



Happy Summer Holidays!

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Here comes the end of another school year! This time of the year usually feels quite nice and is filled with celebrations, but it can also be a pretty challenging time for learners who struggle with transitions and changes. During the next weeks, classrooms daily schedules may change to fit in special events and students will have to empty their desks and lockers to clean the space that other students will take next September. For some individuals, it may be difficult to accept a change in their regular schedule just because a picnic is happening outside instead of a regular lunch at the cafeteria. They might feel nervous throughout the whole morning while others feel so excited.

Here are some tips to help you adapt the environment or offer extra help to your students so that these last weeks at school are positive moments that every child will remember:

Note: This document does not constitute clinical advice, but rather serves as an example of an effective practice for a student with ASD. Intervention plans should be based upon assessment, and evidence-based teaching strategies should be carefully selected according to the child's needs, and learning profile.

Visual Boundaries

For this type of visual support, we use furniture, colours and the whole room setting so that what happens and where it happens seem obvious. For example, in the case of learners who would participate to some unusual outdoor activities with several other groups, using visual boundaries may help learners to understand where they should go or stand.

Visual Schedule

Visual schedules are common supports used in classrooms and they can be even more useful on days with special activities. Teachers can go over the day schedule at the beginning of the day and can go back to it as many times as needed to prepare their group for activities to come. The full day's schedule may be overwhelming for some students. The teacher could therefore use two images only, one for the ongoing activity and one for the following activity. You could for instance use "first" and "then" flashcards to illustrate that one activity must be completed before the other can begin.

Visuals Cues

You can use visual cues such as objects, photos, drawings or words which will be some sort of reminders for learners. Teachers could for example prepare an image with a student taking deep breaths to remind this strategy to a learner as they are in the community for an outing.

Social Stories

Social stories can help learners get ready for a new situation or any situation that could cause anxiety. They could even help understand the cause-and-effect relationship between a specific behaviour and its consequences. Social stories are individualized for each learner and include clear instructions to guide learners and help them feel safe. A learner might be very excited to see his parents at school for the end-of-year BBQ. A short social story may help him/her remember the appropriate behaviours expected during parents' visit.

Visual Timers

Timers can help learners give meaning to the duration of a specific activity. They help learners anticipate the end of an activity and the transition to the next one. You could use a timer to show learners how much time is left for a math activity after which there will be a gym activity for which they have been waiting.

Adapt the Environment to Sensory Differences

Some individuals can be sensitive to specific sensory stimulus. For example, it can be very difficult for some learners to deal with a noisy environment. This means that an end-of-year activity at the gym might be very unpleasant for them. The last days of school when students are supposed to be cleaning their desks or lockers may also be difficult for a learner who is sensitive to visual distractions. It could be hard for this learner to function in an environment that is more disorganized than usual. Teachers can prepare bins or boxes to help learners put their materials in the right places and keep as much order as possible in the classroom.

No matter the strategy you use, what is important is to take into consideration the challenges some learners may face during transitions and routine changes throughout the last weeks of school. Some interventions may help several learners while other interventions will have to be adapted according to specific individual needs. Just a little bit of extra support may help everyone, staff and learners, to have a fun end of the school year. Enjoy your summer holidays everyone!

Information from the course: ASD and Behavioural Interventions – Module 7

About Us

Autism Learning Partnership (ALP), a branch of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (EECD) in New Brunswick (Canada), is the sole provider of the Provincial Autism Training curriculum for preschool autism agencies and educational personnel in New Brunswick. The Autism Learning Partnership provides bilingual, evidence-based, high-quality professional learning and resources to support families, preschool agency personnel and educational personnel in the province, and has a mandate to establish partnerships with organizations nationally and internationally.