

SENIA Brasil

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April is Autism Awareness Month

Autism affects individuals uniquely, with diverse strengths and challenges. According to the World Health Organization, approximately 1 in 100 children has autism spectrum disorder (ASD), prompting the declaration of April as Autism Awareness Month or Autism Acceptance Month.

When discussing autism, there's often debate over whether to use identity-first language or person-first language. Identity-first supporters argue that autism is an inherent part of a person's identity, while person-first supporters emphasize the individuality and humanity of the person.

Clinically, the term ASD has replaced three previous subtypes: Autistic Disorder, Asperger Disorder, and Pervasive Developmental Disorder Not Otherwise Specified (PDD-NOS). However, these terms are still sometimes used outside of clinical settings.

According to the American Psychiatric Association, the diagnostic criteria for ASD encompass deficits in social-emotional reciprocity, non-verbal communication, and relationship development. Additionally, individuals must exhibit at least two of four specific symptoms: repetitive speech or movements, rigid adherence to routines, intense fixation on narrow interests, and heightened or diminished reactivity to sensory stimuli.

Despite these diagnostic distinctions, autistic individuals exhibit a wide range of abilities and support needs. Embracing neurodiversity means celebrating their unique perspectives and contributions, fostering a more inclusive and supportive community for everyone.

A Family's Journey after Diagnosis

Navigating the delicate journey following a child's diagnosis is an intricate process that families face with resilience and hope. This period, often unexpected, marks the beginning of a nuanced path filled with a spectrum of emotions, from confusion and grief to acceptance and understanding. It's a transformative experience that reshapes family dynamics, priorities, and expectations for the future.

Receiving a diagnosis can feel like a solitary journey, yet it's a shared experience among many families worldwide. It challenges the very foundations of parental hopes and dreams, compelling a reevaluation of what success and happiness mean for their child. This process isn't linear; it ebbs and flows through stages of denial, bargaining, anger, and finally, acceptance. Each family's path is unique, influenced by cultural, societal, and personal beliefs about disability and difference.

The role of schools and educators, in this context, becomes pivotal. They are not just institutions for academic learning but vital support systems that can either uplift or further challenge these families. Creating an inclusive educational environment where every child is seen, understood, and nurtured according to their individual needs is not just beneficial but essential. It's about more than accessibility and accommodations; it's about fostering a culture of empathy, respect, and genuine inclusion.

Empathy from educators and peers can make a significant difference in the lives of these children and their families. It's about recognizing the strength it takes for parents to advocate tirelessly for their child, to adapt to new realities, and to celebrate every milestone, no matter how small it may seem. Educators and schools that strive to understand and accommodate the emotional and educational needs of these families become invaluable partners in a journey that is both challenging and rewarding.

Inclusion, therefore, is not merely an educational policy or strategy but a commitment to understanding, respecting, and valuing the diversity of experiences among all families. It's about creating a community where every child has the opportunity to thrive, and every family feels supported and acknowledged in their journey. Through understanding and empathy, schools can transform the educational experience for these families, making it a journey of growth, discovery, and shared humanity.

Accommodations for Students with Autism taken from Songbird (2023) Reviewed by: Hannah Andreasen M.Ed BCBA on August 9, 2022.

Keep distractions to a minimum with:

- earplugs;
- low distraction work areas
- optimized seating
- sensory tools

Use many visual cues with calendars:

- to show what is happening next; reduces anxiety
- daily calendar—these can include pictures of classes and activities in each class
- weekly calendar
- monthly calendars to show what is happening next.

Take breaks:

- go for a walk
- exercise breaks
- a sensory break in a sensory room

In a sensory room there should be:

- dim lights
- a simple visual palette
- be soft and comforting.

Model appropriate behavior and language:

- have a buddy to practice appropriate behavior scenarios

-use positive instructions ie: "Please, sit down."

Determine which learning style best suits the child: visual, auditory or tactile and incorporate this into the teaching and learning.

Visual learners benefit most from: written media; videos; pictures

Auditory learners benefit most from: recordings of written material; conversations; role-playing

Tactile learners benefit most from: projects; games; building; experiments

Use assistive technology (AT): low; mid and high

Low assistive technology (AT): stress balls; weighted vests; picture boards

Mid assistive technology (AT): sensory toys; videos; visual timers

High assistive technology (AT): robots; communication technology for non-verbal people; electronic aids to daily living.

Classroom Aides: these folks can support the student by practicing social skills; transitioning between locations; staying on task; encouraging group play; reducing challenging behavior; completing tasks of daily living.

ASD - IEP and the Brazilian regulations

The Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) is a document that describes all the strategies and resources mobilized by the school to promote learning equity. With regard to individuals with ASD, the IEP should be written to implement evidence-based practices. Its formal structure must contain: a) student identification; b) student evaluation using a scientifically validated protocol; c) student's educational programs accompanied by record sheets; d) the school's conduct protocol regarding the student; e) support guidelines for adapting activities and assessments; and f) the necessary resources for its implementation.

When a student with ASD first enrolls, the IEP must be developed within a maximum of 30 days after the start of classes. In case of continuity in the same school, it is recommended that it be developed at the end of the previous year, after the period of final assessments, for implementation from the beginning of the following year.

The development of the IEP should consider the student's skills, potentials, and needs to provide greater chances of success and effectiveness in the strategies and resources. The IEP should be dynamic, flexible, and accessible, considering the conditions and stage of student's development.

In addition to the IEP, Brazilian law provides for the creation of the Specialized Educational Assistance Plan (PAEE). Below is a table to help distinguish between the two documents:

References:

Law No. 13,146/2015, Article 28, item VII.

National Education Council (CNE) Resolution No. 4/2009.

Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Article 24, annexed to Decree No. 6,949/2009.

General Comment No. 4 of 2016, prepared by the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities of the United Nations (UN).

Law No. 13,146/2015, Articles 28, V, and VII.

Decree No. 7,611/2011, Article 1, VI.

Virtual PUB PD May 14 20:00 - 21:00

Neurodiversity: An Approach to Teaching Atypical Students with the Use of the Theory of Multiple Intelligences

This month we are honored to have Isabela Cota present our Pub PD. Isabela is currently a third grade teacher at the American School of Belo Horizonte. In addition to her degree in education, she holds post-graduate degrees in bilingual education, neuroscience, and neuropsychopedagogy. We look forward to a great discussion around this topic.

<https://eabh-br.zoom.us/j/98704137807?pwd=UHNBVXUzeCtmZWl3NDRFdmdqUDDqUT09>



LEGAL TERMS



Nomenclature	Plan for Specialized Educational Assistance - PAEE	Individualized Educational Plan - IEP
Target Audience	Special Education target audience, including students with Autism Spectrum Disorder	Special Education target audience, including students with Autism Spectrum Disorder
Components	As provided in Article 10 of Resolution No. 4/2009 of the National Education Council/Ministry of Education (CNE/MEC): a) identification of educational needs; b) definition of necessary resources; c) activities to be developed. It is also suggested: Identification data General objectives Specific objectives such as: a) Location; b) Frequency; c) Participants involved in the service; d) Activities to be developed; e) Materials; f) Interface with the AEE teacher; g) Analysis of partnerships; and h) Process evaluation and registration.	a) Student identification; b) Student evaluation with a scientifically validated protocol; c) Student's educational programs, accompanied by record sheets; d) School conduct protocol regarding the student; e) Support guidelines for adapting activities and assessments; and f) Necessary resources for its implementation.
Responsible for Elaboration	Specialized Educational Assistance Teacher in collaborative work involving AEE Teacher, Regular Classroom Teacher, Specialized Companion, Multidisciplinary Team, family, and student with autism spectrum disorder.	Collaborative work involving AEE Teacher, Regular Classroom Teacher, Specialized Companion, Multidisciplinary Team, family, and student with autism spectrum disorder.
Implementation Location	Within multifunctional resource rooms or in Specialized Educational Assistance centers of the public network, or of community, religious, or non-profit philanthropic institutions.	Throughout the school space, being able to assist activities at home for caregivers.
Legal Basis	- Article 28, item VII, of Law No. 13,146/2015; - Resolution No. 4/2009 of the CNE.	- Article 24 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, annexed to Decree No. 6,949/2009 - General comment No. 4 of 2016, prepared by the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities of the United Nations - UN. - Article 28, V, and VII, of Law No. 13,146/2015. - Article 1, VI, of Decree No. 7,611/2011.



The Power of Routines: A Case Study

Given the growing body of evidence showing the importance and effectiveness of inclusive education, it was shocking to hear an educator argue in favour of a remedial classroom for some of our students. One such student was Samuel (not his real name), a young boy with autism. It was “in his best interest,” it was argued, “as he is obviously lost in the general education classroom.” It was unfair on both him and the other students to have him in the gen ed classroom. The message was clear: Lower your expectations.

What brought these comments about? A 10–15-minute observation session of one class.

It was surprising to hear a fellow special educator speak about lower expectations for this student; more so, that she had met him once. This brief snapshot was viewed as his entirety, ignoring completely the journey the student had been on to this point, and what still lay in his future. It is something that occurs all too often with people with autism: It is easy to see what they can't do, without taking the time to see what they can do.

Unfortunately, this colleague is not alone when speaking about Samuel. Before arriving at our school, I was sent a package about Samuel with his strengths and limitations. His strengths included an ability to listen, follow instructions, and keep a good routine. While Samuel's previous school's message resembled that of my colleague—lower expectations—they were absolutely right when it came to routines.

Whereas his previous schools had only looked at Samuel from a deficit point of view, arriving with us partnered him with a team that only cared about his strengths. Visual schedules were printed and left in places Samuel could see readily; breaks were implemented, which both acted as a time to calm down and a positive reward; surprises were avoided as much as possible—schedule changes were introduced a week prior to prepare; noise-cancelling headphones were utilised; but, most importantly, expectations were raised.

It would be easy here to discuss the effect this had on the student's academic performance, how he grew more than two grade levels in less than a year, how Samuel now does grade-level maths summative assessments and can write a five-paragraph essay. But, to me, that's not the real story. To me, the more interesting story is the young man who has blossomed. He is funny, interesting, kind, inquisitive. In other words, he is a middle school boy. Samuel is now an integral member of the community. Other students love his different way of thinking that can add often unique insight into a situation. He also makes a valuable study partner when it comes to the solar system—did you know the rings of Uranus are actually fading?

That to me is the story. Yes, people with autism are different; because everyone is different. There is no person with autism. Each individual is just that: an individual. Samuel's story is not unique, however. Students do well if they can, and for a student with autism, a strong routine is vital to do well. Another student with autism is one of the best writers I have come across. This was a hidden talent for too long as they could never get anything done by the due date. Again, support was put in place and now they are acknowledged for their often-striking critique of the mundane. Autism is not something to be feared or hidden away in a remedial classroom. Some students with autism may need extra support and environmental accommodations to access materials the way other students seem to do more easily. Take the time, however. You might just be pleasantly surprised at what you find.



We Are All Neurodiverse

The wheel above represents some traits that we sometimes see in students with autism. These are traits that we all share to some extent. Use the wheel above to explore your own unique profile and compare yourself to the diverse learners around you.

Keep in Touch!

seniabrazil@seniainternational.org

