



ECHO IDAHO: **K12 Supporting Students with Autism**

Identifying Strengths and Challenges of Autistic Students

10/17/2024

Panel Roundtable

Please keep in mind that your School District policies and Health Services procedures, medication administration protocols, process guidelines, remain the guiding principles to your practice.

None of the planners or presenters for this educational activity have relevant financial relationship(s) to disclose with ineligible companies whose primary business is producing, marketing, selling, re-selling, or distributing healthcare products used by or on patients.

Adrienne Seamans, PhD, BCBA

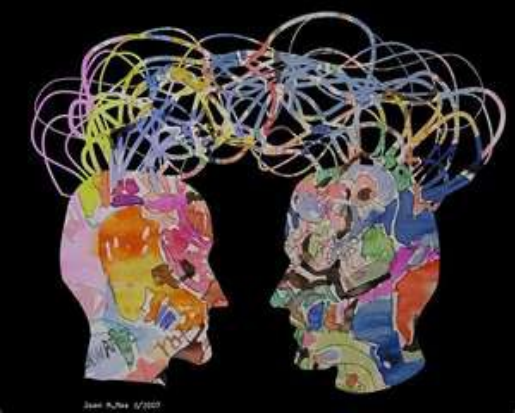
Special Education

- A diagnosis does not automatically equate to being eligible for special education services. A thorough eligibility evaluation needs to be completed to ensure that students are placed in the least restrictive environment to access the general education curriculum.
- Students with autism often struggle with innuendoes, implied instructions, and sudden changes in routines. They can be extremely literal.
- What parents/guardians see at home vs. What teachers see at school.

Suggestions:

1. Talk with parents regarding students' preferences/aversive
2. Ask about common language to be used at school and home to help with consistency
3. Developing a routine, having visual schedules, and advance notice of changes
4. Identify professional resources for support as needed
5. Foster social interactions among students in classroom (e.g., give students a chance to share interests, If parents agree, have a class discussion regarding autism)
6. [Most Important: Build a partnership with the parents](#)





Anne Kuhlmeier: MA, CCC/SLP, ATP

Communication

Strengths

- Memory
- Exceptional talents for specific areas
- Language development follows an uneven path,
- Advanced reading & writing skills
- AAC Systems often bridge communication gaps

Challenges

- Speech is often delayed or doesn't appear
- Struggles with social interaction, peer play
- Verbal language can be rigid, nonsensical and repetitive
- Narrow interests
- Reading body language, eye contact is challenging

Christiane Blackeagle: Special Ed Paraprofessional, Autistic Indigenous mother of two Autistic girls

Determining Strengths and Challenges

- Low or high pain tolerance
- Ability to entertain ones-self, don't need extra company
- Limited food preferences
- Conversing endlessly about their high interest
- Low social battery life
- Notice human patterns and make predictions

Julie Mead: EdS, MEd

IEPs and Least Restrictive Environment

Access to school, typical peers, and grade level instruction can be a challenge for children with Autism. *Please remember:*

- Every child has the right to education in their Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)
- Schools are obligated to consider general education for all students FIRST
- Students do not have to demonstrate readiness skills or behavior management skills to “earn” their way into class. IEP teams are obligated to develop a program that supports the student in their LRE.

To the maximum extent appropriate, students with disabilities are to be educated with students who are not disabled. –*Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)*



Julie Wittman: BCBA & Parent Advocate

Determining Strengths and Opportunities

- **Listen with more than your ears** – watch what they do through observation, what do they find interesting? where do they like to spend their time? what are their behaviors, what are their special interests? Use those things to discover their talents and what they use to calm themselves. **Ask the child directly**, don't presume to know them because you read a report about them.
- **Collect data.** Find data from multiple sources and contexts. **Graph data** over time. **Listen to parents**, don't judge. Interview all members of the team.
- Give the child **multiple ways to show you what they know**, traditional assessments, exams, classroom environments are not designed for children with Autism. Utilize Universal Design for Learning – (multiple means of expression, representation, engagement) when teaching and assessing.
- Understand when assessing these children that breaking it up into **short, manageable chunks** is best, and they may require **more cognitive processing time**, **visuals** are always helpful (visual schedule for the assessment) with built in **breaks**.

Susan Cooper: OTP

Occupational Therapy Lens

Strengths:

- Exceptional memory
- Expertise in areas of interest
- Visual thinking/learning
- Attention to detail
- Motivation to detect patterns
- Sensory Acuity
- Honest, direct and authentic in their communication

Differences:

- Sensory processing differences and vulnerable regulatory systems
- Motor Differences (e.g., muscle tone/hypermobility, praxis, postural stability oral/fine/gross motor)
- Engagement differences (OTP supports partnerships/connections)
- High levels of stress (neurobiology etc. often resulting in stress behaviors)

Tom Patterson: MD

General Pediatrician Lens- Safety is a key, Self care is part of Safety

- **Start early**- encourage parents to use and to use stories or pictures to show water and water safety. Be aware of those that may show an interest in water or those that may tend to wander.
- Encourage families to seek developmentally appropriate swim lessons early
 - Ex: YMCA, Swim Angelfish videos on YouTube
 - **Consider swim lessons in full clothing to reproduce conditions of wandering.**
- Emphasize the dangers of water (both swimming pools and natural bodies of water)
- Take precautions to prevent wandering
 - Secure the classroom and school
 - Consider monitoring doors or location devices
 - Encourage parents to have GPS enabled trackers
- Alert others the child may come in to contact with that they have a tendency to wander and have an interest in water.
- Lastly, **Self care is not selfish care! This helps build resilience and that allows parents to co-regulate better.**