ASD NEST PROGRAM

THREE-TIER GUIDEPOSTS

The ASD Nest elementary school program is an inclusion program for students with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) from kindergarten through fifth grade housed in multiple public elementary schools in New York City. The ASD Nest Program Three-Tier Classroom Guideposts serve as the basic manual on methodology for the program, with the structure of the program described in detail separately elsewhere. The Guideposts offer expanded descriptions of the strategies that make up the ASD Nest Three-Tier Model, and are divided into the same four domains: prevention strategies, teaching/replacement supports, and reinforcement-based practices.

The ASD Nest program uses a Positive Behavior Support (PBS) approach, and incorporates strategies that address areas of difficulty common in children with autism spectrum disorders (ASD), specifically sensory functioning, social relatedness, self-regulation, managing anxiety, and selective cognitive problems. The strategies used are a combination of evidence-based and highly promising practices, reflect a coherent intervention framework, and are implemented in a systematic way bolstered by initial training and periodic additional training experiences. The premise of these Guideposts is that school-based interventions can help many children with ASD achieve fuller lives.

ASD NEST CLASSROOM GUIDEPOSTS

I. Prevention Strategies

Prevention strategies are designed to keep interfering behavior from occurring or to minimize such behavior and its disruptive effect upon the child with ASD as well as the other students in the class. Most of the prevention strategies included in the Guideposts are valuable for all students and reflect evidence-based teaching practices that have been tailored to more fully address the specific needs of children with ASD.

Basic Classroom Design

When setting up your classroom at the beginning of the school year, aim for a calm, soothing environment. Care should be taken to avoid the clutter that may be created by unnecessary furniture and materials or poorly organized materials.


Covered Shelving

Cover display areas: If you are going to cover your bulletin boards or other display areas such as doors or walls, use neutral tones or light/warm colors (e.g., light blue or green, cream, etc); avoid using bright colors, like orange or red, as they may be too distracting and over-stimulating for some students with ASD.


Lower Grade Classroom

Bulletin boards: Reserve a particular bulletin board or area of the room to display children's photographs as well as samples of recent work products relevant to current learning objectives. This will help communicate to the students that this room is their school home.


Upper Grade Classroom

Display necessary instructional materials: Only those materials that are being used in a lesson or that are needed for ongoing reference should be displayed. When materials are no longer being used for either of these purposes, they should be put out-of-sight or turned around so that only a blank surface is visible. Use drop cloths to cover shelves holding items that may be distracting when those items are not to be used.

Consider point of view: We need to be mindful of the child's visual point of view. Items to be used by children for reference should be easily viewable by them. Consider the height, size, and distance of the display from where children using these items are seated. For example, word walls to be referenced during writing should not be 9 or 10 feet from a child unless students are free to move up close to the wall to read it; nor should editing checklists or number boards be posted close to the ceiling of the room.


Break Area

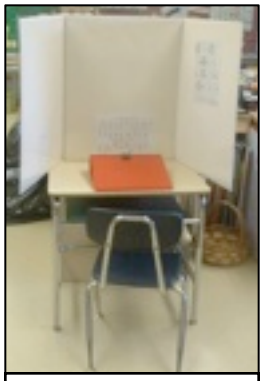
Work spaces: Spaces for individual and group work, including learning centers, should be clearly demarcated throughout the classroom.

Break area: Each classroom should have a break area (sometimes referred to as a "calming corner" or "recharge center") a set-off quiet area with a beanbag chair and tools for self-calming, such as headphones for listening and fidgets.

ASD NEST CLASSROOM GUIDEPOSTS

I. Prevention Strategies, *continued*

Additional Environmental Modifications to Address Sensory Sensitivities



Student "Office"

Modified room lighting: Standard classroom lighting can be modified to better suit the sensory needs of the students on the spectrum. Classrooms can use non-florescent lights, use a limited number of ceiling lights, dim lights during selected activities, keep shades drawn on particularly sunny days, or position light-sensitive children away from areas in the classroom where the sun is brightest.

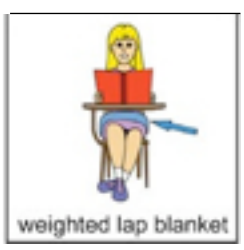
Minimize visual stimuli: Students can use dividers or study carrels to separate themselves from distractions in the room or during tasks that they find particularly challenging.

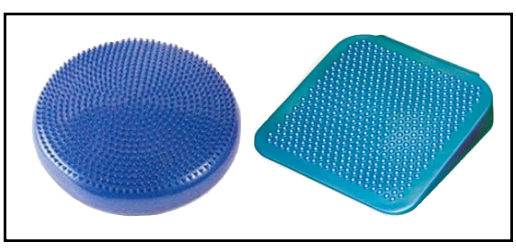
Tennis Balls

Address auditory sensitivities: Headphones can block out loud or disruptive noises to minimize auditory distractions during tasks that require concentrated attention. The Incredible Five Point Scale (see later discussion of this tool) can help students develop an awareness of their voice levels. Other supports include providing alternative tasks during crowded/noisy activities and using tennis balls or felt padding on the bottom of chair legs/ movable furniture/equipment to minimize the loud scraping noises on the floor. Students should also be given advanced notice for fire drills or loud bells (e.g., "We may have a fire drill today. If we do what will we do? Let's practice so we will be ready.") In the case of a child who is still quite upset by the fire bells after the class has been primed for fire drills, consider keeping headphones with his name or initials on them in a place where he can retrieve them easily to use during fire drills.

Address heightened needs for movement: Classrooms should provide enough space for students to move around and engage in vigorous activities such as dancing, jumping, and jogging in place during short movement breaks throughout the day. Try to plan your daily schedule so that activities are alternated between sitting on the carpet and sitting at tables so that students are not expected to sit on the carpet in a modified yoga position ("criss-cross-applesauce" or "pretzel position") for long periods of time.

Address individual sensory/motor needs: Use adaptive materials and equipment such as adaptive seating (e.g., Disc-o-Seat; wedges; therapy ball chairs) or weighted lap or shoulder cushions to address individual needs. Occupational Therapists should be consulted prior to any implementation of adaptive equipment, and parents should be informed about the use and rationale of such equipment prior to their use with individual children.





ASD NEST CLASSROOM GUIDEPOSTS

I. Prevention Strategies, *continued*

Basic Classroom Strategies and Tools

These strategies should be part of the tool chest of every teacher working with children with ASD

Visual Aids

The use of visual aids such as pictures, words, and drawings may enable children with ASD who are better at visual processing than auditory processing better function and succeed in the classroom. Visual supports provide students with increased predictability, help structure their environment and organize their day, and clarify expectations. Visual aids can be used both in the place of and to supplement verbal communications. Some behavior that may appear to reflect non-compliance is actually a reflection of lack of understanding or confusion about what is expected or how to carry out a task.

Center Time Schedule

Schedules and Task Boards

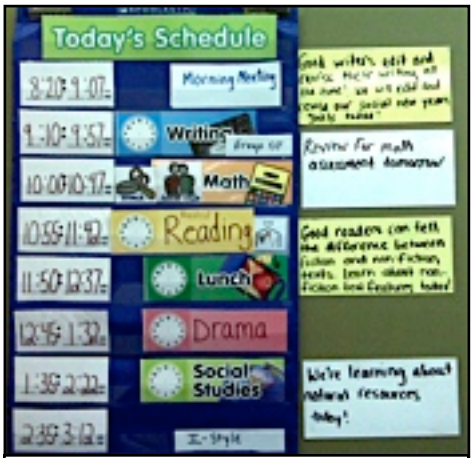
Daily class schedule: A daily classroom schedule must be clearly displayed for easy viewing and reference by students throughout the day. The schedule should outline the flow of the day's activities, with individual activity cards with written text and pictures as appropriate representing the activities. The activity cards should be detachable, so that as each activity is completed, the corresponding card can be removed, flipped over, or moved to a separate column that indicates that the period is over. The daily schedule should be reviewed each morning and referred to after each activity to clarify what will come next and assist children with the transition to a different activity.

In the early part of the year in kindergarten, the daily schedule of activities can overwhelm children with more visual information than they can absorb at any one time. Therefore, it may be helpful to breakup the schedule into "morning activities" and "afternoon activities," presenting only the morning activities until lunchtime at which point the afternoon activities are placed on the schedule.

Morning Schedule!		
8:30		Unpack
8:45		Circle Time
9:15		Music
10:05		Snack
11:00		Math
11:40		Read Aloud
12:00		Lunch

Lower Grade Schedule

In order to avoid reinforcing the inflexibility that is commonly present in children with ASD, after the first few weeks of the year the schedule should be varied to include a different experience once a week. Children should be prepared in advance by a question mark or a picture of a mystery box on the daily schedule indicating a surprise activity.



Upper Grade Schedule

ASD NEST CLASSROOM GUIDEPOSTS

I. Prevention Strategies, *continued*

Basic Classroom Strategies and Tools, *continued*

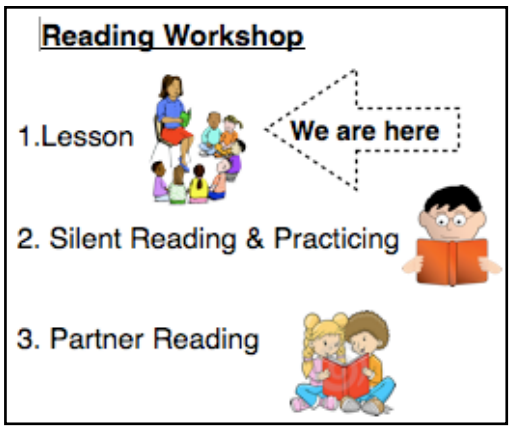
Individualized Mini-Schedules

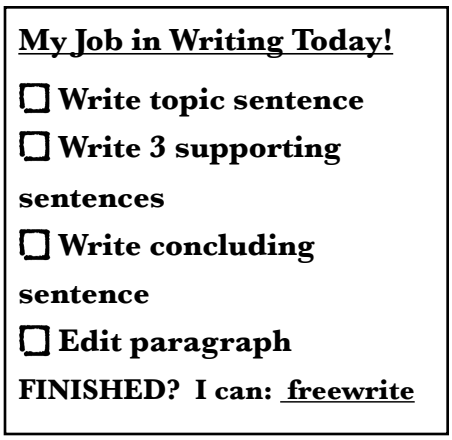
Individual Schedule

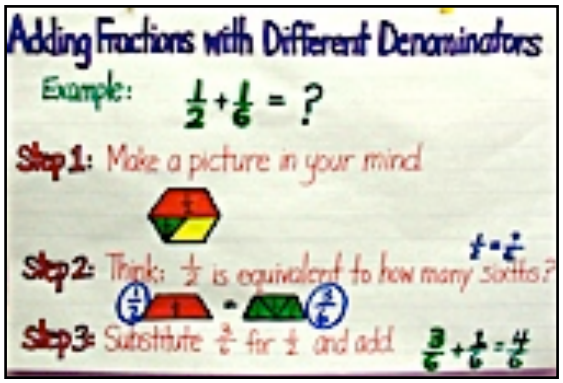
Individualized mini-schedules can be used with students who benefit from a more personalized schedule with a shorter sequence of activities than can be provided by the daily class schedule. Mini-schedules should consist of a written text and/or pictures representing 3-4 upcoming activities.

The mini-schedule should be easily transportable and may be displayed on a small clipboard that the student keeps with him/herself throughout the day to provide an additional form of support. The student should be able to directly interact with the mini-schedule (e.g., he/she can remove or flip over the picture/written text of each activity, or cross off each activity after it is completed); teachers should encourage students to refer to their schedules frequently throughout the day.

Task-Sequencing Boards: A type of mini-schedule that breaks down an activity into its component parts or a sequence of steps, and should be used with students who need additional visual support to successfully complete certain tasks that are challenging for them. Students are given written directions or pictorial representations of each step and then they check off each step as it is completed. This strategy is particularly useful for students who have difficulty sustaining attention during longer activities, those who have difficulty completing multi-stepped activities, or students who may find certain activities overwhelming or distressing. As students become older, they can begin to write their own task sequence with the guidance of a teacher, increasing their feelings of both competence and independence.







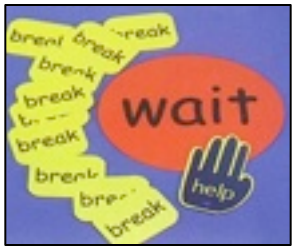
ASD NEST CLASSROOM GUIDEPOSTS

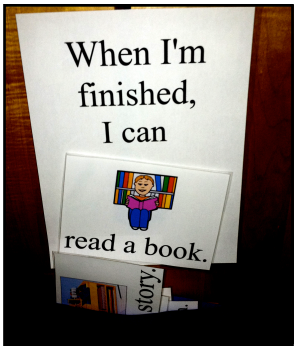
I. Prevention Strategies, *continued*

Basic Classroom Strategies and Tools, *continued*

Visual Aids to Supplement Verbal Directions

For the benefit of students with ASD who may be better at visual processing than auditory processing, the use of visual aids such as pictures, words, drawings, or actual objects to accompany verbal instructions can help reduce uncertainty and prevent frustration that can lead to interfering behavior. Individuals with ASDs often have difficulty with abstract concepts; thus providing concrete examples and visual aides helps reduce ambiguity and clarifies expectations. Examples of visual aids include: popsicle stick reminders; center time poster; turn-taking chart.





Reading Workshop

Today's Directions:

1. *Fill out reading log*
2. *Read & think about characters' traits*
3. *Jot one trait for each character*
4. *Complete reading log*

Display, teach, and use The Incredible 5-Point Scale (Buron & Curtis, 2003): This visual scale can be used to illustrate a range of behaviors appropriate in various settings and activities. It should be clearly displayed for easy viewing and reference by students, and should be used to teach voice modulation in all classrooms where voice volume levels impede concentration on learning tasks or make the room uncomfortable for students with auditory hypersensitivity. The use of this scale can also help elicit more audible voice levels from children who can barely be heard even in one-to-one settings. Teaching younger students the meaning and function of this scale should involve a high level of student-teacher interaction, using modeling by students as well as teachers, game-like listening activities, and role-playing by students.

Voice modulation is one form of self-regulation. It applies not only to students but also to teachers. Very loud teacher voices can be overwhelming and frightening to children with ASD and should be restricted to the uses indicated by The Incredible 5-Point Scale. Displaying and teaching this scale should help teachers become more aware of their own voice volume.

The Incredible 5-Point Scale can also be used to address various aspects of emotional control (see "enhancing self-management," p. 14).

Voice Scale

5		Screaming/ Emergency
4		Recess/ Outside
3		Classroom voice/ Talking
2		Soft voice/ Whisper
1		No talking

ASD NEST CLASSROOM GUIDEPOSTS

II. Instructional Strategies and Supports

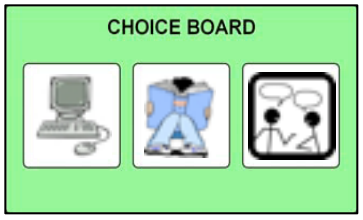
This section focuses on prevention through the use of strategies designed to enable students to succeed at learning tasks; to give students a sense that their teachers care about them and their ideas; and to show students that their interests will be recognized and incorporated into the school experience. Communication plays a major role in achieving this. Clarity in communication by teachers is important. Positivity in communication by teachers is important. Listening to students is important. Reciprocal communications with students is important.

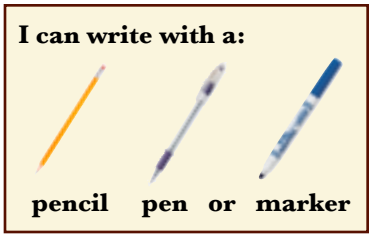
Basic Classroom Operation

We need to become aware of the language we use when interacting with students to ensure that we are communicating in ways that are easily understood by everyone. Individuals with ASD tend to be literal, concrete thinkers, and often have difficulty with abstract concepts and inferential thinking. Therefore, remembering to use the following strategies when communicating students with ASD can help to clarify expectations, reduce uncertainty and anxiety, and ultimately prevent interfering behavior from occurring.

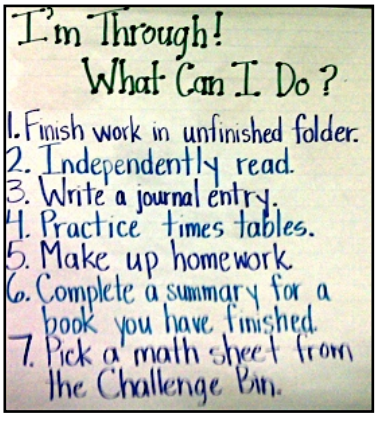
Utilize positive behavioral instructions: Whenever possible, use positively-phrased statements to explain what to do, and avoid using negatively phrased instructions (e.g., statements that include "don't" "stop" "no"), as children may stop what they were doing or what they were about to do but not know what *to do* after that. Telling students "what to do" helps to reduce uncertainty about what is expected and provides students with more concrete information. Using visual supports, modeling, and/or prompting can bolster positive behavioral directives, by providing students with an additional layer of support to reduce confusion or uncertainty that may lead to interfering behavior.

- Use clear, concise, developmentally appropriate language when providing instructions
- Ensure the child understands what is expected and check for understanding.
- Provide "processing time" for verbally presented instructions
- Use concrete examples when providing instructions, as children with ASD tend to learn better when concrete examples are used to illustrate abstract concepts. (For example, "Hang up your coat," rather than "Don't throw your coat on the floor").





Opportunities for Choice-Making: Children in the ASD Nest program should be provided with frequent opportunities for making choices throughout the day. This serves several purposes: It gives students a feeling that they are active members of their classroom community, and thus the classroom is a place where they belong and want to be; it also helps create engagement in activities by enhancing motivation; and it decreases noncompliance and other interfering behaviors. The choices provided can be as simple as choosing where to sit at lunch, which of two songs the class should sing first, whether to use crayons or markers during a particular activity, and which of two activities the child would engage in when he/she has finished an assigned task.



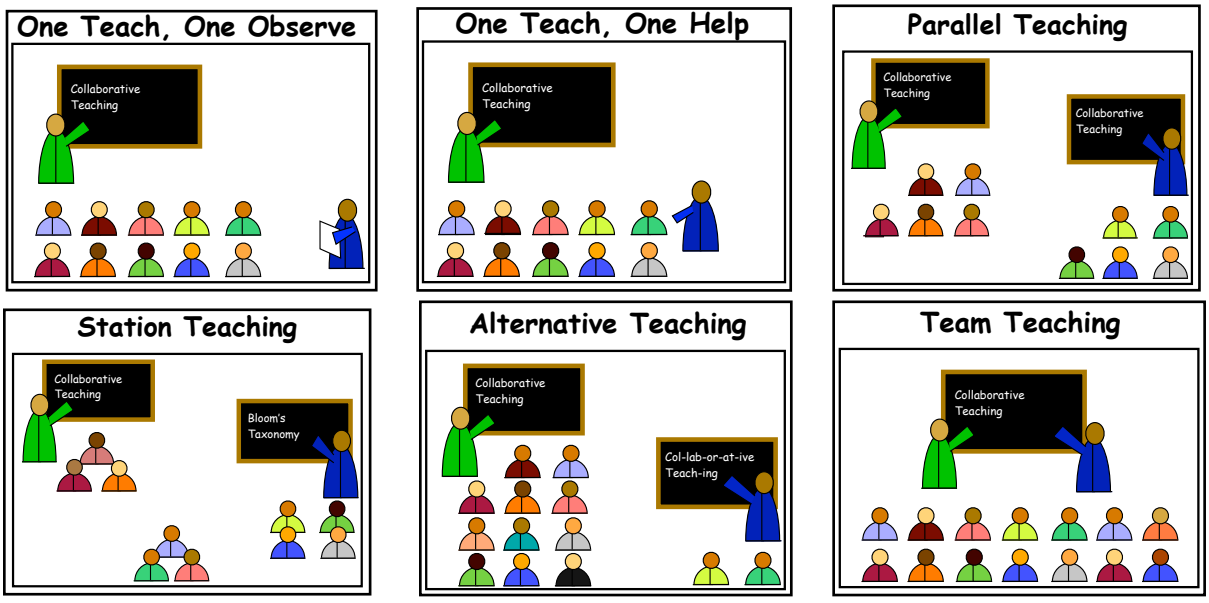
ASD NEST CLASSROOM GUIDEPOSTS

II. Instructional Strategies and Supports, *continued*

Basic Classroom Operation, *continued*

Priming: Priming is a process of preparing a student or students for a new learning experience in advance of its formal presentation or actual implementation. It involves previewing learning materials and learning activities under relaxed conditions, usually on a one-to-one basis, sometimes presenting new learning tasks in a simplified or more game-like format. It can be implemented by a teacher, related service provider, or parent. Priming is a particularly effective technique to use with students who need more time to learn new concepts and procedures as well as students with high anxiety levels for whom group instruction of new and challenging learning experiences may be overwhelming. Group priming may be used for class experiences such as trips or assembly programs that are not only new but may also introduce experiences and expectations that students find difficult or frightening.

Instructional grouping: Using a variety of instructional groupings during classroom activities can help educators deliver targeted, efficient instruction. *Integrative co-teaching models* and small group instruction can help tailor this instruction to the needs of the students, maximizing instructional time during lesson. Different models of integrative co-teaching, such as parallel, station, or team teaching, can help educators differentiate for a variety of student learning styles and academic readiness levels, while also decreasing the number of students in each lesson. Friend and Cook (1996) outlines six different co-teaching models:



Co-teaching icons created by A. Lanou (2005)

Small group activities following lessons can also provide the opportunity for students who are struggling to receive additional support or for students who are ready to be challenged to receive more advanced content. Care should be taken to vary the co-teaching models used to match the needs of the students and the content. The students included in various small groups should also be changed regularly to ensure that they get the opportunity to work in different groups. In the ASD Nest program, both the special and general education teacher are trained and expected to work with *all* students in their class across all subject areas which makes this instructional flexibility possible.

ASD Nest Classroom Guideposts

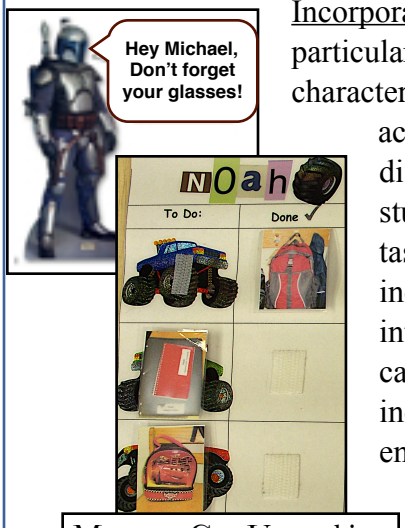
II. Instructional Strategies and Supports, *continued*

Basic Classroom Operation, *continued*

Peer supports: These supports include various types of peer buddies, peer mentoring, and peer mediated instruction. The first critical element in this process is the identification of peers who display some mutual interest in each other, making sure that the typical child demonstrates a helping disposition. The teacher then facilitates a peer mentoring relationship in two ways: by providing more opportunities for the children involved to interact, e.g., seating them next to one another, putting them together for paired reading, making them line partners, assigning them jointly to classroom jobs and errands; and by providing either formal training or informal guidance to the typical peer mentor on how to be most useful to his/her partner. Note that some children with ASD can also serve as peer mentors in specific situations with appropriate guidance.

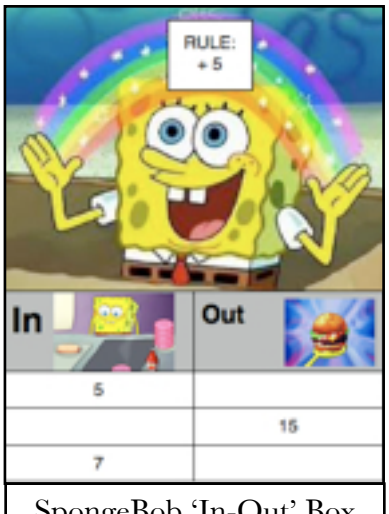
Activity/Task Modifications: Modifying activities, tasks, and/or materials is an effective way to help students to learn while also preventing the occurrence of problem behavior triggered by task difficulty and/or duration, and by the heightened anxiety that engenders. Examples of task modifications include:

- *Re-teach or review the lesson* on which the task is based, modifying the presentation if it has not been sufficiently effective for particular children.
- *Simplify the task or activity* by shortening it, breaking it into smaller steps, and/or reducing its duration.
- *Modify the materials* involved in a task or provide a variety of appropriate materials, e.g., different types of paper and writing utensils, to allow the child to use those with which he/she feels most comfortable.
- *Encourage communication* from the child on the difficulty being experienced.
- *Increase assistance* to the child during the task or activity so as to support good performance and reduce the child's anxiety about completing the task correctly. (Don't wait until the child has made errors or his/her anxiety has escalated to the point where it impedes performance.)
- *Provide more frequent opportunities to take breaks or move* around the classroom during a challenging task.



Monster Car Unpacking

Incorporate students' interests: Many students with ASD have a particular area of interest (e.g., trains, cartoon or movie characters, etc). In order to enhance motivation and encourage active participation in activities (particularly more difficult tasks), teachers should try to incorporate their students' particular interests into lessons, activities, and tasks. For example, creating math worksheets that includes trains or reading a story about their special interest area. Incorporating students' special interests can build a positive rapport with the students, further increasing the likelihood that they will be motivated to engage in class.



SpongeBob 'In-Out' Box

ASD Nest Classroom Guideposts

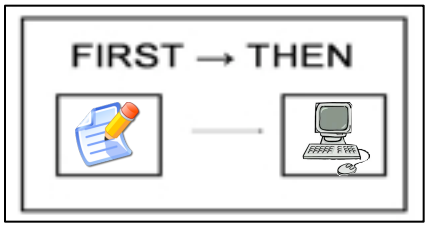
II. Instructional Strategies and Supports, *continued*

Basic Classroom Operation, *continued*

Provide support during transitions: Transitions between settings and/or activities have been found to be quite challenging for many individuals with ASD, due to a lack of predictability associated with the nature of transition routines. The student may experience difficulty ending the activity they are currently engaged in (prior to the transition), or may be unclear about what is expected or what to do during the transition itself. There are a number of strategies that have been found to be extremely effective in enhancing predictability and reducing interfering behavior correlated with transition difficulty.

High-probability requests are based on the concept of behavioral momentum. They involve presenting the student with three to five requests to perform a skill that is both simple and motivating right before presenting him/her with a less preferred activity or more challenging task. This strategy provides the child with opportunities to experience success, enhances motivation, and can decrease the likelihood that problem behavior will occur. For lower grades, the teacher could lead the class in a quick game of following the leader while transitioning from the classroom to the lunchroom, presenting a series of simple gross motor movement directions that must be imitated by the students (e.g., "touch your feet, give your partner a high-five, place your hands at your side, and quietly walk in the line to lunch"). For upper grades, prior to transitioning to a more challenging math task, the teacher could lead the class in some more basic math fact drills, allowing the students to feel successful going into the more demanding lesson.

Visual supports such as "First-Then" Boards, mini-schedules, or checklists have been found to be highly effective in increasing the speed and success of transitions both within the steps of an activity as well as between different activities. Visual supports provide the student with increased structure and predictability, making the routine less overwhelming and easier to complete. Depicting the sequence of steps involved in the routine helps to make the transition more concrete, as the student is provided with a clearer understanding of what to expect.



Timers are specific visuals that can be helpful for students who have difficulty with transitions. Timers signal the end of an activity (e.g., 5 minutes before it is time to clean up and sit on the rug) or remind students of the amount of time remaining in an activity (e.g., 3 minutes left in a break before having to return to the group). This strategy helps students prepare themselves for transitions, providing additional structure to help them organize their time during challenging activities. Some students with ASD may fixate on timers, so their use should be closely monitored to avoid initiating or intensifying such fixation. Also, auditory timers can be frightening to some young children with ASD who have strong auditory sensitivities or who are highly anxious. Visual timers can be a nice alternative for these students.


TimeTimer Visuals

Additional transition supports such as advanced verbal notices (e.g. "Stop, look, listen - you have 3 more minutes..."), transition songs that outline transition expectation (e.g. "clean up" songs), or songs played during specific transitions that can be paired with that transition to establish a more predictable routine. Students can also carry preferred transition items or be offered choices to increase comfort, predictability, and motivation. Relaxation strategies can also accompany transitions to help students increase tolerance and reduce anxiety.

ASD NEST CLASSROOM GUIDEPOSTS

II. Instructional Strategies and Supports, *continued*

Basic Classroom Operation, *continued*

Additional strategies to prevent escalation of problem behavior:

Modeling with self-talk: In this strategy the teacher verbalizes her problem solving method step-by-step, talking through her thinking process and presenting ways to resolve rather than exacerbate problem situations. The teacher verbally identifies a problem situation ("I want that game but Michael has it."); identifies the action a child may want to engage in and its likely outcome ("I want to take that game from Michael but that will make him angry."); considers other alternatives and their likely outcomes ("I could ask him if I can use the game with him or if we could trade games; maybe he will say yes."); and comes to a decision ("I will ask Michael if he wants to trade games, and if he says no, I will ask him if I can play that game with him").

Most of the following strategies are adapted from Myles and Southwick, 2005 (see reference list):

- Proximity control: move near the child who seems distressed rather than calling attention to signs of anxiety or frustration prior to escalation of impeding behavior (e.g., circulating around the room during a lesson, moving near the child seems distressed or agitated, prior to escalation of behavior)

- Signal interference: use a nonverbal signal to let child know you are aware of his/her difficulty/ feelings of frustration (e.g., walk by the student, tap on his/her desk, or give a wink, nod, or secret signal chosen by the child)

- Distraction: shift the child's attention away from the distressing task or situation to quickly diffuse early stages of problem behavior (e.g., use humor, a topic of interest, a brief interruption of an activity to sing a song, play a quick game, move around the room, do a brief relaxation exercise)

- "Looking forward to…" approach: use an upcoming preferred activity to help the child focus on the next activity (e.g., reminding the child that it will be snack-time right after the current disliked activity is finished)

- Antiseptic bouncing: remove the child from a distressing/overwhelming situation in a non-punitive way (e.g., sending the child on a errand to the office, asking the child to drop off a book to another Nest classroom)

- "Just walk, don't talk:" take a child who is displaying early signs of distress and difficulty maintaining self-regulation for a walk. Teachers should not attempt to discuss the situation or be confrontational during this walk; the child should be free to say anything without fear of contradiction. Discussion/analysis of the situation should be dealt with through planned intervention after the distress has subsided.

ASD Nest Classroom Guideposts

III. Social Supports that Strengthen Social Relational Development and Social Cognition

Social strategies in the Nest program are incorporated throughout the school day. Each strategy aims at addressing the core social challenges of students with ASD. There are six areas of social supports:

Experience Sharing

Social supports in the classroom are designed to promote true engagement and interaction, as well as to highlight shared experiences between classmates. Students learn to gather and share information in dynamic learning exchanges.

Label the moment: Brainstorm a word or phrase together to capture a moment (After a group puzzle activity, label the memory as "*The Puzzling Puzzle Search*").

Declarative language: Invite students to interact by sharing your thoughts, making comments, and wondering.

What might declarative language sound like?

Wondering: "I wonder why this character would..."

Invitation: "Let's try to solve this without calculators."

Self-narratives: "I'm going to go back to the text..."

Comments: "I didn't think the story would go in this direction!"

Language and Dynamic Communication

Expressive, receptive, and pragmatic language challenges can impact students' abilities to succeed in their school environment. Educators consider *their own* language as well as their *students'* language needs.

Wait time: Provide time to process language. Some students will need additional time to process language.

Encourage "checking in:" Eliminate expectation for sustained eye contact. Direct eye contact can be uncomfortable for students with ASD and can also interfere with processing language. Encourage the concept of "*checking in*" rather than requiring a student to, "*Look at me*." This builds an understanding of an important non-verbal expectation of the speaker.

Encouraging checking in might sound like this:

"Alex, thanks for checking in with me with your eyes. I was not sure you heard my directions, but you looked up at me and now I know you heard me."

Social Problem Solving

Problem solving requires recognition of the problem, involves consideration of multiple solutions, and demands novel thinking. A positive spin demystifies the process and makes searching for solutions both and enjoyable and attainable challenge.

Size of the problem: 5-point problem scales can help distinguish a big problem from a little problem.

Roles: Facilitating the use of roles helps students recognize their place in a group and promotes group problem solving (e.g. one person can be the director, one can be the reporter, and another can be the camera-person).

Using roles might sound like this:

"Ok, so this math group is working together to figure out the arm span from fingertip to fingertip of each group member. It looks like Keema is going to be the measurer first because she is holding the measuring tape. Maybe Anita could be the measurement recorder? Now someone will have to have their arm span measured first..."

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III. Social Supports that Strengthen Social Relational Development and Social Cognition, *continued*

Social Cognition

Social cognition involves thinking about the dynamic social world. In the younger grades (Kg-2) we work on developing an understanding of the social concepts through highlighting and modeling. These concepts will be more directly explored in the older grades.

Social clues: Explore social clues such as facial expressions, gestures, verbal and nonverbal language, environment, and context.

Use Social Thinking ® vocabulary: Using Social Thinking such as Winner's "smart guess" and "thinking together" in the classroom can promote generalization of the underlying social concepts (Winner, 2005).

Social Vocabulary in the Classroom:

"Wow- that was a **smart guess**! You used all the information about the character to..."

"When we connect all of your answers. I see that the class is **thinking together,** so..."

"You both thought to write a story about footprints on the moon- cool, **brain match**!"

Flexibility

Students on the spectrum may prefer routines and sameness and can struggle with change and unpredictability.

"Flexibility:" language: Highlight the concept of flexibility in the classroom (e.g. "You were flexible when you decided to use a different color when there were no blue markers left." or "I wonder if we can all think flexibly and imagine what it would be like to be a child in Colonial America- many things would be different.").

Partnerships: Tasks that require collaboration can helps students problem solve and think flexibly as a team.

"Good enough": This phrase highlights that perfection is not always expected or attainable.

Highlight preferences: Discuss likes, dislikes and personal preferences and how different opinions are okay!

Using strengths and preferred interests

Capitalizing on strengths and interests can tap into students' motivation and learning style.

Balance discussions of strengths and challenges: Develop self-awareness of strengths and relative challenges.

Match interests/strengths to roles: Incorporate strengths and interests when defining roles to help student channel their intrinsic motivation towards working with their group.

Celebrate strengths to build competence: Helping students learn to recognize and celebrate their individual strengths can help students increase their feelings of competence and increase their intrinsic motivation.

Celebrating strengths might sound like this:

"Amelia, something I know about you is that you have an AMAZING memory for math facts. Did you know that lots of kids find learning their math facts really hard? This is a real strength of yours, and some of your classmates could really benefit from your expertise. Maybe we could set up fact buddies, and you could help some of the students who are having a hard time learning their facts. I am sure that they'd really appreciate your help."

ASD NEST CLASSROOM GUIDEPOSTS

III. Social Supports that Strengthen Social Relational Development and Social Cognition

Social Stories™: The Social Stories™ strategy was developed by Carol Gray (1994, 2011) and is an empirically-supported strategy used to help children develop a better understanding of social expectations, and clarifies ways to cope with challenging social situations. The underlying premise of this strategy is that once the social expectation of a particular environment is clarified, students can better negotiate the situation. The story is written from the child's perspective, and typically describes the difficult situation, skill or concept in terms of the relevant social cues, perspectives, and responses. The teacher reads the story with the student on multiple occasions prior to the occurrence of the difficult situation, enhancing predictability.

Sammy's Book about Going First *1*	My name is Sammy, and I like to go first. Sometimes I get to go first, and I feel happy! *2*	Sometimes other children get to be first, and that can make me feel sad. *3*	Everyone gets a chance to go first sometimes. When my friends go first, they might feel happy! *4*	If I am sad about not going first, I can think about how happy my friend is today and how happy I will be when I am first again! *5*

Comic strip conversations™: A comic strip conversation™, also developed by Carol Gray, is a simple drawing used to break down communicative exchanges between two or more people. It is a visual strategy where illustrations are used to help to clarify social interactions. Dialogue bubbles, thought bubbles, and different colors are used to represent what different people said and what they might have thought and felt during a social situation. This is also a helpful strategy for gaining insight into how the student on the spectrum may have interpreted a situation. Comic strip conversations™ can be used to highlight a positive social interaction, like when a student on the spectrum helps a classmate. They can also be used to clarify a confusing social situation, such as why some people might want to play something different than you at recess. Comic strip conversations™ can also be very helpful for breaking down a complex social situation to facilitate problem solving, therefore developing both perspective-taking and flexibility. This strategy can be used in the classroom, during lunch, or during recess. It can also be a powerful tool to support reading comprehension and other academic tasks.

Thought Bubble

Dialogue Bubble

Shared Thought Bubble

Sample Comic Strip Colors

Green: Good ideas, happy, friendly

Red: Bad ideas, anger, unfriendly

Blue: Sad, uncomfortable

Black: Facts, truth

Multi-colored: Confusion

Role play: Role play can be a powerful strategy to help students explore social scenarios in a group or to help a particular child rehearse for an upcoming new or difficult situation. Typically, a teacher models first, followed by role playing with the students. For children with ASD, several additional steps may be needed, such as role play between one teacher and one typical child, between one or two teachers and a child with ASD, and between one or two typical children and a child with ASD.

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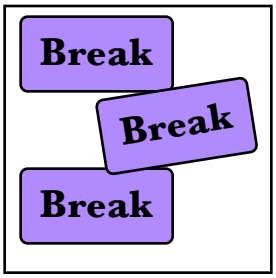
IV. Reinforcement Practices: Teaching Replacement Behaviors

Replacement behavior refers to the substituting of appropriate and productive behavior for impeding/ interfering behavior. The impeding behavior to be replaced may interfere with the individual student's learning, the learning of other students, and the child's acceptance by peers.

Functional Communication Training

This involves teaching the child ways to communicate his or her wants, needs, dislikes, and preferences in more appropriate ways. A Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA) may need to be used in this process with some children to identify the function of the problem behavior, but, in other children, the function of a child's impeding behavior is clear without an FBA. The replacement behavior should be something that the child is capable of doing, can be easily taught and used, and, most importantly, serves the same function as the problem behavior. Examples of replacement behaviors (alternative forms of communication) include teaching the child more appropriate ways to request assistance when needed, obtain attention from others, request a break from overwhelming sensory situations or very difficult work, or request a desired object or activity. Functional Communication Training is communication skill development. Examples include:

HELP cards: Teaching children to use a HELP card when a task is very difficult for them to deal with independently can prevent the heightened stress that often precedes a "meltdown." This strategy involves teaching students to recognize when their distress level is escalating because of an inability to carry out an assigned task independently, and then selecting an response, which may be use of the HELP card. This strategy is only effective if the HELP card results in a response to the child's communication within a short time. (Under some circumstances the HELP card may first bring assistance from a peer mentor.)



The "Break" Program: This strategy involves teaching students to self-monitor to identify feelings of anxiety and distress, and subsequently replace problem behavior with a more appropriate method of coping. A designated "calming corner" (quiet, set-off area) should be used as the break area that students can use as a place to relax/self-soothe when needed. A variety of relaxation tools should be kept in the calming corner for students to use while on their break. Students are taught to request a "break" when they become overwhelmed or distressed during an activity/situation. A "break card" may be used as a visual cue to help prompt students to request the break. In teaching children this replacement behavior teachers may prompt the student to hold up the break card (request a break) and go to the calming corner at the first sign that the child's distress is escalating, threatening to precipitate a "meltdown." The teacher then sets a timer for 3-5 minutes (exact time to be determined on individual basis) and encourages the student to use one or more of relaxation tools available. Once the timer beeps, the teacher prompts the student to return to the previous activity. The ultimate goal of this program is to have the child learn to self-monitor and spontaneously request and implement breaks independently as needed. It is important that teachers distinguish breaks from rewards or free-time, as this strategy is intended to be used as a *coping skill* to replace problem behavior, and not a form of positive reinforcement.

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IV. Teaching Replacement Behaviors, *continued*

Functional Communication Training, *continued*

These strategies involve teaching the student more appropriate and effective ways to cope with distress, anxiety, fear, and anger.

Deep breathing exercises and progressive muscle relaxation training: These techniques can be introduced by the OT and used by the entire class (with practice). Individual children can receive additional training in how to implement these strategies when they experience distress or feel overwhelmed, as a way to replace challenging behavior.

School-based yoga: Yoga for the social setting can be introduced by the OT and can include a series of poses and postures beneficial for increasing body awareness, self-regulation, as well as breathing exercises and relaxation techniques for calming and improved concentration. Yoga can be used as a therapeutic intervention for the whole classroom, small groups, or individual students.

Enhancing Self-Management

Problem-solving frameworks: Students on the spectrum can have difficulty identifying a problem, recognizing its cause(s), coming up with one or more solutions, and then evaluating the selected solution to plan for addressing this problem in the future. Problem solving frameworks can help students recognize the components of problem solving, helping them break down the steps to addressing a problem and organizing their response. For younger students, teachers first model the problem-solving process using self-talk. A problem-solving song can also make the process more fun and manageable. An entire class can help an individual student recognize and solve problems or individual students can remind themselves of the steps with the lyrics of an easily-remembered song. For older students, more advanced problem solving frameworks can be used. S.O.C.C.S.S. (Situation, Options, Consequences, Choice, Strategy, and Simulation- insert reference) can be a powerful tool for more advanced students who need support in recognizing the cause of a problem, considering the possible consequences of various solutions, preparing for the solution they would like to try, and reflecting on their solution to help them better plan for the future. With the initial support of an adult, students complete a S.O.C.C.S.S. sheet (see figure- need to make), selecting and rehearsing a solution with desired consequences and returning later to evaluation their choices. This strategy empowers students to consider the ramifications of their actions while also helping them to organize their thinking.

Problem Solving Song!

(Sung to tune of "It's raining!")

A problem! A problem!

When you have a problem…

Think about it… get ideas…

Choose the best solution!

SITUATION:

Who was there?: _____

What happened (problem)?: _____

Where?: _____ *When?:* _____

Why?: _____

OPTIONS	CONSEQUENCES / RESULTS	Choice

STRATEGY- Plan of action

SIMULATION (Select one)

For whatever simulation you choose, think about

- what might others do, think, feel?
- what might you do, think, or feel?
- does this still seem like the best option?
- think about short and long-term consequences

1. Act out your option(s)	
2. Draw / write out option(s)	
3. Stop and think about option(s)- make a picture / mind movie	
4	

Simulation outcomes, notes, or reminders:

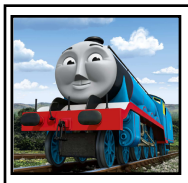
ASD NEST CLASSROOM GUIDEPOSTS

IV. Teaching Replacement Behaviors, *continued*

Enhancing Self-Management, *continued*

5-Point control scales: 5-point scales can help students develop skills in self-management. Students on the spectrum can often seem to go from "zero to sixty" without recognizing that they are becoming upset or anxious. Five-point scales ranking levels of control can help students become more aware of their escalating feelings. Teachers and therapists, such as OTs, can work with students to help them recognize the levels on their "control scales." A student who feels "content" at a level 1 can begin to recognize that he/she may begin to feel "hot" and "nervous" when they are at a level 2, and that they may need to take some deep breaths to regain control. That same student can also learn that when he/she feels like they are at a level 5, that their bodies are "not in control," and that a break may be necessary.

Power cards (Gagnon, 2001): Power cards can be excellent tools to help students learn and practice coping strategies by incorporating their preferred interests. Power cards consist of a power card script, outlining how a favorite character or celebrity has challenges similar to the student and how they try to handle these difficulties. In the beginning, the student may read this script daily/multiple times a day. A smaller, abbreviated "power card" version of this script, featuring an image of the preferred character, is also created that the student can keep in his/her desk or pocket and reference when needed.



Gordon is very fast, and he does not like other trains to go faster than him. Sometimes he rushes and misses his stops or blows his engine. Oh no! Gordon likes to go fast, but he reminds himself to SLOW DOWN. When Gordon needs to slow down his engine, he tries to:

1. **Take 16 deep breaths**
2. **Count back from 20**
3. **Say, "I can slooooooooow down."**

Godzilla is a ***powerful*** hero and a protector of the earth who can sometimes lose control. Godzilla wants you to try to remember **3 things** to help catch yourself before you react:

1. ***tell the person bothering you to stop***
2. ***take 5 deep breaths***
3. ***walk away and ask a teacher for help***

Video Modeling: Video-modeling taps into the visual preferences of students with ASD. This technique involves capturing scenarios, interactions, and activities on video, (minimally) editing the video to show positive experiences, and then showing the video to a student/students to teach and/or enhance a particular skill or set of skills. The videos may show adults, slightly older children, or the child him/herself (v*ideo self-modeling)*. For example, one ASD Nest kindergarten class watched a videotape of a staged fire drill with students in a 2nd grade ASD Nest class modeling the procedure. The second graders showed what it looked like to listen to their teacher, line up with their partners quickly and quietly, and walk through the hallway. The kindergarten students watched the video, discussed what they observed, and practiced the behaviors they had seen. At the next fire drill, the Kindergarten class was then much better able to follow the procedures that had been modeled.

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IV. Positive Reinforcement Systems

These strategies involve modifying the ways in which teachers and others who interact and work with a child respond to both problematic behaviors (decreasing the likelihood that they will be displayed) and to positive/replacement behaviors (to increase the likelihood that they will be used consistently in the future). Our goal is to always take advantage of the power of positive reinforcement. Reinforcement systems, coming in a variety of different formats, can be implemented on a classroom-wide level or on an individual basis. The basic premise underlying these systems involves providing the student with a "reward" upon the performance of a certain skill or task, or for displaying (not displaying) a specific behavior, with the ultimate goal of increasing the likelihood that the behavior/skill will be used in the future.

General practices

"Catch Children Being Good": This technique involves frequently reinforcing the child whenever positive behaviors are displayed, and whenever the child attempts to engage in more appropriate behavior. When providing reinforcement, it is important to specify what the child did to produce positive feedback in order to increase the likelihood that this skill/behavior will be used again in the future, e.g., "I like the way you used your words to tell us what upset you." Some children enjoy very demonstrative modes of reinforcement while other children can only tolerate quiet displays of recognition, so care should be taken to match the type and level of reinforcement to the individual pattern of the child.

Reduce direct attention provided to interfering behaviors: Essentially, when the child engages in problem behavior, the adult limits the amount of attention provided. The adults do not intentionally make eye contact with the child nor verbally comment on the behavior, e.g., they should not tell the child "stop it," or "don't do that" because any form of attention, which is what the child may be seeking, will only further reinforce the negative behavior. It is important to remember that during instances of problematic behavior, a child is usually not receptive to learning a new skill, nor is he/she likely to comprehend why they should not be engaging in the interfering behavior; hence, this is not a teachable moment.

Instead of attending to a negative behavior, you could:

- ✓ Highlight and compliment students who are doing the "right thing"
- ✓ Restate the expectations and why you have them
- ✓ Compliment a student who may be starting to do the "right thing"
- ✓ Use the "looking forward to approach" and highlight an upcoming preferred activity to motivate behavior change

ASD Nest Classroom Guideposts

IV. Positive Reinforcement Systems, *continued*

Classroom-wide reinforcement systems

Any classroom management system that is implemented should be aligned with the overall philosophy and systems utilized by the school. In the ASD Nest Program, the systems we recommend are all based on principles of positive reinforcement, as the research clearly demonstrates the effectiveness of reward-based procedures. We strongly caution against the use of any system that relies on punishment-based procedures (e.g., time out, losing points, privileges, etc), as there is ample evidence in the research suggesting that such strategies are not effective in bringing about meaningful and lasting behavior change.

A class-wide reward system may allow students to earn a "point" (e.g., sticker, smiley face, check mark, ticket) for displaying the targeted positive behavior, for not engaging in a particular negative behavior, or for performing a certain task/skill. Each student may be required to accumulate a specified number of points in order to obtain a reward (e.g., extra computer time, choice time, access to a preferred item). To further enhance motivation, a reward menu may remind students of the various rewards that they can earn. The specific details (e.g., the format that will be used, the number of points needed to obtain the reward, the reinforcers that will be provided) of the point system are typically determined by the teachers, according to the needs of individual students and the group.

When using these systems, especially early on, it is important that the child be provided with frequent opportunities to experience success. This will make the system more motivating for the student, thereby increasing the likelihood that he/she will want to actively participate in the reinforcement system.

Classwide Behavior Chart

Whole-class & classroom table reinforcement system

Note that punitive systems, i.e. those in which "points" or rewards are removed or opportunities to earn rewards are restricted should not be used. A common punitive system that should not be used is the "traffic light" procedure.

ASD NEST CLASSROOM GUIDEPOSTS

IV. Positive Reinforcement Systems

Individual reinforcement systems

Some students may need an additional layer of support, and the use of behavior charts can serve as an effective way to provide them with a more individualized means of receiving positive reinforcement.

Behavior chart: A behavior chart is a tool used to track, reward, and encourage specific desired behaviors. There are many considerations when creating and implementing this type of individualized reinforcement system:

Make it positive. The point of the chart is to emphasize positive behaviors, not the negative ones.

Make it motivating & fun. Ensure the rewards are highly reinforcing for the student…i.e., something worth earning! Make it a game with younger children. With older students, involve them in designing the chart or system

Make it interesting. Variety is the spice of life. Remember to change it up often so the system remains rewarding. Vary your reward options to keep it novel.

Make it easy and attainable. Ensure success (especially early on) to enhance motivation.

Make it easily visible. Hang the chart in a location that is easily visible. Teachers and staff need to remember to utilize the chart and they need to model consistency by keeping up with the chart.

Make it specific. Be specific in stating your expectations and make sure that the student has a clear understanding of expectations and how the chart is used.

Make it clear and realistic. Tell the student exactly how he/she can earn rewards - what counts & what doesn't. Don't require perfection. Highlight achievement, even if he/she achieves the goal only 3 out of 5 days.

Make expectations attainable. Avoid including too many expectations or tasks that may overwhelm the student and reduce his/her motivation. We want the student to experience success early on.

Remember:

Keep it simple. For younger students, the reward chart and recognition may be reinforcing enough to start!

Be creative. Incorporate the student's interests, increasing their motivation to participate in the system.

Be consistent. Once you start a chart, follow through. If the chart is a weekly chart, finish through the week. It will only be effective if we consistently USE IT!

Focus on rewards. Focus on EARNING rather than losing or taking things away.

Change takes time. Set up a point or reward system that is fair and realistic for both your student and for you! If you cannot consistently implement the strategy (i.e., reward system), then it is not realistic nor practical for your classroom. You can find another method that works better for everyone involved.

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Reference List: Organized by Section, *continued*

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These Expanded Guideposts feature photographs from the classrooms of the following educators in the ASD Nest Program: *Pollock & Youssef, Lopez & Wattenberg, Engel, Murray & Buccellatto, Tobin & Ramirez, Lanou, Boylan & Annunziata, Bell & Fratti, Dallas & Dworkin, and Guerrero.*

We thank them for all for their work and dedication!