

# **Child and Family Centre**

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## **WORKING WITH CHILDREN THAT HAVE SOCIAL, COMMUNICATION AND BEHAVIOURAL DIFFICULTIES**

### **Guidelines for Teachers and Educational Assistants**

Typical difficulties children may display include: sitting independently and appropriately at circle time or other large group activities, looking at the teacher or materials that are being presented, maintaining attention to a tasks for an appropriate period of time during centers or semi-structured playtime are also typical. Difficulties transitioning independently from one activity to another such as lining up to go outside to play, coming back inside after playtime and being able to stop a desirable activity and move on to the next one. An ongoing goal for most children will be to increase the amount of time that they interact with other children. This can be something as small as just sitting with another child and looking at toys together (joint attention) or actually taking turns in some kind of play activity or game. General recommendations are as follows:

- Remember that the goal is for the child to be functioning independently. What tasks does the child need to demonstrate to achieve an acceptable degree of independent functioning in the classroom?
- When Educational Assistants (EA's) are being used in a mainstream setting there is sometimes a tendency for the child's regular teacher to become dependent on the EA to provide directions and prompts for the child who is being helped. Mainstream teachers are encouraged to give directions and prompts as much as they possibly can without taking undue time away from the other children. Try to avoid the child becoming overly dependent on the EA. The EA's time should be utilized for prompting, directing and redirecting back to appropriate activities. Mainstream teachers should consider doing things like saying the child's name before giving directions to the group as a whole and giving positive feedback when the child follows directions and transitions appropriately and most important when the child shows any kind of appropriate social interaction with other children.
- Teachers and E.A's. should prompt the child to greet them in the morning and also ask them to make eye contact. Asking them to greet some of the other children would also be helpful. Think in terms of trying to get the child to greet the other children and say their names on a more regular basis.

- Show the child any picture cues that are provided before they start circle time. This could include, sit down, look at the teacher etc. Ask the child to look at the pictures for a few seconds, give them the directions and then have them sit down in the group. Try to get the child seated and then move back whenever possible. Avoid sitting directly next to or behind the child unless absolutely necessary. If needed get in a place in the room where you can be within the child's eye sight and prompt (by pointing) to look at the teacher or hold up the picture cue. Remember that you are trying to get the child to be more independent in all areas of functioning and that would include following the routines and listening to directions from the regular teachers in the classroom. If the child becomes loud or goes off task and seems to be disturbing other children, move in, give a prompt to stay seated/be quiet and back off again.
- During open play a goal should be to get the child to select an activity and stick with it for an appropriate period of time. Children may have difficulty maintaining their attention to a task for long periods. Encourage the child to stay with something and finish it before they move on to something else. If possible, use this opportunity to sit near other children and establish joint attention to a task. Try to keep the child from moving around very quickly from one activity to another. When the children are in semi-structured play activities take this opportunity to try and get them to sit with other children, establish joint attention and perhaps do a bit of turn taking in play. Use the same method described during circle time of seating the child near others (who may be engaging in a desirable activity to the target child), give some directions and prompts and then back off. Intervene when necessary to give directions to participate in the task at hand or to stay with the activity. The child need not always actively play with other children during this time but try and encourage some interaction with others or at least sitting near other children.
- Circle time activities can be a bit difficult for some children if it involves imitation of gross motor movements and signing songs. You may need to be a little bit closer to the child and encourage participation during this time. The goal is to keep the child in the required activity near the other children and listening to some directions from the regular teacher at the front of the room.
- When the child is transitioning to various places around the kindergarten (queuing up to go outside and play, to the bathroom etc.) give verbal prompts to line up and follow the child in front of them. Try to avoid holding the child's hand or being very close during these times. Think in terms of establishing independence. If the child gets distracted and does not move along as they should, give a verbal prompt and physical prompt if necessary, step back again and let the child move on their own as much as possible.
- To ease transitions warn the child when they are engaged in an activity that they will have to stop soon and transition to something else. For example; "Project time will be over soon, then we go to the circle" or "you can play for a few minutes, then we're going outside". When giving the child directions and instructions,

make sure they are at least looking at/near your direction. Try to get them to stop and look at you to be sure they are taking on board what you are saying.

- Using prompts effectively: The goal is usually to get the child to respond to verbal prompts only. If verbal prompts are paired with visuals it usually helps get the message to the child, physical prompts are used last, A possible sequence is as follows: verbal - no response - verbal and visual – no response – physical. Extensive use of visual paired with verbal prompts is a well researched way to help communicate expectations and routines.