

(ISSN : 2455-8001)
Online



Vol (4), No (1), 2021

INTERNATIONAL
eJOURNAL
Disability Studies
Special Education & Rehabilitation

Young Children with Autism: Instructional Strategies in Indian Settings:

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Abstract : Children diagnosed with Autism are on the rise, or in other words they are now coming more into the fold of the education system. So to enable better learning and development of these children on the Autism Spectrum Disorder, it is becoming very important for professionals to gain Knowledge and strategy- skills of teaching-learning processes for these children. Listed are some tried and tested strategies that have been used and refined in the Indian educational setups and found to be affective in facilitating learning and holistic development for the children on the autism spectrum disorder.

Keywords : Dealing, disorder, vital intervention, Autism, Syndrome, Pervasive development, Stereotypic behaviour communicate, Environment, Reduce, Frustrated, Schedule.

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Introduction : Surveys have indicated that Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is found in about one and a half million people in India. Many children with ASD especially those with Asperger's syndrome can be and are fully included in regular early childhood classrooms with their typically developing peers.

With more number of children now being diagnosed with autism it has become to identify as a first step which type of autism the child has. This identification helps the teachers and other stake holders to prepare teaching-learning strategies which will enable the child to develop and ultimately be able to lead a successful life. ASD is a broad-based term and it includes majorly five types of autisms which include Kanner's Syndrome (Classic Autism Disorder), Pervasive Developmental Disorder- Not otherwise

Specified (PDD_NOS), Childhood Disintegrative Disorder (CDD), Rett Syndrome and Asperger's Syndrome. Multi disciplinary teams play an important role in helping develop effective Individual Education

Program (IEP) and Individual Family Service Plan (IFSP) for the child on the Autism Spectrum Disorder. In India it is realized how important it is to have multidisciplinary professionals on the team for each and every child with ASD. The multidisciplinary team includes the Child Psychiatrics, Child Psychologist, Occupational Therapist, Social Worker, Special Educator, General Teacher, Speech-language pathologist, neurologists, parents and the child.

It has been emphasized in the Indian settings that the child is more important than the condition and hence the child referred to as the, "Child with Autism" or 'Child with Aspergers" and so on and not as 'Autistic child. This little change in the way of addressing in itself has brought about a lot of change in the attitude and perspective of the family, school, community and even the professionals of the field.

Revised Person With Disability Act 2016 defines "autism spectrum disorder" to means a neuro-developmental condition typically appearing in the first three years of life that significantly affects a person's ability to communicate, understand relationships and relate to others, and is frequently associated with unusal or stereotypical rituals or behaviours.

According to the latest DSM-5, the diagnostic descriptors of Autism Spectrum Disorders include

- A significant delay in social interaction across multiple context (such as eye contact, expression, maintaining and understanding relationships, deficit in socio-emotional reciprocity)
- A communication delay.

- Restricted repetitive patterns of behavior, interest, activities manifested by at least two specific examples such as rituals or fixated, restrictive interests or stereotyped movements or repetitive movements or hyper or hypo reactivity to sensory inputs.
- Symptoms that limit or impair everyday functioning
- Symptoms must be present in early developmental period
- The disturbances cannot be explained by intellectual disability

The special schools and inclusive schools in India have also realized that one should not take all information about ASD which one sees on the internet or on television and other multimedia to be as authentic and so it is very important to gain information and knowledge from other reliable sources. Not all information about autism including what is shown on television and found on the internet is accurate. The teachers and other stakeholders in the education system are getting sensitized towards aspects such as the ones highlighted below

1. Understanding the behavior of the child with Autism in your classroom:

It is very difficult for a teacher to be responsive when the teacher is not able to make out what the child is trying to say or in other words what the child is attempting or wanting to communicate. So for that teachers and other stakeholders in Indian classroom attempt to ask themselves the following questions. The teachers who do not have adequate training and experiences with children with Autism Spectrum Disorders are encouraged to ask themselves the following questions when there are behavior difficulties.

- What in the environment might have triggered the behaviour burst ? ○ Did something/ someone make a loud noise?
- Did the class room suddenly get brighter?
- Is child with ASD unfamiliar to other child?

2. Various ways by which a Child with Autism might communicate

Some of the ways, as observed by this study that the teachers and other stakeholders tend to communicate with the child with Autism Spectrum Disorder in the Indian setting are.

- a. Before attempting to calm down the child, the adult works on calming themselves down
- b. The child is made to feel accepted, safe and comfortable.
- c. Use of visuals and Picture Exchange Communication (PEC) and other cue card systems
- d. Using signs and sign language and teaching the child the same
- e. Tablets and i-pads support communication for children with ASD
- f. Explain and practice with the child the basic social interaction procedures such as

- Introducing oneself
 - Asking the other person their introduction
 - Telling them what you need • Asking them what they need
- g. Develop buddy system where several other children help you and the child practice meeting people, communicating for basic needs etc.
- h. Having a structured routine helps these children with ASD. When the child becomes familiar with this routine, add additional cues, such as one showing something that he likes to do or asking a next friend to play a game.

3. What do we do when a child want interact with others:

Children with autism generally do not initiate interactions, social skills training including how to respond in social situations should begin as early as possible and continue throughout the child's education. It is vital to structure the environment to help the child succeed.

4. How do we arrange a preschool environment for success?

It has been observed and realized that children with autism function best when they have

- Structure and a predictable routine.
- Environment that do not distract.

○ Picture Schedule

Schools where children with Autism are welcome and comfortable, the teachers in particular and the school at large design environment as much as possible for a child with autism. Such school settings have communication through pictures and signs beside verbal communication

- The child can look at the picture to get an idea of what is supposed to occur in that area.
- Transitions times are accepted as a time when the child with autism is likely to have an out burst.
- To facilities smooth transitions the school system knows that the picture schedule helps and the adults and also the peer group can often be seen going and pointing to the next activity.

5. How can we prepare to welcome a child with Autism Spectrum Disorder to the classroom?

The best way teachers can prepare themselves and the other children in the class for welcoming a child with Autism Spectrum Disorder to get to know as much as possible about the child. Before enrollment encourage the family to come with their child to visit your classroom before the first day of school. One way to help a child learn more about the new class room is to take the child on a class room hunt.

The Indian Special Schools and also the Inclusive school generally have a family information form, but you will need to find out much more about the child than is typically included on such forms. Here are some questions to ask the family before a child with ASD arrives at the programme.

- Does the child have a favorite activity or song?
- How does the child communicate with others.
- What do you see in the child strong or weak?
- What do you consider the child to become upset or frustrated?
- What might cause the child to become upset or frustrated?
- What are the child's particular interest? Does the child have an object that is attached to the child?
- How much experience has the child interacting with other children.
- What is the child's daily routine?

6. Ways utilized to setup the daily routine for a child on the Autism Spectrum Disorder:

Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder are less frustrated when they can follow predictable and organized routines. When setting up a daily routine for a child with autism, it is important for the child to understand, what is expected from the child by the teacher and others in the school.

It has been noticed and documented that how the day begins often determines how the child will behave during the rest of the day. If there is any variation in the scheduled they are less adaptive to the particular environment.

In our special school we start the day with Morning Greeting. To establish a morning routine that starts the day on a positive note

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- 1) We often bend down to eye level and use a picture schedule to make the child understand and become comfortable with activity.

This we have tried with Rekha, Ananand and Piyush (names changed for confidentiality reasons) they improved a lot with a regular performance of 6 months.

- 2) Second approach we try with children is that we guide the child to the centerpoint if the child does not go on his own.

- 3) Once the child starts responding to above activities then we select two or more center choices and expect him to choose where he wants to go, we will likely stand still or hide our selves. This activity has also helped one of our child Rupek (name changed) to improve a lot.

Teachers of our school state that is most important to :

1) Stay focused on your primary objective which is to start each day with a calm and predictable sequence. 2) Keep in mind, regardless of your morning routine, that consistency will make the child with autism feel more secure.

Conclusion:

I conclude with that as often said, "Autism isn't a shell that a person is trapped inside". Autism is way of being. All the children with Autism Spectrum Disorder are no exception. We can help to come out of their "shell" or the way of living they only know to use and learn to behave/ reach out as the majority of the children do. (the so called normal child.). It can be possible for you to do that in your class room as well. For be able to do this, we need to follow a structured and a predictable routine without any gap. The environment around the child with Autistism should be calm and not distracting. Every now and then verbal reminders to be given to the child to help in remaining focused to the task and also ask their parents to do practice these things at home too. We should take utmost care of the child, keep them away from intense light and loud noise. Allow them to take proper rest, keep them away from crowd and always our behavior towards them should be appropriate. We should never be harsh instead we should talk softly and give them love and affection. Consistence behavioural practices in the classroom as well as at home can surely bring improvements in the child with Autism and they behaviors may move towards normalization. The basic characteristics will remain, but can learn to deal with society effectively and be able to communicate their needs and more.

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