset or frustrated?
- What do the parents think are her strengths?
- What do the parents think are her challenges?
- Who is her pediatrician?
- What other services has she been getting? Speech therapy? Occupational therapy?
- Are there any other children at home?
- What does the family do when she has an outburst at home?
- How much experience has she had with other children?

## How Do I Arrange a Preschool Environment for Success?

*The environment should be:*

*Children with autism also need:*

Remember that children with autism function best when they have:

## How Do I Set Up Predictable Routines for a Child With Autism That Will Not Be Boring to the Other Children?

### Transitions

*Transitions are likely times for a child with autism to:*

Other ideas to help facilitate smooth transitions include:

## What Can I Do to Make All Children Feel Part of the Class?

When planning for children with disabilities, keep these points in mind:

### **We're All in This Together: Teaming Up with Families**

*Use the space provided to record important information from the course.*

### **What Can I Do to Understand a Family's Perspective?**

*As a teacher, your job is to:*

*Teachers can help parents by:*

*Resources may include:*

## What Is the Cycle of Grief and Loss?

*This process includes:*

*Parents of children with disabilities never:*

## How Do I Let Parents Know I Need Their Help?

## What Can I Do To Make Family Interactions Positive?

To facilitate good interactions, it is important to do the following throughout the process:

## How Does All of This Fit Together?

***Websites for More Information***

- Autism Research Institute: [www.AutismResearchInstitute.com](http://www.AutismResearchInstitute.com)
- Autism Society of America: [www.autism-society.org](http://www.autism-society.org)
- OAR–Organization for autism research: [www.researchautism.org](http://www.researchautism.org)
- Advice To Parents Who Have Just Found Out Their Child Has Autism:  
[www.autism-resources.com/advice-to-parents.html](http://www.autism-resources.com/advice-to-parents.html)
- [www.autism.org/adviceforparents.html](http://www.autism.org/adviceforparents.html)



## SPN103: Teaching Young Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder Handout

### Strategies to Help Children Adjust to Preschool

NOTE: The following classroom guidance strategies are provided here in their entirety, as they appear in the course as well as in the text of the book [\*Teaching Young Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder\*](#). These notes are provided for your convenience and to encourage you to test these strategies in your classroom.

#### Before School Starts: A Strategy for the Teacher

##### Overview

This strategy works best if you can use it the first day the new child is in your classroom.

##### Objective

To help the preschool classroom teacher feel comfortable and confident when children with special needs, specifically autism, join the class

##### When to Use This Strategy

When you learn there will be a child or children with special needs in the classroom

##### Materials Needed

Notebook or folder for taking notes during the meeting

##### What to Do

1. When you learn that a child with autism will be in your class, contact the family and request that they provide you with a copy of their child's most recent medical evaluation.
2. Contact the parents to arrange a meeting. When the parents arrive, be positive and tell them you are excited about having their child (use his name) in your class. Assure them that you want to meet to plan for his success in preschool together.
3. When meeting with parents, encourage them to invite others who work with the child as well, such as grandparents, babysitters, or extended family members. Start the meeting on a positive note and tell them you are counting on them to help you. Assure them that you hope preschool will be a positive experience for their child.
4. Ask them about their child. Remember that the child will be with you for some of the day, but he is with his family the rest of the time. Parents know their children best. Even if the parents have unrealistic expectations for their child, it is not up to you to make predictions as to what can and what cannot be accomplished.
5. Avoid making promises you cannot keep, such as, "I promise Tom will have a great year and make many new friends." Instead, say, "I hope Tom will have a great year. I will try to help him make friends."
6. Educate yourself about the child's disability. Find out as much as you can about the child's schedule and how he learns best. Avoid falling into the trap of trying to cure the child. Instead, look for ways to help him develop his strengths.
7. Begin the year with a commitment to yourself to always tell the parents one positive thing that their child has done before you discuss any weaknesses.
8. Remember to take notes throughout the meeting. Jot down any questions you might want to ask before the parents leave.
9. Set an example for others in your center or school by always using people-first language and referring to the child as a child with autism. For example, avoid describing or referring to the child as, "that autistic child" or "that emotionally disturbed child." Instead, say "the child with autism."



## Helpful Hints

- Don't be too hard on yourself. You will make mistakes, but you will also learn a lot in the process.
- Remember that working with children is stressful, and that working with children with special needs can add to that stress. Take care of yourself. Learn to take a deep breath, relax, and keep the challenges in perspective.
- Ask for help. Asking someone to help you with a child's behavior or with making curriculum adaptations shows that you are experienced enough to know when you need extra support.
- If you focus on the child's abilities, rather than his disabilities, your experience will be much more enjoyable.

## Laying the Foundation: Starting From Day One

### Overview

**Try to anticipate the needs and preferences of the child** before he arrives, keeping in mind that there will always be things you did not anticipate.

### Objective

To make classroom modifications and preparations for a child with disabilities, specifically autism

### When to Use This Strategy

Before the first day the child with autism is in your classroom, and if possible, before he makes his first visit to his new classroom

### Materials Needed

Notes or comments written down during the initial visit with the child and his family

### What to Do

1. Study your notes from the initial parent meeting and any other information you have received about the child.
2. Make a list of the child's preferences. Include his favorite story, songs, and activities on the list. Remove or eliminate things that may make him uncomfortable, like certain noises or smells. If you find out the name of his pet or sibling(s), write it down for future reference.
3. Go through each center and do an environmental check.
4. Ask yourself the following questions: Are there activities she might enjoy? Have I designated a quiet place for her to get away and calm down, if needed? Is each area or center clearly marked with a picture so that it is easily identifiable? Have I made a picture schedule of what will happen throughout the day and is it posted in a prominent place?
5. Review your procedure for choosing centers or activities. How do the children move from place to place? Is the method one that all children can use? For example, if each center has a colored sticker that children wear when they are in that center, is it something that the child with autism can easily learn to do?
6. If school is already in session, consider the children already in your class. Who might be a good peer-buddy for the child with autism? Who might be fearful of the child and need some guidance about how to treat people with disabilities? Will this be the first child in your class with disabilities? If so, do you need to talk to the class about valuing diversity?
7. Have you met with your teaching assistant and others who might come in contact with the child? Do you have a plan of action if and when things get out of control or when the child has a tantrum?
8. Make a list of the child's medical issues, and any other concerns that will help the other adults (assistant teachers, volunteers, etc.) in your class feel more comfortable.

## Helpful Hints

- Remember, all parents want what is best for their child, and some parents of typically developing children in the class may have fears and concerns. Answer them honestly, assuring them that all the children in your class are valued.
- This may be the first time the child with autism has been in a setting with other children, and her parents may be anxious. Assure them that you will contact them, if needed. You should try to avoid letting the child's parents stay for extended periods in the class. It is important for the child with autism to learn that you are the one in charge in the classroom.

## Good Morning! Good Morning!

### Overview

Sometimes the child may arrive upset and need a few minutes in the quiet area before the day begins.

#### Objective

To greet the child with autism and start the day on a positive note

#### When to Use This Strategy

When the child arrives in the morning

#### Materials Needed

Picture schedule of Morning Routine

### What to Do

1. Start each day with the same routine. It is important that you use the same words and phrases each day. You might try something like, "Good morning, (child's name)." Wait to see if the child responds. "Let's check and see what we will do first."
2. Either kneel down at eye level and show the child a picture schedule of what you want him to do, or, if you are wearing a communication apron (an apron worn by the teacher with pictures depicting the day's schedule) point out to the child what happens first.
3. If the child does not respond to a spoken welcome, he may respond to a song. Try the following, sung to the tune of "Three Blind Mice"(first verse).  
*(child's name) welcome,*  
*(child's name) welcome,*  
*I'm glad you're here.*  
*I'm glad you're here.*
4. Direct the child to his cubby. If he hesitates, walk with him and show him. Put a picture of the child above his cubby to help him identify it more easily.
5. Tell him what to do next, "After you put away your backpack in your cubby, go to the \_\_\_\_\_ center."
6. Say or sign, "Thank you."
7. If the child does not move independently to a learning center, walk with him. Show him the picture cards that relate to putting away his backpack, coat, and so on, and then guide him to the center where he will begin his day.
8. A child with autism likes structure and set routines. Even if you start the morning with independent center time, direct the child to a specific place each morning.
9. After he is accustomed to the routine, you can vary the welcome by giving two or more center choices. However, initially, if you tell him to choose where he wants to go, he is more likely to stand in the middle of the floor or go hide in his cubby.

### Helpful Hints

- Keep focused on your primary objective, which is to start each day with a calm and predictable sequence.
- Regardless of how you start the day, consistency will make the child with autism feel more secure.
- Face it, some children are just not morning people and need a little more time to wake up. If the child is prone to rough mornings, then begin each day by allowing him to go to his quiet center for a few minutes, until he has adjusted to the routine.
- Don't forget that when you are absent, it is crucial that any substitute or teacher's assistant follow the same morning welcome routine that you follow.

## "All About Me!" Bulletin Board and Book

### Overview

This strategy helps the child with autism feel special and valued.

#### Objective

To enable the child with autism to feel like a part of your class and to help his classmates get to know all about him and his family

#### When to Use This Strategy

When you want to help the children in your class get to know more about the child with autism

## Materials needed

Pictures and information about the child; ribbon, paper, or other materials to decorate a bulletin board and make a book

## Bulletin Board

### What to Do

1. Ask families to send some pictures of the children and their families to school. Action pictures work best, because they show the children doing activities. Ask the families to write a few sentences to go along with each picture that describe what the family is doing, and include names of the people in the pictures.
2. Feature a different child each week on the bulletin board. Put up pictures of his family and pictures of what the child enjoys.
3. After you have displayed the pictures, build an activity around them. Talk about the child's siblings, pets, or activities. This helps the child feel more comfortable and helps all children in the class see the child with autism as being more like them.

## Book

### What to Do

1. Make an "All About Me!" book for each child in the class. Be sure to include pictures of grandparents, pets, activities, and customs that the family enjoys. The child can use the book throughout the year. To make the book, collect pictures of the child and the special people, pets, and places in his life. Mount the pictures on paper in the child's preferred color to enhance his use and enjoyment of the book. Invite the child to help you write a short caption or description about each picture. If the child is nonverbal or has limited communication skills, ask family members to help write the captions at home. Make sure that no more than two pictures are displayed on each page because too many pictures can be overwhelming. Place each page into a plastic sheet protector. Insert the sheets into a small notebook (a three-ring binder ½ inch wide works best). Ask the child to draw a picture for the cover or place a picture of the child's family on the cover. This will help the child identify his notebook.
2. Making a book about a child also helps connect his family to your classroom, and it can be used to help children discover things they have in common with their classmates, such as the number of brothers and sisters, types of pets, family customs, family activities, and so on.
3. An additional benefit of this activity is that, as you get to know more about the child with autism and his family, you can plan activities centered on familiar things.

## Helpful Hints

- Be aware that not all children come from traditional families. Family is defined by the child and those he lives with, not by any traditional rule.
- Some children may be in foster care or come from families that are not currently intact. In this case, the All About Me activities might center on what the child likes to do and what activities he enjoys at school.
- It is also not uncommon for a child to be in a blended family or be in a situation where he spends some time with parents in two separate households. In this case, try to include all family members from both households.

## Books That Teach a Lesson

Avoid doing this activity in groups that are so large that the child with autism is overwhelmed by the other children.

### Objective

To use books and stories to teach concepts that will help the child learn important lessons or skills

### When to Use This Strategy

During small group instruction or when you are reading one-on-one with the child

### Materials Needed

Book chosen by the teacher for a specific lesson

### What to Do

1. Books can be important tools for helping children learn certain lessons or values.
2. Once you have identified what you want to help the child learn, such as perseverance, conquering fears, or dealing with autism, then select a book that has that theme.

3. Whenever you read aloud, be sure to show the child that books have a title page, a beginning, and an end. Let the child hold the book while you read it to her.
4. To reinforce the concept in the book, plan activities in learning centers to support the book's lesson or value, and send a family letter home telling families that this week the children are learning to \_\_\_\_\_ and the book they are reading is \_\_\_\_\_.
5. Below are some books that teach common themes to which all children can relate:

### **Title**

*Itsy Bitsy Spider*  
*Amazing Grace*  
*A Chair for My Mother*  
*Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day*  
*Owl Babies*  
*Fourth Little Pig*  
*Going Home*  
*When My Autism Gets Too Big*  
*The Three Little Pigs*  
*Rainbow Fish*  
*The Tenth Good Thing about Barney*

### **Theme**

Try, try again  
 Believe in yourself  
 Cooperation, love, and respect  
 Everyone has a Bad Day  
 Fear  
 Fear  
 Celebration  
 Helping children with autism relax  
 Working together  
 Learning to share  
 Death

*This list is adapted, with permission, from Smart Start by Pam Schiller. Additional titles added by C. Willis.*

## **Helpful Hints**

- If the child can't attend (pay attention) while you read the whole book, read only part of it. When you return to read the remainder, remember to review what had happened so far in the story.
- Before reading a book about the child's disability, make sure his parents are in agreement.

## **Making New Friends**

Alert the family that the child is working on introducing himself, so that they can help him practice.

### **Objective**

To learn how to meet new people

### **When to Use This Strategy**

When you want to encourage the child with autism to make a new friend

### **Materials Needed**

Cardstock or heavy paper, pencils, markers, or a picture that depicts stop; a picture of the child; clear contact paper or laminating machine

## **What to Do**

1. Make a cue card with two cues. Have one for the child's name and one to remind him to wait for the other person to respond. Laminate the cue card, if possible.
2. Explain to the child that the cue cards will help him know what to do when he meets someone new.
3. Ask several children to help you and the child practice meeting people.
4. Sit in a circle and practice what to say and how to wait for the person to respond.
5. Remind the children that, when you are meeting someone for the first time, it is a good idea to look at them.
6. Look for opportunities to encourage the child to practice using the cue cards to introduce himself.

## **Helpful Hints**

- Later, when the child is familiar with this routine, add other cues, such as communicating something that he likes to do or asking the new friend to play a game.
- Remember to make a set of cue cards for the child to take home.

## My New School (Getting to Know Who Works at Our School)

Wait until the child can successfully leave the classroom without getting anxious before trying this strategy.

### Objective

To help the child with autism become familiar with the people he will see every day, and to help other staff members get to know him

### When to Use This Strategy

After the child has been in your classroom for a few days and is getting used to the routines and the other children

### Materials Needed

None

### What to Do

1. Plan ahead. Alert the other personnel in the school that you plan to bring a new child to meet them. Explain to them that the child is fearful of new people and that you are counting on them to help him feel welcome.
2. Tell the child that you are going to take him on a walking tour to meet people who work at the school.
3. Encourage him to take his introduction cue card with him.
4. Take the child to the people and places in the school where he might go: the library (media center), cafeteria, bus barn, custodian, school office, and so on.
5. Plan a short script for each area you visit. It will help if you use a routine that is predictable and consistent. For example, "This is the cafeteria; (worker's name) works here. She cooks the food that we eat for lunch. Introduce yourself to (worker's name)."
6. Continue until you have visited all the areas and appropriate people in the school. If you can, take a digital picture of each person and make a display in the classroom called, "People Who Work at Our School."
7. Make cards with a picture of the person's job. See if the children can match the jobs with the person who is responsible for that job.

### Helpful Hints

- You may want to take all the children in your class to meet the people who work at the school. However, when you take the child with autism, it will be best for him if you take him alone or with one other child.
- Refer to the people who work at the school and their jobs, so the child will learn to associate the people at school with what they do. For example, "Miss Mary, who cooks our food." or "Mr. Thomas, who cleans our room." or "Ms. Abernathy, who is our center director."

## Classroom Hunt: I Spy!

Introduce the strategy gradually--too much too soon can be overwhelming.

### Objective

To encourage the child with autism to explore new areas of the classroom, interact with new toys, or try new activities

### When to Use This Strategy

When you want to encourage exploration of new areas

### Materials Needed

A basket with a handle, one item from each learning center

### What to Do

1. Gather items that represent each of the centers in your room. For example, blocks from the block area, a magnetic letter from the literacy center, a paintbrush from the art area, a book from the reading center, and so on.
2. Place the items in a basket or box. A basket works well because you can carry it on your arm. The child may even be willing to carry it for you.
3. Tell the child that you need help putting the things in your basket back in the centers where they belong.
4. Start each hunt with the same phrase, "Here is a \_\_\_\_\_. I wonder where this goes."
5. If the child looks away or appears disinterested, try to refocus him on the item by holding it in front of him.

6. Ask, "(child's name), where do you think this goes?" (Hold up object)
7. If he does not reply or take the object, then try to prompt him by walking to a center and saying, "Do you think it goes here?"
8. When you and the child decide the center where the object belongs, ask the child to place the item in/on the correct bin or shelf. Continue with the other objects in the basket.

## Helpful Hints

- If the child is willing, you might try to do the activity with another child as well, so that the three of you look for the correct center.
- Vary the activity. If you are using picture cards, match the item to the picture card, before returning it to its proper location.
- Always say the name of the object.
- If the child acts uninterested or bored, try putting the object in the wrong place and see if he will correct you. Sometimes, even nonverbal children have an extraordinary sense of place and know in fine detail where items are usually located.

## We're More Alike than Different

This strategy helps the child with autism see that we all have strengths and weaknesses.

### Objective

To help other children become more tolerant of those who are different, especially children with disabilities

### When to Use This Strategy

When you want to prepare the children in the classroom for a child with a disability, or when you want the children to learn to be more tolerant of others

### Materials Needed

Empty paper towel roll, uncooked rice or dried beans, duct tape, contact paper or bits of colored paper to cover the roll, glue

## What to Do

1. Before beginning the activity, make a talking stick. Make one by decorating a paper towel roll, covering one end with heavy duct tape, adding uncooked rice or dried beans, and then covering the other end with duct tape. If possible, encourage each child to add something (a scrap of paper, a bit of yarn, a bit of cloth) to the talking stick until it is completely covered.
2. Place children in a small group (five or less works best). Tell them, "Today, you are going to play a game called 'This is what I like!'"
3. This game is loosely based on a Native American custom of using a talking stick, where only the person with the stick can talk.
5. Continue to pass the stick around the circle, with all of the children saying something they like about themselves, and then something they like about the person sitting next to them.
6. If the child with autism does not participate, that is okay. However, encourage the child next to him to say something she likes about him.

## Helpful Hints

- The first time you complete this activity, place the child with autism on your right so that you can be the one to say something about him.
- Vary the game by adding other things like, "I am good at \_\_\_\_\_" or "You are good at \_\_\_\_\_."
- Encourage parents to play the game at home with their child.

## Things We Do at School (A Small-Group Activity)

The first time you play this game, place the child with autism close to you so you can help redirect him, if necessary.

### Objective

To help the child identify the various learning centers and activities he will experience throughout the day

**When to Use This Strategy**

When you want to familiarize children with the classroom layout and the daily routine and when you feel a child needs additional practice learning about the classroom

**Materials Needed**

None

**What to Do**

- 1.** Before beginning the activity, tell the children that they are going to help you play a game. You will describe something in a learning center and they will tell you which center it is.
- 2.** Place children in small groups (five or fewer works best). Begin the activity by telling them that you are going to describe a place in the room and you want them to tell you where it is. For nonverbal children, ask them to point to which center you are describing.
- 3.** Describe a center, such as, "I am thinking about a place where we paint pictures."
- 4.** Wait, and see if anyone raises a hand to answer the question. The child with autism may watch as other children answer. When it is his turn, use his name. For example, say, "Derek, can you tell me (or point to) the center where we play with blocks?"
- 5.** Continue to ask questions, until everyone has had a turn.
- 6.** Later, when everyone is familiar with the classroom, expand the game to include questions about other places at school, such as, "I am thinking about a place where we play outside." or "I am thinking about where we go when we need to go to the bathroom."

**Helpful Hint**

- Expand the activity by putting matching games into learning centers. Make a large picture card of each learning center. Then, make smaller picture cards with various items on them and ask the child to match the card to the picture of the learning center where the item would be found.