
The ASD Nest Classroom

The ASD Nest classroom is designed to meet the needs of students with ASD and their general education peers in an inclusion setting with therapeutic supports. The physical environment and classroom supports meet students' social, academic, behavioral, and sensory needs.

The ASD Nest program's Classroom Guideposts and the Three-Tier Model inform professionals' implementation of Nest strategies and supports.

The ASD Nest Program Expanded Classroom Guideposts:

The ASD Nest Program Classroom Guideposts is a compilation of strategies used in Nest classrooms. The strategies are a combination of evidence-based and highly promising practices implemented systematically by members of the ASD Nest team. The premise of the Guideposts is that well-implemented classroom interventions can help many children with ASD succeed. The Guidepost strategies are divided into five major sections:

- Prevention strategies, including visual supports and environmental modifications, to decrease the likelihood that problem behavior will occur.
- Instructional strategies and supports, such as choice-making and incorporating student interests, to address the learning needs of students with ASD.
- Social supports, for example providing wait time and using social stories, to address the core social challenges of students with ASD.
- Teaching replacement behavior, such as using help cards or self-management strategies, to help students substitute appropriate behaviors in place of interfering behaviors.
- Positive reinforcement systems that are school-wide, classroom-wide and individualized, are designed to recognize and reward positive behaviors, increasing the likelihood of their future use.

The ASD Nest Three-Tier Model:

The ASD Nest Three-Tier Model provides an intervention framework to guide strategy implementation. This model organizes the Guidepost strategies into tiers defined by the a) intensity of supports, b) level of individualization, and c) level of adult involvement. Each tier is organized into four domains: social, behavioral, academic, and sensory functioning/self-regulation.

- Tier I: Tier I interventions are basic, classwide strategies and supports appropriate for all students in Nest classrooms. The Tier I Checklist outlines these strategies.
- Tier II: Tier II interventions are planned, individualized Nest student supports that are added to the Tier I strategies, as needed. ASD Nest teams implement Tier II interventions following case conference discussions and the completion of the Tier I Checklist.
- Tier III: Tier III interventions are individualized, multi-component, comprehensive supports for Nest students with significant needs. Moving to Tier III interventions requires specific documentation and the involvement of an ASD Nest consultant to guide intervention design and implementation.

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Additional Questions & Considerations:

What really makes a “Nest Classroom”?

A Nest classroom is—at its core—positive. A Positive Behavioral Support (PBS) framework ensures that supports focus on prevention, skill development, and reinforcement. Punishment procedures are not used. The overall tone of the Nest classroom is welcoming, supportive, and encouraging. Student strengths are recognized, celebrated, and utilized. Nest professionals provide clear expectations, highlight appropriate behavior, and celebrate experiences using declarative language. Teachers do not yell, use demeaning sarcasm, make threatening comments, or engage in inappropriate discussions in front of students. A Nest classroom employs Tier I supports across all four domains. For some Nest students, the ASD Nest team also develops individualized Tier II and Tier III supports that professionals implement consistently throughout the day.

How do I know when an intervention is working or not working?

Interventions take time to introduce, teach, tweak, and practice, especially when working towards student independence. There is no hard and fast rule about numbers of days or amount of time to give a newly introduced intervention before determining its level of effectiveness. When the ASD Nest team introduces an intervention, they discuss the amount of time this intervention will be implemented and monitored before judging its effectiveness. Nest professionals working with the student monitor the success of the intervention and for any unplanned side-effects. The ASD Nest team reviews the results at the end of the planned trial period and decides if the intervention will be continued, modified, or discontinued. ASD Nest teams immediately modify or discontinue any intervention that causes any harm or excessive stress to the child, regardless of the length of the planned trial period.

For more information on the ASD Nest program, please see:

The ASD Nest Model: A framework for inclusive education for higher functioning children with ASD, edited by Shirley Cohen and Lauren Hough (2013), AAPC Publishing

Everyday classroom strategies and practices for supporting children with ASD, written by Jamie Bleiweiss, Lauren Hough, and Shirley Cohen (2013), AAPC Publishing

A note on the ASD Nest Model:

This paper outlines an element of the ASD Nest Model. Fidelity of implementation to the model is essential for program consistency. While a degree of flexibility is necessary given individual school needs, the program benefits from schools' commitment to a cohesive model.