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Building Systems & Developing Skills to Support Individuals with Autism

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AGENDA

- Overview of ASD
- Effective Teaching Strategies to Support Students with ASD: Developing Skills
- Empowering Students in the Classroom: Building Effective Support Systems
- Tying it Together: Case Study






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Autism Overview

A row of seven hands, palms up, holding colorful plastic letters that spell out 'AUTISM'. The letters are: A (blue), U (yellow), T (red), I (green), S (red), M (green). The hands are of various skin tones and are positioned against a light beige background.

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WHAT IS AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER?

 Definition A complex neurodevelopmental disorder that affects the functioning of the brain and how an individual takes in information and interacts with the world.	 Onset Appears during the first 3 years of life.	 Prognosis ASD is a lifelong condition. There is no "cure" for autism, but impacts can be minimized through education and use of strategies.
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CHANGES TO THE DIAGNOSIS

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is the **diagnostic term** in the DSM-5. It combines the previously separate diagnoses of autistic disorder, Asperger's disorder, pervasive developmental disorder - not otherwise specified (PDD-NOS), and childhood disintegrative disorder.

Note: These individual diagnoses no longer exist in the DSM-5 as of May 2013. However, individuals diagnosed prior to the changes may still have the prior diagnoses. **For our purposes today, we will use "ASD".**

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ASD: LEVELS OF SEVERITY

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
Needs support . Patient's social and communication skills and repetitive behaviors are only noticeable without support.	Needs substantial support. Patient's social and communication skills and repetitive behaviors are still obvious to the casual observer , even with support in place.	Needs very substantial support. Patient's social and communication skills and repetitive behaviors severely impair daily life.

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ASD CHARACTERISTICS

Characteristics from **each** of the 3 main categories must be present:

Deficits in
social skills

Deficits in
**communication
skills**

**Restricted
and
repetitive
behavior**

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Prevalence

ASD continues to be the fastest growing developmental disability in the US.

Source: CDC Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR), April 2025

over 30% increase since 1994 (1 in 150)

1:31 1 in 31 8-year-olds in the US meet the criteria for ASD

4x more common in boys than girls (1 in 34 vs 1 in 145)

diagnosed among all racial, ethnic, religious, & socioeconomic groups

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EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING

Accessing information, **thinking** about solutions, and **applying** what we know to act on those solutions.

EF enables us to cope & **persist** when things are difficult, block out distractions, **focus** on completing a task, ask for help when needed, and identify when a break is necessary.

EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING

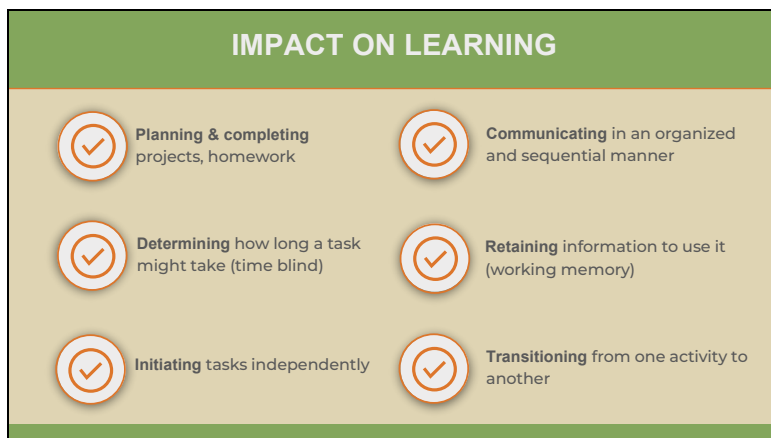
EMOTIONAL CONTROL, WORKING MEMORY, FLEXIBILITY, PLANNING, TASK INITIATION, ATTENTION, TIME MANAGEMENT, METACOGNITION

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DEVELOPING SKILLS: PROBLEM SOLVING

What?

- **Problem-solving** involves various skills that help individuals manage everyday tasks and adapt to new situations. It helps with independence

Why?

- This can cause problems with planning, organizing, and focusing making it difficult to solve problems which might require more rigid thinking and longer processing information

How?

- **Visual supports:** diagrams, charts, step by step guides, problem solving sheets
- **Hands on Learning:** having them experience situations in the real world
- **Modeling and Role Playing:** situations that have happened and practice what to do to
- **Solution Wheel** presents a variety of potential solutions. (talking it out, apologize, ask for help count to ten, take a deep breath)
- **Provide choices**

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DEVELOPING SKILLS: INITIATION

What?

- **Initiation** is the ability to begin a task, a project, or an activity without relying on others

Why?

- May struggle if the tasks or requests are undesirable or non-preferred
- Can cause procrastination leading to not being completed
- May have a lack of motivation or interest
- May not understand what you want them to do
- May have difficulty focusing

How?

- Break down large tasks into more **manageable steps**
- Use a **visual or written schedule**
- Use a **First/Then** board.
- **Cue cards**
- Timers, alarms or **visual reminders**
- Recognize and **reward** even small steps to encourage motivation.

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DEVELOPING SKILLS: CONNECTING SOCIALLY

What?

- **Connecting socially** through understanding social cues and forming and maintaining relationships. Initiating interactions, responding appropriately to others, and understanding non-verbal cues.

Why?

- May struggle with sharing, taking turns, and engaging in mutual conversations
- Difficulty recognizing facial expressions and body language
- Initiating or engaging in conversations
- Making and keeping friends
- Managing their emotions
- Sensory sensitivities or become overwhelmed by sensory input in social situations

How?

- Provide social skills **training**.
- Provide structured social **activities**
- Recognize that everyone with ASD has **unique strengths** and challenges
- **Social Scripting**
- **Social Stories**
- Role playing/Peer modeling
- **Visual support**
- Use a **digital app** to monitor social interactions during targeted times (break time)

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DEVELOPING SKILLS: SELF-MONITORING

TODAY IS _____
RATING 1 2 3 4 5

Happy
Sad
Confused
Excited

What?

- **Self-Monitoring** is a technique that can help individuals with ASD manage their behaviors and improve their independence
- It involves learning to observe and record one's behavior to track progress, identify triggers, and adjust

Why?

- Helps monitor and record their behavior in various ways
- Can be more self-directed and less dependent on others
- Helps them be more aware of their own actions and consequences
- Can help them identify and reduce challenging behaviors
- Can help them stay on task and complete activities

How?

- **Visual checklists** mark or cross off completed tasks or behaviors (ex. tracking completion of assignment or completing daily hygiene routine)
- **Digital Apps** track behaviors, provide prompts and offer feedback
- **Self-Instruction** to help guide behavior
- Individualized **visual data collection sheets**

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DEVELOPING SKILLS: SELF-REGULATION

What?

- **Co-regulation** is when a caregiver, paraprofessional, teacher etc. provides support to help manage emotions and behavior, providing a safe calming environment
- It is a **critical first step** in developing self-regulation as it is during this time they begin to develop their own strategies
- **Self-regulation** is having the ability to control your behavior, thoughts, and emotions to achieve desired goals

Why?

- Helps them manage emotions, behaviors and social interactions
- It helps provide security
- It helps to manage one's own emotions and behaviors independently
- Individuals with ASD often experience sensory processing difficulties, this makes it difficult to regulate their emotions and behavior due to sensory input

How?

- Create a safe and predictable environment
- Model calming techniques
- Provide positive verbal praise
- Use a variety of visuals
- Be calm
- Provide movement and play
- Create a sensory friendly environment or space
- Provide a calm-down area or safe place
- Teach how to label and identify emotions
- Positive Behavior Supports

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DEVELOPING SKILLS: SELF-ADVOCACY

What?

- **Self-advocacy** is the ability to speak up for oneself, assert one's rights and being able to communicate one's needs and interests

Why?

- Helps them understand their own strengths and needs
- Helps set personal goals
- Informs them of their legal rights
- Helps communicate their needs to others
- Empowers individuals to independently make decisions, pursue their goals, and make sure their needs are met
- They can ensure they have the appropriate accommodation

How?

- Ensures they understand their **strengths and support needs**
- Be aware of **resources** that can help (ex. Autism Society or the Autistic Self Advocacy Network (ASAN))
- Have **effective communication** both verbally and nonverbally
- Set **boundaries** within your limits
- Make decisions about daily activities
- **Ask for help** seeking assistance if needed
- Celebrate and **acknowledge accomplishments**
- **Promote** autism acceptance








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EXAMPLES OF SUPPORTS

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EXAMPLES OF SUPPORTS

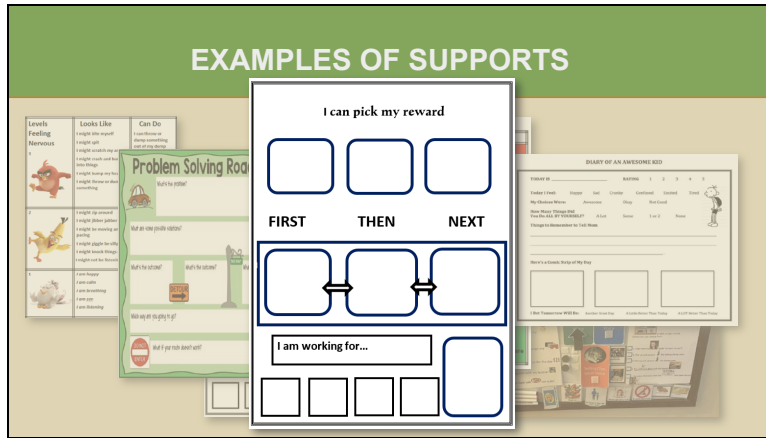
Levels	Feeling Nervous	Looks Like	Looks Like I feel	Can Do
1	 <p>I might be myself I might spit I might scratch my arm</p>	<p>I might be myself I might spit I might scratch my arm</p>	<p>I might be myself I might spit I might scratch my arm</p>	<p>I can throw or dump something out of my mouth box</p>
2	 <p>I might crash and bump into things I might bump my head I might throw or dump something</p>		<p>I might bump my head I might throw or dump something</p>	<p>I can get up by my chair I can get up by my blanket and vibrating toy</p>
3	 <p>I might giggle or laugh I might jump I might dance I might sing</p>		<p>I might giggle or laugh I might jump I might dance I might sing</p>	<p>I need to remember to be like Mufasa calm and Zen I might ask for my Soundline song or my lists</p>
4	 <p>I might be myself I might spit I might scratch my arm</p>		<p>I might be myself I might spit I might scratch my arm</p>	<p>I can throw or dump something out of my mouth box</p>

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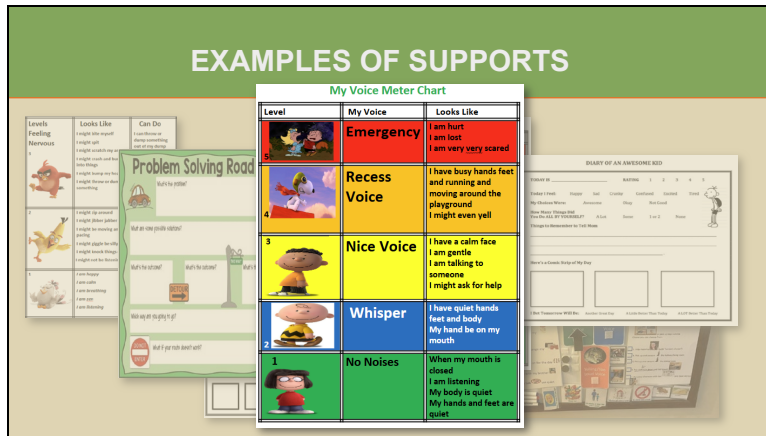
EXAMPLES OF SUPPORTS

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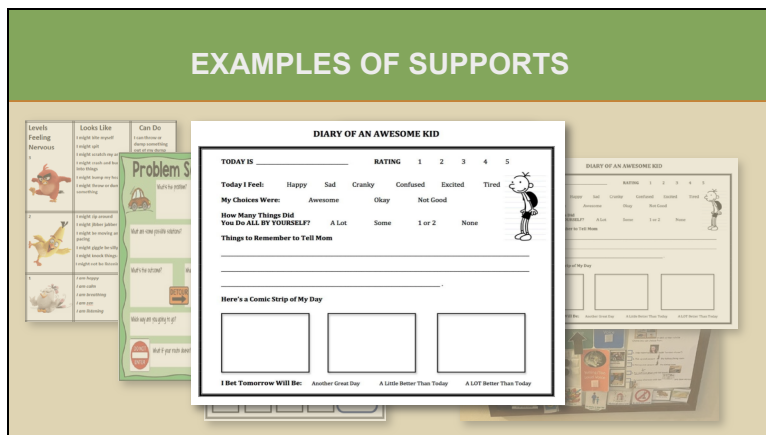
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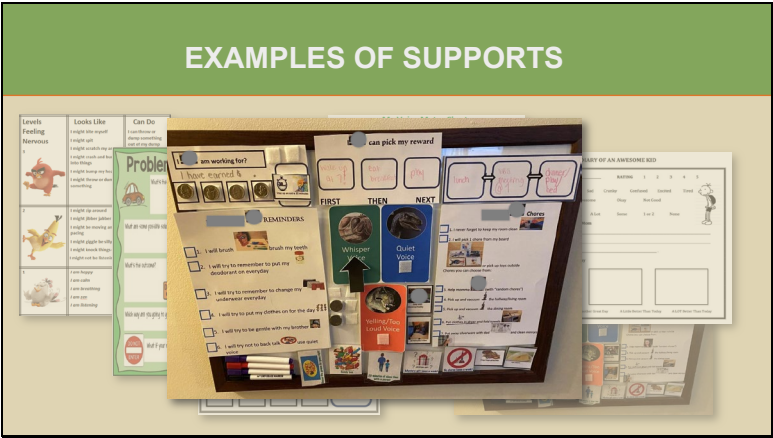
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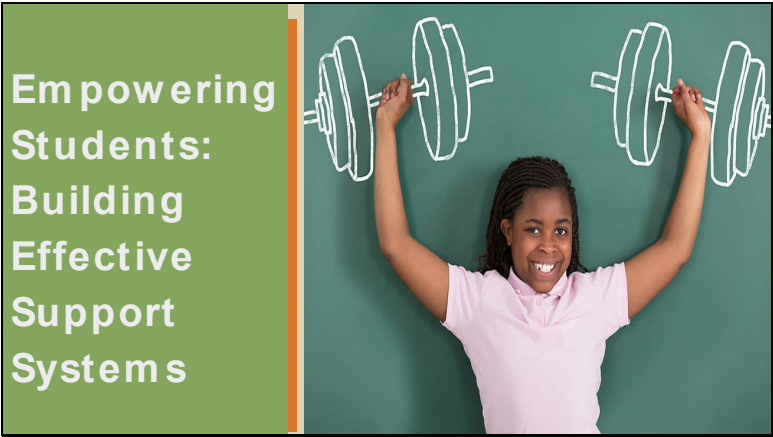
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BUILDING SYSTEMS: TRANSPARENCY

TRANSPARENCY:

- Share information openly with the team, including challenges and decision-making processes
- Build trust and foster collaboration within the team




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BUILDING SYSTEMS: GOAL-SETTING

GOAL-SETTING:

- Clearly define team goals and objectives making them (SMART)
 - Specific
 - Measurable
 - Achievable
 - Relevant
 - Time-bound



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BUILDING SYSTEMS: DELEGATION

DELEGATION:

- Assign next steps according to targeted goals
- Empower the team members through accountability



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BUILDING SYSTEMS: COLLABORATION

COLLABORATION:

- Create an environment that encourages teamwork
- Share ideas
- Support each other
- Work together to achieve common goals
- Maintain a positive working environment
- Provide regular feedback to team members that includes praise *and* areas for improvement
- Support growth and development in achieving goals
- Develop individualized data sheets for decision making

A central box labeled 'collaboration' has eight arrows pointing outwards to circles containing the words: Teamwork, Trust, Inspiration, Exchange, Assist, Support, Success, and Share. A hand is shown drawing the 'Assist' circle.

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BUILDING SYSTEMS: TEAM BUILDING

TEAM BUILDING:

- Organize activities to strengthen team dynamics
- Build trust
- Allow team members to have the autonomy to make decisions
- Encourage motivation and engagement within your team
- Celebrate team successes and individual successes to encourage motivation
- Lead by example, modeling commitment, accountability, and a positive attitude

A group of four diverse people (three women and one man) standing outdoors in a grassy area. They are wearing red and blue t-shirts that together spell out the word 'TEAM' in large, colorful letters.

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Tying it Together

A close-up shot of wooden blocks arranged to spell out the words 'case study' on a dark wooden surface. A small, glowing lightbulb sits next to the blocks.

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CASE STUDY: BACKGROUND

- This case study focuses on the **steps utilized** and the **challenges overcome**, with a particular focus on developing positive relationships with administration and stakeholders within the school system.
- The consultation work that was completed on this study involved a 7th grade general education classroom that also had special education inclusion students.



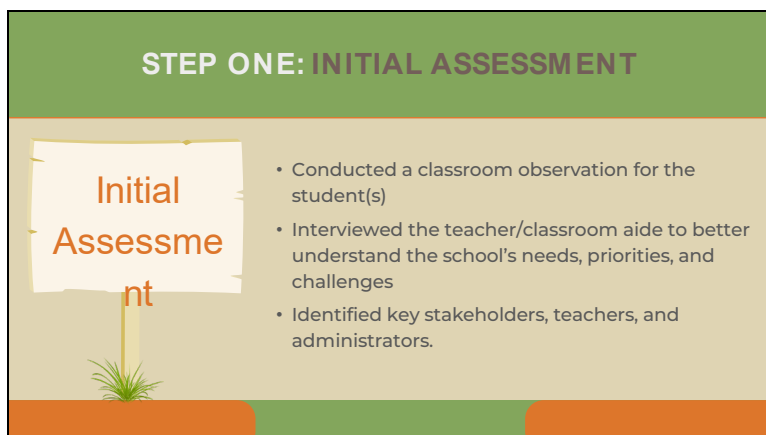
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CASE STUDY: STEPS UTILIZED



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STEP ONE: INITIAL ASSESSMENT



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STEP TWO: BUILDING TRUST

Building Trust

- Organized meetings with teachers and administrators
- Provided team with a timeline for follow-up

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STEP THREE: COLLABORATIVE PLANNING

Collaborative Planning

- Developed a team-based approach with stakeholders, teachers, and administrators
- Set goals as a team within a timely manner

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STEP FOUR: RESOURCES

Resources

- Planned a team meeting to go over/discuss recommendations
- Provided additional information on recommendations such as YouTube videos, websites, etc.

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STEP FIVE: IMPLEMENTATION



- Provided training and support to school stakeholders, teachers, and administrators to ensure successful implementation of resources
- Provided stakeholders, teachers, and administrators data collection resources to successfully monitor and evaluate outcomes.

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CASE STUDY: CHALLENGES OVERCOME



RESISTANCE TO
CHANGE
SUSTAINING
ENGAGEMENT
COMMUNICATION
BARRIERS

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CHALLENGE ONE: RESISTANCE TO CHANGE



- Some stakeholders, teachers, and administrators were initially resistant to outside involvement
- Some stakeholders, teachers, and administrators were resistant to change in their classroom environment
- Overcame this by demonstrating the benefits of collaboration within our agency for long-term success

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CHALLENGE TWO: COMMUNICATION BARRIERS

- Differences in communication styles and expectations created misunderstandings
- Addressed this by using Communication Best Practices and regular check-ins.

Communication Best Practices:	Example:
Clarity	Be direct and clear on expectations
Engagement	Encourage participation
Language	Watch nonverbal cues and body language

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CHALLENGE THREE: SUSTAINING ENGAGEMENT



- Maintaining long-term engagement was difficult because change involves commitment and some wanted instant results
- Overcame this by developing a timeline for realistic goals
- Created check-in dates to keep everyone motivated and informed

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CASE STUDY: CONCLUSION

- Focusing on **communication best practices** with stakeholders, teachers, and administrators is important when building relationships, as a resource to help you understand what the **needs and priorities** are within the classroom to improve overall success. This also gives each person a feeling of their voice **“being heard”** while maintaining a team-based approach.
- Using this approach showed that stakeholders, teachers, and administrators **felt more confident** working within the team and voicing their concerns, resulting in future consultations, professional development, etc.

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Review

- ASD impacts learning and executive functioning
- Use a "What, Why, How" framework to help students with ASD develop skills.
- Build effective support systems through communication, transparency, goal setting, delegation, collaboration, and team building.
- Use communication best practices to facilitate consults for optimal success.



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Any Questions



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WEST VIRGINIA
AUTISM TRAINING CENTER
AT MARSHALL UNIVERSITY

Thank You

For Your Attention