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Building Systems & Developing Skills to Support Individuals with Autism

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WEST VIRGINIA AUTISM TRAINING CENTER

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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

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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.

- 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

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

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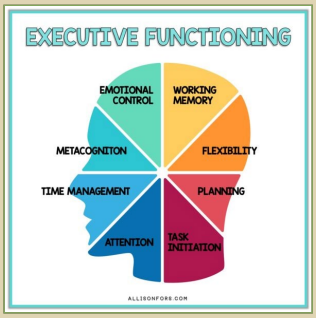
EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING

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.



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EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONS

Activation/Planning
- Organizing
- Prioritizing
- Getting to Work

Emotions
- Managing Frustrations
- Modulating Emotions

Focus
- Sustaining Focus
- Alertness
- Sustaining Effort

Self-Monitoring
- Monitoring and Regulating Actions

Memory
- Utilizing Working Memory

Flexibility
- Shifting Attention
- Shifting Tasks

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IMPACT ON LEARNING

Planning & completing projects, homework

Communicating in an organized and sequential manner

Determining how long a task might take (time blind)

Retaining information to use it (working memory)

Initiating tasks independently

Transitioning from one activity to another

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Effective Strategies to Support Students with ASD

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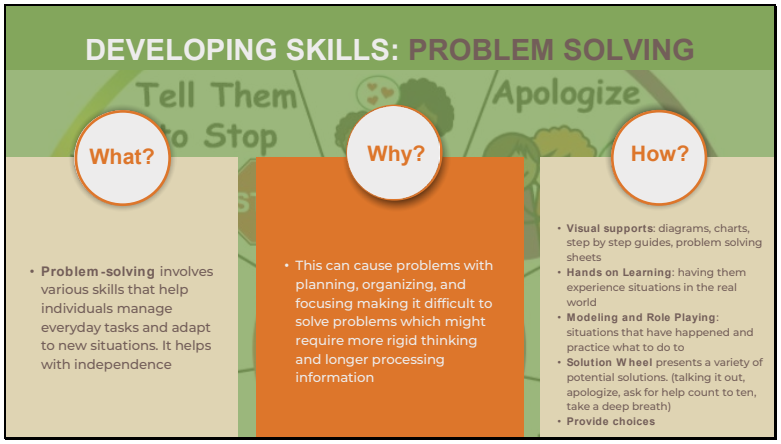

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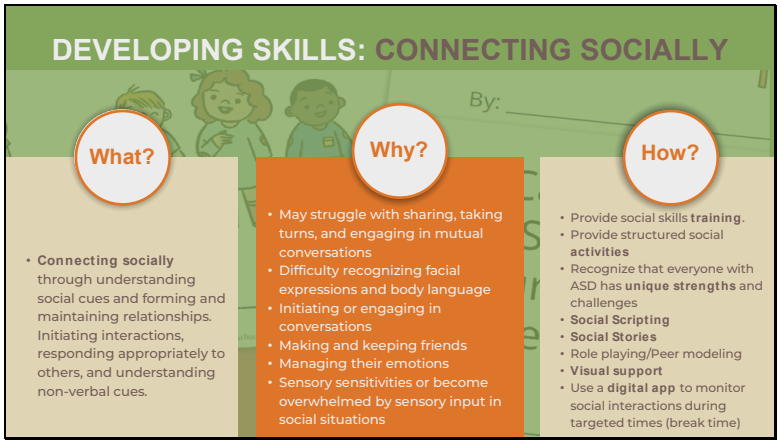

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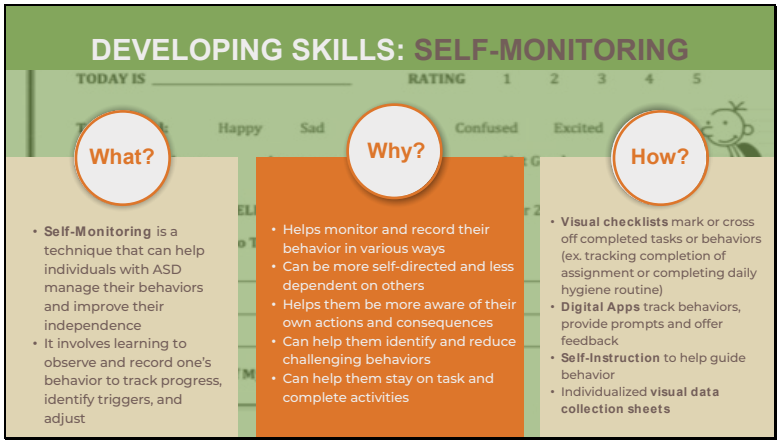

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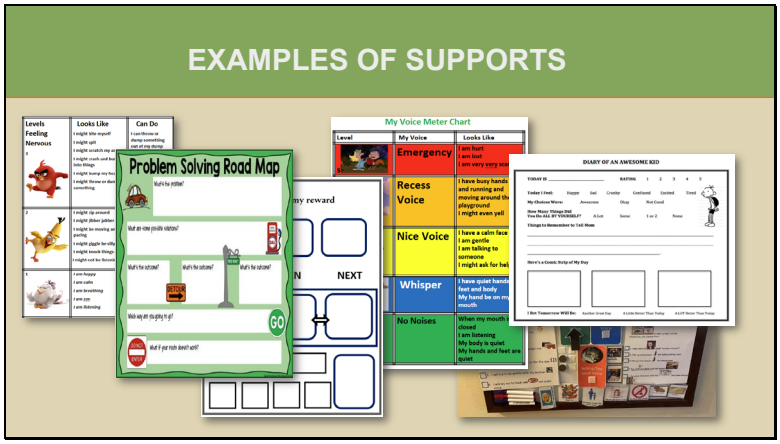

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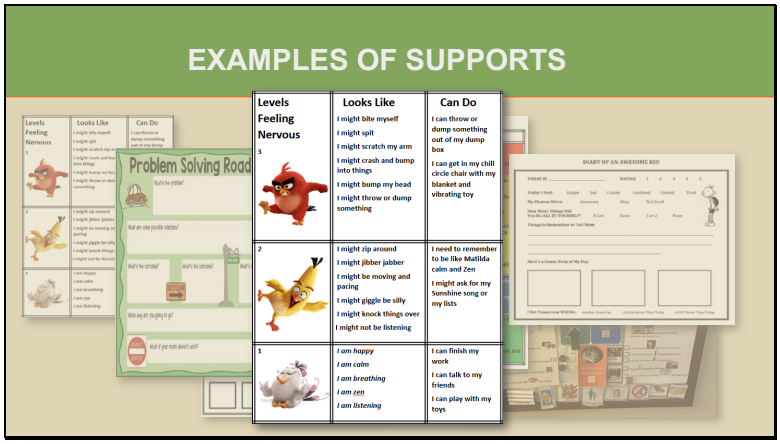

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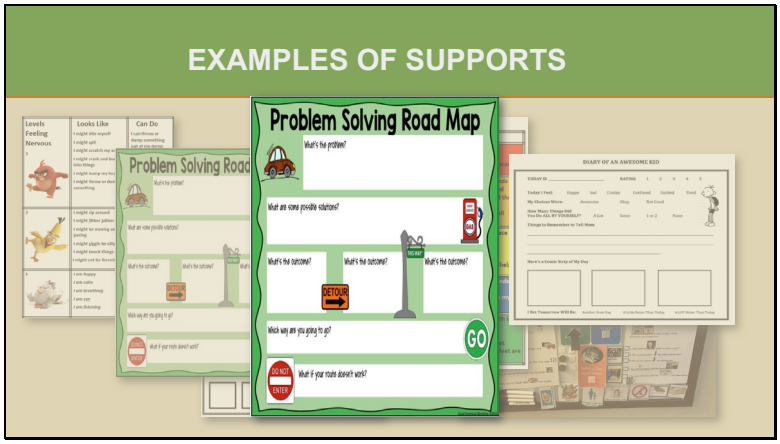

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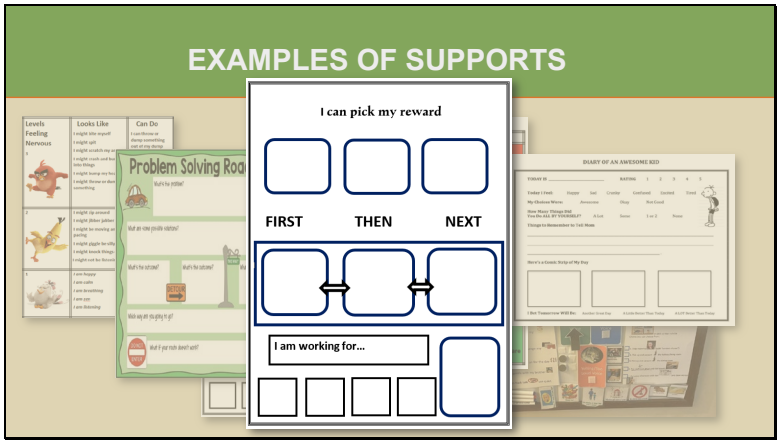

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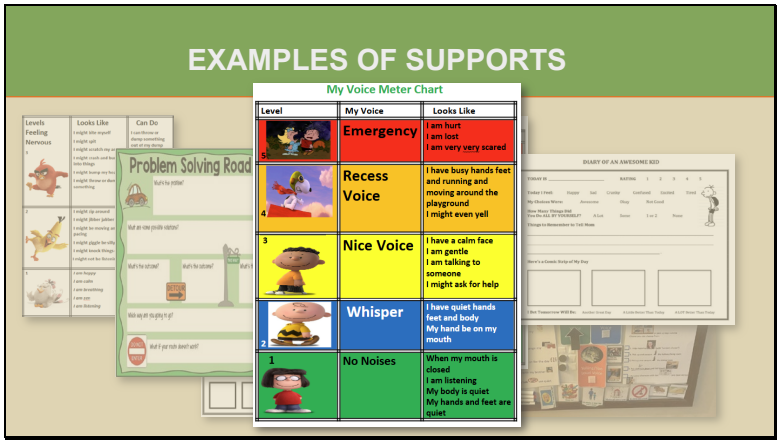

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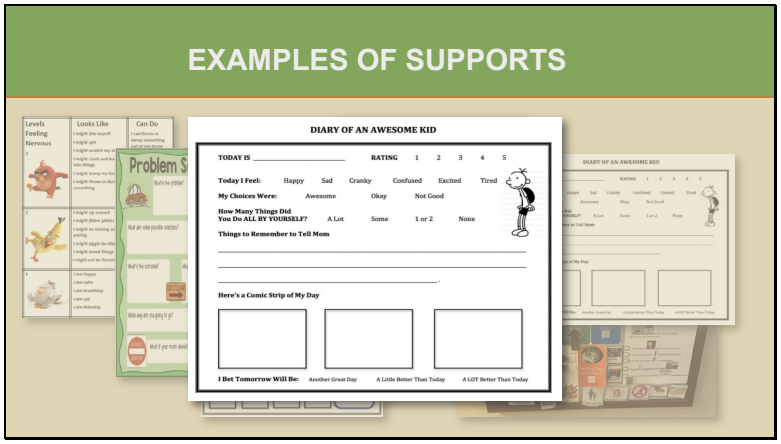

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EXAMPLES OF SUPPORTS

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Empowering Students: Building Effective Support Systems

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BUILDING SYSTEMS: COMMUNICATION

COMMUNICATION

- Maintain open and consistent communication
- Actively listen to team members, and ensure everyone is informed about updates and goals
- Be direct and clear on expectations or goals
- Encourage team members to participate

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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

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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, account-ability, and a positive attitude

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Tying it Together

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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

Initial Assessme nt

- Conducted a classroom observation for the student(s)
- Interviewed the teacher/classroom aide to better understand the school's needs, priorities, and challenges
- Identified key stakeholders, teachers, and administrators.

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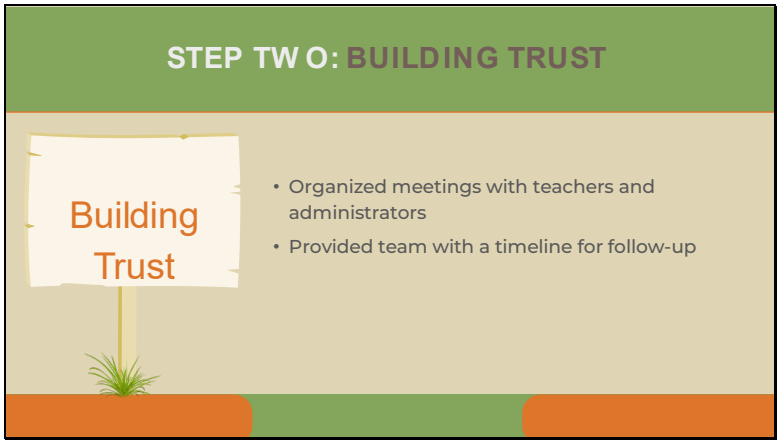

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STEP FIVE: IMPLEMENTATION

- 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

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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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