The Road Towards Independence: Living and Working with Autism

Presented by:
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TLC – The Treatment and Learning Centers

- The Treatment and Learning Centers is a private, non-profit organization founded in 1950 in Rockville, MD
- We serve nearly 2,000 people yearly with a wide range of special needs.
- Our mission is to improve the lives and expand possibilities for individuals with disabilities through offering a family of services within one organization.
TLC – Our Programs

- The Katherine Thomas School
- Speech Therapy
- Occupational Therapy
- The Family Hearing Center
- Psycho-educational Evaluations
- Tutoring and Coaching
- Summer Programs
- The Outcomes Service
Helping adults with disabilities live independently and find and keep jobs through supported employment.

Services

- Vocational Assessment & Career Discovery
- Supported Employment (SE)
- Community Learning Service (CLS)
- Personal Support (PS)
- Transitioning Youth (TY)
- Transitional Advocacy (TA)
The Outcomes Service - Funding

- Funding is received through the
  - Maryland Developmental Disabilities Administration (DDA)
  - Maryland Division of Rehabilitation Services (DORS)
  - Private fee for services
Statistics on Autism

- 1 in 68 American children with autism, by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).
- A new government survey of parents suggests that 1 in 45 children, ages 3 through 17
- In the State of Maryland: 1 in 60 children.
  - Boys 1 in 37. Girls 1 in 179 girls were identified with ASD
- The 1 in 150 children counted in the first 2007 CDC prevalence report are now adults.
“If you’ve met one person with autism, you’ve met one person with autism,”  By Dr. Stephen Shore
Every individual on the autism spectrum is different, and as a result, the skills taught to develop independence, as well as the pace at which they are taught, will vary significantly across the spectrum.
What does “independence” mean for you in regards to the individual?
What expectations do you want to set?
What areas require growth in independence?
What practical strategies can you use?
Barriers to Independence

- Generalizing is difficult for many people with cognitive disabilities.
- Executive function challenges – a struggle with sequencing, planning, predicting, and focusing attention
- Motivation can be a problem. Rewards can help.
The goal is to increase independence not perfection
Start young and keep going
Setting High Expectations

- Expect that the individual will do things, for him/herself even if it is quicker and easier to do it yourself.
- Expect chores to be done
- Expect self care tasks will be done
- Expect good manners
- Expect increased independence and social appropriateness over time.
Sure, you can do it better and faster than me, but that won’t help me learn to do it for myself.

Patience, practice. More patience, practice.

"Ten Things Your Student with Autism Wishes You Knew"

Photo: Glenda Powers/dollarphotoclub.com
Developing Independence
Eleven areas to work on ...

- Communication Skills
- Social Skills & Behaviors
- Personal-Care Skills
- Safety Skills
- Home-Care Skills
- Meal Preparation Skills
- Money Skills & Shopping
- Leisure & Recreation
- Community Integration & Travel Training
- Employment Skills
- Self Advocacy
Building Independence

Strategies for facilitating independence for people on the Autism Spectrum.

- Promote independence over accuracy
  - Avoid prompt dependency, Fade out prompting
- Teach Self Management
  - Behavior, Personal-Care
- Provide Structure & Consistency
  - Environment, Routines, Time
- Use Visual Supports
Visual Supports – The Benefits

- Presenting information in a visual way can help support communication and the ability to process information.
- It can promote independence, build confidence and raise self-esteem.
- Visual support is beneficial regardless of age or skill ability.
- It’s an opportunity to communicate without complications.
Visual Thinking

- “I think in pictures. Words are like a second language to me...when somebody speaks to me, his words are instantly translated into pictures... One of the most profound mysteries of autism has been the remarkable ability of most autistic people to excel at visual spatial skills while performing so poorly at verbal skills.” (Grandin, 1995. p19)
Thinking in Pictures

- share
- question
- argue
- develop
- enjoy
- invent
- grow
- know
- create
- sort
VISUAL THINKING MATTERS.

ONE PLUS ONE EQUALS TWO.

\[ 1 + 1 = 2 \]
Teaching with Pictures

- Dress the part
- Plan Your Route
- Prepare some questions
- Breathing / control nerves
- Get there early
- Rehearse your answers
- Eat / Hydrate
- Know who to ask for
- Research the job
- Practice your lucid stories
More Teaching with Pictures

Laundry

Washing Machine
1. Put dirty clothes in machine.
2. Add 4 scoops detergent.
3. Move dial to 12 minutes.
4. Pull dial to start.

Dryer
1. Put in wet clothes.
2. Empty lint screen.
3. Turn dial to 55 minutes.
4. Press start.
Areas Visual Support Can Help

- Schedules and time management
- Transition and change – Now, Next, Upcoming
- Behavior
- Starting and finishing activities
- Sequential instructions and reminders
- Choice
- Social skills
- Safety
- Structuring the environment
- Increase independent living skills
Structured Work Systems
Visual Supports @ Work
## Visual Supports Anywhere

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Tuesday</th>
<th>Wednesday</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7:00 - 8:45</td>
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<tr>
<td>8:45 - 9:45</td>
<td>reading</td>
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<tr>
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Schedules

- Look in throat
  Say “Ahh”
- Listen to heart
- Listen to back

DONE

Wednesday
- Play
- Work
- Snack
- Outside
- Work
- Work
- Lunch
- Bathroom, brush teeth
- Wash the table
- Work
- Go Home
Visual Supports @ Home

Line Drawings

- Put on pajamas
- Go to the bathroom
- Wash face & hands
- Brush teeth
- Get a drink
- Read a book
- Go to bed

Checklist

- Time for bed
  - Put on pajamas
  - Use the bathroom
  - Wash hands
  - Brush teeth
  - Get a drink
  - Read a book
  - Get in bed and go to sleep
Hierarchy of Visual Supports
Highest - Lowest

- Written phrase or sentence
- Written word
- Black and white line drawing
- Colored drawing
- Photograph
- Object
- Physical gesture
Assistive Technology
National Trends in Disability Employment

<table>
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<th>National Trends In Disability Employment: Comparison of People With and Without Disabilities (March 2015 and March 2016)</th>
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<td><strong>Labor Force Participation Rate</strong></td>
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<td>% change ↓ 0.3</td>
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Source: Kessler Foundation/University of New Hampshire Institute on Disability

*PWD – People with disabilities; PWOD – People without disabilities*
Employment Preferences

- Interest Inventory
- Skills & Abilities
- Stamina
- Work environment
- Location of employment
- Transportation
Employment Options

- Customized Employment
  - Montgomery County Public Intern Position
  - Project Search

- Competitive Employment
  - Schedule A Letter
  - Disclosure?

- Creative Employment
  - Self Employment
  - Family owned business (bookstore)
Steps to securing and maintaining employment

- Networking
- Resume
- Interviewing
- Landing the job
- Maintaining the job
Networking

- Who do I know that can assist in finding meaningful employment?
  - Family
  - Friends
  - Acquaintances
  - Companies that publicly promote hiring individuals with disabilities
Resume building

• Skills based resume
• Experience based resume
• Visual resume
• Portfolio
• Letters of recommendations
• References
Interviewing

- Visual resume/portfolio
- Research employer
- First Impressions
- Scripting
- Be prepared for working interview
- Get contact information
- Always send a Thank You!
Landing the Job

- Timeline
- Training staff/coworkers
- Preparing for staff support
- Accommodations in the workplace
Maintaining the job

- Natural job supports
  - Supportive coworkers

- Outside job supports
  - Job coaching
    - Job Coaching Procedures
    - Tools/ checklists
  - Behavioral supports
    - Monitoring/communication
  - Phase out
  - Self Advocacy
Video

Walgreens welcomes disabled workers