



## **Living, Learning, Linking: The 3LPlace Transition Curriculum**

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## PROLOGUE

The shift from adolescence to young adulthood represents one of the most critical evolutionary phases of life. We sift through and draw upon our accumulated experiences, we solidify our ethics and belief systems, and we envision the life we wish to lead. It is a pivotal time of identity formation and self-discovery that we expect will lead us to the clarity of vision and surge of internal motivation we need to embark on the next leg of our journey. We take inventory of the tools for life we have gathered, identify the ones we need moving forward, look to others for guidance, and surge ahead with a mix of capability, naiveté, and optimism. We actively seek intimacy and more meaningful relationships. We expect that as we grow our options will expand, the world will rise to greet us, and the possibilities will be endless.

For young adults with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) or other developmental disabilities the transition to adulthood is just as critical, but it is significantly more challenging. Their disorder is characterized by challenges in communication and social interactions, restricted interests and activities, and difficulty in engaging in symbolic thinking. Instead of taking successful steps forward along a healthy developmental path in early childhood, most individuals with ASD accumulate stresses and traumas that overshadow the positive experiences from which they have to draw and a lack of experience narrows their menus of possible choices. Their ability to generate, conceptualize, internalize, and apply their own ethics and beliefs can be compromised by inefficient processing systems: biological, sensory, and emotional systems that derail and distress them and a motor system that prevents them from following through on intent in meaningful ways.

We believe that individuals with ASD and other developmental disabilities, when provided appropriate tools and supports, can lead productive, connected, and meaningful adult lives. Individuals with ASD and other developmental disabilities have enormous potential that is consistently under recognized and cultivated. They have much to share with their families and friends, and contribute to their communities and the rest of the world.

This is what the Transition Curriculum is about: Recognizing the potential within each individual, providing rich and rewarding experiences, and strengthening an individual's capacity to learn and make meaning of the world. With the right tools, well-designed supports and guidance, and the proper environment to develop their passions, these young adults with ASD and other developmental disabilities *can* envision a fulfilling and successful future like their typically developing peers. And they *can* lead meaningful lives.

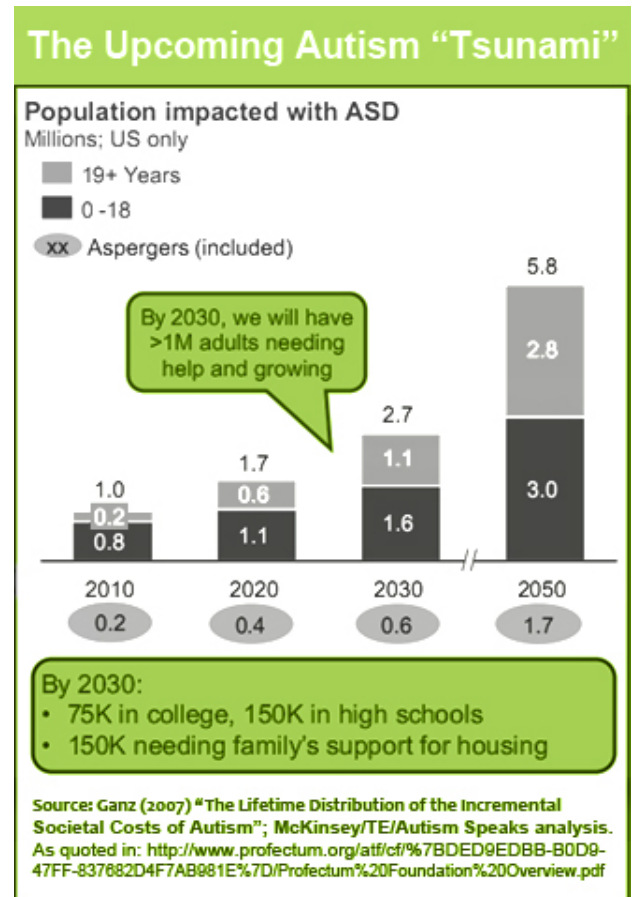
## Growth Rate of Population in Special Education

The extraordinary increase in the number of children with autism passing through the U.S. educational system has been frequently characterized as a tsunami, and for very good reason.

In Massachusetts between 2002 and 2007, the number of students with autism who participated in special education programs in the Massachusetts public schools *more than doubled*, from 4,080 to 8,699 (Budney and Warfield, 2009).

In California between 2002 to 2010, the number of students with autism who participated in special education programs in the California public schools *more than tripled*, from 17,508 to 59,690 (Lucile Packard Foundation for Children’s Health, 2011).

Nationally, nearly one million children diagnosed with ASD will be transitioning into adulthood in the next decade. Although the statistics are difficult to find, it is clear enough that the number of young adults with autism between the ages of 18 and 21 enrolled in special education programs is also beginning to surge.



## Current Situation in Transition Education

Beginning at age 16, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA 2004) requires the development of a transition plan for individuals with ASD. The goal of the transition plan is to facilitate an individual moving from school to adult living and includes continuing education, work, housing, and community participation. This is both an official process and one of personal discovery. The transition plan is an integral part of the Individualized Education Program (IEP) and carries the same legal authority.

Recent research published in *Pediatrics* indicates that in the first two years after high school more than 50% of those individuals with ASD did not work or attend school, 79% lived with their parents, 60% received some type of supplemental services (such as speech therapy, mental health counseling, and case management), and nearly 40% received no services whatsoever (Shattuck, 2012, pp. 1042-1049).

One of the most urgent matters facing families today is finding suitable transition programs for individuals with ASD and other developmental disabilities once they reach adulthood and having options for lifelong housing, recreation, and employment. The availability of these services is exceedingly limited, and more constrained today given current government budget shortfalls. Without well-designed transition

programming and appropriate supports over the lifespan, these individuals have limited prospects for living fulfilling, meaningful lives.

Currently there are very few entities in existence that offer integrated continuing education and independent living support for these maturing children. Some social service agencies do provide services, but the services they provide, such as day services, residential services, transportation services, and vocational services, are rarely presented in an integrated fashion. Also, these social service agencies are primarily funded by state and federal dollars, which are limited, and priority is given to those individuals who are the most challenged and in need. These services often focus on remediating skill deficits and maximizing functionality. In too many cases, they are oriented towards placing individuals in small group homes and employment opportunities that are segregated from the larger world and feature simple jobs with repetitive tasks. Very few are oriented to explore the individual's strengths, interests, aspirations, and potentials for living and working as a member of the general society.

### The Curriculum Gap

At present, there are no comprehensive, integrated curricula in existence to support individuals with ASD who are transitioning to adulthood.

What is currently available focuses on job and life skills but uniformly omits teaching students how to explore their own interests, form lasting and meaningful relationships, build reflective skills and coping strategies, and contribute to their community. These are critical skills for individuals with ASD to learn so they can maintain a functional level of independence and appropriate interdependence.

Another omitted factor is the matter of student preferences and goals. A student with an IEP might have additional transition goals outlined, but schools often look to parents to address them through specialists and supplemented activities

**The term “transition services,” according to IDEA publications, means a coordinated set of activities for a child with a disability that:**

- Is designed to be within a results-oriented process, that is focused on improving the academic and functional achievement of the child with a disability to facilitate the child's movement from school to post-school activities, including postsecondary education, vocational education, integrated employment (including supported employment); continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation;
- Is based on the individual child's needs, taking into account the child's strengths, preferences, and interests; and
- Includes instruction, related services, community experiences, the development of employment and other post-school adult living objectives, and, if appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills and functional vocational evaluation.

*(U.S. Department of Education, 2007, p. 1)*

because they lack the curriculum needed. Teachers may lack the training to address this educational challenge. Too often young adults with special needs in transition are guided to make choices that society deems realistic; an approach that is likely to marginalize rather than capitalize on their passions, interests, and potentiality.

By filling in these missing pieces, we will better comply with the letter and spirit of federal IDEA regulations, truly providing young adults with ASD and other developmental disabilities an education that "... meets their unique needs and prepares them for further education, employment and independent living." [34 CFR 300.1(a)] [20 U.S.C. 1400(d)(1)(A)]

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## Section 1.0

# INTRODUCTION

This Transition Curriculum represents a first step in changing the paradigm of how transition from adolescence to adulthood is approached in education and society for individuals with ASD and other developmental disabilities. This is the collaborative work of a multi-disciplinary team of committed educators, researchers, clinicians, and therapists who have expertise working with individuals with ASD and related disorders. It is an evolving work designed to close the “curriculum gap” described in the prologue. We are following a rigorous development and review process to create this comprehensive work, incorporating continuous feedback, data, and results learned from pilot projects, and new material from users, collaborators, and stakeholders. Through this process, we will shape it into an easy-to-use, best practices curriculum.

We feel it is *absolutely essential* to rise to this challenge. To that end, we offer this work as our first contribution.

### 1.01 Integrating Many Disciplines

In recent years, individuals with ASD and other developmental disabilities have had a wide assortment of different therapeutic approaches and instructional milieus from which to choose (e.g., ABA, TEACCH, Verbal Behavior, Pivotal Response Training, Positive Behavior Support, PECS, Floortime/DIR, SCERTS, RDI, Enhanced Milieu Teaching, Hanen – More Than Words, Son-Rise Program, etc.).

No matter what an individual’s therapeutic or educational background has been, this Transition Curriculum can work for any individual with ASD or other developmental disabilities. This curriculum offers the kinds of elements that must be taken into consideration if we want individuals to move into adulthood and lead successful, fulfilling, and meaningful lives.

To achieve the curriculum’s goals and objectives, we have drawn from a variety of educational and therapeutic disciplines. Each adds its own depth, quality, and breadth to transitional support. When woven together they create a comprehensive web of approaches capable of meeting the complex transitional needs of young adults with ASD.

### 1.02 Transition Curriculum Goals

For transition programs to be effective, we must devise ways to comprehensively build individual strengths up from wherever they are developmentally and functionally so our students can

- Become more effective thinkers and problem-solvers who can operate within the context of typically-developing society, to the greatest extent possible;
- Achieve more healthy interdependence for better support, enjoyment, and personal growth; and
- Attain greater independence, to the extent possible, given their inherent challenges.

### 1.03 Transition Curriculum Objectives

The Transition Curriculum will enable clinicians, educators, and students to reach the following objectives:

- Make it possible for clinicians and educators to view every student through a holistic lens wide enough to acknowledge the full spectrum of an individual's developmental, physical, sensory, emotional, social, and cognitive needs.
- Provide a rich and rewarding educational experience that is intentional, explicit, and individualized so that the student's program experience results in measurable positive outcomes in all domains of their adult lives: career development, life skills, community involvement, social relationships, self-care, and recreational choices.
- Provide the support needed in the design, planning, implementation, and refinement of individual student goals.
- Incorporate humor, creativity, and joy throughout because these are the energizers and social connectors that enliven and deepen relationships and experiences.
- Make it easy for staff to individualize approaches and expectations concerning independence skills, goal setting and achievement, and the acquisition of knowledge based on individual strengths and challenges. In this way, ensure the student's lifelong selection of career, educational, recreational, therapeutic, and social opportunities are in alignment with his capabilities, goals, and desires.
- Enlist the power of a student's personal preferences and interests to increase internal motivation, infuse enthusiasm, increase social engagement, and design short- and long-term social, recreational, and career goals.
- Bridge transitional program work to applicable, meaningful, ongoing, supported community experiences.

- Strengthen the foundational capacities of regulation, engagement, reciprocity, and social problem solving that lead to increased resiliency, adaptability, self-care, effective communication, and social connection.
- Nurture the evolution of healthy social cognition and development through the accumulation of ongoing, connected, meaningful, and supportive experiences in one-on-one, group, and community settings.
- Emphasize and foster self-awareness as an integral part of equipping students with the best chance of finding their own unique, fulfilling way to participate in their lives, form lasting and meaningful relationships, and contribute to their communities. This person-centered approach (focusing on building self-esteem, close personal relationships and greater openness to experience) ensures the selection of the activities and experiences in their adult life are in alignment with who they are and who they are becoming.
- Allow students and their loved ones a chance to dream big and embrace optimism while still addressing the real world demands and challenges they face on a daily basis.

### 1.04 Who Does This Transition Curriculum Serve?

The curriculum is appropriate for a broad range of students on the autism spectrum or with other developmental disabilities. It takes into account a wide range of individual variability and can be customized to meet the needs of each student. There is much in this curriculum for every student, although all the components may not be needed or appropriate for every student. Use this content judiciously based on the individual profile of each student you are serving.

### 1.05 Who Can Use This Transition Curriculum?

The Transition Curriculum is designed to be used by teachers, administrators, and other special education professionals who are already working with individuals on the autism spectrum or with other developmental disabilities across a variety of educational and therapeutic milieus. The curriculum requires a skilled educator or clinician to implement.

In the public and private service sector, service agencies can draw from it to provide a wider range of transition and independence interventions and services. Medical, therapeutic, and social work professionals, as well as speech/language pathologists, occupational therapists, physical therapists, and other clinicians can draw upon it to supplement their interventions. Public schools and agencies that already have transition programs can utilize it to enhance and expand service offerings and orient staff. Private programs currently in development can incorporate the methodology and approaches into their curriculum design. Private practitioners, parents, homeschool instructors, mentors, and other professionals can use its content, activities, information, and multi-faceted approach in their work with those individuals who are eligible for transition services.

In public and private education sectors there will be applications for a well-conceived, well-executed transition curriculum. Schools, colleges, and universities can use it to meet the educational and social-emotional needs more comprehensively of individuals with ASD in both mainstream and inclusionary programs and classrooms. Educators in the fields of psychology and education could use it as a teaching tool and practicum guide for both graduate and undergraduate work.

### 1.06 Phase One

#### 1.06.1 Transition Guidance

With the completion of Phase One, we present what we believe to be the most essential teacher guidance, processes, tools, and approaches required for implementing a fully integrated transition program.

These materials include clear guidelines and a structured approach that allows teachers and other professionals to individualize content, use creativity, try innovative approaches, and establish relationships with their students.

The Phase One guidance release includes the following four sections:

**Core Teaching Principles.** Describes the six core teaching principles woven through the curriculum that focus on the process of how to learn.

**The Student's Individual Profile (SIP).** Provides an overview of essential information needed to individualize the transition program and explains how it can be collected over time.

**Intake and Individualizing the Transition Curriculum.** Guides users through the intake process and "Discovery Phase", which together allow staff to gather information from students and their families, gain insight through observation, and establish rapport. The Discovery Phase is a period of up to three months during which the student is under minimal stress, giving him time to adjust to the new environment and form new relationships, and give staff the time to gather more information so they can tailor the program to the student's needs.

**Teaching Approaches, Methods, Processes, Assessments, and Tools.** This section provides explicit processes and supports for individualizing the curriculum so students can identify their unique, fulfilling ways to participate in their lives, form lasting and meaningful relationships, and contribute to their communities. It is planned that the material provided in this section will be the subject of detailed user training in later phases of work.

1.06.2 Transition Curriculum

We are also releasing the first content module, which lays the foundation for all those that follow in subsequent phases.

**Awareness Development and Executive Functioning (ADEF)** module is designed to increase potential and capacity for individuals on the autism spectrum or with other developmental disabilities to improve self-awareness and open avenues of understanding and insight. By building reflective skills and coping strategies, the capacity for interdependence and independence in adulthood is greatly increased. By engaging in self-examination, students are exposed to opportunities that will expand self-awareness, identify personal needs, form opinions, receive feedback, practice communication skills, increase their ability to make meaningful connections, and engage in collaborative relationships.

In addition to improving self-awareness, heavy emphasis is placed on developing executive function skills in natural or real-life context; assuring students will experience consistent, ongoing practice strengthening fundamental life skills that determine quality and outcome of choices and actions.

### 1.07 Phase Two and Beyond

In phase two we will present eight more curriculum modules. These modules will be completed by September 2013 and published online as they become available. They will be released in the sequence most students should participate in and will cover:

**Social Awareness.** This module goes beyond what is learned in the ADEF module. Once *social awareness and understanding* are achieved, social skill development is begun on a well-established foundation. This assures social skills taught can become meaningful, flexible, and understood in context so individuals are able to manage the social experience they are having rather than reverting to a rote list of fixed social behaviors and scripted social communication. Executive function is incorporated into the module to build strategic thinking, problem-solving, self-monitoring, planning, and previewing as applied to the social context; prompting more effective social interactions and communication.

**Higher Order Thinking.** This module combines higher-order thinking skills (such as critical thinking and problem solving) with executive function to teach students how to use critical thinking in the real world. Students learn to coordinate clear reasoning with real-world action and in this way gain access to vast new areas of life opportunities.

**Understanding and Developing Self and Life Skills.** Includes nutrition and meal preparation, sleep, health and sexuality, money management, personal organization, personal geography, housekeeping, shopping, and use of technology.

**Understanding and Developing Relationships.** Includes self-care relationships (with health care professionals, therapists, and support staff), parental and sibling relationships (including aging, death, etc.), community relationships and community participation, friendships (creation and loss), romantic relationships, and employer relationships.

**Creative Expression.** This module seeks to develop the student’s passions and interests, in the form of spontaneous creativity and many other forms of artistic expression.

**Understanding and Participating in Community.** Includes orientation to the local community, services, and opportunities available; community service exploration; personal safety (e.g., avoiding victimization by others, dealing with emergencies); community collaboration; and using groups and committees as learning tools.

**Education and Career.** Includes career exploration, job readiness, job skill development, the use of technology as it applies to education and career, resume writing and interviewing, internships, job support, supportive employment, and workplace advocacy.

**Understanding and Participating in Society.** Includes human rights; justice and the law; developing a worldview (current events); social norms and social discussions; understanding structures and rules (governmental, educational, and medical systems; voting and civic responsibility).

We recognize that successful implementation of this Transition Guidance and Curriculum will require teacher training. With appropriate funding, we plan to release additional support materials and training in subsequent phases. However, before doing so we must first establish fidelity through several pilot programs and assess the efficacy of this curriculum taught by a wide range of teachers to a wide range of individuals with ASD or with other developmental disabilities



We welcome you to join us in this collaboration through our Wiki at [www.3LPlace.org](http://www.3LPlace.org) to provide ongoing feedback and to help this become “best practice” through application, assessment, and refinement by schools and other social service programs.

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## Section 2.0

### CORE TEACHING PRINCIPLES

There is an endless source of educational “content” available in the world around us. We are bombarded daily with things we can learn about ourselves and our environment: facts about an issue, procedures to accomplish tasks, information about how our minds and bodies work, and so on. So much of what we “know” in order to navigate the world successfully we have learned without really considering the process of learning.

However, content is just the tip of the iceberg. In order for an individual to master and fully integrate content – which leads to functioning independently and adaptively – she must have already mastered a large number of basic functional skills. She must be able to:

- Access her memory to recall the content when needed
- Mentally organize the information in proper order to make sense of the content
- Use the information in its proper context
- Discern when a piece of information doesn’t fit or needs to be adjusted

Students must be flexible with the organization and application of information. Ideally, they should be able to use information in a specific situation, as well as be able to generalize or draw larger conclusions about the world from a specific situation and gradually become adept at managing a wider range of situations.

Students who must approach every task as if it is unrelated to others will have a more limited capacity for mastery of new content. We benefit from having a meaningful place to “put” new information relative to the old information we have already stored. When summiting Everest, climbers use intermediate camps to organize and refuel. Our use of knowledge works similarly. We don’t climb the entire mountain every single time we learn something new. Instead, we use the intermediate camps along the way, where the trails are well-worn and familiar to us, so we can extend our reach into new territory.

Within the curriculum we define specific areas of functioning, from hygiene and transportation to social communication and banking. But more important than the content is the focus on the process of

“meaning-making.” For the staff teaching this curriculum, the essential questions they must ask themselves *for each student* are:

- How do I help her make sense of content within the context of her life?
- How do I apply what I have learned from the Student’s Individual Profile (SIP) to make content personally relevant to her?
- How can I help her to learn to make sensible decisions with or without all the necessary information?
- How can I create emotional experiences with the content so she will be an active, adaptive learner who becomes an independent seeker and user of knowledge?

**Understanding the *process of how to learn* is more important than the teaching of any particular content.**

### 2.01 Core Principle #1:

#### **Effective Learning Occurs When Learners are Calm and Regulated.**

A student should be in the best possible mental and physical condition; one in which she can pay attention, communicate, organize information, and function as independently as possible during the learning process. By helping her become more calm and regulated, she is better able to remain undistracted emotionally and physically.

*Regulation* refers to how a person’s response to her environment can be adjusted. For example, an individual prone to distraction and agitation may be calmed by being exposed to gentle background music. Or she might take steps to reduce her own agitation (*self-regulate*) by squeezing a stress ball or doodling in her notebook.

Regulation also works the other way around: sometimes a student needs to have her attention heightened by increasing stimulation. A teacher might get the entire class up out of their chairs and have them play a short social game involving physical contact and movement. Or in an effort to self-regulate, a student might raise her attention level simply by squirming in her chair.

Everyone has individual preferences. Some of us favor noise and movement; some of us don’t. Some of us like to be touched; some of us don’t. Some take in auditory information easily; some need visual support for better understanding.

The better we understand how an individual receives and processes information, and prefers to experience the world, the more easily we can create learning conditions tailored to her preferred style.

Equipped with this knowledge, we can adjust the individual's interaction with the environment in ways that help the student to be physically and emotionally calm but alert and ready to learn.

**Thoroughly understanding the student's regulatory needs and tailoring the learning environment and curriculum accordingly can result in greater student persistence in mastering complex subjects or tasks.**

## 2.02 Core Principle #2:

### **Communication is the Foundation for all Learning and Making Meaning of the World.**

Communication is the bridge between our own internal experience and the outside world. Through it, we expand our capacity exponentially for self-expression, connection, understanding, and shared experiences. Whether it comes in the form of a glance, a gesture, a word, or an art form, communication ignites relationships and provides us with a way to make meaning of our own thoughts and ideas.

In our complex society, the ability to communicate has become synonymous with the ability to succeed. Educational institutions firmly hold the expectation that students are to be skilled at receiving and originating communication. Oral and written expression has become the basis for assessment of a student's intelligence, and thus one's ability to communicate has become the measure of success in learning. The learning style movement that emerged in the 1970's ushered in more acknowledgement and acceptance of variability in individual communication styles, but supports for individuals who struggle with receptive and expressive communication still often remain narrowly focused on increasing their skills in the two traditional forms of communication – oral and written.

Due to individual differences in the language regions of the brain and in particular those with ASD and other developmental disabilities, the means of communication that prove most effective can vary greatly from person to person. To fully support struggling communicators we must encourage a wider range of avenues for expression, in addition to helping them acquire skills with traditional forms of communication.

In fact there are many forms of communication, all of which can entice engagement, deepen reciprocity, enhance learning, express emotional meaning, and offer endless pathways for connection to others:

- Non-verbal (touch, gestures, eye contact, pantomime, appearance, etc.)
- Internal (self-talk, thoughts, etc.)
- Verbal (spoken sounds or words and written language)
- Creative expression (art, photography, dance, etc.)
- Limbic resonance (non-verbal, shared emotional states)
- Assistive or facilitated technology

By expanding what we consider acceptable forms of communication for learning, social, and work environments we offer individuals with ASD far more opportunities to thrive, learn, and evolve.

A fact that can be very challenging for individuals with ASD and other developmental disabilities is that use of communication varies tremendously depending on context:

- Formal (authority, work, school, many community interactions. *Example: a job interview*)
- Informal (peers, conversation, many community interactions. *Example: asking for help in a store*)
- Spontaneous (chatting, initiating connection, navigating community interactions. *Example: a stranger asks you for directions*)
- Relational (communication used to build rapport and relationships with others. *Example: discussing common interests with a friend*)

These contextual differences can result in considerable difficulties in social situations as well as accomplishing simple tasks requiring interactions with others. For that reason, in addition to expanding and strengthening the student's use of various communication methods, it is also important to:

- Build an understanding of how personal expression and the exchange of ideas relates to interpersonal and social contexts
- Strengthen the ability to strategize and make choices about timing and approach when communicating
- Increase flexibility of expression

**! To be able to express our individuality as well as be contributive and successful in work and social groups, we must be able to initiate and sustain connections to others.**

### 2.03 Core Principle #3:

#### **Learning Occurs Most Easily When Topics are Approached Using the Student's Preferences and Interests.**

Educators rediscover time and again that learning most effectively supports personal growth when it aligns with or draws upon the student's own natural interests. Math can be a dull subject to the student who loves the theater ... until it is needed to figure out how much material is required to build the sets for her new play.

*Affinities* are beloved subjects and activities that have great meaning to the individual and are a pleasure to participate in. Entering curriculum content through an affinity can be highly motivating. They are magical doorways into a person's education. Conversely, unfamiliar topics or topics that hold little to no interest to the student can produce greater anxiety or boredom. An individual's ability to communicate, relate, and think is more constricted when she perceives the subject to be less relevant or less interesting.

Of course, as with any tool, learning by using just a person's interests or affinities can be misused. If unpleasant topics are avoided during a student's education, she may come to believe that the world should (and will) always accommodate and engage her. This can have devastating results, especially as she seeks employment or transitions into group living where the needs of others become as important as her own.

But even in that case, a skilled use of affinities can be a way to engage a student effectively. Even difficult topics become easier to learn when they are approached using pleasant associations. More than a few people who hated sports have picked up a baseball bat for the first time after watching a moving or heart-warming film of a child overcoming a terrible handicap disability because they wanted to play.

A college student will learn more effectively in classes of her own choosing, and will get more out of classes that relate to her chosen field. However, it is also true that she has to get through core requirements that may not be to her liking. It requires a great deal of internal focus and strength to persist in a course of study.

Though unquestionably challenging to achieve, students should be taught in the most personal and meaningful ways by using examples, metaphors, analogies, and strategies that speak to personal interests and experiences. Balanced against this, however, is the very real need to teach students how to deal with activities they feel are boring, or require considerable patience or compromise. They will need this knowledge and skill to continue functioning and move on when life refuses to meet them on their terms.

**For all of us, but especially for those whose challenges are relatively pervasive and profound, affinities-based learning is an excellent means to advance growth. Starting in a place where a learner feels most confident, calm, or passionate can build trust and excitement for the process of learning.**

#### 2.04 Core Principle #4:

##### **Meaningful Learning Arises More Easily from Emotionally-Based Experiences.**

If we think about the knowledge that has been most important to us and has shaped our lives or guided our thinking, chances are that knowledge was gained through emotional experience. As infants, we learn cause and effect through the emotional experience of crying, which in turn prompts a caregiver to offer warmth and caring. As adults, we learn more deeply about issues directly affected by them. For example, many of us have learned a great deal about a particular health condition when that condition affects someone for whom we care. In both cases, the learning lasts longer and is richer in meaning because the content was tied to a personal, emotional state of being.

Our emotions engage us in our lives, alerting us to danger and increasing our continued efforts towards joy. Emotions in the process of learning increase our attention and alertness, provide greater motivation and



drive, and offer opportunities for more robust exploration. Without an emotional connection to content, learning can become rote and tedious – “I have to...” instead of “I want to...”

In designing and implementing transition curriculum, we should make every effort to infuse educationally helpful emotions into the experience of learning. This can be accomplished by creating an environment open to affective experiences, where emotions are shown more demonstratively so that they become both a vehicle for, as well as a subject of, learning.

The emotions of a scary short story could be acted out and exaggerated to convey the plot more accurately. The following discussion could be about how the story elicits emotions in the reader.

Another way to create emotional experiences for learners is to present content in emotionally meaningful ways. Fractions can be presented by cutting a cake; budgeting can be taught using an example of a desired purchase.

Emotionally-based experiences can be created (or capitalized on in real time when they occur) in the dynamic of learning. Disagreements, negotiations, collaboration, and competition all create emotion that can strengthen learning.

**! No matter how it is accomplished, learning that engages the emotionality of the learner leads to greater understanding, perspective, and retention. It serves as the basis for higher-level thinking, social development, and self-sufficient learning.**

### 2.05 Core Principle #5:

#### **Effective Learning Happens in the Context of a Warm, Empathetic Relationship.**

When we think back upon our own education, many of us will remember vividly the positive influence a specific teacher had upon us. So much learning occurs in the context of trusting, warm, supportive relationships.

Individuals with challenges in relating and communicating are often seen to have “unsolvable” learning problems – difficulties with emotional regulation, behavioral control, information processing, comprehension, and so on. These challenges can be frequent and persistent, and very overwhelming for the individual and those trying to support her. The trusting, warm relationship is always a starting point and establishing that relationship is a major learning achievement in its own right and should not be undervalued. The capacity to engage and relate, to know another person, and to communicate reciprocally are all fundamental to higher-level thinking and problem-solving. Thus, the easier the flow between the teacher and student, the greater the value of the education for the learner, and the more growth occurs.

When all else fails, returning to this basic starting point is an effective strategy, because at its core, learning is a dynamic flow of information and emotion.

A student with underdeveloped communication skills may have an exceedingly difficult time during a class exercise on speaking with “new people.” She knows what she is supposed to be doing but there she sits, intimidated. You might go over to her, look her directly in the face with a warm smile and say; “Hilary, I know how incredibly difficult it is for you to even *think* about talking with others in this class. I do see how hard you are trying inside to just accept the idea of it. You should not be hard on yourself; I know you are really trying.”

**! This curriculum is built on the idea that all individuals want to learn, and their learning will be optimal within the context of a warm, trusting, supportive relationship.**

### 2.06 Core Principle #6:

#### Effective Teaching Encourages Students to Become Independent Seekers and Users of Knowledge

By using the foregoing Core Principles, a student should be well on her way to becoming more than a vessel for the receipt of information. Increased self-awareness and bolstered self-determination will likely motivate her to take charge of her own education.

To support this end, she will need to learn how to identify where she is lacking knowledge or skill so she can then seek it. She will need the ability to ask and get questions answered such as:

- How do I work?
- How do I take in and make meaning out of information?
- Why is this task easy for me?
- Why is this task hard for me?
- What don't I know about this subject?

The ability to pose these sorts of questions and the level of self-awareness required to do so are important foundational elements for any vocational or avocational exploration. Indeed, they are important elements for any healthy concept of oneself.

Self-determination appears as a thread in most transition programming as a way of saying, “we respect the individual’s right to choose”, and it is certainly hard to argue with this kind of assertion. However, just because an individual says she wants to do something, or doesn’t want to do something, doesn’t mean it is a wise course of action, nor one that we can necessarily support. But what is essential is respecting and supporting the student’s fundamental right to direct the course of her life and aiming for greater self-reliance.

No matter how much the parent, teacher, or employer might want a certain skill to be learned, without the student fully committed to the goal, learning just isn’t going to happen.

Throughout this curriculum, both implicitly and explicitly, including the individual in the decision-making process is evident for two reasons:

- Individual buy-in leads to better motivation, which leads to higher engagement, and engagement is one of the cornerstones of optimal thinking and problem solving.
- It's respectful.

Although it is true this curriculum is intended to support individuals who actually need support and don't always make good decisions independently, it is also true that, in the end, the goal is to support someone in choosing the direction of her own life to whatever extent possible.

**! An important part of the transition to adulthood is becoming a self-determined seeker of knowledge and skills.**

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**Note to the reader:** These Core Teaching Principles are discussed in greater detail and with an eye toward application in **Section 4.0 Intake and Individualizing the Curriculum**. Additional citations supporting the claims made in these principles will be found in that section as well.

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## 2.07 References

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## Section 3.0

# THE STUDENT'S INDIVIDUAL PROFILE

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### 3.01 Introduction

The Student's Individual Profile (also known as "the SIP") is a multi-purpose hard copy or electronic portfolio created during the individual's intake process and updated throughout the student's participation in the transition program. The SIP is a tool for individualizing the curriculum. The SIP allows you to record information about the student (challenges, achievements, and personal experiences), sample work, track ongoing changes, revise goals, and document strategies used or accommodations needed.

While the SIP is designed to store a vast amount of information, there is no requirement that all the data be acquired at once. We have purposely provided an exhaustive list of questions – *far more* than anyone could ask or answer at one time. The questions highlighted in Section 4.0 Intake and Individualizing the Transition Curriculum address information you should obtain during the intake process. The remaining information can be gathered over time.

Schools may want to limit the time required for parents to fill out forms to 45 minutes, and the total time required for intake interviews to 90 minutes. However, it is up to the school to develop its own intake guidelines and forms, as well as screening, interview, and acceptance processes.

#### Purposes and Uses of the SIP

- To assist the transition team ("transition team", "transition staff", "staff", or "teachers") in identifying patterns, trends, and progress
- To support the ongoing process of short-term and long-term goal setting
- To track a student's skill development and mastery
- To provide a big-picture view of the student's overall progress
- To assist in refining a student's daily program schedule, providing updates as needed, and addressing other concerns and needs as they arise
- To assist in assessing the student's readiness to take on new responsibilities
- To identify strategies or interventions that have worked in the past that may help resolve a current challenge
- To provide the student's transition team with clinical information as needed
- To identify challenges and needs that have emerged since initial planning
- To store information that might be reviewed by the student or transition staff for self-awareness, self-reflection, and goal-setting activities
- To inform and support long-range life planning such as continuing education, career development, living environment needs, health care, and financial support

The SIP is developed, maintained and utilized throughout the course of the transition program, first during the intake process, then during the discovery phase, and then for the balance of the program.

### 3.02 Information Gathering During Student Intake

During the student intake, the transition team seeks to collect the information listed below from the individual and family. The transition team may not be able to obtain all of this information for every student early on. We encourage transition teams to get what they can and move on, then try to collect the missing information over time. *See Section 4.0 Intake and Individualizing the Transition Curriculum for a detailed description.*

- A. Diagnoses and treatments
- B. Educational histories
- C. Most recent assessments, IEPs, and reports for OT, PT, speech/language, and other therapeutic interventions
- D. Family and caregiver profiles
- E. Student's connection to friends and the community
- F. Chronic challenge areas
- G. Self-regulation
- H. Social engagement and reciprocity
- I. Current level of functioning in meaningful roles and activities; independent living skills
- J. Significant behavioral issues and concerns
- K. Cognitive capability
- L. Communication abilities and supports
- M. Emotional style, issues, and concerns
- N. Sensory processing
- O. Visual-spatial and temporal-sequential processing
- P. Strengths and weaknesses
- Q. Initial family and student goals

### 3.03 Information Gathering During the Discovery Phase

Based upon transition team evaluations of the information gathered during the intake process, team members construct a preliminary daily schedule for students to begin their transition experience. Guidelines are detailed in the Intake section. This period – called the “Discovery Phase” – typically takes up to three months. In addition to allowing the student to adjust to the new environment, it provides students and transition staff with time to:

- Get to know the student's interests, preferences, personality, interactions, and learning styles
- Gather more information from parents and other members of the student's clinical team
- Gather important information by offering a wide range of experiences in which the individual can participate and be observed
- Establish an advisor relationship (*For more information about selecting an advisor see Section 5.0 Teaching Approaches, Methods, Processes, Assessments, and Tools*)
- Identify gaps of information about the individual not apparent during the intake or interview process
- Begin to tailor a schedule to fit the student's specific interests, strengths, needs, challenges, and goals
- Support the student through shared experience with peers and staff, providing a common thread for discussion and reflection
- Identify student strengths or challenges where consultation by outside experts may be warranted

During the Discovery Phase the SIP will grow in depth and breadth. All material entered into the SIP should be dated. If the SIP is maintained electronically, it is suggested there be an accompanying binder to hold additional hard copy information that will be valuable in developing student programs, internships, and career planning. Examples include:

- Work samples of significance (worksheets, student writing/dictation, etc.)
- Artwork of significance
- Concept maps and other teaching aids used with the student
- Internship or work feedback
- Incident reports
- Documentation of events (certificates, awards, tickets, or brochures relating to important outings that had significant effects)
- Student and staff insights, reflections, conclusions, and observations made as the student engages with staff and peers
- Other hard copy data not available in electronic form

If the SIP is contained in a binder, make sure there is room to add additional information as needed.



Transition team members meet as a team on a weekly basis during the Discovery Phase. These meetings are used to identify student difficulties and strengths, address any changes to schedules or student subgroupings, and to begin forming more individualized goals. The SIP can be very helpful when:

- Making changes to the individual's program schedule
- A challenge arises and staff need guidance on how to intervene/approach
- Staff need information to design strategies and accommodations
- Selecting an internship
- Seeking to guide career development
- A difficulty arises in selecting the right combination of individuals for a group, class, project, etc.
- Anticipating challenges and designing support, strategies, and accommodations
- A new staff member wants to become familiar with program participants
- Identifying difficulties, strengths, and challenges for short- and long-term goal setting
- Transitioning a student out of the program

The SIP should be updated at regular intervals, such as weekly team meetings. It should also be updated when: significant events occur; there are changes in strategy, goals, accommodations, or approaches (probably discussed during team meetings); and new abilities or challenges emerge.

### 3.03.1. Assessing a Student's Learning Style

Understanding an individual's learning style has enormous implications across the program experience.

It:

- Informs staff about on the modalities and ways in which an individual learns best
- Informs staff when designing a student's program schedule
- Provides guidance on good matches for group and project-based work
- Assists staff in identifying strategies and accommodations that will increase support learning
- Provides vital information that can be used to raise student self-awareness
- Identifies areas where self-advocacy can be increased
- Informs educational planning and continuing education matches based on learning style (*Examples: community college, online education, certificate programs, trainings, experiential learning, internships, etc.*)
- Provides guidance for selecting potential internship, work, and career

Students learn in their own unique ways as influenced by their individual strengths, challenges, sensitivities, interests, preferences, and passions. These factors strongly influence how they take in information and make meaning out of it. Understanding how these factors interact gives transition staff insight into how best to present information to students, how to deepen their comprehension, and how to encourage them to apply knowledge in meaningful ways. *Transition staff must always be mindful that students may understand and comprehend the world around them much more deeply than they are able to express. Staff must always seek to support and scaffold each student's communication faculty and style.*

Understanding a student's cognitive functioning enables the transition team to ascertain which approaches work best in a wide variety of learning environments.

**Topics to cover include strengths, challenges, fixed skills, expandable skills, most effective learning methods, and learning accommodations and strategies.**

### Questions to guide assessment of learning styles

- How should information be presented to the student? *Examples: auditory, visual (demonstration, written, or images), kinesthetic, multi-sensorily)*
- What type of learning environment supports focus and readiness to learn?
- What methods and pace best enables the student to take in information, connect it to prior knowledge, and retain it?
- What range of vocabulary and content is a good match for his language systems?
- How can a student's strengths, interests, and passions be capitalized upon to enliven learning in creative and engaging ways?
- What strategies and accommodations need to be in place to provide the appropriate levels of support for challenges and disabilities to minimize interference in the learning process?
- What strategies and accommodations need to be in place to ensure that the student is able to communicate what he learns?

**Fixed skills** have well-defined steps and sequences that, once learned, can be used in various settings without much variation. *Example: Learning how to use a computer to search for items to purchase – more or less the same procedures are used regardless of what item is being searched for.*

**Expandable skills** are non-rote and usually in a continuous state of development and growth. *Examples: Cooking skills often start with simple, rote recipes (boiling or scrambling an egg) but with interest and time are expanded to where the individual can make intuitive changes to recipes or create his own. Social interacting skills may start with fixed procedures such as greetings and goodbyes but are expandable due to constantly changing life circumstances.*

### 3.03.2 Assessing a Student's Emotional Style

Students have their own unique emotional reactions to learning. Some are energized by learning and others have emotional responses that interfere with learning. By understanding the emotional makeup of each student, educators grasp the role emotions play for each. These insights are used in lesson plans, instruction, feedback style, and other interactions with students.

**Topics to cover include strengths, challenges, ability to manage learning-based stressors, optimal emotional climate for learning, and emotional accommodations and strategies needed during learning.**

### **Questions to guide assessment of emotional learning style**

- What type of emotional support encourages a student to stay enthused and positively engaged in learning?
- Which emotional environmental factors support a student's learning, and what factors might present distress or distraction?
- What are the student's emotional sensitivities related to learning? (*Examples: test anxiety, perfectionism, fear of failure, feeling misunderstood, history of struggling, etc.*)
- What strategies and accommodations can be put in place to support the student and reduce possible stressors, including developing skills to enable the student to self-manage difficult emotions when they arise in a learning context?

### **3.03.3 Assessing a Student's Mindset Toward Learning**

A student's learning mindset is the way he views his own education-related intelligence and capabilities. Students may need support to see themselves as highly able learners. Students must come to appreciate there are many different learning abilities and types of intelligence.

**Topics to cover include strengths, challenges, optimal mindset for learning, accommodations and strategies needed to support mindset during learning.**

### **Questions to guide assessment of mindset during learning**

- What support does this student need to see him as intelligent and capable of learning?
- What strategies and teaching approaches will help an individual with a fixed or negative mindset to increase self-esteem as a learner?
- How can material be presented to learners who are hesitant, anxious, fearful, or rigid in order to encourage them to try new activities?
- What ways can a classroom environment foster a culture of learning that infuses excitement, creativity, and risk-taking?
- How can the concept of multiple intelligences be embedded into lesson plans and classroom cultures so each student's unique way of learning is celebrated and fostered?

**Multiple Intelligence Theory** states there are several forms of intelligence, they inherently vary from person to person, and should be used by teachers to improve the educational experience for each student. (Gardner).

#### 3.03.4 Assessing a Student's Ability to Regulate Sensory System

Two of the most vital aspects of learning are attention and emotion. When a student is dysregulated by his sensory system, his attention often shifts from learning to the source of distress. In addition to shifting attention, the student often experiences a strong emotional response, which further reduces learning. When the student's sensory system is calm and regulated, it is far easier to absorb and make meaning of information.

**Again, topics to cover include strengths, challenges, optimal sensory environment for learning, and strategies and accommodations for sensory support.**

#### Questions to guide assessment of sensory system supports for learning

- Does the student's learning environment accommodate his sensory sensitivities and needs?
- What can be added, removed, or changed in a given learning environment to reduce sensory interference and capitalize on stimuli that are calm and regulating?
- Does the student need specially designed sensory breaks throughout the day? At what frequency should these breaks occur?
- What preparations and plans can be designed when out in the community to anticipate and accommodate for sensory sensitivities?

#### 3.03.5 Assessing a Student's Executive Function

Executive functions play a large part in making experiences meaningful and lasting. They determine how well a student can attain and maintain a sense of organization; how well he can approach, manage, and complete a task successfully; how efficiently he can follow directions; how well he can make use of feedback; and how aware and in control he is of the end result of his work.

**Topics to cover include strengths and challenges.**

#### Questions to guide assessment of executive functions and learning

- What explicit supports are needed to help student approach, navigate, and complete tasks successfully?
- Which creative and fun teaching techniques can be used to reinforce self-monitoring, step-wisdom, and self-checking so student begins to feel a sense of independence and ownership over his work?

#### 3.03.6 Assessing a Student's "Learning Disabilities"

Some students have disabilities that make learning more difficult. There are many different types of learning disabilities, ranging from those that affect one's ability to read to others that challenge one's mathematical ability.

**Topics to cover include diagnosis, history of identification, history of intervention and support, strengths, challenges, optimal climate to support learning, and strategies and accommodations to support learning disabilities.**

#### **Questions to guide assessment of learning disabilities and learning**

- When working with an individual with a learning disability, what specific areas need to be addressed to enhance his learning and increase his sense of empowerment, enthusiasm, and optimism for learning? (*Examples: understanding the disability and how it affects learning, destigmatizing disabilities, strategies and accommodations, etc.*)
- What learning strategies or techniques does the student know or use effectively already? How can we harness existing strengths, resources, and strategies to advance the student's progress as an independent learner? What new tools and strategies might be utilized?
- How can practice with the tools and strategies become part of lesson plans for reinforcement?
- What creative approaches can be used to reduce dependence on others and increase personal sense of ownership, and pride in one's learning?

#### **3.03.7 Assessing if a Student has Other Significant Factors Affecting Learning**

Effective teaching must be sensitive to personal issues that impact a student's availability and ability to learn. Physical discomfort, pain, trauma, chronic illnesses, dramatic life changes, biochemical imbalances, low blood sugar, and many other conditions and circumstances can become preoccupying and inhibit learning.

**Topics to cover include medical/biological, traumatic experiences, and other factors.**

#### **Questions guiding assessment of other factors and learning**

- Does the transition team have the information they need to understand the depth and breadth of the student's circumstances so they can accommodate accordingly?
- What strategies or accommodations help when the student presents as overwhelmed, anxious, or distressed? What changes to schedule or extra measures can be taken to reduce anxiety, distress, surprise, and agitation?
- Are other therapeutic interventions needed?
- Would it be helpful for the individual to become more aware of his situation through learning more about what is happening to him or joining a support group with others who have similar experiences?

#### **3.03.8 Assessing a Student's Interests and Passions**

Integrating individual passions and interests into learning experiences, whether they be academic, life-skill, or career/job focused, is an effective and engaging way to work with and motivate all students, including individuals on the autism spectrum. Understanding and sharing a student's passions and co-discovering creative ways to explore and deepen them open the doors for opportunities to strengthen relationships,

infuse enthusiasm, learn new content and skills, and sustain meaningful engagement. Identifying this information during the Discovery Phase enables transition staff to create meaningful individualized student program schedules that capitalize on them; identify avenues to pursue (*Examples: outings, internships, jobs, classes, guest speakers, projects*); increase personal expression and creativity in the program experience; inform educational planning, internships, work, and career exploration; and generate creative and engaging ideas for program clubs and off-hours activities (evenings and weekends).

**Topics to cover include interests and passions already identified and developed, emerging interests and passions that may need developing or deepening, ways to explore interests and passions through program experience, and creating goals that build upon interests and passions.**

### **Questions guiding identification of student passions and interests**

- How developed is the student's interest (expansive, organized, and cohesive; or narrow, fragmented, and disorganized)
- How can a student's interests and passions be expanded creatively to motivate learning through experiences, outings, internships, artistic expression, and projects?
- How can the student's interests and passions be integrated into other areas of his life such as expanding social interaction and participation in the community?
- What glimmers of interest or signs of curiosity can be nurtured and expanded upon as activities or ideas to pursue?
- How can interests be used as a means for sharing, collaborative projects, and other meaningful social learning experiences?
- How do interests and passions identify potential work or career paths?
- Are there any mentors and role models in the program or local community who could support the student to expand his interests and passions in the service of learning-related skills?
- What goals could be set to encourage the student's momentum and motivation to pursue his interests and passions?
- Are there others students who share the same or similar interests and passions who could be grouped together for a special class, project, or outing?

### **3.03.9 Assessing a Student's Strengths and Talents**

Some individuals are born with innate talents and strengths. Others develop them over time naturally or through hard work. Regardless of their source, talents and strengths provide us with self-esteem, pride, enthusiasm, confidence, positive attention, praise, and personal enjoyment.

**Topics to cover include strengths and talents already identified and developed, ways to develop strengths and talents further, ways to capitalize on strengths and talents within program experience, ways strengths and talents can serve as assets in jobs and careers, ways strengths and talents can be an asset to others and the community.**

### Questions guiding identification of strengths and talents

- If the individual recognizes his strengths and talents, how can staff support their growth and application in many contexts (learning, social, recreational, career, community participation, etc.)?
- If the individual is unaware of his strengths and talents, what strategies and teaching approaches could best raise his awareness and interest?
- How can the student's strengths and talents benefit his peers, the program community, and the local community?
- What volunteer, internship, or work experiences match the student's strengths and talents, allowing them to shine?
- Can a student with strengths and talents mentor peers who struggle with related tasks?

#### 3.03.10 Assessing a Student's Hobbies

Hobbies can provide an individual with an endless source of learning, entertainment, and recreation. They can also motivate group identification and shared activity. Some hobbies can lead to a career path; others serve as lifelong pursuits, an outlet for creativity, or a source of stress relief.

**Topics to cover include hobbies already identified and developed; if not existing, ways to develop hobbies or ways to develop existing hobbies further; ways to develop hobbies independently, with peers, as members of a community, and through projects or internships.**

### Questions guiding identification of hobbies

- In what ways can a student's hobbies be incorporated into the program through projects, group work, classes, show and tell, and community outings?
- If the individual's hobby is isolating, what ways can it be expanded into a social experience?
- Are there student hobbies that can be starting points for the formation of a student club or joining a pre-existing club?
- Is there a virtual component to a student's hobbies? (*Examples: blogs, online communities, YouTube how-to videos, etc.*)
- Does it need monitoring for safety or time limits for health reasons?
- Can a variety of student hobbies become venues for sharing with the community? (*Examples: showcase, crafts show, art display on campus or at a local venue, etc.*)

#### 3.03.11 Assessing a Student's Hopes and Dreams

Everyone's hopes and dreams are unique as are their choices about the ways they share them. Some people keep them as their own private pleasures, some share only with those they trust, while still others shout them from the treetops and share them indiscriminately. However they are expressed, hopes and dreams contain some of our most precious desires.



### Questions guiding identification of hopes and dreams

- How can hopes and dreams be incorporated into goal setting, educational planning, and career development?
- How can staff be supportive of students' hopes and dreams while also infusing realism when necessary? How can 1:1 and group discussions about hopes and dreams be conducted so they are fun, creative, and non-judgmental?
- What therapeutic techniques and supports can be used to encourage them to risk hoping and dreaming?
- How can hopes and dreams be incorporated into lesson plans and learning opportunities?
- What program-wide activities and community events can be designed to celebrate student hopes and dreams as valid and important?

#### 3.03.12 Assessing the Quality and Extent of a Student's Program Participation

The Discovery Phase provides transition staff with the time and opportunity to observe each student in the context of how he is adjusting and acclimating to group interaction. Since the intake process does not involve peer interaction, the Discovery Period enables staff to begin understanding first-hand how an individual manages group settings. This information is useful for:

- Identifying individual strengths, challenges, and sensitivities in a group or activity-based context so that they may be addressed successfully in current as well as future program activities
- Sharing at staff meetings, so all staff can contribute ideas for how to engage the student and improve participation
- Designing participation, self-regulation, and communication goals for the student
- Creating a bank of individualized strategies and accommodations to increase successful group and activity-based participation

The extent to which new students willingly try group activities and new experiences during the Discovery Phase reveals much about how readily they acclimate to new environments.

**During the Discovery Phase, transition staff should assess each student's level of engagement, reciprocity, problem solving, collaboration, and social risk-taking. They should track which challenges resolve as a student grows confident and more comfortable with the program, and also note which environments produce the greatest success. They should also note which challenges continue to be difficult and target these through goal setting and individualized program planning.**

#### Questions guiding this assessment include

- What activity parameters are more successful (classrooms, one to one, small groups, large groups, guest hosts, community based)
- What strategies and accommodations maximize involvement and engagement?



- What strategies and accommodations facilitated successful sensory, emotional, and cognitive regulation during activities?
- What strategies and accommodations fostered student resiliency (ability to regroup, rebound from difficulty that arises during activity, whether externally or internally triggered)?
- What aspects of the environment worked well? What aspects of the environment were distracting, distressing, etc.?
- What is the student's assessment of an experience?
- What is the staff's assessment of an experience?
- What strategies and accommodations are recommended for future activities?
- What goals might be developed to support student participation strengths and challenges?

The Discovery Phase provides students and staff with their first opportunities to work together on discussion-based activities. Students may struggle with discussion-based activities for many reasons – lack of experience, language challenges, slow processing speed, internal or external distractors, shyness, and much more. Often students on the autism spectrum find discussion-based activities challenging even if they have strong verbal skills because discussions also require engagement and reciprocity, as well as social skills (perspective-taking, turn-taking, word choice, reading the face and body language of other discussion participants, awareness of one's own tone of voice, etc.). Working on discussion skills is expected to be an ongoing part of every student's schedule.

By observing students closely during discussion times in the Discovery Phase, staff can identify groups and pairings that are good social-emotional and developmental matches for future classes, groups, projects, and teams. The guidance questions listed above should be applied to the assessment of each student's participation in discussion-based activities.

### 3.03.13 Assessing the Quality and Nature of a Student's Relationships with Others

Building relationships with others is vital to leading a meaningful life in the community. Some students with autism form initial connections readily but struggle to maintain and deepen them. Others find initiating interactions a challenge but relax as they become familiar with people. Some students are perplexed when a relationship goes wrong because they lack the skills to repair or resolve issues. Still others struggle along the whole continuum of relationship skills – initiating, maintaining, deepening, and repairing.

By beginning to assess a student's strengths and challenges in relationship formation at the outset of the Discovery Phase, staff is better equipped to meet the student's needs throughout the program experience.

This information is useful for:

- Understanding what challenges a student might face as he adjusts to becoming a member of the group
- Developing individualized social, emotional, behavioral, and relational goals

- Understanding how well the student is forming friendships and relationships that can be capitalized on in group work, projects, and roommate matches and those needing explicit work or facilitation to build
- Helping to identify personality styles
- Helping to identify which styles of relating work well with a student and which are problematic
- Helping to identify relationships that can be capitalized on and those needing explicit work or facilitation to build

### With Staff

The Discovery Phase is an excellent time to begin observing interactions between students and staff. Naturally developing relationships, shared common interests, similar personalities, and affectionate exchanges can be identified, encouraged, and cultivated for continuing growth through advising, teaching, and staff mentoring matches.

Conflicts with staff are as important to note and equally valuable for informing future program planning. These early clashes may remain or develop into issues that will generate valuable experience and crucial practice for students to work on problem-solving, negotiation, conflict resolution, and relationship repair. It is also important to note that student-staff conflicts naturally arise at the beginning of most programs, as it is human nature for young adults to test limits, exert their control, explore and push against new rules or boundaries.

### Questions guiding the assessment of student relationships with staff

- What are the positive interaction patterns with staff?
  - What role does staff member play (shared interests, comfort person, problem solver, etc.)?
  - What role does student play (initiation, sharing, seeking person out, maintaining relationship, actions done to build relationship, etc.)?
  - In what ways can staff relationship be a positive motivator?
- What are the negative interaction patterns with staff?
  - What role does staff member play (authority, container/target for negative emotions)?
  - What role does student play (antagonistic, dominating, needy, aggressive, overly dependent, defying authority, etc.)?
  - What patterns and specific issues with individual staff members can be addressed to reduce problematic interactions/actions toward staff and increase negotiation, compromise, and pro-social relating (establishment of boundaries/rules/interpersonal guidelines, specific conflict resolution, etc.)?
  - What is student's assessment of challenging relationship?
  - What is staff assessment of challenging relationship?
  - What strategies and accommodations might be utilized by both staff and student to move forward with, to build on, to avoid)

### With Peers

The relationships between students participating in the program will shift continuously throughout the year. Relationships begun during the Discovery Phase may prosper and deepen or dissolve quickly. Friendships are tried, some last, some need to come to a close. Alliances are formed that may dissolve naturally or through conflict. Interests and passions shift and change, affecting the nature of peer relationships. Learning to navigate and negotiate an array of friendships and relationships will be an ongoing topic (*Examples: friendships, co-worker relationships, romantic relationships*).

The challenge for staff is to observe each student's overall social-emotional relationship style (as outlined on the following page). This information is valuable when developing each student's relationship and social cognition goals.

### Questions guiding the assessment of student relationships with peers

- What are the positive interaction patterns with peers?
  - What role does student play (initiation, sharing, seeking person out, actions done to build and maintain relationship, etc.)?
  - What role do peers play (initiation, sharing, seeking person out, actions done to build and maintain relationship, etc.)?
  - What approaches work best for building positive peer relationship (groupings, projects, roommate assignments, internship pairs, etc.)?
- What are the negative interaction patterns with peers?
  - What role does student play (antagonistic, dominating, needy, aggressive, jealous, competitive, reactive, etc.)?
  - What role do peers play (antagonistic, dominating, needy, aggressive, jealous, competitive, reactive, etc.)?
  - What negative relationship patterns ways with individual peers can be addressed to reduce problems and increase negotiation, compromise, and pro-social relating (interventions, establishment of boundaries/rules/interpersonal guidelines, specific conflict resolution, etc.)?
  - What is student's assessment of relationship difficulty?
  - What is staff assessment of relationship difficulty?
  - What strategies and accommodations might be utilized by both staff and student to move forward with, to build on, to avoid)
  - What peer relationship goals emerge from this assessment?

### Within the Community

Community-based learning introduces additional opportunities and challenges for forming new relationships, participating in new roles with different social expectations, and encountering new

experiences, including the unexpected. It is an important program goal to equip students with skills to navigate their communities with independence and confidence.

The first step is to acclimate them by bringing the community to them as well as trying out a few well-planned exploratory outings. This can take the form of guest speakers, visiting teachers or instructors, interactions with community members on outings, etc. As transition staff observe students interact with community members, they begin to identify areas that need work to improve interactions so the students become successful community participants.

### Questions guiding the assessment of student relationships within the community

- What are the positive community member interaction patterns?
  - What actions does the student take to participate in the community (initiation, sharing, seeking person out, actions done to build and maintain relationship, pro-social actions, etc.)?
  - What actions do community members take (initiation, sharing, seeking person out, actions done to build and maintain relationship, etc.)?
  - What ways can positive community relationships be built upon (outings, community projects, mentorships, apprenticeships, internships, etc.)?
- What are the negative interaction patterns within the community?
  - What role does student play (antagonistic, dominating, needy, aggressive, withdrawn, reactive, etc.)?
  - What roles do community members play?
  - What negative relationship patterns ways within the community can be addressed to reduce problems and increase negotiation, compromise, and pro-social relating (interventions, establishment of boundaries/rules/interpersonal guidelines, specific conflict resolution, etc.)?
  - What is student's assessment of relationship difficulty?
  - What is staff's assessment of relationship difficulty?
  - What strategies and accommodations might be utilized by both staff and student to move forward with, to build on, to avoid)
  - What community relationship goals emerge from this assessment?

### With self

### Questions guiding the assessment of student relationship with self

- What are the student's strengths in the domains of self-care, management of responsibility, independence, life skills, work skills, internal motivation, and initiation?
- What are the student's challenges in the domains of self-care, management of responsibility, independence, life skills, work skills, internal motivation, and initiation?
- What goals emerge from this assessment?

### 3.03.14 Student's Use of the SIP

There are aspects of the SIP that will be very important to share with the individual. In fact, students have the legal right to access this document. Advising, individual work on self-awareness, internship coordination, educational planning, and career development are all areas where sharing information from the SIP with the student can be very useful. Since this document is so extensive — and to prevent overwhelming the student — regular advising meetings (weekly would be ideal) will be used to identify and review priority areas of concern or progress per advisor and student collaborative agreement

### 3.04 Information Gathering throughout the Transition Program (Post Discovery Phase) and Maintaining the SIP

At the conclusion of the Discovery Phase, staff and student will know one another reasonably well and the student will be partially adjusted to his environment. An Advisor for each student will be identified and student goals and schedules will be articulated. Now, the transition program will begin in earnest. The transition team will meet periodically (ideally weekly) to:

- Review emerging patterns, trends, challenges, and needs
- Revise and add goals based on the team's assessment
- Adjust the student's schedule to address any revised goals and newly identified needs
- Determine if there is key information missing that can be
  - gathered directly (*Examples: by asking the family, obtaining any missing documentation, calling for formal assessments*)
  - gathered indirectly through discussions, activities, and experiences (*Example: If the student has few peer interactions during the Discovery Phase and is spending most of his time with staff, a small group may provide greater opportunities to observe his strengths and challenges relating to peers*).
- Discuss any significant information revealed in the Discovery Process that needs to be pursued in more depth (*Example: there was no mention of reading problems in the interview process but during the Discovery Phase staff noted – and documented in the SIP – that there were signs of possible reading difficulty. Further evaluation may be required to assess ability and any contributing factors.*)
- Reflect on the choice of an advisor for each student. The advisor will take the lead in managing the student's SIP, monitoring progress, assuring the goals stated in the SIP are being supported by the individual's program schedule, meeting with the individual on a regular basis, raising awareness regarding concerns and underserved needs that arise, and coordinating the flow of communication with the rest of the transition team. For more information about selecting an advisor see Section 5.0 Teaching Approaches, Methods, Processes, Assessments, and Tools.

Students and their families are expected to be active contributors to their own SIP. Staff should support access to the SIP by students and families. Staff should be available to guide students and families on how to understand the information the SIP contains and how the SIP presents data that is meaningful for to each student in planning, goal setting, and understanding of self.

The SIP will continue to evolve as the student participates in the transition program. It will continue to serve as a source of information, a valuable reference during meetings, a means to track progress, and a way to maintain a holistic lens so each student's needs can be met and goals approached in a dynamic, comprehensive manner.

### 3.04.1 Planning for Continuing Education

When a student shares that he is interested and motivated to pursue further education, the SIP will aid staff in determining what educational options might be potential matches for him.

These options might include:

- Formal apprenticeships (*Examples: plumbing, electrical, horse handling, etc.*)
- Formal internship (*Examples: law office, internet company, etc.*)
- Technical training (*Examples: forklift operating, welding, computer assembly, etc.*)
- Post-secondary education (degree or certificate)

Whether the pursuit of learning is for pleasure or as part of a work/career development plan, the SIP will help outline strategies, accommodations, and approaches that may be needed to support the student's cognitive strengths and learning style.

### References

**Gardner, H.** (2006). *Multiple intelligences: New horizons*. New York: Basic Books.

## Section 4.0

# INTAKE AND INDIVIDUALIZING THE TRANSITION CURRICULUM

*“A work of art is the unique result of a unique temperament.” Oscar Wilde*

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## 4.01 Introduction

Young adults with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) possess a unique physical, sensory, emotional, social, and cognitive developmental profile. Their perceptions, sensations, feelings, and thoughts are influenced by their own personal set of factors (genetics, neurology, family dynamics, medical issues, exposure to environments, etc.). These factors become further affected by all they have experienced in their lifetimes.

The intake and discovery processes are designed to gather this information over time. An individual plan is then developed for each student based on individual strengths, challenges, goals, concerns, and difficulties.

Sources of information include the student, his family, the entire Individualized Education Program (IEP) team, and any other professionals who may be working with the individual.

An understanding of what motivates and regulates the student is invaluable for:

- Increasing and sustaining engagement
- Igniting curiosity
- Strengthening mental stamina
- Monitoring attention
- Opening additional venues for communication and expression of thoughts and feelings
- Establishing and building rapport
- Uncovering shared peer interests and activities
- Designing opportunities for creative expression
- Increasing learning
- Identifying possible community outings, internships, and career paths
- Infusing laughter and joy into the participant experience

By nurturing all dimensions of the individual we can provide our students with the strongest chance to reach their highest level of independence, awareness, and social connection. In doing so, we make it possible for them to find fulfilling ways to participate in life, form lasting and meaningful relationships, and contribute to their communities.

## 4.02 Transition Curriculum Intake Process

### 4.02.1 Purpose and Use

The intake process is a collaborative, interactive exploration designed to help you tailor the Transition Curriculum to the student. As stated in the introduction, this is intended to be used by teachers, administrators, and other special education professionals who are already working with individuals on the autism spectrum or with other developmental disabilities across a variety of educational and therapeutic milieus. This process requires a skilled educator or clinician to implement.

The family is asked to provide essential documentation (IEPs, diagnostic evaluations, etc.), fill out an extensive intake form, and participate in an interview process. The student is asked to write an essay, provide any works of art or other items to share, and participate in an interview, both with the family and 1:1. As the process unfolds there are continual opportunities for all parties involved to ask questions, clarify expectations, express concerns, and seek the information they need to make an informed decision.

As mentioned elsewhere, these are suggested general guidelines. It is up to the school to develop their own specific intake guidelines, forms, and interview processes. Schools may want to:

- Design their questionnaire forms to use rating scales (1-5, 1-10, etc.) and check boxes (yes/no, etc.) wherever possible to simplify the process
- Limit the time required for parents to fill out forms to 45 minutes, and the total time required for intake interviews to 90 minutes

In subsequent phases we hope to include many checklists, forms, and other methods to help you gather, organize, and utilize this information.

### 4.02.2 The General Process

1. Have the family complete their section of the Transition Curriculum Student Intake Form.
2. If possible, have the student complete the student essay and submit work samples, art, writing, etc. If the student has difficulty writing, even a few sentences or dictated thoughts would be helpful.
3. Interview family and student together, then family and student separately to obtain the data needed for the clinical portion of the intake form/Student's Individual Profile (SIP). Again, schools may want to limit the time required for intake interviews to 90 minutes. At this time, obtain most recent IEPs and reports from neuropsychological, occupational therapy (OT), physical therapy (PT), speech-language pathology (SLP), and other evaluations.
4. The Transition Coordinator reviews all the assembled information.
5. After the student has begun the program, have the family write a letter of introduction to the staff about their son/daughter, sharing whatever information they feel they need to know.

Once the student enters a program, often the family relaxes and a lot more information is shared. This is a chance to reveal very honest hopes, dreams, expectations, fears, and limitations that might not be revealed during the interview process. Letters can be very insightful.

6. Using the Individualize the Curriculum Process, create an initial lesson schedule for the student.

This should be a pretty standard schedule but with flexibility (a mix of physical, cognitive, and emotional work). Many students will be dealing with anxiety and adjustment issues. This will affect the student but to what extent you won't know until he begins the program. Typically as the student becomes more comfortable the initial behaviors, emotions, and fears settle and you can begin to get a baseline understanding the student without it being colored by adjustment issues. If you set a schedule too fast it can be too difficult for the individual, may not align well with his needs, and can become frustrating for staff. But if transitioning into the program is defined as an explicit stage it takes the pressure off everyone so the real individual emerges.

7. Student meets with transition coordinator or adviser to review proposed schedule, get feedback, see if there are any major revisions needed, and preview what to expect. Student is assured this is a "getting to know you phase" and the schedule will change as you get to know him, his needs, and goals better.
8. After the first week the team assesses how the student did, how well he is establishing new relationships with peers and staff, the nature of participation, and what additional changes, if any, need to be made.
9. Student gives feedback on how the week went.
10. Feedback loop is established and continues with all parties. A lot of important information will reveal itself during this step.
11. After a period of initial assessment, the student settles into a core schedule and begins to form relationships. During this time – perhaps one to three months – the team continues to gather information and feedback from the student and family. A longer range plan for the student is gradually developed.
12. The family, student, and team have a meeting to roll out the transition plan-identified goals and a schedule that supports them.
13. Plan is monitored and refined as needed.

## 4.03 Information to Collect from the Family for the Student Intake Form

Together with whatever information your school or program may require for administrative purposes, it is imperative that the family provide to intake personnel a comprehensive profile of the student in written form. It is up to the school to develop its own intake forms. The questions below are suggested topics that will help you when preparing these forms. They are not necessarily the exact questions to be asked, as they should be worded according to the ability and understanding of the individuals and families you serve.

As mentioned in the introduction, we have purposely provided below an exhaustive list of questions – *far more* than anyone could ask or answer at one time. **A subset of these questions has been highlighted in bold and marked “Essential.” It is this information you should obtain during the intake process.** The remainder of the questions, marked “Useful,” can be gathered over time.

The intake forms should be mailed to parents / caregivers in advance so they have ample time to complete and return to you prior to the student and family intake interviews.

### 4.03.1 Diagnoses and Interventions Physical/ Medical/ Behavioral/ Emotional/ Biological/ Nutritional/ Sleep/Educational

**Diagnoses and interventions within last four years, or beyond if relevant (include OT, PT, SLP, social skills groups, complementary therapies, and mental health therapies)**

#### *Essential*

- **To what degree is the student aware of his various diagnoses and knowingly participating in his interventions?**

#### *Useful*

- Please describe your interactions with your son surrounding his diagnosis. If you have not discussed it with him, please explain your reasons.
- Describe how successful or unsuccessful interventions were and how they impacted rate of progress in different areas.
- Describe continuing challenges.
- Need for further exploration?

## For Nutritional

### *Essential*

- **Tell us about current programs and interventions. Include interventions to address food sensitivities, difficulties, and issues (e.g., supplements, routines, strategies).**
- **Dietary preferences and food sensitivities (items and textures), including description of range/restriction of foods in diet**

### *Useful*

- Are the interventions for food and texture sensitivities effective or is there a need for further exploration?
- To what extent do nutritional issues cause dysregulation (e.g., dyes, additives, etc.). Describe and indicate frequency and duration.

## 4.03.2 Educational History

### *Essential*

- **List day and residential schools/programs student attended in past four years.**
- **Describe how successful or unsuccessful they were for the student.**
- **Were the interventions for learning issues effective or is there a need for further exploration?**
- **Were the accommodations and strategies to support effective or is there a need for further exploration?**
- **Provide copy of most recent IEP.**
- **What are the short-term and long-term academic goals?**

### *Useful*

- Describe how these programs impacted the student's ability to progress educationally and continuing challenges.
- Describe learning style and other educationally significant issues and trends
- Mention if anxiety, rigid thinking, psychological, sleep, and/or medical issues impact learning.

## 4.03.3 Family / Caregiver Profile

### *Essential*

- **Describe the nature, quality, and frequency of each relationship.**
- **Tell us about the contribution of family activities, patterns, stresses, and conflicts to current condition.**

### *Useful*

- Describe the extent to which family members participate in and share in the student's interests.
- How has the above impacted the student's ability to progress in all areas and continuing challenges?
- Are interventions for family issues, stressors, dynamics, and conflicts effective or is there a need for further exploration?

#### 4.03.4 Extended Support Network

### *Essential*

- **List individuals outside the home who are actively involved in the student's life (relatives, members of community and/or church, tutors, instructors of extracurricular activities or interests, therapists, teachers, etc.).**
- **Describe frequency of contact for each relationship.**

### *Useful*

- Describe the nature of each relationship.
- Is the level of these individuals' involvement optimal or underutilized?

#### 4.03.5 Community and Public Areas

Community and public areas include: classes, camps, teams, religious organizations, youth groups, recreational, entertainment, restaurants, shopping, events, transportation, and neighborhood activities.

### *Essential*

- **How often and in what ways does the student get out into the community and public areas?**
- **Describe how the student functions and interacts in these environments.**

### *Useful*

- Contribution of community or public patterns, stresses, and conflicts to current condition
- Who, if anyone, provides support to the student while in the community or public areas?

#### 4.03.6 Emotional Aspects

### **Regulation**

### *Essential*

- **What does the individual require to attain and maintain emotional regulation?**
- **To what extent does the individual provide for his own needs vs. require the assistance of others? Describe.**



### *Useful*

- Describe the individual's level of flexibility or rigidity surrounding the experience, interpretation, and expression of emotions.
- Describe the individual's coping mechanisms for attaining and maintaining emotional regulation. To what extent are these coping mechanisms disruptive or maladaptive in public or social settings?

## **Engagement**

### *Essential*

- **To what extent can the individual participate in a shared emotional experience?**

## **Use of Affect**

### *Essential*

- **Describe intensity of emotional expression, perception, and interaction.**

### *Useful*

- Describe range of affect and emotional expression, interaction, and perception, including ability to read affect.

## **Perceptions of Emotional States of Others**

### *Essential*

- **Describe student's ability to identify or interpret accurately the emotions of others.**

### *Useful*

- Describe the extent to which the student can respond to the emotions of others, including the level of intensity and appropriateness.

## Emotional Self-Awareness

### *Essential*

- **To what extent is the student aware of his emotions?**
- **How successful is he at verbally and non-verbally communicating emotional states and needs in a socially appropriate manner?**

### *Useful*

- To what extent is the student able to use an understanding of his emotions to problem solve, engage in self-care, and make choices consistent with emotional needs?
- Can this individual predict how he will feel in a projected scenario? If so, can he use this ability to select activities, experiences, and environments that are a good match for his emotional needs? (*Example: "I don't want to go to the amusement park because big crowds make me anxious."*)

#### 4.03.7 Sensory Processing

##### **Essential**

Describe the student's sensory processing in the following domains:

- Visual
- Auditory
- Tactile
- Taste
- Olfactory (smell)
- Proprioceptive (awareness of posture, movement, position, weight, and resistance of objects as they relate to the body)
- Vestibular (provides orientation in space using motion, gravity, and balance senses in the inner ear)

Please include:

- Does the student constantly seek or avoid certain sensory situations?
- Give examples.
- What helps the individual to stay sensorially regulated?

##### **Useful**

- How well does the student use, understand, and learn by what he hears, sees, tastes, smells, feels, etc.?
- Are there any difficulties related to balance?
- How well does the student navigate in and around spaces such as hallways, crowded rooms, and wide open areas?

#### 4.03.8 Visual-Spatial and Temporal-Sequential Processing

Describe the student's current level of spatial and temporal functioning.

##### **Essential**

- Does your son have any difficulties locating objects in space? (Examples: 1-dimensionally, locating things on paper; 2-dimensionally, locating things on a board; and 3-dimensionally, locating objects in physical space, such as a room or inside a drawer or closet)
- Do you often have to show the student where things belong, even if they are kept in the same or a predictable location over time?
- Does the student struggle to visualize a scene described in verbal conversation or as written in a book?
- Does the student bump into people and objects, drop things frequently, or have difficulty sensing whether an object will fit in a given space? (Examples: Will the couch fit in the room? Can the soup go in this size container? Are my hands big enough to carry given objects?)

- **Does the student have difficulty learning how to tell time? Does he continue to struggle with telling time, especially on an analog clock?**
- **Are multi-step directions that require a specific sequence and/or time limit difficult?** *(Examples: cooking, science experiments, etc.)*
- **Does the student have a sense of passage of time or does he become anxious, complain about how long something takes, or constantly ask what time it is/how much time is left?**
- **Does the student struggle with putting and keeping things in order?** *(Examples: objects, ideas, joke telling, recalling/retelling of events, steps)*
- **Does the student have trouble with combination locks or activities that require serial movement?** *(Examples: martial arts, dance, yoga, etc.)* **With other physical movements that require timing and sequence?** *(Examples: driving, hitting a buzzer during a game, etc.)*

### Useful

- Does your son get confused understanding or applying spatial language? *(Examples: “the cat is under the couch,” “please put the bread next to the basket of apples,” giving directions or instructions to others relating to space and location of objects, etc.)*
- Does your son forget where he places objects and often lose items, even if the object is in plain sight?
- Does your son have difficulty in math, particularly lining up numbers correctly for computation, carrying numbers, geometry, and long division?
- Is the student heavily dependent on visuals made for him vs. creating them on his own? *(Examples: charts, graphs, and other visual organizers to locate and draw meaning from information)*
- Does the student have difficulty recognizing faces?
- Does the student have trouble drawing things in approximate and realistic proportions?
- Does the student struggle with visual puzzles and games?
- Do drawings, stories, creative works, or verbal explanations lack spatial logic and become confusing or convoluted, requiring you to ask for clarification, especially where things are in proximity to each other?
- Can the student estimate how long a given task or activity will take (given that he has the information he needs at his disposal)?
- Can the student apply an understanding of time to planning, executing, or evaluating an event or experience?
- Does the student struggle with learning multiplication, order of operations, order of syntax, grammar, science labs, long-term projects, meeting deadlines, understanding historical events?

#### 4.03.9 Auditory and Language Processing

Describe the student's current level of hearing and speaking.

##### *Essential*

- **How well does he comprehend spoken language?** (*Examples: vocabulary; following directions; understanding stories, jokes, slogans, movies, lectures, explanations, etc.*)
- **How is his memory? Does he remember rules, procedures, multi-step processes, sequences, etc.?**
- **How wide a range of interests does he have in various subjects? Within a given subject, does he have a wide or narrow range of ideas?**

##### *Useful*

- Does your son have any difficulties associating sounds with their proper symbols? If so, does this show up in speaking and/or writing? (*Example: has trouble discerning vowel sounds, chronic spelling difficulties*) *If there are such difficulties, has he been evaluated and/or is there a diagnosis?*
- When you ask a question, does he pause or stall?
- How many times do you need to repeat the question?
- Does he only understand a portion of what you say?
- Does he understand the meaning of what you are saying?
- How easily does he use expressive or spontaneous language in social, academic, or incidental situations?

#### 4.03.10 Communication

Discuss the student's:

##### *Essential*

- **Ability to stay engaged surrounding a shared topic** (*Examples: changes subject, jumps around, refuses to discuss, doesn't over elaborate*)
- **Ability to read non-verbal communication** (*Examples: gestures, tone, body language, eye contact, meaningful looks*)
- **Ability to access and use words to communicate needs, thoughts, and emotions accurately, appropriately, and clearly so others can understand**
- **Describe communication use to meet needs/get help, to engage, to share ideas, creativity, accomplish a task, to fill space, etc.**

##### *Useful*

- Ability to stay sensorily and environmentally regulated (*Examples: calm, stimming, agitated, etc.*)
- Ability to stay regulated emotionally (*Examples: excited, giddy, anxious, angry, frustrated*)
- Ability to stay engaged physically and verbally with other members of conversation/interaction

- Ability to follow reciprocity and flow of communication (*Examples: tangential, confused, reciprocal, talks over others, interrupts*)
- Describe common themes within communication (*Examples: restricted, only talks about proscribed topics/wide range, etc.*)
- Ability to use language to negotiate and problem solve successfully with others
- Ability to understand abstract language (*Examples: metaphor, irony, wordplay, puns, colloquialisms, idioms, etc.*)
- Level of fatigue/need for communication breaks

#### 4.03.11 Motor Skills, Planning, and Sequencing

**How are the student's motor skills?** (*Examples: riding a bike, walking a balance beam, juggling, running obstacle courses, learning new physical games and activities, etc.*)

**Describe these abilities as strong or weak. Include:**

##### *Essential*

- **Gross motor skills** (*Examples: sitting upright, walking, lifting, kicking, etc.*)
- **Fine motor skills** (*Examples: writing, typing, eating with utensils, fastening clothing, grasping and manipulating small objects, etc.*)

##### *Useful*

- Planning out a sequence of physical actions in order to obtain a physical result

#### 4.03.12 Higher Order Thinking

##### *Useful*

Review the four environments listed below. Describe and elaborate on the student's level of functioning and success with higher order thinking in each environment. In addition to describing the quality of each, indicate frequency and quality.

- Classroom
- Social settings
- Out in the community
- At home

Strategic thinking: can the individual design or apply strategies to approach tasks in an organized, sequenced, and successful manner?

Causal relationships: to what extent can the individual see how ideas connect and how something or an event occurs as a result of or in reaction to another?

Concept formation: to what extent can the individual understand both concrete concepts? (*Example: "a frog"*) and abstract concepts (*example: "democracy"*)?

Critical thinking: describe the individual's ability to evaluate information, draw connections, make conclusions, and apply logic.

Creativity and brainstorming: to what extent are these applied to thinking?

Problem solving: describe the individual's ability to approach problems and seek solutions independently and collaboratively. (*Examples: idea generation, brainstorming, step wisdom, trial and error, seek help, etc.*)

- Make choices
- Initiate ideas
- Sequence ideas
- Use ideas to problem solve
- Identify problems
- Attempt to solve problems independently
- Ask for help with problems when needed
- Reflect on problem solving solutions (*Example: Did it work?*)
- Try again if first solution doesn't work
- Problem solve in isolation
- Problem solve in groups

Range, flexibility, and stability of adaptive and coping strategies

- Describe the student's range, flexibility, and stability of adaptive and coping strategies.

#### 4.03.13 Attention

##### *Essential*

**Describe the student's ability to maintain focus and regulate attention in the following environments:**

- **During tasks**
- **During conversations**
- **During group activities**
- **In learning environments, such as a classroom**
- **In public places where there is a lot of ambient noise and activity**
- **In quiet environments with few external distractions**
- **During physical activities**
- **While watching TV shows, movies, etc.**
- **During favorite recreational activities**

**Describe the student's:**

- **Sleep/arousal balance** (*Examples: difficulty falling asleep, difficulty waking, etc.*)
- **Alertness** (*Examples: consistent, inconsistent, task specific*)
- **Mental energy** (*Examples: fuel to stay mentally alert and responsive to requests, lectures, discussions, and trains of thought*)

## Useful

Describe the student's distraction tendencies and reactions to the following external elements:

- Sensory external factors (*Examples: sounds, smells, sights, touch*)
- Physical external factors (*Examples: managing self in space such as staying seated in a chair, walking down a hallway, etc.*)
- Emotional external factors (*Examples: other people's expressions and emotional reactions*)
- Cognitive external factors (*Examples: what others are saying, requests, lectures, and expectation of verbal response*)

Describe the student's distraction tendencies and reactions to the following internal elements:

- Sensory internal factors (*Examples: reactivity and lack of resiliency/ability to bounce back when exposed to sensory sensitivity*)
- Physical internal factors (*Examples: physical discomfort, pain, medication side effects, gastrointestinal difficulty, resiliency/ability to bounce back after experiencing physical discomfort, etc.*)
- Emotional internal factors (*Examples: reactivity, emotional overload and escalation, sticky feelings, low emotional resiliency/ability to bounce back*)
- Cognitive internal factors (*sticky thoughts, negative mindset, distorted beliefs, fantasy/daydreaming*)

## 4.03.14 Behavior

### Essential

Review the following list. Describe the intensity, frequency, duration, and triggers for each behavior the student engages in:

- **Attention-seeking**
- **Avoidance**
- **Non-compliant/resistive**
- **Escapist** (*physical, cognitive, etc.*)
- **Disruptive**
- **Controlling, rigid, inflexible, or overly rule-bound**
- **Anxious, fearful**
- **Withdrawn, sad, depressed**
- **Self-absorbed**
- **Non-reactive to stimuli or attempts at engagement**
- **Impulsive**
- **Aggressive**
- **Self-criticizing, negative self-thoughts**
- **Perseverative**
- **Self-stimulatory**
- **Intensely emotional**
- **Paranoid**
- **Unrealistic**
- **Other**

### Useful

- How do the student's regulatory and sensory systems affect positive and negative behavior?
- What approach(es) do teachers use to address behavior(s)? What are the outcomes?
- Do the teachers understand the cause of the student's behavior and what that means?
- Do the teachers understand why, when, and how the student's body needs to be energized or calmed?

## 4.03.15 Social Cognition in Unstructured and Spontaneous Contexts

### Essential

Describe the quality of the student's ability to navigate unplanned and spontaneous social interactions and situations:

**Initiating, maintaining, and ending a conversation:**

- **With a peer**
- **Within a group of peers**
- **With familiar adults**
- **With unknown adults** (*Examples: ordering in restaurant, being introduced to a new teacher, etc.*)
- **Able to generate topics and questions for conversation**
- **Able to respond to the topics and questions of others**
- **Knows when to be quiet and conversely, respond**
- **Ability to recognize who to ask for help from in public places** (*Examples: grabs first person he sees vs. looks for uniform, goes to customer service desk vs. wanders aimlessly*)

**Shared interests**

- **Shares high level of interest when...** (*Example: likes same sports team, Pokémon, etc.*)
- **Does not share interest when...** (*Example: able to ask questions and listen to low interest or unfamiliar topics*)
- **Ability to regulate humor/read the audience**

### Useful

Social problem solving, collaboration, and negotiation

- Ability to engage in shared problem solving
- Ability to collaborate on a shared goal (*Examples: topic of interest, group project, or task*)
- Ability to take the perspective of others
- Ability to recognize and accept differences
- Ability to negotiate and compromise



#### 4.03.16 Formal Group Social Behaviors and Skills

##### **Essential**

Tell us about the student's abilities to:

**Abide by explicit, spoken rules:**

- **Follows directions, rules, and procedures** (*verbal and written*)
- **If assigned a specific role in the group, manages one's role and respects the boundaries of the roles of others** (*Examples: level of self-control, bossiness/micro-managing, etc.*)
- **Shows care for materials and property**
- **When directed, works independently**
- **Works towards the stated, shared goal of the activity**
- **Accepts authority, feedback, and instruction from whomever has been placed in charge of the given activity** (*Examples: teacher, fellow peer*)
- **Uses the resources given** (*Examples: tools, methods, etc.*)
- **Works within established time parameters**

**Abide by covert, unspoken social rules:**

- **Shows respectful attitude** (*Examples: displays manners appropriate to the people and context, respects the property of others*)
- **Gets along with others** (*Examples: collaborative, empathic, considerate of others, disruptive, aggressive, defensive, distracting, etc.*)
- **Assumes responsibility for own actions**
- **Resolves differences of opinion and other peer conflicts appropriately**
- **Shows self-control** (*Examples: behavioral, verbal, emotional*)

#### 4.03.17 Quality of Peer Interactions

##### **Essential**

Review the following categories and assess the student's current quality and depth of peer social interactions. During:

- **One-on-one situations**
- **Small groups**
- **Group games situations**
  - **Does he isolate himself in parallel activities with low engagement or is he interactive and collaborative?**
  - **Is he functional and constructive?**
  - **Can he engage imaginatively, dramatically, and symbolically – that is, substitute one object for another?** (*Example: using a hairbrush to represent a microphone*)
  - **Can he sustain attention?**
  - **Can he follow the ideas, lead, or direction of others?**
  - **Does he imitate or use peers as models?**

- What is his level of assertiveness?
- What is his level of flexibility?

#### 4.03.18 Independence

##### *Essential*

Review the following list of personal care and independent life skills. Describe and elaborate on the student's level of functioning and success. In addition to describing the quality of each, indicate frequency and quality.

- Nutrition, cooking, eating
- Dressing, outfit selection, clothes shopping
- Toileting
- Personal hygiene (*bathing, brushing teeth, deodorant, etc.*)
- Health and fitness
- Family relationships
- Sexuality
- Other instrumental skills of daily living
- Use of public transportation or driving
- Voting
- Management of money
- Awareness and management of personal safety
- Seeking out news and what's happening in community, world
- Computer and technology
- Phone and cell phone
- Managing medication
- Organization (*self and belongings*)
- Independence in the classroom

#### 4.03.19 Executive Functioning and Self-Advocacy

##### *Useful*

Review the following list of executive functioning skills. Describe and elaborate on the student's level of functioning and success. In addition to describing the quality of each, indicate frequency and quality.

- Paying attention to and remembering details
- Previewing (*being able to project and anticipate what comes next, visualizing consequences*)
- Strategizing
- Planning
- Self-monitoring (*being able to watch, analyze, and evaluate self as one is doing a task. Example: How am I doing? What/who do I need to accomplish this task?*)
- Organization (*self, belongings, materials, thoughts, emotions*)

- Managing time and space
  - Also discuss his sense of pacing: ability to adjust speed of approach to fit work (*can speed up or slow down depending on difficulty, etc.*)
- Managing tasks
  - Facilitation/inhibition: ability to know when to start and when to stop (*Example: being able to perceive multiple options and pick the best one before starting*)
  - Tracking multiple events simultaneously (*Example: coordinating bus schedules with arrival and departure events*)
- Reinforceability: ability to use previous experience to guide correct behavior and work output – learning from experience (*Example: “Well, last time I rushed through my math test and failed it. I should slow down on this math test”; “Last time I teased her she broke into tears. I should take a softer approach next time and know she is not a good person to tease.”*)

#### 4.03.20 Additional Aspects of Student’s World

Address the following questions to help illuminate the student’s expressed hopes, dreams, and desires.

##### **Essential**

- **In what ways does the individual express himself creatively?** (*Examples: art, written stories, music, homemade videos, pictures of models made, etc.*)
- **Has the student expressed short-term and long-term goals?**
  - **hobbies and passions to pursue**
  - **accomplishments** (*Examples: finish college, build a boat, etc.*)
  - **independence and maturation skills** (*Examples: live in own apartment, drive, travel, go on a date, etc.*)
  - **bucket list** (*realistic and unrealistic*)
- **List the problems or issues the student has expressed he wants to change or resolve in his life**
  - **social** (*Example: make friends, etc.*)
  - **emotional** (*Example: feel less scared trying new things, etc.*)
  - **behavioral**
  - **quality of life issues** (*Example: stop having nightmares, etc.*)
  - **other**

##### **Useful**

- Has the individual expressed a vision of himself for the future? (*Examples: career, where he wants to live, get married, etc.*) Elaborate.

#### 4.03.21 Student's Own World

##### **Essential**

- **Work samples, writings, works of art, or other forms of creative expression that should be included so you can better understand the individual?** (*Examples: written stories, homemade videos, pictures of models made, etc.*)
- **Preferences, affinities, hobbies, sports**
- **Activities that have been successful** (*Examples: church youth group, bowling, etc.*)
- **Activities that have not been successful and why** (*Examples: parties, movies, shopping*)
- **Favorite shows, characters, books**
- **Phobias and fears**
- **Passions and obsessions**

##### **Useful**

- Student's vision of himself for the future
- Student's goals (*short, long term, bucket list*) [**Note:** student may need help with this]
- Student's concerns (*issues he would like to resolve*)
- Diet/food issues and preferences

#### 4.03.22 Anything Else?

##### **Essential**

- **Is there anything else about the student that would be meaningful to share?**

## 4.04 Preparing Staff for the Student / Family Intake Interviews

On the day of the interview, the student and the family are faced with managing their own personal thoughts and feelings as they approach an interaction that might dictate the direction of the next phase of their lives. Particularly for those families seeking a residential program the process is filled with a mix of excitement, anticipation, hope, and anxiety. They come prepared to answer questions, but very often also come seeking many answers. Staff should recognize these dynamics and be prepared to set their interviewee at ease and build rapport while affirming the interview is an opportunity to see if the student might be interested in becoming a new member of their community.

The Transition Curriculum intake process should be designed for staff to lead the student and the family through a collaborative experience designed to elicit the information needed in a relaxed, clear, supportive manner.

The following should be viewed as guidelines or suggestions rather than exact questions. Questions should be tailored according to the individual's developmental level and style of communication. Again, not all of these questions need be asked during this process. The questions in bold are considered to be the most important for intake purposes. Intake interviews should be limited to a total of 90 minutes.

### 4.04.1 Part 1: Interviewing the Family and Prospective Student Together

#### **Introducing what the interview is all about.**

For the steps that follow, the warm-up conversation and current interventions must come first but the rest can be done in any order that makes sense and best follows the flow of the conversation. In the absence of a conversational flow it is fine to do these in order.

Ideally have two people present during the interview — the same two to split off so there is continuity in the discussion both with the family and when the team reviews the student intake form as a group. The questions in bold and marked “Essential” should be obtained during the interview. The remainder of the questions, marked “Useful,” can be gathered over time.



**The following sample is one way to approach this.**

“The goal of us getting together today is to talk and get to know you better. Your parents provided us with a lot of information on our intake form, you gave us an essay, and I see you brought \_\_\_\_\_ (*name whatever portfolio or creative work they may have shared*) to share with us.

During this time:

- We'd like to ask each of you a variety of questions, some related to the intake form you filled out and some new questions.
- We'd like to give you a chance to ask questions
- Then we will split up so each of you has a chance to speak with us more privately. We will have a chance for you to show me the \_\_\_\_\_ you brought, tell me more about the things that interest you, and answer any private questions you may have.”

## **Essential**

1. Begin with warm-up conversation to help everyone settle in – light chat.

**Watch for clinical significance:**

- **Overall interactions with those present**
- **Communication styles**
- **Level of affect, intimacy, conflict, anxiety, etc.**

**Shift to information gathering with open-ended question. This will lead to many places so note responses as you may want to return to a comment to pursue further.**

*(Example for a student with a high communication level: “Tell us why you are interested in attending [name of school] and what you are hoping we can offer you.”)*

*(Example for an individual with a lower communication level: “Can you tell me why you like [name of school]?” “What would you like to do if you came here?”)*

*(Example if the student is non-verbal and has no communication device to assist him: Enlist the help of the parents to translate the answer, have him point to pictures in the school’s brochure if it shows pictures of various activities, etc.)*

**Get a sense of the family’s level of awareness surrounding diagnosis and presenting problems.**

*Ask both parent and prospective student:*

- **What do you see as the biggest stressors right now?**

2. Current interventions *(ask both parent and prospective student)*

- **What are you currently trying/doing to improve health, sleep, behavior, and school/work problems?**
- **How well are they working?**
- **Anything you tried in the past that you may want to try again now to help with \_\_\_\_\_**

3. Family culture

*Ask both parents and student:*

- **How would you describe family relationships at home?**
- **If you had to pick one word to describe life at home what would you say? (Give examples: chaotic, stressful, calm, conflict, funny, peaceful, etc.)**

*Ask student:*

- **What are your responsibilities/duties/chores at home?**
- **How well do you think you manage your responsibilities/ duties/chores?**
- **Do you think you should have more responsibilities? Like what?**

### *Useful*

Ask parents:

- How successfully do you think he is managing his responsibilities?
- How independent is he with his responsibilities and duties?
- Do you think he should have more responsibilities? What?
- Is there anything else you would like to share with me about your life at home?

## 4. Friends and social interactions

### *Essential*

Ask student:

- **Do you have any friends?**
- **What is the most important quality in a friend?**

If yes (to “Do you have any friends?”) then ask:

- **What do you usually do when you get together with your friends?**
- **How often do you hang out?**
- **How close are you?**
- **Do you ever have conflicts with your friends? How do you resolve those conflicts?**
- **Would you like to make more/new friends or are you happy with the ones you have?**

### *Useful*

If no (to “Do you have any friends?”) then ask:

- Do you want friends?
- Do you feel lonely?
- Tell me a little about why you think you don’t have any friends in your life right now.

### *Essential*

Ask parents:

- **Do you have anything to add about what you just heard?**
- **Do you have any concerns or hopes when it comes to your son/daughter and having friends?**

### *Useful*

Ask student:

- Have you ever had a boy/girl friend?
- Had a crush or been on a date? Tell me about it.
- Do you want to have a romantic relationship with someone or get married, have kids at some point in your life?

Ask parents:

- Anything to add?
- Any concerns or hopes when it comes to romance and dating?

## 5. Extended network

### *Essential*

If student is currently in school:

- **Do you have friends in school?**
- **How do you get along with adults at school (teachers, support people, principal)?**

If student has an extended network:

- **Ask student: I see on your intake form there are a few/quite a few people in your life.**
- **Do any of those relationships stand out as more helpful or more important to you? Explain.**
- **Ask parents: Do you agree or are there other people you feel are very helpful or supportive that your son/daughter did not mention?**

### *Useful*

If student does not have an extended network:

- **Ask student: Have you ever thought about expanding your relationships outside of your family and friends (if they have any)? What kinds of people would be helpful or would you like to add?**
- **Ask parents: In an ideal world, if you could extend the network of people in your son's life, who would they be and how would they be of help?**

## 6. Out and about

### *Essential*

If the student is currently out and about in the community:

- **Ask student: I see on your intake form you are doing \_\_\_\_\_. Tell me about it. Of all the community activities you are involved in, which do you like best? Dislike?**
- **Ask parents: Of all the community activities your son is involved in, which do you see him enjoy or benefit from the most (not necessarily the same thing)**

If not out and about in the community:

- **Ask student: Apart from structured activities in the community, how often are you out and about doing other things such as errands, shopping, eating out, taking public transportation, going to church, etc. How do those experiences go?**
- **Ask parents: Would you agree?**

### *Useful*

- **Ask student: I noticed on your intake form you stay home a lot and you are not very involved in your community. Is that correct? Why do you think that is? What would you like to be doing outside the house?**
- **Ask parents: What do you see as the reason why your son is not involved in your community? Would you like that to change? What would you like to see him do that he is not doing now?**



## 7. Sensory reactivity

### **Essential**

One issue that many individuals can have difficulty with relates to the senses. I'd like to ask you some questions about how your body processes senses so I can understand you better and whether it is sometimes a problem for you.

Ask the individual about sensitivity to the following senses, including when sensitivities arise, and get parent feedback.

- Smell
- Taste
- Touch
- Sight
- Hearing

Based upon the sensitivities and situations identified in A above, ask questions about each, first with the student, then with parents:

- How much does it bother you and how often is it a problem?
- Does it cause you to have an emotional reaction (*Example: anxious, angry, fearful etc.*)?
- Physical reaction (*Example: scream, run away, hit, etc.*)?
- Have difficult thoughts?
- Does it make things more intense if the sensation is a surprise or when you know it is coming?
- Do any of these sensitivities bother you so much that you melt down or shut down? Need support? Cause you to avoid certain places, people, or things?
- When one of these sensations upsets you, how long does it take you to relax again? What do you do, if anything, to calm yourself?
- How often does this happen in public vs. at home?

## 8. Emotions

Ask the student:

### **Essential**

- How would you describe your emotions?
- How well do you feel you handle your emotions?
- How do you communicate to other people when you are feeling \_\_\_\_\_ (use emotions student gave you)?
- Give me examples. Do you have any concerns about your emotional experiences or how you express your emotions?

## Useful

- What types of feelings do you usually have?
- Describe how intense these feelings are and how long they last.
- Which feelings are difficult to manage? Why?
- Do you feel you get stuck in certain feelings?
- When you do, what do you or someone else do to help you get unstuck?

Ask parents:

## Useful

- How would you describe your son's emotions?
- What types of feelings does he most commonly have?
- Describe how intense they are and how long they last.
- How well do you feel he handles his emotions? Do you see him get stuck in certain feelings?
- When he does, what do you do?
- Does anything help him get unstuck?
- Do you have any concerns about your son's emotional experiences or expression of emotions?

## 9. Processing information and applying skills

"While we still have you together we want to ask some questions about how you process information and communicate. This will help us understand how you think and learn, which is important to us in knowing how best to support you. Some of these questions may seem random but they give us a lot of information about you."

(Direct questions first to the student, then parents to add and give feedback)

## Essential

- **How well do you follow directions? Elaborate.**
- **How good are you keeping track of your things? Do you lose them often?**
- **How are you at putting together models, puzzles, and other hands-on projects?**
- **What is the hardest thing about being in a conversation?**
- **Do you like to learn? What and how (Examples: lectures, videos, hands-on, etc.)?**
- **How good is your memory?**
- **How good are you at paying attention?**
- **What makes you anxious? Frustrated? Tired?**

## Useful

- Do you get lost or confused in the middle of conversations, lectures, or classes?
- Do you get lost in public places? Do directions confuse you?
- Describe your sense of humor. What types of thing do you find funny? Does anyone share your sense of humor?
- Do you often wonder why other people are laughing, as if you missed the joke and they all heard it?
- Do you tend to be super loud and people shush you or are you too quiet and people ask you to speak up?
- Are you good at art?
- Do you consider yourself creative? How? Is it easy or hard to come up with new ideas?
- Do you have any special talents?
- How often do you get bored?
- Do you consider yourself a perfectionist?
- How fast or slow do you typically do things? How fast/slow are your thoughts?

## 10. Additional aspects of student's world

Follow up on this section from the intake form:

### Essential

- **What short-term and long-term goals has the student expressed?**
  - **hobbies and passions to pursue**
  - **accomplishments** (*Examples: finish college, build a boat, etc.*)
  - **independence and maturation skills** (*Examples: live in own apartment, drive, travel, go on a date, etc.*)
  - **bucket list (realistic and unrealistic)**
- **List problems or issues student has expressed that he wants to change or resolve in his life**
  - **social** (*Example: make friends*)
  - **emotional** (*Example: feel less scared trying new things*)
  - **behavior** (*Example: not get angry so often*)
  - **quality of life** (*Example: stop having nightmares*)
  - **other**

## Useful

- Has the student expressed a vision of himself for the future? (*Examples: career, where he wants to live, get married, etc.*) Elaborate.
- In what ways does the individual express himself creatively? (***Examples: art, written stories, music, homemade videos, pictures of models made, etc.***)

11. Open floor for questions before taking a break and splitting parents and student.

### 4.04.2 Part 2: Preparing Staff for Student Observations

The preceding section gives questions to ask directly of the family and student when they are together during the interview. During this discussion, the interviewer will want to take note of characteristics the student demonstrates per the lists below.

The following exhaustive lists provide insight and suggest possible lines of observation, questioning, and areas to explore. While all this information might be significant, the interviewer must work out how to gather what seems most important and trust that the follow-on Discovery Phase process will pick up on much of what cannot be obtained during the interview.

It is also important to remember that the student is likely undergoing anxiety and other stressors related to the intake process, being evaluated, the prospect of change, and interacting with unfamiliar people. Although it is helpful to know how the student manages under duress, it is also important not to assume his performance during the interview process is an accurate indication of how he will manage his experience and himself once enrolled in the program.

The observations made during this time and any conclusions regarding his current level of functioning will need to be revisited in the Discovery Phase and revised as the student acclimates and settles into a routine.

#### **1. Awareness of and involvement in own diagnosis and interventions**

- Degree to which student is a decision maker in own interventions (including medications)
- Degree of active involvement in interventions
- Ability to self-advocate

#### **2. Sensory regulation and reactivity**

- Emotional regulation and reactivity
- Social awareness, sensitivity, appropriateness, and interaction
- Are there concerns about the appropriateness and social adaptability of the individual's regulating, calming, and soothing activities in public? Explain.
- How is the individual's self-care and independence under these circumstances?

- Reaction to novelty (*Examples: wants to try new things, curious, needs encouragement, shies away, negative reactions*)
- Need for facilitation and support
- Adaptability with the unexpected
- Predictable triggers and difficulties
- Routines and rituals that help
- Are the strategies for regulation, calming, and soothing in public the same as those applied at home? Explain.
- Stamina
- Initiation and responsiveness to interactions with others (*Examples: chatty, curious, friendly, shy, aggressive, demanding, etc.*)
- Level of participation in planning (*Examples: selecting outing, planning outing*)
- Level of participation during activity
- Positive outcomes, level of success

### 3. Auditory and language processing

- Describe the current level of functioning surrounding auditory processing.
- When you ask a question, does the student pause or stall?
- How many times do you need to repeat the question?
- Does the student only understand a portion of what you say?
- Does he understand the meaning of what you are saying?
- Describe the current level of functioning surrounding language processing
- Speech/articulation
- Receptive language and comprehension (*Examples: vocabulary, following directions; understanding stories, jokes, slogans, movies, lectures, explanations, etc.*)
- Memory (*Examples: rules, procedures, multi-step processes, sequences, etc.*)
- Ideational range (*has a wide range of ideas about a given subject and interested in a wide range of subjects*)
- Expressive language/spontaneous language (*Examples: social, academic, incidental, etc.*)
- Fluidity in social language/conversation skills

Contribution to group discussions (*Examples: pacing, track topic, timing*)

### 4. Communication

- Ability to stay sensorily and environmentally regulated (*Examples: calm, stimming, agitated, etc.*)

- Ability to stay emotionally regulated (*Examples: excited, giddy, anxious, angry, frustrated*)
- Ability to stay engaged surrounding a shared topic (*Examples: changes subject, jumps around, refuses to discuss, doesn't over elaborate*)
- Ability to stay engaged physically and verbally with other members of conversation/interaction
- Ability to read non-verbal communication (*Examples: gestures, tone, body language, eye contact, meaningful looks*)
- Ability to access and use words that accurately, appropriately, and clearly communicate needs, thoughts and emotions so others can understand
- Ability to follow reciprocity and flow of communication (*Examples: tangential, confused, reciprocal, talks over others, interrupts*)
- Describe communication to get needs met, engage with others, share ideas, fill space, creativity, accomplish a task, etc.
- Describe common themes within communication (*Examples: restricted, only talks about proscribed topics/wide range*)
- Ability to use language to negotiate and problem solve successfully with others
- Ability to understand abstract language (*Examples: metaphor, irony, wordplay, puns, colloquialisms, idioms, etc.*)
- Level of fatigue/need for communication breaks

## 5. Cognitive

### Regulation

- Describe pace of the student's cognition (*Examples: mind races, measured, slow and deliberate, very slow and labored, jumbled, out of sequence, etc.*)
- What is the level of awareness regarding the student's internal thoughts and his ability to control and manage them?
- Are there any techniques used to help with cognitive regulation (*Examples: mindfulness, meditation, writing down, talking them over, etc.*)?
- How easily does the student learn?
  - new ideas
  - new tasks
  - new routines, rules, and procedures
  - names of peers
- How does the student approach problems?
  - use logic
  - use creativity
  - brainstorm/generate multiple ideas
  - ask for assistance

- Does the student think only in concrete terms or does he also generate abstract ideas?
- To what extent does the student use creativity or innovation in thinking?
- To what extent can the student understand and expand upon the ideas of others?
- Does the student have flexibility or rigidity in his thinking?

## 6. Attention: regulation and self-awareness of regulation

- **Overall attention control:** How well does the student regulate/control his attention? Can he remain focused when asked to fully receive incoming information? Does his alertness fluctuate depending on topic or task?
- **Saliency determination:** Deciding what incoming stimuli is important to attend to. When exposed to information, is the student able to identify what is important and what is a small detail? Does he get distracted by or over-focused on less important information? (*Examples: focusing on small details and missing the big picture, not knowing what to take notes on in class, not getting what the key parts of the directions are important to remember.*)
- **Depth and detail of processing:** Extent to which the student is allocating his attention to stimuli intensely enough so that it can be processed and encoded into memory. Indicated by superficial understanding rather than a comprehensive detailed level of understanding, can give back the overall topic discussed but no supporting details, often memory recall problems are linked to weak depth and detail of processing (*Example: “in one ear and out the other” processing*).
- **Focal maintenance:** Extent to which a student can sustain concentration for the appropriate amount of time needed given the task, lecture, etc. (*Examples: drifts off into internal thoughts and daydreaming, not completing tasks, only gets partial information/holes in understanding or recall, susceptible to external distracters – window, peers, etc.*)
- **Distractibility levels and triggers:** Internal (such as thoughts, feelings, sensory) and external (such as environment, sensory input). (*Example: pays attention to itchy tag vs. lecture*)
- **Satisfaction threshold:** Allocating the appropriate amount of attention to a task that is of moderate to low interest. Can the student rally the needed attention for information, tasks, and activities of moderate- to low-interest level or only pay attention when stimuli are of high-interest level? Does the student describe a wide range of tasks, responsibilities, experiences, or topics as “boring” and consequently avoid or disengage? Do behavioral or emotional issues surface when satisfaction threshold is too high (*Examples: self-stim, become disruptive, sideline with antics or behavior, become emotionally distressed*)?

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**Note:** When individuals are confused, overwhelmed, anxious, or do not understand, their reactions can look similar to someone with a high threshold for satisfaction (only able to sustain focus when highly interested). If low-interest information, tasks, etc. are linked to an affinity, passion, or interest, it will be easier to keep the individual engaged.

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- **Mental energy:** Initiating and maintaining the mental effort needed for optimal learning and behavior in a given context
  - Alertness: Maintaining effective level of targeted listening and watching. Can the student target and sustain listening and watching skills long enough to absorb meaningful information?
  - Mental effort: The fuel one brings to a task or experience. Being able to keep up the flow of energy output needed for cognitive, physical, and emotional work.
  - Does the student often complain of being tired, bored, or not feeling well when presented with tasks? Does he appear fatigued (zoned out, stalled, head on desk, won't run to meet the ball on the soccer field, etc)? Does he lose steam mid-task or never rev his engines at the onset? Does he perk up when exposed to high-interest level or novelty and then wilt once the stimuli have been removed? (*Example: Head on desk in class but leaps up and races to get lunch, chatty during lunch, then sleepy again once back at desk*)
  - Sleep/arousal balance: Getting enough quality sleep at night to be able to wake in the morning and stay awake during the day. Does the student appear sleepy, complain of exhaustion, or yawn a lot? Does he report difficulty falling asleep, staying asleep, waking early, difficulty waking?
  - Performance consistency: Being able to keep up a reliable and predictable flow of mental energy to function dependably over time (able to do something competently one day and not the next, unreliable, inconsistent task performance)
- **Strategies and techniques implemented**
  - To what extent can the student self-regulate?
  - To what extent is he dependent on others to regulate? To attend? (*Examples: needs reminders, verbal and non-verbal cueing*)
  - Are there any strategies and approaches that seem effective or that the student identifies as effective?

## 7. Developmental levels with adults and peers

- **Shared attention/regulation and interest in the world**

The student's ability to regulate his or her attention and behavior while being interested in the full range of sensations (sights, sounds, smells, own movement patterns, etc.). The student's ability to enter into a state of shared attention with another person. This is a student's ability to process his environment, filter out distractions, and engage with others, attend to games, activities, or tasks (pay attention in the classroom).
- **Engagement/forming relationships**

The student's ability to engage in relationships, including the depth and range of pleasure and warmth, related feelings, such as assertiveness or sadness, that can be incorporated into the quality of engagement and stability of the student's engagement (withdraw, become aimless when under stress).



- Two-way, purposeful interactions with gestures - intentional two-way communication and language**

The student's ability to enter into two-way purposeful communication. At its most basic level, this involves helping a student to open and close circles of communication. This is a student's ability to be intentional in interactions and activities (*Example: student is able to initiate with another person to keep activities going, for desired objects or activities, etc.*).
- Two-way, purposeful problem-solving interactions / development of complex sense of self**

The ability to string together many circles of communication/ problem solving into a larger pattern (ten or twenty). This is necessary for negotiating many of the most important emotional needs in life (*Examples: being close to others, exploring and being assertive, limiting aggression, negotiation safety, etc.*). This is the stage where the student begins to develop a sense of self/self-esteem/independence ("I did it!" or "Look what I did!" using affect, gestures, and words if verbal)
- Elaborating ideas/representational capacity and elaboration of symbolic thinking**

The student's ability to create mental representations. The ability to do imaginary games or activities or use words, phrases, or sentences to convey some emotional intention ("I'm really angry!"). The student begins to have his own ideas and share them with people around them. This is the ability to share ideas with others and represent ideas and real life through games or activities.
- Building bridges between ideas/emotional thinking**

The student's ability to make connections between different internal representations or emotional ideas ("I'm mad because you're mean."). This capacity is a foundation for higher level thinking, problem-solving, and such capacities as separating fantasy from reality, modulating impulses and mood, and learning to concentrate and plan.
- Multi-cause, comparative, and triangular thinking**

The student is able to explore multiple reasons for a feeling, comparing feelings, and understanding triadic interactions among feeling states ("I feel left out when Susie likes Janet better than me.")
- Finding an indirect road to problem solve.** *Example: John wants to be Sarah's friend. He sees that Tom is Sarah's friend, so John becomes Tom's friend.* This type of thinking is more expansive and even a little manipulative. He learns to "work the crowd" to satisfy his social needs.
- Emotionally differentiated gray-area thinking**

Shades and gradations among differentiated feeling states (*Example: ability to describe degrees of feelings about anger, love, excitement, disappointment, such as "I feel a little annoyed"*). The student begins to know where he falls on the social ladder. He begins to define himself by how accepted he is by his peer group. He begins to see "shades of gray" and becomes a better

problem solver. He can also see consequences of his behavior. The student is able to express a range of emotions. (Examples: *"I'm a little mad, very mad, etc."* or *"I'm the best, Jo is the second best, and John is the worst."*)

- **Intermittent reflective thinking, a stable sense of self, and an internal standard**

Reflecting on feelings in a relationship to an internalized sense of self (Examples: *"It's not like me to feel so angry"* or *"I shouldn't feel this jealous"*). The student begins to internalize values and develops a greater sense of self that can't be broken down by lack of acceptance by peer group (Example: *Sally was mean to me because she was having a bad day, but I'm still a good person*).

## 8. Theory of mind

- Identifies emotions in self
- Identifies emotions of others
- Expressions of emotions that match the context appropriately
- Response to others' emotions that match the context appropriately
- Expresses emotions appropriately
- Responds to others' emotions appropriately
- Predicts emotions given a situation
- Understands situation-based emotions (Example: *the girl is scared because she thinks the dog is going to bite her*)
- Understands desire-based emotions (Example: *the boy is jealous because he wants what the other student has*)
- Understands belief-based emotions (Example: *the girl is sad because she thought it was her turn*)
- Understands simple visual perspective taking (*identifies that people in different places see different things*)
- Understands complex visual perspective taking (*identifies that two people can see the same thing differently*)
- Understands that "seeing leads to knowing" (*people only know things they have experienced, directly or indirectly*)
- Predicts actions based on another person's knowledge (*making action predictions on the basis of where another person believes an object to be*)
- Recognizes false beliefs

## 9. Social cognition in unstructured and spontaneous contexts

Describe the student's awareness of the following. Provide examples.

- **Verbal**
  - Understands and uses social and age-appropriate language

- Code-switching: understands that social communication varies depending on context and the people involved (*Example: understanding one addresses a teacher differently than a peer and can apply that understanding in relationships – goes from PE to a group discussion and brings the bravado and trash talk with him instead of leaving it on the playing field*)
- Topic selection: ability to select topics of conversation that are of interest to others. Does the student seem to have awareness of and attempt to select shared interests? Does he alienate peers and staff by solely focusing on his own interests? Can the individual sense when others are not interested (verbal and non-verbal cueing)?
- Humor regulation: matching one's expression of humor to a given audience, including level of appropriateness. Describe the student's style of humor. Can he match the appropriate humor to the right audience? Does he crack jokes, puns, or other intended humorous comments in an inappropriate manner or at inappropriate or insensitive times? If asked to do so, can he adjust his humor to make appropriate to a different situation? Can he detect and respond appropriately to other people's jokes and humorous statements?
- Reciprocity: ability to understand the give and take and timing of social conversation. Does the student interrupt, talk over, or otherwise skew the flow of conversation with a lack of reciprocity? Do his responses match the asker's question? Does he incorporate the other participants into the conversational flow (*Example: talk "at" as opposed to talk "with"?*) Does he dominate conversations, tend to go off on rants or monologues that hijack the conversation? Do his reciprocity skills vary depending on the number of people in the conversation?
- **Behavior**
  - Self-marketing: building and displaying an image that is appealing to others. Does the student appear to possess a sense of how he is coming across to others? Does he shape and change his social persona in various contexts according to who he is interacting with? Can he change his persona or approach midway if the other members of the interaction show dislike or displeasure? (*Example: Comes barreling in with jokes but after nobody laughs stops the jokes or keeps going regardless of the lack of response, is very loud, notices the other person shrinking away, or tones down voice and behavior accordingly?*)
  - Social information processing: understanding the underlying meaning and agenda to a social interaction (*between the lines, subtitles, big picture*). Does he understand the underlying meaning to small talk, chatting, niceties, compliments, etc.? Does he get a sense of the socially influential peers in a group and use that knowledge to navigate the situation?
  - Initiation: How successfully does the student initiate social interaction and join a pre-existing group? How does the student attempt to build rapport with strangers? How does the student re-establish rapport with someone he knows? How does he enter a group? How does he initiate conversation?
  - Extent to which student can exhibit self-control within social interactions: Does the student know when he is being given overt and covert clues to stop or tone down a particular behavior, expression of emotion, or topic? Does he know when to be quiet?

- Timing and staging: How aware is the individual of when it is okay to do what in the context of different relationships (*Examples: overly touchy, too intimate, when to bring up what topics and personal information*)?
- Conflict resolution and negotiation: How skilled is the student in navigating conflict?

#### 4.04.3 Part 3: Interviewing the Family Privately

This section of the interview process is designed to expand on issues that come up during the interview with the student or as a result of responses from the intake form, plus issues and concerns parents or caregivers may have felt hesitant to share in front of their son/daughter or on paper. It is also an opportunity for the family to ask additional questions that may have surfaced during the interview process.

The following are a list of questions to guide this discussion; however, note that the interviewer should supplement, revise the wording to fit the student or parent, skip those questions that do not apply, and decide the best order in which to discuss each domain. These are just guidelines.

The most important topics to be covered are highlighted in bold and marked “Essential.” It is suggested that a time limit of approximately 45 minutes be placed on this interview. The remainder of the questions, marked “Useful,” can be gathered over time.

#### Executive Functioning and Self-Advocacy

Review the following list of executive functioning skills. Describe and elaborate on the student’s level of functioning and success. In addition to describing the quality of each, indicate frequency and quality.

##### **Essential**

- **Paying attention to and remembering details**
- **Previewing: being able to project and anticipate what comes next, visualizing consequences**
- **Organization** (*self, belongings, materials, thoughts, emotions*)
- **Managing time and space**
- **Pacing: Ability to adjust speed of approach to fit work - can speed up or slow down depending on difficulty, etc.**
- **Managing tasks**
- **Facilitation/inhibition: ability to know when to start and when to stop – being able to perceive multiple options and pick the best one before starting.**
- **Tracking multiple events simultaneously** (*Example: coordinating bus schedules with arrival and departure events*)
- **Reinforceability: ability to use previous experience to guide correct behavior and work output – learning from experience** (*Example: “Last time I rushed through my math test and failed it. I should slow down on this math test.” “Last time I teased her and she broke into tears. I should take a softer approach with her this time and know she is not a good person to tease.”*)

## Useful

- Strategizing
- Planning
- Self-monitoring: being able to watch, analyze, and evaluate self as one is doing a task.  
(Example: “How am I doing?” “What/who do I need to accomplish this task?”)

### 4.04.4 Part 4: Interviewing the Prospective Student Privately

This interview seeks to provide the student with an opportunity to share his thoughts and feelings in a more relaxed setting. The following questions are suggestions or prompts to guide the interviewer into discussions of the student's interests, concerns, and goals. They should be reshaped by the interviewer as she sees fit into a relaxed series of guided questions to be used in an informal, conversational manner.

Some questions will seek to expand on issues that arise in the discussion with the parents, whereas others open up opportunities to learn more about the individual. If the student brought things to show, the objects and ideas can provide a springboard for discussion or may dictate the entire theme of the interview. The interviewer should encourage spontaneous sharing and attempt to assuage any anxiety.

It is suggested that a time limit of approximately 45 minutes be placed on this interview. The most important topics to be covered are highlighted in bold and marked “Essential.” It is suggested that a time limit of approximately 45 minutes be placed on this interview. The remainder of the questions, marked “Useful,” can be gathered over time.

Cover the following topics concerning the student's own world:

## Essential

- **Student’s vision of himself for the future**
- **Work samples, writings, works of art, or other forms of creative expression that should be included so we can better understand the individual** (Examples: written stories, homemade videos, pictures of models made, etc.)
- **Preferences, affinities, passions, hobbies, sports**
- **Activities that have been successful** (Examples: church youth group, bowling, etc.)
- **Activities that traditionally break down** (Examples: parties, movies, shopping)
- **Student’s goals (short, long term, bucket list) [Note: student may need help getting to this]**
- **Student’s concerns (issues he would like to resolve)**
- **Diet/food issues and preferences**
- **Favorite shows, characters, books**

## Useful

- Phobias and fears
- Obsessions

#### 4.05 Sample Request for Parent Letter of Introduction

“We are excited that \_\_\_\_\_ is joining our community. We look forward to getting to know your son/daughter so that we are best able to support him/her in his/her transition into independence and adulthood.

During the intake process you provided a lot of information about your son/daughter's educational history, medical issues, social and behavior concerns, strengths and weaknesses, and areas of challenge. This information is very important but as you know does not fully capture who your son/daughter is – his/her passions, goals, dreams, hopes, personality, sense of humor, and more.

Thus, we request you draft a letter of introduction to us of a more personal and narrative nature so as we begin the initial Discovery Phase we can benefit from the richness of your perspective and see your son/daughter through your eyes as parent/caregiver. Feel free to share whatever you think is important for us to know about \_\_\_\_\_.”

#### 4.06 Sample Student Intake Essay Prompts

“As part of getting to know you we would like to hear about you in your own words. Here are some ideas to help you get started. You are not expected to answer all the questions below. They are simply suggestions from which you can choose if you do not want to come up with your own topic. Do not worry about spelling, grammar, or how long the essay should be. If it is easier you can use a computer (or any other means of communication or facilitated communication is acceptable). It is also fine to dictate your thoughts to someone who can type or write your thoughts down for you. We just want you to share what you are comfortable telling us about yourself.”

- My hopes and dreams for the future are...
- If I were to have a career or job I would like to...
- Things I love are...
- Things I don't like are...
- If I were in charge of the world, I would...
- I am good at...
- The things I find hard are...
- I think this program can help me with...
- Topic of your choosing

## 4.07 Using the Core Teaching Principles: the Scientific Basis and the Art of Implementation

In an earlier section, we introduced five teaching principles important in all educational efforts but most particularly in transition curricula. Here we shall examine them more closely within the context of applying them to individualize the curriculum.

### 4.07.1 Core Principle #1: Effective Learning Occurs When Learners are Calm and Regulated.

#### The Science

In order to be present, engaged, responsive, reciprocal, functional, and emotionally available in any environment an individual must first be calm and regulated. The regulatory functions that dictate the quality and extent to which one can engage with and respond to ideas, other people, and the world around them are:

**Physical regulation**, which depends upon the healthy functioning of the:

- **Endocrine system**, which dictates hormonal balances, imbalances, surges, and deficits that affect emotions, behavior, motivation
- **Sympathetic nervous system**, which up-regulates (fight/flight/freeze/submit)
- **Parasympathetic nervous system** down-regulates (calming and soothing)
- **Somatic nervous system**, which regulates the voluntary systems of senses and movement. This includes **sensory regulation**, which involves both the physical ability for the brain to detect through the senses and how that input is processed in the brain.
- **Autonomic nervous system**, which regulates involuntary systems such as gastrointestinal, heartbeat, blood pressure, etc.
- **Sleep/arousal** regulates sleep and awake cycles

**Emotional regulation**, which involves how an individual experiences emotions, attempts to influence them, and the contexts and triggers that dictate when the emotions surface (Gross, 1998b).

**Cognitive regulation**, which involves ability to control the rate, volume, patterning, and complexity of thoughts. Because of the effect biochemistry and the endocrine system has on cognition, cognitive regulation is strongly tied to emotion, attention, motivation, and memory.

#### The Art

Once the above science is understood, the skillful use of planning tools begins:

- **The SIP:** By this point, there should be a considerable amount of information on the individual's regulatory issues in the Student's Individual Profile.



- **Lesson plan development:** Understanding the individual's regulatory issues will make it possible to devise lessons the student can absorb, make meaning of, and retain. Well-designed lesson plans select environments, peer groupings, teaching modalities, and supportive materials that are compatible with the individual's regulatory needs.

For example, consider how you would plan a science experiment lesson plan for a student who is very anxious (emotion regulation), tactile sensitive (sensory regulation), easily slips into fantasy (cognitive regulation), and is chronically sleepy due to sleep difficulty (sleep/arousal regulation). The following *strategies and accommodations* might be valuable:

- **To promote emotion regulation:** Have all steps and procedures written down with visual examples to anchor, be available to model, and/or co-conduct the experiment if anxiety spikes. Build in lots of check-ins and reassurance, catch mistakes early so the student doesn't have to undo a lot of work, and get further hindered by anxiety.
  - **To promote sensory regulation:** Since the individual is tactile sensitive, measure out all the ingredients before the lab starts so he does not have to handle a lot of materials. Allow enough space between him and other students so he has the space to work and does not feel like he is going to brush up against another individual easily. Wear cloth gloves to soften/muffle the tactile input. If extremely sensitive, the student can be in charge of the experiment and dictate to the teacher what to do every step so he is intricately involved but does not have to manipulate the materials.
  - **To promote cognitive regulation:** Build in as much hands-on work as possible to keep the student alert, engaged with the work, and present. Arrange for frequent check-ins. Have him repeat back instructions to make sure he didn't lose focus during listening. Keep affect, gestures, and humor up so animation is high and it is compelling to stay present for the task at hand.
  - **To promote sleep/arousal regulation:** Schedule movement and physical activity before science class to help with alertness and arousal. Do not place class first thing in the morning. Arrange for a snack, have water before or during a break. Stretch during breaks. Have the student stand during lab instead of sitting.
- **Goal setting and expectations:** In order to form realistic goals and expectations, it is essential to reference an individual's regulatory styles. To ignore this data is to run the risk of selecting internships, jobs, careers, peer groups, activities, and community outings that are not compatible with regulatory needs.
  - **Self-awareness, self-regulation, and self-care building:** Since regulatory systems have such a tremendous impact on an individual in all domains of experience and functioning, it is vital that individualized work be incorporated into every student's program experience that focuses on raising awareness and identifying strategies for self-regulation and self-care/self-soothing. The ability to manage one's own regulatory systems opens up tremendous opportunities for personal growth, self-determination, independence, and more. Without an awareness of one's



own regulatory needs and challenges, an individual will become dependent on others, limited in the experiences he can benefit from, and restricted in potential to establish and maintain friendships and other meaningful relationships.

- **Relationship building – peers and staff:** Placing such high value within the program culture on the importance of maintaining regulation and a sense of calm enables staff to infuse not only classes and activities with this value but also invites the topic to be raised naturally within the milieu and for staff to take advantage of teachable moments.

#### 4.07.2 Core Principle #2: Communication Provides the Foundation for Effective Learning and Making Meaning of the World.

##### The Science

Communication is the basic skill that makes it meaningful for us to live in the company of others. It is what makes it possible for us to exchange information, ask for help, seek assurance, help others, solve problems, and stay connected. Beyond just basic survival, it allows us to thrive by sharing and debating ideas, conveying desire and preference, exerting will, displaying personality, sharing joys and heartbreaks, and expressing artistic thought.

Individuals with ASD and other developmental disabilities often possess communication barriers that limit their ability to survive and thrive. It is the responsibility of educators, clinicians, and caregivers to establish and support the expansion of communication methods for these individuals so they can access opportunities the world has to offer. By matching communication methods to strengths and challenges, we can potentially offer these individuals greater independence, social connectedness, and success for the future.

##### The Art

Opening channels of communication for individuals with inherent language and social challenges requires:

- Matching communication options to a student's strengths and challenges
- Understanding of variation in language processing and brain functioning for individuals with ASD and other developmental disabilities
- Understanding current cultural communication trends; discovering ones the individual might want to make use of
- Identifying individual communication preferences
- Trial and error, resiliency, persistence, optimism, and patience on the part of the teacher
- Flexibility in making accommodations and shifting strategies as needed
- Understanding of the role communication plays in societal expectations (*Example: making RSVPs for a party*), independent living (*Example: renewing a prescription with a pharmacist*), social navigation (*Example: trying to initiate a friendship*), educational pursuits (*Example: asking questions in class*), and career choices (*Example: interviewing, interacting with supervisors*)

When designing and individualizing communication-based interventions for a student with ASD or other developmental disabilities, a balance should be struck between the contexts and needs that apply to the individual's life:

- What forms of communication would work well for the individual in meeting basic needs? *(Example: ask for help, express needs)*
- What forms of communication would work well for the individual in seeking meaning? *(Example: exchange information, ask questions, get clarification, etc.)*
- What forms of communication would work well for the individual to engage socially? *(Example: establish rapport; grow, maintain and repair friendships; negotiate, engage in shared experiences, join in group activities, etc.)*
- What forms of communication would work well for the individual to express individuality? *(Example: creative expression, exchange of ideas, indicating preferences and desires, dream in personal goals, etc.)*
- What forms of communication work well for the individual in pursuit of enjoyable, meaningful experiences? *(Example: express and increase capacity for joy, activate and sustain motivation, ignite creativity and passion, etc.)*
- What forms of communication work well for the individual in meeting independence goals? *(Example: community navigation, interaction with businesses, managing self-care, transportation, shopping, etc.)*
- What forms of communication work well for the individual in meeting short- and long-term goals? *(Example: educational, career, job readiness, etc.)*

**Providing individuals with ASD and other developmental disabilities with communication tools appropriately matched to their language and communication skills significantly improves their chances of living connected, meaningful, self-driven, and joyful lives.**

#### 4.07.4 Core Principle #3: Learning Occurs Most Easily When Topics are Approached Using the Student's Preferences and Natural Affinities.

##### The Science

Affinity-based learning is the process of harnessing the interests and passions of students and incorporating them into curriculum and lesson planning. Studies show that learning capacity increases when information is presented in a high interest area. Other systems that support learning such as attention, visualization, motivation, and mental stamina also increase, creating an optimal environment for learning to take place.

##### The Art

Embedding affinities and subject matter of high interest to students in lessons, classes, field trips, and other program experiences requires staff to be:

- Knowledgeable about the individual preferences of each student

- Creative in their thinking and planning
- Flexible in their approach to teaching and the topics they cover
- Enthusiastic about sharing interests and learning about the interests of others
- Actively engaging students in the learning process and planning
- Open to allowing students to take the lead, assume classroom responsibilities, and co-teach or teach
- Enthusiastic and encourage students to share interests with one another

The opportunities affinity-based learning offers are endless. Whether it be planning a potato chip flavor taste test; teaching a scientific method with a gardening project; or practice following directions, working as a team, and learning about art in a scavenger hunt at an art museum; affinity-based learning packages information in a manner that is exciting, fun, and compelling. In addition, this approach engages emotions to help bolster learning and often creates momentum and energy not present in typical classroom settings.

#### 4.07.4 Core Principle #4: Meaningful Learning Arises More Easily from Emotionally-Based Experiences.

##### The Science

Emotionally-based memories are some of the strongest memories one can experience. Since memory is inextricably tied with learning, it follows that weaving the emotions and emotionally-based experiences of students into the learning process bears significant positive results:

- Energizes learning
- Infuses enthusiasm
- Increases student participation through the sharing of experiences and emotions
- Bolsters memory
- Increases attention
- Provides a personal context for unfamiliar or abstract information
- Increases opportunities to practice empathy, perspective taking, and causal relationships

##### The Art

Incorporating emotions and emotionally-based experiences into learning invites a level of creativity, interaction, and expression that is not present in traditional learning environments. Students who are having difficulty connecting to material can begin to draw upon their own experiences and feelings as a way to reach understanding. They are able to use their own emotions and experiences as reference points for connecting with the material in an energized, highly personal way.

Abstract ideas can be concretized through the use of personal experience and emotions. Creative teaching methods can be expanded to include emotionally-based activities such as art, improvisation, role playing, debates, acting, creative writing, and more. The flow of classroom communication becomes more

fluid and reciprocal as students have a well of emotional experiences from which to draw, contribute, and compare to their peers. *(Example: I want a boyfriend. You have a boyfriend. I feel anger, but underneath the anger is the dynamic of “I want what you have.” I may actually feel very sad about this underneath the anger as well. Anger is a more linear cause and effect dynamic, thus much easier to identify than “you hit me and that made me mad.” In order to understand more circuitous and contextual emotions such as jealousy, one has to examine more deeply both the underlying social dynamics of the situation and the underlying feelings involved.)*

It should be noted that students who struggle with emotional regulation will need additional support, guidance, and boundaries to help them navigate the emotional components and maintain a sense of emotional balance. In the case of highly reactive emotional students, accommodations and modifications will need to be in place.

For some, emotionally-based learning may need to be limited to positive emotions until the individual is capable of sourcing from his own negative emotional experiences without becoming emotionally overloaded. *(For example, if discussing fear that a character in a book faced, there may be students in the class who are unable to draw from their own fear experiences without going to a place of fear and activating fear responses that will distract, distress, or shut them down.)*

#### 4.07.5 Core Principle #5: Effective Learning Happens in the Context of a Warm, Empathetic Relationship

##### The Science

**Alliance building exercises** are intended to build and strengthen rapport and trust. They are easy, team-building fun games and activities that permit participants to get to know one another.

An example is a group sharing exercise such as "Never Have I Ever". Everyone sits in a circle and one person sits in the middle. The person in the middle says "never have I ever bungee jumped". Everyone who has bungee jumped has to leap up and switch chairs. The person left standing is now in the middle and the game continues. Often the facilitator will have a basket of examples for the person in the middle to pick from in case anyone has difficulty generating ideas. It is a fun way to get to know people and find commonalities.

*“When the teacher has the ability to understand the student’s reactions from the inside, has a sensitive awareness of the way the process of education and learning seems to the student, the likelihood of significant learning is increased. This type of understanding is sharply different from the usual evaluative understanding that follows the pattern of, ‘I understand what is wrong with you.’ ”*

*“When there is a sensitive empathy, however, the reaction in the learner follows something of this pattern: ‘At last someone understands how it feels and seems to be me without wanting to analyze or judge me. Now I can blossom, and grow and learn.’ ” (Rogers, 1969)*

## The Art

Empathy and relationship building can be established in the classroom and in therapeutic activities in a multitude of ways. Approaches can be tailored to fit the style and needs of the individual students, the group dynamics, and the comfort level of the teachers and facilitators. Some methods for using empathy to strengthen therapeutic relationships include:

- Sharing and self-disclosure
- Using alliance building exercises
- Encouraging and modeling expressions of warmth, encouragement, and acceptance
- Building a climate and expectation of non-judgment and mutual respect within the culture of the classroom or group
- Building in opportunities for positive exchanges among students in a relaxed format (*Examples: joke telling, sharing accomplishments, show and tell, etc.*)
- Conducting empathy and relationship building exercises (*Examples: case study scenarios, stories, role playing, games, self-questionnaires, and other activities aimed to generate discussion and reflection on empathy. An example of a case study scenario is: The facilitator gives a real or made-up case and has the students discuss, express opinions, make conclusions, act as judge and jury, etc.*)
- Incorporating check-ins for students to share with one another what is currently going on with them
- Designing clear classroom rules that incorporate empathy and are posted on the wall for reference and reminder
- Maintaining availability to students who might need 1:1 support or emotional assistance
- Incorporating empathy into content instruction (connecting deeper to historical events, current events, and characters in novels)
- Use of media, movies, and TV shows to observe scenarios and discuss empathy

### 4.07.6 Core Principle #6: Effective Teaching Encourages Students to Become Independent Seekers and Users of Knowledge

## The Science

*“Self-initiated learning which involves the whole person of the learner – feelings as well as intellect – is the most lasting and pervasive.”* (Rogers, 1969)

A comprehensive review of literature on independent learning reveals that the following defining elements need to be present to foster students’ ability to participate actively in their own learning process:

- **Collaboration:** Students understand their learning goals and work with teachers to modify their environment so it best fits their learning needs. The student is explicitly supported in understanding the ways in which the student-teacher relationship involves mutual responsibility (each responsible for aspects of learning, clear boundaries regarding expectations).

- Personal responsibility: The student understands and is supported in being accountable for his learning and has explicit responsibilities that encourage the development of accountability and ownership of the learning process.
- Motivation: In addition to external motivational techniques the teacher applies, students are encouraged and supported in finding their own internal sources of motivation.
- Strong empathic relationship: Students feel positively emotionally connected to their teachers and feel a sense of safety and support in the learning environment
- Cognitive and meta-cognitive support: The teacher explicitly and implicitly supports the building and strengthening of cognitive and meta-cognitive skills that are needed for independent learning to take place (*memory, attention, analysis, problem-solving, etc.*)
- Affective skills: Students are exposed to and get practice on how to use their emotions and feelings to enhance understanding, motivation, and learning.
- Clear feedback loop: In the context of a supportive, trusting relationship, the student is exposed to explicit feedback and ways to incorporate that feedback into their learning process.
- Information and technology: Students are guided in learning how to approach information and the process of information seeking through technology that enables them to actively seek the information they need and think critically about its source and content.
- Executive function: Teachers assist students in the key executive functions needed for effective learning to take place (*planning, self-monitoring, controlling and evaluating learning activities, and self-reflection*) (Meyer, et al., 2008)

## The Art

Fostering independent learning in students with ASD and developmental delays is a dynamic and emotionally engaging process for both the student and teacher. Teachers of the Transition Curriculum content are encouraged to incorporate and implement the important independent learning ingredients listed above with creativity, flexibility, innovation, and high affect. These elements can be individualized to each student's learning style, regulatory needs, personality, interests and passions, sense of humor, and cognitive capability.

By holding the Transition Curriculum to a high standard of teaching that emphasizes independent learning, we give students a chance to be enriched by learning inside the program as well as the skills to increase their learning capacity outside the classroom.

Whether it is an internet search to find a laser tag venue for a birthday party, the selection of a book to read for pleasure at the library, the quest to find out if Annie Oakley really was a such a sharpshooter that she could split a playing card in half, or settle a bet on how many flavors of Coca-Cola are manufactured, we want students to actively desire and seek out information that is meaningful to them and connects them to the world in which they live.

The goals for independent learning are similar in nature to the Transition Curriculum's big picture goals for fostering empowerment, self-determination, and self-awareness in every student. This compatibility in methodology between big picture goals and teaching philosophy allows for a program-wide, consistent

emphasis on process-oriented, person-centered, and relationship-based approaches across a wide variety of program activities.

#### 4.08 Steps for Individualizing the Curriculum

When the student first arrives, chances are he will be dealing with anxiety and adjustment issues because of entering into a new social milieu. Those factors will affect him but to what extent won't be known until he starts. Typically as the student becomes more comfortable the initial behaviors, emotions, and fears settle and you can begin to get a baseline of how he is without it being distorted by adjustment issues.

If you set a curriculum schedule too quickly, it is often difficult for the student, does not align well with his needs, and becomes frustrating for staff. But if transitioning into the program is itself defined as an explicit stage, then it takes the pressure off everyone so the real person emerges. It works well to individualize the curriculum in two steps:

##### 4.08.1 Step One – The Discovery Phase

Consists of a more or less fixed set of program elements organized to:

- Place minimal stress on the student, allowing him time to acclimate to his environment
- Give staff plenty of opportunity to size up the student under various 1:1 and group circumstances and understand his learning style, emotional tendencies, biases, mindset, sensory sensitivities, preferences, challenges, and strengths, etc.

Ideally, these program elements would include:

- Physical activities in a group setting
- Advising and goal setting (done one-on-one)
- Group discussion-based class (6-8 individuals) on current events, pop culture, sharing, negotiation, planning in a larger group
- Starting the Awareness Development and Executive Functioning (ADEF) module (begin journal) (done one-on-one)
- Exploring the student's interests (affinity exploration) (done one-on-one)
- Any therapies that student is currently engaged in (e.g., OT, PT, speech-language, social skills group, etc.)
- Diagnostic assessment (if needed to fill in gaps of clinical understanding)
- Dyad or triad work – small group to see how the student can negotiate, navigate, and compromise surrounding a project or shared interests
- Community outings - introduce well planned and supported community outings that give staff opportunities to observe how the student regulates and self-manages in a variety of public settings
- Free period (to see how he manages himself and time)
- Lunch (unstructured but staff present to monitor and facilitate)
- Other elements such as a media-based class, art, etc.



#### 4.08.2 Step Two – Adjustment Period

At any point, the student's program can be further adjusted based upon what was learned in step one. Depending upon the school, their resources and policies, this adjustment can be at fixed intervals or when the need is evident.

In this step the program could become more organically adapted to the student, focusing more precisely on issues specific to the individual.

- Awareness Development and Executive Functioning (ADEF) module is continued but now becomes more tailored in one-on-one and dyads or triads, if there are good matches that open doors to sharing and comparing experiences.
- Affinity exploration continues one-on-one, but add in work in dyad and triads, if there are peers who are a good match with similar interests.
- Independence and adulthood topics one-on-one, small group or large depending on individual. Topics cover a wide range such as understanding how to vote, public transportation, shopping, money management, dating and sexuality, managing medication, etc.
- Current events (community, state, country, world)
- Social-emotional development (1:1, small group, large group)
- Goal setting and building self-determination (short- and long-term goal setting, planning, and implementation)
- Career development, job seeking, job coaching and support
- Project-based affinity work – one-on-one or small group (surrounding a project or shared interests) begin to incorporate identifying and planning outings related to topics of interest
- Program-based community projects (*Examples: newsletter, bake sales, field day, Guitar Hero day, making rules and procedures, painting or decorating, etc.*)
- Creative projects – creativity in the shape of ideas, art, media, or otherwise (*Examples: research project, model building, movie making, computer animation, photography, music, mural painting, origami, etc.*)
- Remediation of a disability or learning support if needed (*Example: work on writing, reading, math, etc.*)
- Support if in college or seeking to go to college.
- When/if ready, career exploration and development one-on-one
- When/if ready internship and job readiness
- Out and about – identifying, planning, and executing trips into the community
- Other



## 4.09 Observations About a Student During the Discovery Phase

The intake and interview process generates a lot of valuable initial information about the student through the eyes of the family, educators, clinicians, and most importantly, the student. This information provides a foundation of knowledge that can then be matched against firsthand interactions and experiences during the initial, relationship-building Discovery Phase.

As the individual begins to acclimate to the new environment and makes gains from the program, some of the information gathered initially will need to be updated to reflect the changes.

The Discovery Phase is also extremely helpful for staff to get a sense of how aware the student is of his own mental processes and how he deals with them.

The following observations would be extremely helpful:

### 4.09.1 Cognitive Regulation

#### **When regulated:**

- Describe the student's thought patterns, themes, and tendencies when regulated.
- Are there patterns, scripted phrases, or rote thoughts that help the student stay regulated?
- To what extent do thoughts affect the student's emotions and behaviors?
- To what extent does the student appear to control his thoughts?
- To what extent is he able to incorporate the thoughts, ideas, or suggestions of others to help him stay regulated?

#### **When dysregulated:**

- Describe the student's thought patterns, themes, and tendencies when dysregulated.
- Are there patterns, scripted phrases, or rote thoughts that derail or dysregulate the student?  
(*Example: fixed thinking, narrow thinking, emotional themes, etc.*)
- To what extent do dysregulated thoughts affect the student's emotions and behaviors?
- Can the student reign in his thoughts or control them when dysregulated?
- To what extent is he able to incorporate the thoughts, ideas, or suggestions of others when dysregulated?

#### **Notes:**

- If the student gets dysregulated frequently across a wide variety of settings and contexts there will be many opportunities to observe.
- If the student gets dysregulated in more specific contexts or environments, staff should be vigilant to those circumstances for observation.
- If the student only gets dysregulated in narrow contexts, staff may need to intentionally build these experiences into the Discovery Phase so dysregulation can be exhibited.
- Observe the student across a variety of contexts: 1:1, with staff, peer to peer, small group, large group, formal vs. unstructured time, transitions, with family, onsite in program, in community, in learning contexts, in physical contexts, etc.

#### 4.09.2 Higher Order Thinking

- Strategic thinking: Can the individual design or apply strategies to approach tasks in an organized, sequenced, and successful manner?
- Causal relationships: To what extent can the student see how ideas connect and how something or an event occurs as a result of or in reaction to another?
- Concept formation: To what extent can the student understand both concrete concepts (“a frog”) and abstract concepts (“democracy”)?
- Ideational range: Does the student have a wide or narrow range of ideas about a given subject/interested in a wide or narrow range of subjects)?
- Critical thinking: Describe the student’s ability to evaluate information, draw connections, make conclusions, and apply logic.
- Creativity and brainstorming: To what extent are these applied to thinking?
- Problem solving: Describe the student’s ability to approach problems and seek solutions both independently and collaboratively (idea generation, brainstorming, step wisdom, trial and error, seek help, etc.).
  - make choices
  - initiate ideas
  - sequence ideas
  - use ideas to problem solve
  - identify problems
  - attempt to solve problems independently
  - apply logic to problem solving
  - apply creativity to problem solving
  - is aware of the need for contingency planning and able to generate multiple possible solutions and outcomes
  - ask for help with problems when needed
  - reflect on problem solving solutions (*Example: Did it work?*)
  - try again if first solution doesn’t work
  - problem solving in isolation
  - problem solving in group

#### 4.09.3 Learning Profile

- Overall, how easy is it for the student to learn?
- Are there teaching modalities that work best (visual, auditory, hands-on, multi-sensory, kinesthetic, etc.)?
- Are there teaching modalities that stand out as challenges?
- Can the student think and solve problems with logic and creativity?

- Does the student think only in concrete terms, or is he able to use abstract ideas and engage in symbolic representation in active learning, creativity, and play?
- How flexible is he as a learner? As a thinker?
- How is the student's big-picture thinking for theories and ideas?
- How is the student's detail-oriented thinking (*Example: does he think about specifics of a subject, understand how the parts fit into the big picture*)?
- Can the student understand and expand on the ideas of others?
- Are there any identified learning challenges? Describe and explain the extent to which they each impact learning.
- Is there anxiety, perfectionism, or other emotional/cognitive interferences to learning?
- How engaged and active of a learner is he?
- How independent is he with assignments, procedures, rules, and details (extent to which needs support, modeling, examples, reminders)
- Are there any strategies that increase learning potential?
- Are there any accommodations that increase learning potential?
- In the context of learning, how well regulated is his attention?
- Overall, does his memory appear to support or undermine learning?
  - rote facts
  - details
  - rules and procedures

#### 4.09.4 Range, Flexibility, and Stability of Adaptive and Coping Strategies

- How wide or narrow of a range of ideas and concepts does the student understand?
- Can the student display flexibility of thinking (ideas, change of plans, paradoxical dilemmas, contradictions, multiple-outcomes) with his own thoughts? Others' thoughts? Describe.
- Does the student possess adaptability, stability, and consistency in his coping strategies? Describe.

**Notes:** Observe the student across a variety of contexts: 1:1, with staff, peer to peer, small group, large group, formal vs. unstructured time, transitions, with family, onsite in program, in community, in learning contexts, creative endeavors, in physical activity contexts, etc.

In addition to general observation in the milieu, observation can be done formal critical thinking activities aimed to get students to display a targeted critical thinking skill (*brain teasers. aames. debates. etc.*).

#### 4.09.5 Attention

Note whether student is diagnosed with an attentional disorder and on medication.

- Describe the student's ability to sustain attention in the following scenarios:
  - affinity and high interest topics
  - affinity and high interest activities
  - moderate interest topic
  - moderate interest activities
  - low interest topic
  - low interest activities
  - Are there attentional patterns to the time of day?
  - Are there attentional patterns related to blood-sugar, GI, allergies, or other interfering medical issues?
- Are there strategies or accommodations staff has found helpful for student to manage his attention?
- Describe the mental energy the student brings to various tasks. Does his mental energy fluctuate or manifest in predictable ways?
- Are sleep issues affecting mental energy and focus?
- Are nutritional issues affecting mental energy and focus?
- Performance consistency – how consistent is the student within a brief period? Within a day? Within the week? Seasonal?



**Notes:** Observe the student across a variety of contexts: 1:1, with staff, peer to peer, small group, large group, formal vs. unstructured time, transitions, with family, onsite in program, in community, in learning contexts, creative endeavors, in physical activity contexts, etc.

#### 4.09.6 Memory

##### Short-term memory


- Is there any evidence of poor short-term memory (up to 7 seconds)? Evidenced by repeated questions, having to reference constantly to copy from the board (rule out weak attention, language difficulty, or anxiety)
- Is the difficulty pervasive, inconsistent, or content/task specific?

### Active working memory

- How well can the student retain information needed long enough to complete a task, read a book, perform math problems, write a paper, etc.?
  - Hold the big picture or goal of activity?
  - Retain the necessary rules, guidelines, and procedures?
  - Track the evolution of a plot or character as developed?
- Are these difficulties pervasive, inconsistent, or content/task specific?

### Long-term memory

- Consolidation – storing information in long-term memory efficiently
  - Does the student have any strategies for committing information, rules, and procedures to memory (*Examples: repetition, chunking, mnemonic devices, visualizing*)?
- Long-term access – being able to access/recall information in long-term storage when needed (*Examples: home phone number, tying shoes, rote recall on a test*)
- How efficiently can the student recall fact, rules, and procedures from long-term memory?
- Qualify:
  - jumbled
  - key parts missing
  - small details missing
  - slow to recall (rule out slow processing and expressive language difficulty)
  - gets anxious



**Notes:** Observe the student across a variety of contexts: 1:1, with staff, peer to peer, small group, large group, formal vs. unstructured time, transitions, with family, onsite in program, in community, in learning contexts, creative endeavors, in physical activity contexts, etc.

In addition to general observation in the milieu, observation can be done through formal memory activities aimed to get students to display a targeted memory skill (*verbal and non-verbal exercises. games. etc.*).

#### 4.09.7 Executive Function

##### Managing oneself and one's responsibilities independently and in 1:1 interactions with staff:

- **Preview:** How well can the student look ahead to gain insight as to what is expected to happen and how it is likely to affect him? (*Example: I should bring my medication on the hike since we will be gone longer than usual and it will wear off*)
- **Plan:** How well can the student plan to make sure his needs are met in an upcoming event? (*Example: allocating resources ahead of time*)
- **Organize:** How organized is the student's approach, thinking, and management of materials on his own (*Examples: losing things, chaotic*)?
- **Manage time:** How well can the student manage his own time? Anticipate how much time something will take?
- **Apply step wisdom:** Does the student have a sense of the proper order and sequence needed to take for success? Can he apply that knowledge in process?
- **Think strategically:** How strategic are the student's thoughts, actions, and responses?
- **Possess reinforceable behavior and thinking:** Does the student notice his mistakes and is he able to use that knowledge to avoid repeating them in a similar future context? (*Example: Last time I set my alarm too late and missed the bus. Next time I need to set it 30 minutes earlier*)
- **Self-pace:** Does the student work, think, and respond at a pace that supports success? Is he rushing, too slow?
- **Use evaluative thinking:** Can the student evaluate an experience and draw meaningful conclusions about his performance, success, challenges, and what to do differently in the future? Is he able to make both detailed and big picture evaluative statements?

##### Managing oneself and one's approach to tasks and responsibilities when working with peers in a group setting:

- **Preview:** How well can the student participate in group previewing? Is he able to generate his own ideas or are they dependent on others?
- **Plan:** How well can the student engage effectively in group planning? Is he able to generate his own ideas or is he dependent on the ideas of others? Is he disruptive to the planning process?
- **Organize:** How organized is the student's approach, thinking, and management of materials within a group? Is he dependent on others to keep him organized?
- **Manage time:** How well can the student manage time in a group setting? Does he monitor time or is he dependent on others to cue him?
- **Apply step wisdom:** Does the student have a sense of the proper order and sequence he needs to take for success when working with a group? Can he apply that knowledge in process or is he dependent on others to guide him and tell them what to do and when?
- **Think strategically:** How strategic are the student's thoughts, actions, and responses? Do his contributions enrich the group or are the suggestions off base?

- **Possess reinforceable behavior and thinking:** Does the student notice his mistakes and is he able to use that knowledge to avoid repeating them in a future similar context? If someone else points out his mistakes can he internalize the feedback and make changes?
- **Self-pace:** Does the student work, think, and respond at a pace that supports success? Is his pace compatible with the group or does it cause problems? Is he rushing, too slow?
- **Use evaluative thinking:** Can the student evaluate an experience and draw meaningful conclusions about his performance, success, challenges, and what to do differently in the future? Is he able to evaluate the actions, decisions, and contributions of his peers? Is he able to make both detailed and big picture evaluative statements?

#### 4.09.8 Awareness of and Involvement in Own Diagnosis and Interventions

- Is the individual aware of his diagnoses?
- If so, can he define it in his own words? How restricted or expansive is his personal definition?
- What emotions are attached to his awareness of his diagnosis?
- What thoughts are associated with his diagnosis? Are they factually-based, fear-based, lacking essential facts, etc.?
- Does he identify/agree with the diagnosis or resist it? Explain.
- To what extent is the individual involved in intervention decisions (*Examples: adjusting medication, frequency of therapy sessions, goal-oriented with therapy, provides therapists with vital information vs. depending on parents to update/provide information, etc.*)

#### 4.09.9 Social Interactions

##### Staff

- Describe extent to which individual appears to bond with adults.
- Describe extent to which individual is able to display a respectful attitude towards staff.
- Describe extent to which individual initiates interactions with staff, seeks attention, assurance, etc.
- Describe quality and depth of staff interactions.
- Describe extent to which individual displays consideration and empathy of staff.
- Describe extent to which shyness, anxiety, or other emotional issues affect ability to relate to staff.
- Describe extent to which resistance to authority, rules, or other mindset issues affect interactions with staff.
- Can student display skill with code-switching – ability to recognize difference in relating to staff vs. peers (*Example: overly familiar, inappropriate, etc.*)?
- Describe extent to which individual recognizes the presence of and utilizes staff resources and support.
-

- Describe extent to which student seeks help from staff in regulating emotions, behavior, thoughts, sensory or physical issues.
- Describe extent to which student seeks or needs staff to help enter social relationships with peers.
- Describe extent to which student is organized and shows appropriate care for materials and property of staff and the program.
- Describe student's ability to accept responsibility for own actions when interacting with staff.
- Describe student's ability to display self-control (*verbally, behaviorally, and emotionally*).
- Describe extent to which student shows awareness and ability to ascribe to general social behavior rules and group norms (*Examples: covers mouth when coughing, not interrupting, etc.*).
- Describe the student's ability and willingness to follow program and authority rules and procedures.
- Describe extent to which student can work independently when surrounded by others working independently (*Example: distracts self, others*).

#### **Small group and 1:1 peer interactions**

- Describe extent to which student isolates self or engages in parallel activities with low engagement vs. interactive and collaborative.
- Describe extent to which peer interactions are reciprocal.
- Describe extent to which student displays consideration and empathy in a small peer group setting.
- Describe extent to which social interactions are functional and constructive.
- Describe extent to which student is able to display a respectful attitude towards peers in a small group setting.
- Describe extent student can engage symbolically, imaginatively, and dramatically with peers during creative or collaborative work, small group activities, and free time.
- Does the student display an ability to sustain shared attention on task or topic at hand?
- Does the student display an ability to follow ideas, lead, or direction of others?
- Does the student imitate or use peers as models?
- Describe student's level of assertiveness and initiation and extent to which it is appropriate and regulated.
- Describe student's level of flexibility and compromise with peers.
- Does the student display an ability to receive and give feedback in a socially appropriate manner?
- Describe extent to which regulatory issues interfere (emotional and sensory dysregulation).
- Does the student display an ability to take turns and perspective taking with peers?
- Describe student's ability to accept responsibility for own actions.
- 
-



- Describe student's style of humor and humor regulation (*Examples: timing of telling a joke, reading peoples' reactions, not taking a joke too far, being appropriate in use of humor*), topic selection, timing and appropriateness within a small group of peers.
- Does the student engage in attention seeking behaviors? Describe.
- Describe extent to which student is organized and shows appropriate care for materials and others' property.
- Describe student's ability to display self-control (verbally, behaviorally, and emotionally) in small peer groups.
- Describe extent to which student shows awareness and ability to ascribe to general social behavior rules and group norms (*Examples: covers mouth when cough, not interrupting, etc.*).
- Describe student's ability and willingness to follow program and authority rules and procedures.

**Additional individual profile information to note during observation of games and activities:**

- Strengths
- Challenges
- Expressions of affect
- Preferences
- Stamina for engaging in large groups (*need for breaks*)
- Small group social goals



**Notes:** Observe the student across a variety of contexts: formal vs. unstructured time, transitions, with family, onsite in program, in community, in learning contexts, creative endeavors, in physical activity contexts, etc.



In addition to general observation in the milieu, observation can be done through formal social skill-based activities aimed to get students to display a targeted social skill.

**Formal group social behaviors and skills (classroom, clubs, etc.)**

- Describe extent to student is able to display a respectful attitude towards group leader/staff and peers.
- Does the student display an ability to collaborate, negotiate, and resolve differences and relate within the guidelines of a formal setting without conflict with other peers?
- Describe extent to which student displays courtesy, consideration, and empathy of others.
- Describe extent to which student is organized and shows appropriate care for materials and others' property.
- Describe student's ability to accept responsibility for own actions.

- Does the student display conflict resolution skills? With or without support?
- Describe student's ability to display self-control (verbally, behaviorally, and emotionally).
- Describe extent to which student shows awareness and ability to ascribe to general social behavior rules and group norms (*Examples: covers mouth when coughing, not interrupting, etc.*).
- Describe student's ability and willingness to follow classroom rules and procedures.
- Describe student's ability to cooperate and work well on group tasks.
- To what extent does the student listen to authority and follow directions?
- Describe extent to which student can work independently when surrounded by others working independently (*Example: distracts self, others*).

#### 4.09.10 Body Awareness

- How aware is the student of his own body sensations and movements? Can he make meaning of his awareness? Can he act upon his awareness to self-manage or self-advocate?
- Does the student have sense of where his body is in the general physical environment (*Examples: bumps into people, walls, knocks things over, etc.*)?
- Does the student have sense of where his body is when engaging in interactions with others (*Examples: stand too close, touching, etc.*)?
- Is the student aware of smells and sounds his body makes? Is he able to act accordingly to self-manage hygienic and other strategies for mitigating? (*Examples: body odor/needs to put on deodorant, smells/needs to bathe, breath smells/needs to brush teeth*)

Is he aware of its effect on others from a social cognition standpoint (*Examples: what others find offensive, distasteful, odious, etc.*)? If so, does this awareness act as a social motivator to self-care?

**Notes:** Observe the student across a variety of contexts: 1:1, with staff, peer to peer, small group, large group, formal vs. unstructured time, transitions, with family, onsite in program, in community, in learning contexts, creative endeavors, in physical activity contexts, etc.

In addition to general observation in the milieu, observation can be done through formal body awareness, PE, and physical activities aimed to get students to display a targeted body awareness skill (*Examples: brain teasers, games, debates, etc.*).

#### 4.09.11 Sensory Regulation and Reactivity

- Describe student's sensitivities, preferences, sensory seeking, and avoidance behaviors
- How well does the student use, understand, and learn through his sensory system?
- Give examples in each realm of the senses in terms of over or under reactivity:
  - visual
  - auditory
  - tactile
  - taste
  - olfactory
  - proprioceptive
  - vestibular

#### 4.09.12 Sensory Regulation / Modulation Needs

- In each of the sensory realms, what does the student appear to need to remain regulated or to regain regulation when distressed?
- Describe extent to which the student is able to initiate, articulate, and act on sensory regulatory needs vs. be dependent on others.
  - visual
  - auditory
  - tactile
  - taste
  - olfactory
  - proprioceptive
  - vestibular

**Notes:** Observe the student across a variety of contexts: 1:1, with staff, peer to peer, small group, large group, formal vs. unstructured time, transitions, with family, onsite in program, in community, in learning contexts, creative endeavors, in physical activity contexts, etc.

In addition to general observation in the milieu, observation can be done through formal sensory-based activities aimed to get students to display a targeted sensory reaction (*Examples: smell test, games, temporarily take away a sense such as blindfold or sit in dark room and increase input to another sense such as listen to music. etc.*).

#### 4.09.13 Emotional Aspects

##### **Emotional regulation**

- What does the student require to attain and maintain emotional regulation?
- To what extent does the student provide for his needs vs. require the assistance of others? Describe.
- Describe student's level of flexibility or rigidity surrounding the experience, interpretation, and expression of emotions.
- Describe student's coping mechanisms for attaining and maintaining emotional regulation. To what extent are these coping mechanisms disruptive or maladaptive in public or social settings?

##### **Emotional engagement**

- To what extent can the student participate in a shared emotional experience?

### Use of affect

- Describe range of affect and emotional expression, interaction, and perception, including ability to read affect.
- Describe intensity of emotional expression, perception, and interactions.
- Describe intention related to affective states (*Examples: attention seeking, sympathy, avoidance, drive others aware, shock, etc.*).

### Perceiving the emotional states of others

- Describe student's ability to identify or interpret accurately the emotions of others.
- Describe extent to which student can respond to the emotions of others, including the level of intensity and appropriateness.
- Does the student respond appropriately? If so in what way (verbal, non-verbal)?
- Does the student respond inappropriately? If so in what way (verbal and non-verbal)?
- Can the student connect the affective expressions of others to cause and effect?
- If the student is the cause or a contributing factor, can he see his role in the affective exchange?
- Does the student tend to adopt or mimic the affective states of others? Describe.
- Is the student emotionally reactive or defensive at the affective expression of others?

### Emotional self-awareness

- To what extent is the student aware of his emotions? Does this skill fluctuate or is it relatively predictable?
- How successful is he at verbally and non-verbally communicating emotional states and needs in a socially appropriate manner?
- To what extent is the student able to understand and use his emotions to problem solve, engage in self-care, and make choices consistent with emotional needs?
- Can this student predict how he will feel in a projected scenario? If so, can he use this skill to select activities, experiences, and environments that are a good match for his emotional needs?  
(*Example: "I don't want to go to the amusement park because big crowds make me anxious"*)

**Notes:** Observe the student across a variety of contexts: 1:1, with staff, peer to peer, small group, large group, formal vs. unstructured time, transitions, with family, onsite in program, in community, in learning contexts, creative endeavors, in physical activity contexts, etc.

In addition to general observation in the milieu, observation can be done through formal emotionally-based activities aimed to get students to display a targeted emotional experience or scenario (*Examples: discussions, games, journaling, etc.*).

#### 4.09.14 Auditory and Language Processing

- Describe current level of functioning surrounding language processing:
  - rate
  - efficiency
  - volume
  - level of complexity
- Describe student's receptive language and comprehension:
  - vocabulary
  - following directions, lectures, and explanations
  - understanding stories, jokes, slogans, plays on words
  - movies
  - subtleties, hints, nuance
  - irony, plays on words, puns
- When asked a question, does the student pause or stall?
- Need to have instructions, explanations, rules, or other verbally disseminated information repeated or broken down?
- Does the student only understand a portion of what you say?
- Does he understand the meaning of what you are saying?
- What is the state of his auditory and verbal memory (memory of rules, procedures, multi-step processes, sequences, etc.)?
- Describe student's expressive language skills (verbal and non-verbal) with respect to:
  - Usage: How does student verbally and non-verbally communicate needs; desires; ask for help; respond to a familiar and unfamiliar person; use language to connect; express emotions, thoughts, opposition, discontent, agreement; initiate, maintain, and end an interaction? (*Examples: words, full sentences, written notes, draw pictures, keyboarded notes, gestures, miming, body language, facial expressions, etc.*)
  - Social: word choice, topic, style, emotionality, pace, etc.
  - Academic: word choice, cohesiveness, timing, pace, complexity, etc.
  - Incidental: appropriateness, timing, pace, style, etc.



**Notes:** Observe the student across a variety of contexts: 1:1, with staff, peer to peer, small group, large group, formal vs. unstructured time, transitions, with family, onsite in program, in community, in learning contexts, creative endeavors, in physical activity contexts, etc.

#### 4.09.15 Communication

- Describe student's communication style (*Examples: persuasive, whiny, assertive, passive, indirect, blunt, etc.*).
- Describe student's articulation and speech style (*Examples: pressured, slow, poor enunciation, mumbles, etc.*).
- Voice modulation control: Can the student recognize the volume of his voice and modulate it according to what is socially acceptable for the context?
- To what extent does student intentionally use body language to communicate?
- If the student is non-verbal, what has been observed to date about his receptive language capabilities? Provide anecdotes to illustrate.
- Does the student use gestures, pantomime, drawings, or other alternative or creative ways to communicate?
- How reciprocal is student's communication with others?
- Does he have a rich internal world? (*Examples: imaginative abilities, intellectual creations*) Is he able to share/communicate it with others? How?



**Notes:** Observe the student across a variety of contexts: 1:1, with staff, peer to peer, small group, large group, formal vs. unstructured time, transitions, with family, onsite in program, in community, in learning contexts, creative endeavors, in physical activity contexts, etc.

In addition to general observation in the milieu, observation can be done through formal communication-based activities aimed to get students to display a targeted reaction (*Example: verbal and non-verbal games, etc.*).

#### 4.09.16 Visual-Spatial Processing

- Does the student have a conceptual understanding of spatial words (*Examples: up, over, nearby, next to, etc.*)? Can he demonstrate that knowledge on paper 1D? On the board 2D? In 3D?
- Does the student have the ability to locate objects based on a verbal description?
- Can the student visualize a concrete object or scenario based upon a verbal description?
- Can the student visualize an emotionally charged scenario?
- Can the student create visualizations for abstract concepts/think symbolically?
- Are there illogical aspects to his visualizations due to visual-spatial language challenge? (*Example: He says a cat is on the fence and imagines it clinging to the side of the fence*)
- Describe student's non-verbal visual-spatial ability? Is it stronger when language is not in the equation (*Examples: visual logic games, puzzles, physical games, art*)?
-

- Describe the student's ability to use visual-spatial thinking for creating visual imagery?  
(*Example: Can he picture someone's face in his mind?*)
- Describe the student's ability to use visual-spatial thinking for constructing a spatial picture.  
(*Example: Can he search for hidden objects?*)
- How is student's sense of direction? Does it improve over time or with repetition and exposure?
- Describe student's spatial memory: ability to store and recall shapes, symbols (letters, numbers, punctuation marks) and other imagery.
- Describe student's spatial output: ability to create a drawing, write descriptively, or build a design/model that has accurate spatial characteristics (*Examples: arts and crafts, drawing letters and numbers, describing accurately the spatial components of a scene in words*).
- Describe student's materials management: ability to organize objects needed for tasks (*Examples: organize notebook, puts things in places where he can find them again, take home the right materials needed for an assignment, doesn't lose things*)
- Higher spatial thinking: To what extent can the individual reason and conceptualize without language, using mental imagery for thought?


**Notes:** Observe the student across a variety of contexts: 1:1, with staff, peer to peer, small group, large group, formal vs. unstructured time, transitions, with family, onsite in program, in community, in learning contexts, creative endeavors, in physical activity contexts, etc.

In addition to general observation in the milieu, observation can be done through formal visual-spatial activities aimed to get students to display a targeted reaction (*Examples: verbal and non-verbal games, creative activities, etc.*).

#### 4.09.17 Representational Thought

- To what extent does student engage in imaginary thoughts, fantasies, and the creation of imaginary events?
- To what extent does student share this experience with others versus isolate himself?
- If this process is present, how does student use it – personal entertainment, entertaining others, recreational games and activities, or inspiration for art, writing, or other creative endeavors?
- To what extent is student generating his own ideas vs. adopting them from books, stories, video games, movies, or other pre-existing works?
- Describe and highlight themes and recurring images.
- Does this process contribute to either regulating or dysregulating the student?





**Notes:** Observe the student across a variety of contexts: 1:1, with staff, peer to peer, small group, large group, formal vs. unstructured time, transitions, with family, onsite in program, in community, in learning contexts, creative endeavors, in physical activity contexts, etc.

In addition to general observation in the milieu, observation can be done through formal imagination-based activities aimed to get students to display a targeted reaction (*Examples: discussions, games, creative activities, etc.*).

#### 4.09.18 Developmental Levels During Adult and Peer Interactions

##### **Shared attention/regulation and interest in the world**

Describe student's ability to:

- Regulate his attention and behavior while being interested in the full range of sensations (sights, sounds, smells, their own movement patterns, etc.)
- Enter into a state of shared attention with another person
- Process his environment
- Filter out distractions
- Engage with others
- Attend to games, activities, or tasks

##### **Engagement/forming relationships**

Describe student's ability to:

- Engage in relationships
- Exhibit depth and range of affect (such as assertiveness, enthusiasm, or sadness), as it is incorporated into his engagement (*Examples: does he withdraw, self-stim, become scripted when under stress?*).

##### **Two-way, purposeful interactions with gestures/intentional two-way communication/language**

Describe student's ability to:

- Enter into two-way purposeful communication (able to open and close circles of communication, be intentional in interactions and activities)
- Engage in two-way, purposeful problem-solving interactions
- Develop sense of self in relation to others
- Negotiate emotional needs in life (being close to others, exploring and being assertive, limiting aggression, negotiating safety, etc.)
- Does the individual display a sense of self/self-esteem/independence? (*Example: "I did it!" or "Look what I did!" using affect, gestures, and words if verbal*)

### **Elaborating ideas/representational capacity and elaboration of symbolic thinking**

Describe student's ability to:

- Create mental representations (*imaginary games or activities*)
- Use words, phrases, or sentences to convey emotional intention (*Example: "I'm really angry!"*)
- Have own ideas and share them with other individuals around
- Represent ideas and real life through games or activities

### **Building bridges between ideas/emotional thinking**

Describe student's ability to:

- Make connections between different internal representations or emotional ideas (*Example: "I'm mad because you're mean."*)
- Separate fantasy from reality
- Modulate impulses and mood
- Concentrate and plan

### **Multi-cause, comparative, and triangular thinking**

Describe student's ability to:

- Explore multiple reasons for a feeling
- Compare feelings
- Understand triadic interactions among feeling states (*Example: "I feel left out when Susie likes Janet better than me."*)
- Find an indirect road to problem solve (*Example: John wants to be Sarah's friend. He sees that Tom is Sarah's friend, so John becomes Tom's friend.*)
- Use understanding of people and feelings to "work the crowd" and satisfy social needs

### **Emotionally differentiated gray-area thinking/ shades and gradations among differentiated feeling states**

Describe student's ability to:

- Describe degrees of feelings about anger, love, excitement, disappointment (*Example: "I feel a little annoyed"*)
- Know where he is on the social ladder
- Define oneself based on peer dynamics or peer group
- See "shades of gray"
- See consequences of his behavior
- Able to see gradations, variations, and ranges of emotions, social situations, and thinking (*Examples: "I'm a little mad, very mad, etc." "I'm the best, Jo is the second best, and John is the worst."*)

## Intermittent reflective thinking, a stable sense of self, and an internal standard

Describe student's ability to:

- Reflect on feelings in a relationship to an internalized sense of self (*Example: "It's not like me to feel so angry" or "I shouldn't feel this jealous"*)
- Internalize values
- Display a greater sense of self that can't be broken down by lack of acceptance by peer group (*Example: Sally was mean to me because she was having a bad day, but I'm still a good person.*)



**Notes:** Observe the student across a variety of contexts: 1:1, with staff, peer to peer, small group, large group, formal vs. unstructured time, transitions, with family, onsite in program, in community, in learning contexts, creative endeavors, in physical activity contexts, etc.

## 4.09.19 Theory of Mind

Describe student's ability to:

- Identify emotions in self
- Identify emotions of others
- Express emotions appropriately
- Respond to other's emotions appropriately
- Predict emotions given a situation
- Understand situation-based emotions (*Example: The girl is scared because she thinks the dog is going to bite her.*)
- Understand desire-based emotions (*Example: The boy is jealous because he wants what the other student has.*)
- Understand belief-based emotions (*Example: The girl is sad because she thought it was her turn.*)
- Understand simple visual perspective taking (identifies that people in different places see different things)
- Understand complex visual perspective taking (identifies that two people can see the same thing differently)
- Understand that "seeing leads to knowing" (people only know things they have experienced – directly or indirectly)
- Predict actions based on another person's knowledge (making action predictions on the basis of where another person believes an object is)
- Recognizes false beliefs



**Notes:** Observe the student across a variety of contexts: 1:1, with staff, peer to peer, small group, large group, formal vs. unstructured time, transitions, with family, on site in program, in community, in learning contexts, creative endeavors, in physical activity contexts, etc.

In addition to general observation in the milieu, observation can be done through formal theory of mind-based activities aimed to get students to display a targeted reaction (*Examples: discussions, debates, scenarios, role playing, games, reflective writing, etc.*)

#### 4.09.20 Social Cognition in Unstructured and Spontaneous Contexts

##### Verbal

- How well does the student understand and use social and age-appropriate language?
- Code-switching: How well does the student understand social contexts – that social communication varies depending on context and the people involved?
- Topic selection: Is the student able to select topics of conversation that are of interest to others? Can he sense when others are not interested?
- Humor regulation: Can the student make use of tasteful, appropriate humor and can he detect and respond appropriately to other people's jokes and humorous statements?
- Reciprocity: Can he understand the give and take and timing of social conversation?

##### Behavior

- Self-marketing: Does the student understand what a social persona is and understand it is something he can control? Can he intentionally build and display an image that is appealing to others?
- Social information processing: understanding the underlying meaning and agenda to a social interaction (between the lines, subtitles, big picture)
- Initiation: How successfully does the student initiate social interaction and join a pre-existing group?
- Extent to which student can exhibit self-control within social interactions?
- Timing and staging: How aware is the student of when it is okay to do what in the context of different relationships (overly touchy, too intimate, when to bring up what topics and personal information)?
- How skilled is the student in navigating conflict resolution and negotiation?

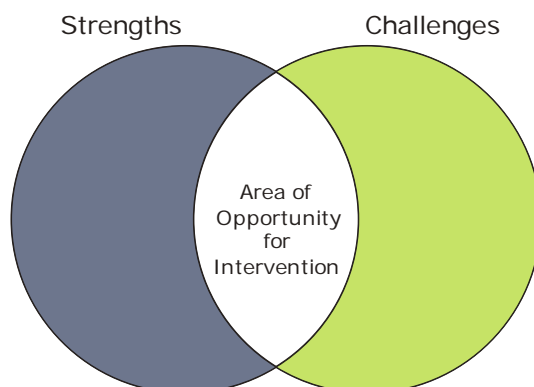
**Notes:** Observe the student across a variety of contexts: 1:1, with staff, peer to peer, small group, large group, formal vs. unstructured time, transitions, with family, onsite in program, in community, in learning contexts, creative endeavors, in physical activity contexts, etc.

Focus on unstructured times such as transitions, free periods, teacher illness, change in schedule, late start lunch, breaks, etc. Can also construct intentionally unstructured situations for the purpose of observation (*Examples: start class late, build in down time before or during an activity. etc.*).

## 4.10 Individualizing the Curriculum Process

The steps below summarize how individualizing the curriculum is managed as a continuous process. By adjusting the student's program over time the curriculum is gradually refined, increasingly meeting the needs of the student.

1. Using the student data collected during the **Transition Curriculum Intake Process**, identify the priorities: the most critical areas of difficulty, challenges, and concerns. The working priorities should be known during the intake process but much better understood during Discovery Phase.
2. Identify the student's areas of strength and affinities/interests
  - To help design activities, experiences, and goals that speak to the student's strengths and supports pursuit of his interests
  - To help design internships and job skill training
  - To guide career development and independence goals
  - To identify possible social opportunities (clubs, classes, groups)
  - To energize learning of academic or lower interest content by weaving interests into subject curriculum
  - To identify analogies that may be useful in solidifying understanding (*Example: use baseball metaphors to explain math*)
  - To identify possible motivators
  - To select research topics and projects
  - To inspire field trips and other outings
  - To create program clubs, classes, and affinity groups
3. Identify challenges
  - To guide short- and long-term goal setting
  - To design strategies and accommodations
  - To anticipate what might cause anxiety or dysregulation
  - To normalize and discuss during 1:1 and peer counseling sessions
  - To recognize roadblocks to or limitations in the pursuit of careers and jobs



*Points where strengths and challenges overlap become the opportunity for intervention*

4. Identify the student's own goals and family/caregiver goals
  - Personal (*Examples: self-care, emotions, sleep, basic needs, etc.*)
  - Relationships and social life (current and future)
  - Academic/learning
  - Independence (*Examples: driving, voting, taking on more responsibility, money management, getting around town, managing medication, etc.*)
  - Career (*Examples: job, career development, skill development, training/certifications, research*)
  - Recreational
  - Big ideas, dreams, and hopes (realistic and unrealistic)
5. Prioritize goals and achieve a consensus on what the program goals should be for this student at this time
6. Determine the general "track" student will be guided along
  - Basic living skills track: overcoming developmental issues, seeking mastery of basic living skills, no academic content
  - Basic academic track: overcoming developmental issues, seeking mastery of basic living skills with some academic content
  - Career/technical training track: overcoming cognitive and academic challenges to achieve career or technical goals – no foreign language, less math, pursuing topics for which student has affinity
  - College prep track: seeking college admissions
  - Custom track: some combination of the above
7. Work out what the student's day or week should look like. From the following list below, identify those that support student's intervention goals:
  - Physical and/or movement-based activities (individualized and/or with group)
  - Social skills (individualized and/or with group)
  - Independence and transition skills development (individualized and/or with group), such as ordering at a restaurant, calculating tip, reading a bus route chart, establish a system for organizing medication, etc.
  - Academic learning and/or remediation (*Example: Is there an academic skill or learning challenge that needs to be worked on, such as writing, using a calculator, helping understand time, or learning how to read?*)
  - Self-discovery – process-oriented and awareness development work (emotional, cognitive, sensory, and executive functioning problem-solving; one-on-one and/or with group). Understanding one's learning style, emotional tendencies, biases and mindset, sensory sensitivities, preferences, challenges, and strengths, etc.

During the Discovery Phase, this would be accomplished using a prescribed curriculum. After that period, the student's individual program can be refocused on to issues specific to his circumstances.

- Recommended interventions

During the Discovery Phase, the student would not start these unless already part of his current routine or specifically recommended by a member of his outside team.

- physical therapy
  - occupational therapy
  - speech and language therapy
  - sensory regulation
  - emotional counseling
  - art
  - yoga
  - dance
  - music
  - creative expression
  - multimedia (*Examples: movies, collages, PowerPoint presentations, etc.*)
  - dance/movement
  - photography
  - creative writing
  - computer (graphics, animation, game development)
  - music (*Examples: band, chorus, drumming, attending performances*)
- Unstructured social time (*Examples: lunch, free social time, transitions in between classes, waiting time, van ride to outing, etc.*)  
These events provide staff with opportunities to observe how the student:
    - copes in unstructured situations
    - manages his time
    - interacts with peers
    - depends on staff to direct, facilitate, and meet his needs
    - is affected by unstructured down time (*Example: is agitated, anxious, and needs down time to re-regulate or relax, etc.*)
    - would benefit from structure, facilitated social opportunities, and additional supports.
  - Community awareness learning experiences  
Community-based activities would typically begin later on in the program. However, it might be valuable for staff to observe students in a few well-supported community activities during the Discovery Phase.
    - outings
    - activities
    - scavenger hunts
    - site visits and facility tours (*Examples: police station, robotics lab at a university, factory*)
    - forums, rallies, lectures, and speaking events
    - concerts, fairs, events
    - community-based volunteer projects (*Examples: clean-ups, Habitat for Humanity, tree planting, handing water to runners at a race, etc.*)

- competitions and races
  - project-based (*Examples: shopping for materials, looking for ideas, research, fact-finding and interviews, bake sale*)
  - occupational or professional education
  - site visits and facility tours (*Examples: police station, robotics lab at a university, factory*)
  - shadow a professional for a day
  - interview a professional
  - work experience on site
  - trainings and other experiential learning related to careers and skill building
  - guest speakers
  - resume building
  - career research and exploration
  - internships and job coaching
8. Juggle the daily/weekly elements into a well-ordered sequence based upon the priorities, pulling on information in the SIP as needed. Applies to Adjustment Period and refined as needed
9. Adjustment Period only: For each module selected, develop the student's lesson plan using the Lesson Plan Development Process and the SIP. Use the following questions as guidelines:
- How does the student learn best (visual, auditory, experientially, multi-sensory, etc.)?
  - Which strategies, supports, and teaching tools will support the student in gaining maximum benefit from the module?
  - What constraints exist due to individual capacities and limitations? What accommodations need to be put in place to accommodate to constraints?
  - What environmental controls are needed for this student to be most available to learn?
  - Assess resources available to the school and the student.
10. Implement the student's plan
11. Throughout Discovery Phase and Adjustment Period, provide feedback to transition team members with observations, successes, problems, and suggestions while implementing the student's program.
- In cases of difficulties, determine areas of complication for the student within each module using the appropriate Skill Difficulties Analysis Checklists (to be completed in a later phase).  
*Example: Student is having trouble with language skills. Does his challenge relate to receptive language issues such as phonemic discrimination or vocabulary? Does his challenge relate to expressive language challenges such as oral motor (controlling muscles in the mouth to articulate sounds), graphomotor (controlling the muscles in the hand and arm to handwrite or keyboard), thought organization, or ideation?)*
  - Determine which team member(s) have the best rapport with the student (vital for all awareness development work).



12. Reiterate the steps above as many times as required to optimize program for the student, refining the strategies, methods, use of tools, supports, and accommodations.

#### 4.11 Individual vs. Group Work

There is tremendous benefit for students in a transition program to engage in both individual and group work. In designing a comprehensive transition plan ideally both approaches should be incorporated, however the decision will ultimately be dictated by each student's SIP.

Individual work is the starting point for most transitional plans – staff needs to assess how much 1:1 interaction with staff an individual needs to

- Manage regulatory needs
- Express, process, and understand emotions and emotional reactions
- Manage behavior
- Organize and make sense of thoughts

A student's readiness to function productively and successfully in a group is based on several factors:

- Emotional, regulatory, and developmental levels of interaction
  - ability to self-regulate or be regulated by others
  - ability to engage with others and sustain engagement
  - ability to be reciprocal
  - ability to engage in two-way communication
  - ability to engage in social problem solving (collaboration, negotiation, perspective taking, compromise)
- Social appropriateness
  - ability to display socially-acceptable behaviors
  - ability to engage in socially-appropriate dialogue (tone, word choice)
  - ability to inhibit maladaptive or inappropriate behaviors and verbalizations
- Level and manner of reactivity and dysregulation and student's ability to control it
  - emotional
  - behavior
  - verbal

For students who struggle with the above group criteria, exhibit aggressive or explosive behavior, or for other reasons are not currently a candidate for group work it is suggested that the program be designed to start with individual work. When signs of self-control, self-awareness, maturation, and readiness begin to emerge activities should be designed to include one other peer who is on a similar functional, emotional

developmental level. Once those activities have resulted in some success, small group work (triads and quads) should be added to continue stretching the student's ability to tolerate and navigate group situations.

Ideally, the student can slowly graduate to participating in moderately-sized peer groups. Individual work should continue throughout this process, as the goal is not to replace individual work with group work but to reach a balance of the two formats as much as possible.

For students with moderate difficulty with the above group criteria but do not have interfering concerns such as aggressiveness or severe reactivity, small group work should be built into the program from the onset.

Individual sessions should be planned to follow the same day as a group experience so the student has a chance to evaluate the experience, process difficult emotions, problem solve, and work on peer relationships and self-management challenges with immediacy and individualized support.

Depending on the student's progress, he may be able to eventually address his needs, concerns, feelings, and thoughts in a group context.

Students who come to the program with a history of positive group experiences and struggle with mild difficulties in the above criteria, group work should be built into the program so there are multiple opportunities to navigate group experiences over a wide variety of activities (*Examples: projects, activities, outings, process/therapy, learning, affinity exploration, discussions, etc.*). Any difficulties that arise can be addressed in both individual and group contexts.

## 4.12 Case Example: Individualizing the Curriculum for a Student

Below we present “Alex,” a young adult who has completed the intake process and is a member of the transition program.

- Information gathered through documentation and the interview process has been consolidated into a single case document that can be presented to the support team.
- Support team reviews information, identifies vital gaps in information and questions that need to be addressed during the Discovery Phase of the student’s program.
- Preliminary individualized daily program is designed to familiarize student with his new environment, establish rapport with peers and staff, introduce program rules and expectations, and begin the process of experimenting with activities and groupings.

### 1. Build/review/expand student's individual profile (SIP)

Completed

- Gather reports and assessments of the student's functional capacities, current IEP, and notes from professionals.
  - speech and language therapist, yoga instructor, drum instructor, psychiatrist (medication), summer camp program director
- Administer or get administered any additional assessments or tests if needed
  - none needed at this time
- Obtain and include copies of the student's work and representative behavior: essays, videos, artwork, etc.
  - portfolio of artwork
  - video of ballroom dancing
  - short storybook about parent’s divorce (with illustrations)

### 2. Identify priorities: most critical areas of difficulty, weaknesses, and concerns.

- **Social cognition:** build and strengthen awareness, understanding, emotions, behaviors, communication, and skills.
- **Critical thinking:** build and strengthen all needed help but in particular abstract thinking, making connections, logical/sequential analysis, and drawing conclusions
- **Executive function:** build and strengthen all domains of executive function regulation, increase awareness and adaptive coping strategies for managing difficult emotions and uncomfortable physical and sensory experiences, reduce self-injurious and maladaptive reactions to dysregulation

### 3. Identify student’s areas of strength, affinities, and interests

- **Strengths:** highly motivated to become more independent, large vocabulary base, responds well to calming and soothing, capable of creating strong bonds with adults, personal hygiene, creativity, working memory, sight reading, visualization

- **Affinities and interests:** word games such as Scrabble, pen and ink drawing, performing in musicals, attending theater and other outings and performances, ballroom dancing, drum kit playing, travel, ice cream
- **Newly emerging skills (require support):** developing a sense of humor, increasing awareness of peers and a desire to form friendships

#### 4. Identify student's own goals and family/caregiver goals

Parent goals:

- Increased independence (cooking, organization, navigating public places independently, participating in management of medication, etc.)
- Increased exposure to and within community (lot of parental anxiety about rejection and social isolation)
- Increased social interaction overall and exposure to typically-developing peers
- Regulation (enormous amount of parental anxiety surrounding self stimulating, head hitting, alienating people/making scene in public place, inability to participate in groups)
- Increased participation in peer groups (has long history of 1:1 work because needs so great has had to have individualized attention)

Alex's goals:

- Have a girlfriend
- Have more friends
- Do art (drawing) and theater (musicals) for a living
- Be in a Broadway musical
- Live in California
- Go to college
- Drive
- Be more independent

#### 5. Prioritize goals and achieve a consensus on what program goals should be for this student at this time

Parent and transition team are in consensus that Alex's program should focus on: regulation, social cognition, executive function support, expressive language and critical thinking. Independence skills are a secondary priority and exposure to independence building experiences should be incorporated when possible.

Alex's goals should be incorporated into direct service work through discussions, activities, etc. as they serve as significant motivators for him and offer opportunities to work on his intervention goals with high interest content.

## 6. Determine general "track" student will be guided along

Alex requires a custom program combining basic living skills track with career and technical training exposure.

## 7. Work out what student's day or week should look like.

- **Physical and/or movement-based activities (individualized and/or with group).** Needed, to raise body awareness and support regulation.
- **Social skills (individualized and/or with group).** Needed to build social awareness, socially appropriate behaviors, reciprocal peer communication
- **Independence and transition skills development (individualized and/or with group).** Alex needs specific help in this domain with planning and executing realistic and developmentally-appropriate community experiences.
- **Academic learning and/or remediation.** None needed
- **Self-discovery – process-oriented and awareness development work (emotional, cognitive, sensory, and executive functioning problem-solving; individualized and/or with group)**  
Alex does not currently possess self-awareness, self-reflection, or expressive language skills to engage in this module with depth and breadth, so a formal course in this domain would be too abstract, overwhelming, and confusing. It is more effective to incorporate observations of the self into activities and provide ongoing opportunities to build self-reflection and self-awareness skills as they apply to real-life experiences.
- **Recommended therapies and interventions**
  - physical therapy - not recommended
  - occupational therapy - recommended but family has decided to take a break and pursue other interventions.
  - speech and language - not needed in day program - sees SLP 2x per week in a private clinic after school
  - sensory regulation - recommended as key aspect of program
  - emotional counseling - not needed
  - art - not needed as a stand-alone class but helpful strategy for communication when Alex is having difficulty articulating his thoughts and feelings
  - yoga - speak to instructor about ways to incorporate calming and soothing yoga techniques into program
  - dance - incorporate into regulatory and movement module
  - music - not recommended

- **Creative expression**
  - **art** - recommended both as a stand-alone class and incorporated into other classes
  - **multimedia** - excellent teaching tool for Alex as he is a visual learner
  - **dance/movement** - not recommended as artistic expression (see above for application to body awareness and regulation)
  - **photography** - no
  - **creative writing** - yes
  - **computer** - no
  - **music** - no
  
- **Unstructured social time**

Alex needs facilitation during unstructured time both to generate ideas of what to do and relating to peers. He tends to isolate himself, wander looking for someone to make a request of, or force a conversation, which typically gets him in an awkward peer situation.
  
- **Community awareness learning experiences**

All outings must be broken down and reviewed with Alex many times prior to the experience. Alex will need his own facilitator to support regulation, reduce confusion, and redirect.

  - **outings** - yes
  - **activities** - yes
  - **scavenger hunts** – no, too developmentally advanced
  - **site visits and facility tours** - yes
  - **forums, rallies, lectures, and speaking events** – no, unable to self-manage/dysregulated when exposed to too much spoken language, multiple stimuli, and high chance of the unexpected.
  - **concerts, fairs, events** - select carefully and only with 1:1 assistance in the event Alex becomes overwhelmed.
  - **community-based volunteer projects** - yes
  - **competitions and races** - no
  - **project-based (shopping for materials, looking for ideas, research, fact-finding and interviews, bake sale)** - yes
  
- **Occupational or professional education**

Alex is not ready for advanced career development. However, to expand his general knowledge, he should be exposed to different fields and the kinds of work people do.

**8. Juggle the daily/weekly elements into a well-ordered sequence based upon priorities, drawing from the SIP as needed.**

(See Alex' daily program below)

**9. Using the SIP, determine how this student learns best (visual, auditory, experientially, multi-sensory, etc.)**

Strong visual learner. Auditory information should be paired with a visual (handout, written on whiteboard). Alex also learns better by experience than observation. He responds well to high affect, animated presentations, and exaggerated gestures.

**10. Determine which strategies, supports, tools, and accommodations are appropriate and/or necessary for what needs to be done**

- Determine what constraints exist due to student's capacities and limitations (accommodations, what to avoid, what to permit). Alex will need a facilitator and lots of time for review and reflection.
- Determine what environmental controls are needed for this student to have the best chances of success. Alex needs access to a dark, quiet room with a blanket to lie down when lethargic, sleepy, or dysregulated.

**At this point, a sample daily program can be written for Alex (see 4.13 Sample Daily Program – Case Study #1).**

## 4.13 Sample Student's Daily Program – Case Study #1

**Student:** Alex, age 17

**Diagnosis:** autism spectrum disorder; rule out possible psychosis

### Transition Priorities

- **Social cognition:** build and strengthen awareness, understanding, emotions, behaviors, and communication skills
- **Critical thinking:** build and strengthen all, but in particular abstract thinking, making connections, logical/sequential analysis, and drawing conclusions
- **Executive function:** build and strengthen all domains of executive function
- **Regulation:** increase awareness and adaptive coping strategies for managing difficult emotions and uncomfortable physical and sensory experiences. Reduce self-injurious and maladaptive reactions to dysregulation.

### Affinities and Interests

- Word games such as Scrabble
- Pen and ink drawing
- Performing
- Attending theater and other outings and performances
- Ballroom dancing
- Drum playing
- Travel
- Ice cream
- Internet research
- Working with his hands

### Strengths

- Highly motivated to become more independent
- Large vocabulary base
- Responds well to calming and soothing
- Capable of creating strong bonds with adults
- Personal hygiene
- Creativity
- Procedural memory
- Sight reading
- Visualization
- Basic navigation of internet (locating information, emailing)

### Challenges

- Significant regulatory issues lead to high variability in mood, energy level, concentration, and ability to verbalize, problem solve, and connect
- Perseverative thoughts and feelings
- Perspective taking
- Managing the unexpected
- Having someone tell him “no” or otherwise create roadblocks to his desires
- Extremely low social awareness



## **Newly Emerging Skills (require support and need to be worked on)**

- Developing a sense of humor
- Increasing awareness of peers and a desire to form friendships
- Awareness of preferences
- Awareness of social behavior appropriateness

## **Individual vs. Group Work**

Alex needs the bulk of his program to be 1:1 at this time because of extreme difficulty staying regulated, significantly low awareness of others, and weak reciprocity and engagement skills. The following 1:1 sessions are recommended:

- Art
- Understanding adulthood
- Community outings with a focus on social interaction, spatial navigation, self-organization, regulation, and independence
- Independent living skill building (*Examples: cooking, shopping, short- and long-term goal setting and planning, understanding street signs, etc.*)
- Computer-based interest exploration and expansion – facilitated use of the internet to pose questions and search for answers. Focus should also be on expanding ideas as Alex tends to switch topics once a singular question has been answered.
- Projects – use Alex’s affinity for working with his hands and his strong visualization and creativity skills to do projects that will enable him to work on building executive function skills (planning and executing a plan, organization, step wisdom, sequencing) and critical-thinking skills.
- Facilitated internship at a theater – expanding on strengths and interests to learn organizational, social, self-regulation, and independence skills. Format for exposing Alex to controlled stressful situations and facilitating him remaining regulated, receiving help, and seeking solutions.
- Reflection – a daily session designed to help Alex reflect upon the events of his day, make sense of his experiences, make connections, address emotions, identify and resolve difficulties, answer questions, etc.

Alex wants to have relationships with peers and needs facilitated practice. He should have 3 small group experiences per day to continue working on group skills but without overwhelming him.

- Group physical activity so Alex can work on physical group navigation: taking turns, playing a position, being assigned a role, coordinating with peers, spatial awareness
- Dyad or triad activities where Alex can work on taking turns, negotiation, collaboration, and social discourse
- Discussion-based small group class where Alex can be exposed to perspective taking, sharing of self and others, reciprocity, conversational flow, topic selection, and expanding social communication skills.

## **Internship**

When ready, Alex should engage in short-term, highly structured internship to work on

- Following directions
- Sustaining and completing tasks
- Increasing task-specific and overall stamina
- Executive functioning
- Receiving and incorporating feedback

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Here are some further examples showing how daily programs might turn out very differently for students elsewhere on the spectrum and with other strengths and challenges.

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#### 4.14 Sample Student's Daily Program – Case Study #2

**Student:** Tom, age 21

**Diagnosis:** autism spectrum disorder; language-based learning disability

##### Transition Priorities

- **Language support:** build and strengthen language capabilities (remediation, strategies, and accommodations) given restrictions due to severe dyslexia and poor phonemic awareness. Build awareness and understanding of how to use language to express emotions, self-advocate, and navigate social interactions appropriately. Build vocabulary base to reduce scripted language, quoting movie lines, and telling scripted jokes and puns.
- **Higher order thinking:** build and strengthen all aspects of comprehension and critical thinking – needs help in particular with making connections, abstract thinking, logical/sequential analysis, drawing conclusions, and problem solving
- **Executive function:** build and strengthen all domains of executive function, in particular address extreme challenges with time
- **Independence skills:** increase awareness of the areas in which Tom can begin to manage his own needs. Develop adaptive coping strategies for managing difficult emotions, confusion, and uncomfortable physical and sensory experiences. Reduce self-injurious and maladaptive reactions to dysregulation. Anxiety management/reduction of chronic overwhelm (when dysregulated tends to overreact, - become hyper verbal, make inappropriate jokes, and engage in other distracting forms of attention seeking behavior).

##### Affinities and Interests

- Movies
- Running 5ks
- Attending concerts, theater, and other outings and performances
- Gay rights
- Travel
- Christianity (mother is pastor of church)

##### Strengths

- Highly motivated to become more independent
- Comfortable with adults, good with adult casual social language
- Capable of creating strong bonds with adults
- Creativity
- Sense of humor
- Visual memory
- Empathic and sensitive to the emotions of others

## Challenges

- Low self-esteem, especially surrounding intelligence and weight
- Perseverative thoughts and feelings
- Higher order thinking – due to significant challenge Tom is often confused and anxious.
- Managing the unexpected (gets dependent, confused, anxious)
- Extremely low social awareness
- Extreme self-consciousness and anxiety around peers – tends to try too hard and drive others away.
- Topic selection for peer conversation
- Over-dependence on staff to help navigate social difficulties
- Low fund of knowledge about systems and how the world works

## Newly Emerging Skills (require support and need to be worked on):

- Developing a sense of humor
- Increasing willingness to take on new independence and responsibility
- Awareness of his preferences and needs
- Self-advocacy
- Awareness of social nuances and undercurrents

## Individual vs. Group work

- Because of significant learning disabilities and extreme self-consciousness, it is currently best to do the cognitive support in a 1:1 to reduce embarrassment.
- 1:1 needs
  - Remediation of language-based learning disabilities. Session designed to identify areas of difficulty due to learning disabilities, remediate/build skills when applicable, and design adaptive strategies (use of iPad and voice-activated software)
  - Understanding adulthood and the world around me – a safe 1:1 place to ask questions about becoming an adult, filling in gaps of understanding, and making personal goals
  - 1:1 goal-oriented community outings with a focus on self organization, planning, strategic thinking, independence with transportation, and navigating commerce, etc. (*Examples: riding public transportation, ordering in a restaurant, shopping trip, etc.*)
  - Independent living skill building (*Examples: cooking, shopping, short and long-term goal setting and planning, understanding street signs, etc.*)
  - Computer-based interest exploration and expansion – facilitated use of the internet to pose questions and search for answers. Focus should also be on higher order thinking and executive functioning
  - Projects – that will enable Tom to work on building executive function skills (planning and executing a plan, organization, step wisdom, sequencing), and critical thinking skills
  - Facilitated internship – expanding on strengths and interests to learn organizational, social, self-advocacy, and independence skills. Format for exposing Tom to controlled stressful situations and facilitating him remaining regulated and seeking solutions.

- Reflection – a daily session designed to help Tom reflect upon the events of his day, make sense of his experiences, make connections, address emotions, identify and resolve difficulties, answer questions, reduce confusion and overwhelming feelings, and problem solve surrounding peer relationships, etc.
- Tom wants to have relationships with peers and needs facilitated practice. Therefore, Tom should have small group experiences each day that aren't overwhelming so he can continue working on group skills.
  - Group physical activity for Tom to work on physical endurance and fitness as well as social navigation in the context of games
  - Small-group counseling - negotiation, collaboration, and social discourse
  - Discussion-based small group where Tom can be exposed to current events, politics, controversial issues, and pop culture to increase fund of knowledge and practice social skills and awareness/perspective taking, sharing of self and others, articulating emotions, reciprocity, conversational flow, topic selection, and expanding social communication skills.
  - As much as possible, pair Tom with other students with similar learning and social issues, as he can get lost quickly or overloaded if the language skills of his peers is beyond his skills.

## **Internship**

Tom should be engaged in the selection of an ongoing internship to work on:

- Building independence
- Strengthening job skills
- Receiving feedback without getting apologetic or anxious
- Increasing responsibilities
- Executive functioning
- Increasing self-esteem
- Increasing stamina

## 4.15 Sample Student's Daily Program – Case Study #3

**Student:** Ben, age 18

**Diagnosis:** autism spectrum disorder, apraxia (disorder of motor planning), expressive language disorder

### Transition Priorities

- **Expressive language:** Build and strengthen ability to use expressive language to communicate emotions, thoughts, needs, and preferences in all domains: 1:1, small group, large group, in community, with peers, and with adults. Due to lack of current expressive language, in addition to work on oral expression, build in strengthening skills with written expression, keyboarding, and use of communication-based technological devices. Support should also include a focus on gestures, facial expressions, and other non-verbal modes and strategies of communication.
- **Motor planning:** Build and strengthen body awareness, descriptive language surrounding body movements, coordination, balance, spatial awareness in relation to the body, and sequencing of motor skills.
- **Parts-to-whole thinking:** Build and strengthen ability to identify key details, make connections between details, and understand how they fit together into a big picture. Incorporate work aimed at solidifying and strengthening other critical thinking skills associated with parts/whole thinking such as visualization, analysis, abstract conceptualization, cause and effect, evaluative thinking, and visual-spatial thinking.
- **Executive function:** Build and strengthen all domains of executive functioning in particular sequencing, prioritization, and planning.

### Affinities and Interests

- Pokémon
- Computer-based drawing and design
- Attending sporting events
- Travel
- Pizza
- Animals
- Digital photography
- Being read stories with lots of affect and flair

### Strengths

- Strong receptive language, including large receptive vocabulary base
- Comfortable being out in community, public places
- Responds well to calming and soothing
- Capable of creating strong bonds both with adults and younger peers
- Creativity
- Attention regulation
- Motor planning and coordination
- Quick to catch on to computer programs and how to use them (art- and photo-based)
- Empathy
- Supportive family system

## Challenges

- Profound expressive language challenge – does not speak and has few non-verbal strategies at his disposal (gesturing, drawing, showing with physical movement) . Those who know him well often anticipate needs and consequently he does not have enough opportunities to practice expression (verbal and non-verbal)
- Passivity, lack of self-advocacy, and infrequent expression of preferences and needs unless in distress
- Restricted diet – will only eat a few specific foods
- Weak motor planning (graphomotor/handwriting, fine and gross motor)

## Newly Emerging Skills (require support and need to be worked on):

- Expressing a sense of humor
- Increasing awareness of peers and a desire to form friendships
- Beginning to use more gesturing to indicate thoughts, preferences, and needs

## Individual vs. Group work

- Ben needs the bulk of his program to be 1:1 and small group at this time to allow him to work on expressive language and forming peer relationships without the threat of feeling overwhelmed or getting lost in the group. Ben needs equal parts 1:1 and small group.

## 1:1 Sessions Recommended

- Computer art – see if Ben can begin using animation programs to add movement and later context and character development to his drawings
- Photography – both in program and out in the community. This will allow Ben to explore another modality of expression in a more abstract and creative manner. Photography excursions and projects capitalize on his strength in photography and his ability to stay regulated when in public. This allows him to work on his difficulties expressing his preference, planning, and intention. Work on reinforcing parts-to-whole thinking can be incorporated by having Ben take photos of the parts of objects and then the whole object.
- Community outings with a focus on social interaction, spatial navigation, planning, and engagement
- Independent living skill building (*Examples: cooking, shopping, short- and long-term goal setting and planning, understanding street signs, etc.*). Cooking may help Ben expand his willingness to try other types of food.
- Computer skills – use Ben’s comfort with art and photo computer programs to widen his ability to utilize the computer for non-artistic endeavors such as keyboarding, writing, email communication, finding information, and planning outings.
- Projects – use Ben’s artistic skills to do projects that will enable him to work on building executive function (planning and executing a plan, organization, step wisdom, sequencing) and critical thinking skills.

- Movement and mindfulness – a daily session where Ben works specifically on activities aimed at raising body awareness, intentionality in movement, sequencing and movement, coordination and balance. Activities can include games, yoga, dance, mime/improvisation, etc.
- Reflection – a daily session designed to help Ben reflect upon the events of his day, make sense of his experiences, make connections, address emotions, identify and resolve difficulties, answer questions, etc. Strategies such as storyboarding, movement, and art can be incorporated as modalities of communication to help reflect on the day. This will also be an excellent time to work on parts-to-whole thinking – reflecting on and delineating the parts of the day and also evaluating how the day was as a whole (fun, bad, boring, etc.).

### **Small group sessions recommended**

- Small group physical activity so Ben can work on both peer interactions and motor planning in a context that would not be anxiety producing or overwhelming. The class should not introduce competition or the stress of timed activities such as races as a dynamic. The focus should be on fun, collaborative games and exercises that focus on motor sequencing, movement awareness, coordination, spatial awareness, and balance.
- Dyad or triad peer discussion group where Ben can work on building rapport, similarities and differences, circles of communication, perspective taking, sharing of self and others, reciprocity, conversational flow, topic selection, and expanding social communication skills with developmentally appropriate peer matches.
- Project-based small group where Ben can be exposed to collaboration, negotiation, and peer interaction while also practicing executive function components of selecting, planning, and executing a project. In the beginning the projects should be within his interests and skills, such as art so he has a strength to fall back on. As he becomes more comfortable with the peer and communication components, projects that introduce new tasks and experiences should be incorporated to help expand his interests.
- Newsletter – Ben should be the resident photographer for the program newsletter, enabling him to contribute to a group project through his strengths. If interested, he can also submit drawings and cartoons.



## 4.16 Sample Student's Daily Program – Case Study #4

**Student:** George, age 23

**Diagnosis:** autism spectrum disorder

### Transition Priorities

- **Executive function support:** Build and strengthen ability to preview, plan, manage time. strategize, sequence, and execute managing his college experience and obligations. Raise awareness to services on campus and how to utilize support services best. Expand ability to juggle responsibilities (tends to only focus on one thing to the exclusion of other responsibilities).
- **Social cognition:** Build and strengthen awareness and ability to: perspective taking, negotiate, enter into and maintain social discourse, social reciprocity, self-marketing (how one comes across to others), topic selection (discuss things of interest to others)
- **Independence skills:** Increase awareness of the areas in which George can begin to manage his own needs and responsibilities more independently (currently extremely dependent on Mom).
- **Emotion and anxiety management:** Develop coping strategies for managing difficult emotions, in particular anxiety and boredom. (Tends to leave abruptly, or conversely, dominate). Expand emotional experiences and increase emotional language.
- **Physical exercise and stamina**

### Affinities and Interests

- Military history
- Russian history
- Role-playing computer games
- World politics
- *My Little Pony*
- Non-fiction reading

### Strengths

- Highly motivated to learn
- Highly intelligent
- Higher order thinking
- Comfortable with adults
- Creativity
- Sense of humor
- Big picture thinking

### Challenges

- Chronic disorganization, especially losing track of details and poor time management
- Perseverative thoughts and feelings – if he gets stuck on thoughts he is unable to put aside until resolved
- Pervasive sense of impatience and urgency, rushing through tasks and responsibilities
- Low social awareness
- Topic selection for peer conversation
- Over-dependence on adults to organize, remind, and manage his responsibilities

- Fatigues quickly, reacts poorly to “boredom”
- Social/conversational reciprocity - tends to talk “at” rather than “with” others – alienates peers by coming across as elitist, rude, and dominating
- Face blindness (inability to recognize faces)

### **Newly Emerging Skills (require support and need to be worked on)**

- Creating and maintaining strong bonds with peers and adults
- Expressing warmth and affection towards others
- Increasing willingness to take on new independence and responsibility
- Awareness of his preferences and needs
- Perspective taking
- Awareness of social subtleties
- Reflecting on his thoughts and feelings and those of others
- Receiving and drawing meaning from peer feedback

### **Individual vs. Group work**

- Most of the issues George struggles with emerge during executive function or social interactions.
- It is recommended that George receive 1:1 support for:
  - Executive function needs (goal setting, organization, time management, strategic planning)
  - Career development
  - Managing college and academic responsibilities
- George is beginning to express an interest in having relationships with peers and needs a lot of facilitated practice. Therefore, George should have small group experiences throughout the day that do not overwhelm him to continue working on group skills.
  - Group physical activity so George can work on physical endurance and fitness as well as social navigation in the context of games
  - Small-group counseling - negotiation, collaboration, social discourse, emotional intelligence, and awareness building
  - Discussion-based small group where George can discuss current events, politics, controversial issues, and pop culture; practice social skills and awareness in perspective taking, sharing of self and others, articulating emotions, reciprocity, conversational flow, topic selection, and expanding social communication skills.
  - Project-based group work where George can work on executive function challenge through goal setting, planning, etc. in a context where he has to negotiate and compromise without being in charge

## Internship

It is recommended that George participate in an affinity-based internship at a museum, history archives, university research, etc. where he can work on:

- Attending to details
- Executive functioning
- Managing responsibilities

Since George traditionally avoids doing anything he sees as “extra work” above and beyond school and basic self-care, the internship must be clearly linked to George’s career development and personal goals to add validity and meaning and to reduce resistance to taking on a new role.

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## Section 5.0

# TEACHING APPROACHES, METHODS, PROCESSES, ASSESSMENTS, AND TOOLS

**"For the mind is not a vessel that needs filling, but wood that needs igniting."**

~ Plutarch, c. 100 A.D.

**"Human beings have a natural potentiality for learning....Significant learning takes place when the subject matter is perceived by the student as having relevance for his own purposes."**

~ Dr. Carl Rogers, 1969

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### 5.01 Introduction

As the title suggests, this section is a collection of teaching approaches, methods, processes, assessments, and miscellaneous tools essential to the delivery of our curriculum modules. The overall purpose of this toolbox is to make it possible for users to customize the transition curriculum for each student more easily and accurately.

Many of these “tools” are lists of prompts – points to remember or consider when preparing lessons or student programs. Some provide guidance on how to adjust material for students with differing abilities; some provide critical processes upon which the success of the curriculum depends.

Not all lists or processes will fit every circumstance or every student. Feel free to add or amend any of these lists, and we shall modify or expand them from time to time as we get feedback from teachers and other professionals using these materials.

## 5.02 Discovery and Examination Process

### 502.1 Purpose and Use

All Transition Curriculum modules are designed with the same goals in mind:

- To create for individuals on the autism spectrum or with other developmental disabilities a rich and meaningful context in which to learn and grow
- To build individual personalized concept of self, others, and the world
- To provide the tools and strategies needed to lead a more independent, self-advocating, and self-determined life

To help individuals with developmental challenges build self-awareness and awareness of others, we offer a process of discovery, examination, experience, and reflection. The process:

- Raises awareness and deepens understanding of the physical, cognitive, sensory, emotional, and social layers of the self
- Explores preferences, needs, affinities, strengths, difficulties, hopes, dreams, and goals as means to increase personal awareness
- Uses new personal awareness and emerging sense of self to improve decision-making, flexibility, adaptability, and self-advocacy skills
- Capitalizes on all preceding personal growth to strengthen the individual's ability to establish and maintain meaningful social relationships
- Capitalizes on social relationships to expand the individual's world into the community through field trips, internships, projects, local events, and individualized independence skill building
- helps staff build a comprehensive understanding of the individual's needs, preferences, interests, skills, strengths, difficulties, desires, and personal goals, which is necessary to individualize long-term transition and independence planning

The ultimate goal of this learning process is to equip young adults with awareness, relationships, and skills they need to manage their own needs, perceptions, and experiences successfully, internally, and in relation to others in a variety of environments.

The process includes a wide range of methods, techniques, and activities: experiential, multi-sensory, non-verbal, verbal, individual, group, explicit (through direct instruction) and incidental (capitalizing on a teaching moment because the topic just happened to come up).

### 502.2 The Process

These are the general steps to apply to each topic addressed in every module:

1. Raise awareness and build understanding of one's
  - Sensory, cognitive, emotional, physical, and social needs; preferences, behaviors, habits, and tendencies in relation to
    - internal experience

- associated physical sensations
  - associated feelings
  - associated thoughts
  - associated reactions and behaviors
  - coping strategies (*Examples: helpful, not helpful, disruptive to others*)
  - Sensory, cognitive, emotional, physical, and social make-up in relation to
    - other people
    - a wide variety of environments
    - performing tasks and engaging in a wide variety of activities
2. Evaluate and strengthen awareness and understanding by means of
- Experimentation and supported trial and error experiences
  - Improvisation and role-playing scenarios
  - Creative expression (*Examples: art, film, photography, music, etc.*)
  - Outings and community events
  - Physical, multi-sensory, and experiential activities, games, and exercises
  - 1:1 discussion
  - Group discussion
  - Individual and peer feedback
  - Social relationship-building activities
  - Emotional awareness and emotional intelligence activities
  - Individual and group projects
  - Internships, jobs, shadowing professionals, visiting workplaces, and other career-building experiences
  - Affinity exploration
  - Clubs (*Examples: newsletter, photography, sports, shared interest theme, etc.*)
  - Independence skill building activities and outings (*Examples: cooking, laundry, money management, public transportation*)
3. Evaluate and draw conclusions
- “Given my emerging self-awareness and deepening understanding of myself, others, and the world around me:
- Am I meeting my needs? Are others meeting my needs? Are the environments and situations I am in meeting my needs?
  - What are ways I can take better care of myself? How can others help me? How can I, and others around me, take better care of my needs when I am out and about in my community?
  - What are ways I can improve my relationship with others?
  - What are ways I can have more positive experiences out in the community?
  - What are ways I can improve my home life? Work?

- What changes would I like to make in myself, in my relationships with others, and my experiences in my surroundings to improve my experiences and my life?
  - What changes can I make so my goals, plans, and dreams fit me better?
  - What situations and people are supportive of me and my needs? Which are not? What needs to change to improve those situations that are not working well? What changes can I take on myself? Who can I enlist to help?
  - What are ways I can start taking on more responsibility and become more independent?"
4. Experimenting with applying new knowledge and awareness with respect to
- Self
  - Home
  - School
  - Social relationships
  - Recreational activities
  - Job
  - Community
  - World
5. Assess application of new knowledge and awareness and revise accordingly
- Use visuals to help compare experiences. (*Examples: concept maps, charts, split page, draw pictures, movement, go over pictures or video footage taken, etc.*)
  - Use techniques to support sequencing and capturing important details. (Examples: storyboarding, timeline, visuals, movement/act out replay)
  - Provide a systematic way to organize thinking and evaluate the experience according to language and cognitive capabilities. (*Examples: scale 1-10, happy faces/sad faces, good/bad, color coding, etc.*)
  - Use visuals and other techniques for big picture thinking—evaluating and comparing outcomes.
  - Make concrete and realistic goals.

### 5.03 Dimensions of Self-Awareness List

The word "**dimension**" is used here to mean a **fundamental quality or property of the self**.

When studying physics, it is useful to break it down to fundamental dimensions of mass, distance, and time. One can study these elements individually and then re-integrate them to see how they function together.

In a similar way, an individual can understand herself better by examining his fundamental components individually and how they interact to create the personality he knows as "me".

Being able to name and understand the elements or dimensions that comprise self-awareness is important because:

- It gives us words to describe our experiences to ourselves and to others.
- It helps support parts-to-whole thinking, causal relationships, drawing conclusions, and making connections. (*Example: "I get cranky when I do not have enough sleep. I did not sleep last night. Maybe that is why I got so angry when we were out of my favorite cereal."*) This can then lead to executive functions such as problem solving, planning, and strategic thinking. (*Example: "I do not want to be cranky when I go to the baseball game tomorrow so I need to get some sleep tonight."*)
- It enables one to ask for what is needed with the appropriate specificity to get those needs met. (*Example: "My body hurts" versus "My stomach feels tight and full and I am having sharp pains."*)
- It provides the knowledge and meaning to know what one needs, increasing the likelihood of being more active in the pursuit of those needs.
- It reduces the anxiety and reactivity that comes from discomfort, and enables one to begin anticipating needs to reduce distress from the unexpected and lack of preparedness.

"Today you are You,  
that is truer than true.  
There is no one alive  
who is Youer than  
You." ~ Suess, 1959

"Although men are accused of not knowing their own weakness, yet perhaps few know their own strength. It is in men as in soils, where sometimes there is a vein of gold which the owner knows not of."

~ Swift, 1706

The following questions can help prompt a student to examine the fundamental dimensions of self. Use these questions as a guide – not all questions need be asked and they should be framed in a way the student can easily understand and answer.

### 5.03.1 Physical, Sensory, Emotional, and Cognitive Characteristics

Four of the most basic dimensions of self-awareness are the physical, sensory, emotional, and cognitive characteristics. The following list offers some questions designed to guide an individual to become aware of each characteristic. The value of having the individual explore and become aware of each cannot be over-estimated since it is awareness that enables one to move into the fundamental processes of forming opinions, identifying needs and preferences, articulating needs and preferences, and making choices that are in alignment with oneself.

**Physical:** my anatomy, systems, nervous system medical issues, immunity, heredity, limitations, sensations (itch, pain), sleep, nutrition, weight

- How does my brain affect my body?
- How would I describe my physical experiences?
- How are my physical experiences affected by my disorder?
- What are the themes and patterns to my body?
- What happens to my body when I am dysregulated? (*Examples: feel tired, get angry, low blood sugar, etc.*)
- In what ways do things work better when my body is regulated?
- What basic physical needs make me feel comfortable? What feels physically uncomfortable?
- How do my physical sensations and needs affect my brain, behaviors, senses, social experiences, and physical body?
- What environments feel supportive of my physical needs and which feel in conflict and how?
- In what ways do I feel in control and not in control when it comes to how my body feels?
- What impact do different people, environments, and activities have on my body and physical experiences?
- What impact does my body have on my relationships with others?
- How do my physical experiences affect my ability to make good decisions and solve problems effectively?
- What ways can I manage my physical needs and experiences better internally, among others, and in a wide variety of environments?

**Sensory:** visual, auditory, tactile, taste, olfactory, vestibular (sense of balance), proprioceptive (internal perceptions especially connected with body position and movement)

- How does my brain and body process sensory information?
- How would I describe my sensory experiences?
- How is my sensory processing style affected by my disorder?

- What are the themes and patterns to my sensory processing?
- What happens when my sensory system is dysregulated?
- In what ways do things work better when my sensory system is regulated?
- What effect does my sensory processing style have on my brain functions, emotions, thoughts, social experiences, and behaviors?
- What environments feel supportive of my sensory system and which feel in conflict and how?
- In what ways do I feel in control and not in control when it comes to managing my sensory experiences?
- What impact do different people, environments, and activities have on my senses?
- How do my sensory experiences affect my ability to make good decisions and solve problems effectively?
- What ways can I manage my sensory experiences better internally, among others, and in a wide variety of environments?

**Emotional:** biochemistry, psychological diagnosis, emotional language, emotional intelligence, verbal and non-verbal expressions of emotions, emotional dynamics

- How does my brain process my emotions?
- How would I describe my emotional experiences?
- How is my emotional style affected by my disorder?
- What are the themes and patterns to my emotions?
- What happens when my emotions are dysregulated?
- In what ways do things work better when my emotions are regulated?
- How do my emotions affect my brain, behaviors, senses, social experiences, and physical body?
- What environments feel supportive of my emotional style and which feel in conflict and how?
- In what ways do I feel in control and not in control when it comes to managing my emotions?
- What impact do different people, environments, and activities have on my emotions?
- What impact do my emotions have on my relationships with others?
- How do my emotions affect my ability to make good decisions and solve problems effectively?
- What ways can I manage my emotions better internally, among others, and in a wide variety of environments?

**Cognitive:** learning, thoughts, mindset, beliefs, assumptions, biases, judgments

- How does my brain process information?
- How would I describe myself as a thinker and a learner?
- How is my thinking style affected by my disorder?
- What are the themes and patterns to my thoughts?
- What happens when my thinking is dysregulated?
- In what ways do things work better when my thinking is regulated?
- How do my thoughts affect my brain, emotions, behaviors, senses, social experiences, and physical body?



- What environments feel supportive of my thinking style and which feel in conflict and how?
- In what ways do I feel in control and not in control when it comes to managing my thoughts?
- What impact do different people, environments, and activities have on my thoughts?
- What impact do my thoughts have on my relationships with others?
- How do my thoughts affect my ability to make good decisions and solve problems effectively?
- What ways can I manage my thoughts better internally, among others, and in a wide variety of environments?

### 5.03.2 Affinities, Interests, and Passions

A key component of the Discovery and Examination Process is engaging participants in activities, experiences, and discussions that highlight or uncover one's affinities, interests, and passions. An awareness and understanding of these characteristics have tremendous impact in guiding one's choices around recreation and leisure, socializing, career development, intellectual and academic pursuits, pleasure reading, creative expression, and more.

Interacting with an individual over affinities, interests, and passions allows staff to use these as motivators to learn, share, discuss, explore, and try new activities and consider new ideas. They open up vibrant avenues of engagement, enthusiasm, and motivation that help individuals with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) or other developmental disabilities to build social relationships, remain regulated, and sustain their attention.

**Affinities:** what do I like?

- Foods and favorite restaurants
- Television shows and movies
- Music
- Types of recreational activities
- Internet (*Examples: YouTube, websites, etc.*)
- Other

**Interests:** what am I interested in and would like to know more about?

- Topics to talk about in conversation
- Academic interests
- Things I collect
- Time periods I am fascinated by
- Things I like to research on the internet
- Things I am curious about
- Things I know a lot about
- Other

**Passions:** what excites and energizes me?

- Topics
- Activities
- Hobbies
- Jobs
- People
- Other

### 5.03.3 Preferences, Habits, Tendencies, and Behaviors

One of the most effective ways for an individual to gain insight into her behavior is to examine the preferences, habits, and tendencies that motivate her to act a certain way. The Discovery and Examination Process incorporates a wide range of methods designed to explore these dimensions of the individual's personality and how they play a role in behavior choices. Through the use of 1:1 discussions, group discussions, experiential learning, activities, and games participants are guided towards addressing the following areas:

#### Preferences

- What are my preferences? (*Examples: food, clothing, environmental, personality, entertainment, humor, etc.*)
- How are my preferences affected by my disorder?
- How are the themes and patterns to my preferences affected by my disorder?
- In what ways do I feel in control and not in control when it comes to managing my preferences?
- What impact do different people, environments, and activities have on my preferences?
- What impact do my preferences have on my relationships with others?
- How do my preferences affect my ability to make good decisions and solve problems effectively?

#### Habits

- How would I describe my habits?
- How are my habits affected by my disorder?
- How are the themes and patterns to my habits affected by my disorder?
- What impact do different people, environments, and activities have on my habits?
- What impact do my habits have on my relationships with others?
- How do my habits affect my ability to make good decisions and solve problems effectively?

#### Tendencies

- How would I describe my tendencies?
- How are my tendencies affected by my disorder?
- How are the themes and patterns to my tendencies affected by my disorder?

- What impact do different people, environments, and activities have on my tendencies?
- What impact do my tendencies have on my relationships with others?
- How do my tendencies affect my ability to make good decisions and solve problems effectively?

### Behaviors

- How would I describe the way I behave around others I know?
- How would I describe my behavior around people I do not know?
- How would I describe my behavior in environments where I feel regulated?
- How would I describe my behavior when I am dysregulated?
- What impact do my behaviors have on my relationships with others?
- How do my behaviors affect my ability to make good decisions and solve problems effectively?

### Strengths and Challenges: Skills

- How would I describe what I am good at?
- Are there themes and patterns to the skills I am drawn to?
- What are my skill strengths?
- How would I describe my skills?
- What are my challenges?
- How are my skills affected by my disorder?
- How is my ability to accomplish skills affected when I feel regulated?
- How is it harder to complete tasks when I am dysregulated?
- What environments feel supportive of my skills?
- Which environments seem to be in conflict with my skills and how?
- In what ways do I feel in control and not in control when it comes to managing my ability to accomplish a task?
- What impact do different people, environments, and activities have on my skills?
- What impact do my skills have on my relationships with others?
- How do my skills affect my ability to make good decisions and solve problems effectively?

### Strengths and Challenges: Social Interactions

- How would I describe my social personality?
- What parts of social interactions am I good at?
- What parts of social interaction are hard for me?
- How would I describe my social life and the quality of my interactions?
- How is my ability to relate well to others affected when I feel regulated?
- How is it harder to relate to others when I am dysregulated?
- How are my social interactions affected by my disorder?
- What environments feel supportive of my social interactions?
- Which environments seem to be in conflict with my social interactions and how?

- In what ways do I feel in control and not in control when it comes to managing my social interactions?
- What impact do different people, environments, and activities have on my social interactions?
- What impact does my social personality have on my relationships with others?
- How does my social personality affect my ability to make good decisions and solve problems effectively?

### **Strengths and Challenges: Organization**

- How would I describe my organizational style?
- How would I describe my ability to be and stay organized?
- What am I good at organizing in my life?
- In what ways am I disorganized?
- What are the themes and patterns to my organization/disorganization?
- How is my organization affected by my disorder?
- How is my ability to be organized affected when I feel regulated?
- How is it harder to stay organized when I am dysregulated?
- What environments feel supportive of my organizational skills?
- Which environments seem to be in conflict with my organizational skills and how?
- In what ways do I feel in control and not in control when it comes to my ability to organize?
- What impact do different people, environments, and activities have on my ability to stay organized?
- What impact does my sense of organization have on my relationships with others?
- How does my sense of organization affect my ability to make good decisions and solve problems effectively?

#### 5.04 Self-Determination, Internal Motivation, Independence, and Interdependence

These are four driving forces that permit a person to lead a healthy, active, engaged, and successful life.

Teachers should note that parents of students may need support as their sons and daughters go through the Awareness Development module. As a student reaches to more for herself, some parents may experience anxiety as they learn to back off from doing everything for their child; as they learn to let their child try and fail; as they learn to not micro-manage their child's life.

Years of experience working with developmentally challenged young adults and their families has led us to the following conclusion:

- Self-determination starts with becoming aware of and valuing one's needs.
- Internal (basic, personal) motivation occurs when one is passionate, fully engaged, and invested in herself and her future.
- Independence arises from the ability to reflect and strategize, and the confidence that builds through independence-building experiences.
- Interdependence results when one can communicate effectively and relate to others in a rich and meaningful manner.
- A healthy balance of independence and interdependence supports one being a successful adult.

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**All transition curriculum work should be designed to maximize for each student senses of self-determination, internal motivation, independence, and interdependence.**

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### 5.05 Goals: Design, Approach, and Achievement

The transition curriculum should engage each student in the design and achievement of her own goals, utilizing tools and approaches that support her considering current limitations.

For example:

- Individuals who have undeveloped interests, affinities, and passions need to engage in goal-setting through creative exploration, activation of curiosity, and exposure to new experiences so they are able to begin developing a sense of their own preferences, inclinations, and skills.
- Individuals with language, processing, and critical thinking challenges need to be encouraged to develop their goals and concepts in a concrete, explicit, and active manner.
- Individuals with ASD who possess strong language and engagement skills may need executive function and critical thinking supports to help reign in their ideas and anchor them in practicality with logic, strategy, sequence, and step wisdom (the ability to visualize what one is trying to accomplish and the steps or sequences of actions needed to arrive at that objective).

The development of goals takes place not only in explicit goal-themed sessions but is also woven into advising, discussions, activities, instruction, activities, and the individual's overall program design. It is this continuous and comprehensive addressing of personal goals that fuels their dreams and subsequently their motivation:

- A sense of self-determination (*Example: I can be in control of my own decisions and my own life*)
- Motivation from within (*Example: I can motivate myself to act, my own intent and desire motivate me to act*)
- Independence (*Example: I want to do things for myself, I want to and can take care of some/many of my needs, doing things for myself is enjoyable*)
- Interdependence (*Example: It is okay to need people, it is okay to ask for help, people care about me and want to help me, I can ask for the help I need and still feel strong and independent*)

#### Examples of Goals

- Personal care goals (*Examples: self-care, emotions, sleep, basic needs, etc.*)
- Relationships and social life goals (current and future)
- Academic/learning goals
- Independence goals (*Examples: driving, voting, taking on more responsibility, money management, getting around town, managing meds, etc.*)
- Career goals (*Examples: job, career development, skill development, training/certifications, research*)
- Recreational and leisure goals (*Examples: going to baseball games, watching movies with friends, bowling*)
- Big ideas, hopes, dreams, bucket list items (realistic and unrealistic)

## 5.06 Assessment and Teaching Methods

### 5.06.1 Purpose and Use

In addition to specific strategies, accommodations, and approaches that can be applied at a specific time to address an identified issue or difficulty, it is also important to recognize there are many support tools that can be used on an ongoing basis regardless of the lesson plan, activity, or targeted goal. The following is a list of the most commonly and continuously used.

### 5.06.2 Basic Task Analysis

The following questions are designed to help break down any activity or task to determine what demands are being made on the individual's cognitive, sensory, emotional, and physical systems. They can be used by the instructor in the selection/planning process, as a diagnostic tool when observing an individual engaged in a task or activity or post-activity or task to evaluate whether the demands made on the individual were appropriate or need to be adjusted. These questions can also be posed to participants and used in discussion or reflection before, during, or after an activity.

- From the teacher's viewpoint, what is the end result of this task? (What would the successful completion of this task look like?)
- What is my goal in asking the individual to perform this task? (*Examples: assess ability, introduce new skills or experiences, practice recently acquired skills to strengthen, in support of a treatment goal*)
- What is the frame used to introduce it? (The frame is the context; *why* this task is being introduced; what need it fulfills or why it is required or needed. *Example: I am asking you to take out the garbage because everyone on campus has a school job and this is the task you picked out of the basket.*)
- What is the *student's* understanding of the end result of this task? (Ensure any gap between teacher's understanding and student's understanding of the task is resolved. The student should be able to demonstrate he fully understands the scope of the task.)
- What skills (*Examples: following directions, manual dexterity, attention to detail*) and meta-skills (*Examples: attention regulation, active-working memory, strategic thinking, etc.*) will this task require for successful completion?
- Based on what I know of the individual, how do I think she will do?
- Where will the individual excel and conversely where might she get stuck?
- Have I provided the individual with all the necessary tools and environmental considerations for successful completion?

**A meta-skill** is a skill used to acquire or make use of other skills. For example a person who is good at teaching herself new skills has the meta-skill of being able to learn things. A great teacher is someone who has the meta-skill of being able to learn any subject and then teach that subject back to others.

### 5.06.3 Knowns and Unknowns Analysis

When selecting activities and tasks for an individual or group, it is useful to begin by assessing what is known and what is not known. This can provide a lot of insight as to where the “knowledge holes” are and predict what might be a challenge for the individual in the context of a specific task. It is a great framework for creating hypotheses and then designing activities and tasks designed to test them.

In some cases it works very well to have an individual engage in a task that is new and observe how she manages herself in a novel situation. In other cases it can be very dysregulating and the individual needs appropriate previewing and discussion before being introduced to novelty. Therefore, it is important to refer to the Student Individual Profile (SIP) for information on regulatory systems and reaction to novelty, and incorporate that knowledge into the planning process. The basic questions for a “Knowns and Unknowns Analysis” are:

- What components of this task will be new to the individual versus something she was exposed to before?
- What known information do I hope to confirm or reassess based on how the student does in this task?
- What am I hoping will be revealed about this individual through asking her to do this task?

#### **Example:** Assembling a Model Car

**Known:** Student loves cars and has put together models before. Parts-to-whole thinking is weak so individual tends to get lost mid-project or distracted by non-essentials that will not help get car finished (lost track of end goal). As a result, there are a lot of half-built, abandoned models at home.

**Unknowns:** Is fatigue or poor stamina playing a role? Is anxiety or perfectionism an underlying factor in difficulty finishing the models? What supports and how long will it take for the student to complete the whole car (never finished one)?

### 5.06.4 Strengths and Challenges Analysis

Encouraging individuals with ASD or other developmental disabilities to think about themselves in terms of relative strengths and challenges supports them positively when building self-awareness and self-understanding; not only because it bypasses a need for labels that can be upsetting and unproductive (*Examples: “stupid”, “bad at”, etc.*), but also because it reinforces the idea skills are on a continuum for everyone and the continuum is not fixed. Individuals with ASD struggle with the concepts of gradation (severity, intensity), contingencies (relational and conditional), and rigid thinking/compartmentalization. For this reason, presenting their abilities in a strength/challenge framework that is dynamic rather than static offers valuable opportunities to work on critical thinking skills.



To plan an activity, lesson, or task that has the appropriate balance of ease and challenge for the student, a teacher will need to know the student's strengths and challenges. Ideally, the activity or task would enable the student to capitalize on her strengths and limit the degree of challenge to prevent interference from reactive negative thoughts or emotions. The basic questions for a Strength and Challenges Analysis are:

- What is the breakdown of strengths and challenges specific to the task I am asking the student to do?
- Is this task overall playing to strengths, challenges, or a combination?
- Is the task designed with the appropriate amount of challenge to weak areas and ways for the individual to call upon her strengths?
- Does this breakdown need to be explicitly communicated to the individual (task selected to work on skill building or self-awareness) or is this an assessment exercise to identify strengths and challenges (in which case it is better for the individual to do the task blindly and discuss what emerged as strengths and challenges post-exercise)?

**Example:** Assembling a Model Car

**Strengths:** Affinity-based (loves cars), strong manual dexterity for snapping small parts together; wants a career as a car mechanic so energized and able to sustain focus by learning part names and functions while working on the model; strong procedural memory, so able to read directions and hold instructions well.

**Challenges:** Emotional dysregulation tends to shut down individual before task can be completed (gets stuck, does and redoes parts assembly obsessively); visual-spatial ordering is a challenge, so has hard time visualizing where parts fit in 3D model based on a picture on the box; poor self-monitoring, so not able to assess self while performing or know to ask for help.

#### 5.06.5 Strategies and Accommodations Assessment

**Strategies** are used when an individual needs support to approach, navigate, and complete a task successfully. They are methods for approaching learning that increase an individual's ability to absorb information successfully, make experience or study meaningful, and generally become productive based on exposure to learning.

Strategies come in the form of cognitive procedures (structured ways of thinking), physical tools, and other aids and materials. Strategies are applied when an individual possesses either an emerging ability or exhibits the basic foundational skills required to perform the task. They are also used when an individual needs to increase efficiency, speed, and accuracy. Strategies are selected on a highly individualized basis.

*Example: Individual uses her finger to track as she reads so she does not lose her place. In addition, she needs to have auditory information given in a visual format to improve retention and increase understanding.*

Strategies can be transient, used only until the individual's skills in the target area are strengthened; or they may be permanent methods, tools, and techniques that are applied regularly.

**Strategies can be very useful when working to:**

- Foster independent learning (gives them tools, especially valuable for homework when teacher is not available)
- Strengthen strategic thinking and other higher order thinking dimensions
- Reduce anxiety
- Support self-monitoring (*Example: How am I doing? What do I need? What do I know and don't know? When do I need help and in what areas?*)
- Bolster awareness of individual's learning style (*Example: This is what I need to learn best, etc.*)
- Introduce creativity, trial and error, and brainstorming into classroom learning
- De-emphasize and break cycle of feeling stupid if help is needed
- Slow down learners who tend to rush

**Accommodations** are methods put in place to either bypass or externally support an area of need or challenge. They are used when the individual has a challenge, deficit, or disability that prevents her from accomplishing a task successfully but she has the capability to do part of it. Specific methods are put into place to bypass, eliminate, or reduce the challenge so she can devote energy to a more limited area to reach success or mastery.

Accommodations level the playing field or otherwise adjust the demands of a given task so it is possible for the individual to attempt it. They tend to be applied to more fixed and permanent difficulties and typically stay once put into place.

**Accommodations are typically put in place:**

- While remediation of a disability or challenge occurs (if skill strengthens may be able to segue to strategies)
- If there is a fixed disability (*Examples: hearing loss, severe dyslexia, communication challenges, etc.*)
- If you want the student to focus on one challenging area at a time – lessens the load
- When the process of applying many strategies have failed
- To reduce shutdown of emotional state for emotionally fragile or severely anxious learners

**Example:** Student struggles with multiplication. *Strategies* are put in place to help navigate each step methodically (*Examples: charts, examples, worksheets, teacher prompts, etc.*). The *accommodation* of providing a times table chart or calculator is provided to alleviate the stress of computation while the student works on higher order thinking and sequencing skills. Once she understands the scope and sequence of multiplication, the accommodation might be removed and strategies put in place to work on bolstering rote memory and pattern recognition.

[**Note:** Also see Appendices – Use of Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) in Transition Curriculum.]

### 5.06.6 Level of Mastery Assessment

Level of mastery is a big picture assessment of the extent to which an individual is able to complete a specific task or activity. This process includes a Strengths and Challenges Assessment, an analysis of what she is able to do well versus not do well throughout her execution of the task. An understanding of the student's level of mastery for given task assists staff in both assessing current level of functioning and formulating academic, personal, and career goals.

**This is the process for assessing level of mastery once an individual has completed a given task:**

1. Do a Strengths and Challenges Assessment – this identifies what was easy or required little support and what was challenging or required assistance. The analysis should include hard skills (computation, manual dexterity, reading ability, etc.) and meta-skills (skills used to acquire or make use of other skills, such as attention, memory, language, rate, etc.)
2. Assess the quality of the end result – including the quality of task outcome; and the emotional, physical, and cognitive effects the effort of doing the task had on the individual.
3. Do a Strategies and Accommodations Assessment – this analyzes the measures put in place to enable the individual to accomplish the task (*Example: strategies such as reminders to slow down, accommodations such as presorting parts*)
4. Assess the student's degree of independence – how independently was the student able to perform the task (*Example: worked efficiently without asking for/needing assistance; once provided with strategies and accommodations was able to apply them on her own; even with strategies and accommodations in place student still needed reminders, reassurance, motivational support, etc.*)
5. Assess the student's ability to execute the task (this is executive functioning: planning, organization, self-monitoring, strategic thinking, etc.)
6. Assess the student's degree of regulation during the task (the extent to which individual attained and maintained self-regulation during task all key areas – emotional, sensory, cognitive, physical)
7. Debrief the student (Ask her to evaluate what the experience was like for her, how she feels she did, what was easy, what was difficult, how she might do better, etc.)
8. Provide meaningful and specific feedback to the student
9. Examine how accomplishing this task fits into her current educational, personal, and/or career goals. Is the task something she needs to have a general proficiency in for emergencies (*Example: change a tire, change the battery in a fire alarm*), need to be adept enough to do occasionally (*Examples: refill prescriptions, check a book out at a library*), need to reach a level of skill to apply in daily use (*Examples: using the internet, cooking, doing laundry*)?
10. Are new goals needed to improve the results moving forward? (*Examples: remediation, intervention, addressing new issues that came to staff's attention when the student performed the task*)

### What to look for

In large part, being successful in helping the student reach her stated goals involves designing the appropriate scope, sequences, and levels of support – in other words, determining what strategies and accommodations are needed.

**The following is a case example that highlights what to observe and questions to ask while watching and/or supporting a student who is engaged in a task.**

**Example:** A student is given all the materials needed to complete a model car. The following can be assessed as the student works:

- **Executive function and strategic thinking:** Did the student take time to look at the instructions to make sure she understood what to do? Did she ask specific questions regarding the task to help navigate the exercise? Did she look at the picture on the box to see what the end result should look like? Did the student look through materials to make sure she had what she needed?
- **Sequencing:** Did the student follow directions in the proper sequence, referring to the instructions as needed? Did she skip any steps?
- **Organization:** Did the student keep track of all parts of the model? Could she find what was needed amongst the materials? Did she get confused or lost?
- **Self-monitoring:** If asked mid-activity, could the student tell you what was completed and what was left to complete? Could the student assess the level of difficulty experienced, both big picture (whole model) and parts (“It was easy to snap things together but really hard to keep my hands steady to paint the small parts.”) Did she know when she needed to ask for help or did she struggle until someone offered assistance? Could she analyze afterward how well she performed and the extent to which she would like to do a similar activity again?
- **Anxiety:** Did anxiety, perfectionism, or overwhelming feelings interfere with the student’s performance and/or the task’s outcome?
- **Regulation:** Was the student able to manage any sensory experiences that interfered with ability to put the model together? Was she able to manage frustration, anxiety, impulsivity, impatience, or any other emotional reactions that surfaced during the activity?

### Drawing conclusions

The following are observations and conclusions that can be drawn from the above sample case study:

- Overall the car model-building task went well. Explore other model-type building activities: capitalize on student’s love for theater by putting together a model of Shakespeare’s Theater in the Round, student loves transportation so introduce a more complex train model and track set to assemble.

- Student needs to strengthen her ability to manage anxiety and navigate a task without getting overwhelmed. When she does another multi-step project, begin by giving small tasks with few steps and a concrete measurable end goal with significant amounts of support and assurance built in. Slowly expand the number of steps, increase the complexity of the end product, and reduce the level of support and assurance as she becomes more confident, organized, and able to manage anxiety that she will “mess up.”
- It was very calming and organizing for the student to work with a model set where all parts and directions are organized for her and she has a picture to follow. What are ways we can use this fact in other tasks she is doing so she has the structure needed to stay regulated?
- The student did well until she lost the box top to the kit, which had the picture of the completed car on it. Even though she still had the paper instructions, she was not able to continue working without a visual model of the end result to which she could refer. Does she need similar visual graphics to help her perform better at her internship so she has a visual format of her end goals?

### Establishing feedback loop

Giving and receiving feedback is an integral part of learning, refining, and meeting goals. Feedback comes in many forms, all of which can be valuable. The means of feedback should vary so students can learn to be flexible and comfortable discussing their performance and being evaluated. Here are some different types of feedback:

- Prescribed and explicit
  - written formal feedback (*Examples: checklist, summary or formal review*)
  - formal oral feedback session with planned protocol and sequence
  - written self-assessment with pre-established prompts or sentence starters to guide the student
  - formal assessment tools (*Examples: quizzes, tests, competitions*)
  - performance and results measured against a concrete outcome (*Examples: examine outcome/object made, look at pictures or videos of performance to assess, etc.*)
  - ask an expert who has mastery in the area to assess in a detailed, formal format
- Spontaneous and anecdotal
  - individual’s verbal self-assessment (*Example: “how do you think you did?”*)
  - informal verbal feedback session (student can play a larger role in guiding the direction and topics of the discussion)
  - solicit feedback from observers (peers, staff, parents)
  - ask an expert who has mastery in the area to assess informally

**Regardless of the format, feedback  
is most effective when it is:**

- Expressed respectfully
- Offers specific details
- Delivered with the right timing and context
- Given privately unless context is established for group feedback
- Framed with positive language
- Encouraging the receiver to respond, rebut, or otherwise contribute
- Implied in language familiar to the individual
- Revisited if needed for further discussion
- Stated in context rather than absolutes
- Clear how the feedback connects to the big picture – why the feedback is important to the student’s life, goals, etc.
- Accompanied by suggestions for how to incorporate feedback into actions moving forward
- Ended with an expression of support and a collaborative feel

**Examples of feedback:**

*“Based on what I saw, it looked like it was really challenging for you to keep all the model parts in separate piles so you could find what you were looking for. I also noticed it seemed really easy for you to decorate the car once the frustrating part of putting it together was done. Is it usually easier for you to decorate things than it is to assemble them? Why do you think that is?”*

*I noticed that it was very helpful to you when we moved to a quiet room because you were getting pretty frustrated with the distractions of other people coming in and out and talking to you. Do you think you concentrate better when it is quiet?”*

## 5.07 Rate, Volume, Complexity, and Prioritization Guidelines

### Purpose and Use

Even when a student’s program has been designed with goals and interests in mind, the teacher may still find the transition student struggling with a task. The teacher will want to examine these four factors immediately and determine if they need adjustment to be in alignment with the individual’s cognitive, social, emotional, and functional developmental levels.

The following guidelines apply to:

- Dissemination of information, homework, assignments, written and oral work
- Analysis of how somebody approaches, navigates, and completes a task
- How tasks, activities, and exercises should be individualized depending on the individual’s capabilities
- Describing an individual’s processing systems
- Analyzing tasks and assessing level of demand on the individual

## Definitions:

### Rate

- Speed at which the flow of information is disseminated and absorbed (receptive, cognitive)
- Speed of the flow of a task or activity (experiential, physical)
- Speed at which an individual speaks, writes, or performs a task (expressive)

### Volume

- Amount of information being disseminated
- Size and scope of task or activity
- Amount of oral or written information and end result individual can produce

### Complexity

- Depth, detail, and breadth of information being disseminated
- Details, components, and nuances inherent in a task or activity
- Depth, detail, and breadth of written or oral output and end result individual can produce

### Prioritization

- Extent to which individual can identify key information within what is being disseminated and can prioritize it
- Ability to recognize, emphasize, and act upon key components inherent in a task or activity
- Ability to prioritize what is important and key when communicating oral or written information and producing an end result

## Examples of Adjusting Rate, Volume, Complexity, and Prioritization (RVCP)

The teacher can ask herself these questions:

**Rate:** Is the activity or demands coming too fast/slow? (*Examples: slow down the lecture, extend due dates, etc.*)

**Volume:** Am I giving too much information, causing her to be overwhelmed? Does she have the information she needs to understand the activity/information? (*Examples: break multi-step projects into smaller chunks, do fewer math problems, etc.*)

**Complexity:** Am I using language or concepts that are too complex? Do I need to frame information with more simple language or reduce complexity? (*Examples: vocabulary too high, topic too complex or overloaded with detail?*)

**Prioritization:** Am I asking the student to do too much simultaneously? Is there something I can remove or reduce that will still achieve the result I am working toward? (*Example: I need to assess reading comprehension but because she is a slow reader I cannot tell whether she is unable to answer the questions due to a reading or comprehension problem. If considering comprehension as the*



*problem, try reading a book out loud to eliminate the stress of her having to read and answer questions concurrently.)*

Adjusting RVCP for teaching group can be somewhat different from adjusting it for a one-on-one situation. Below are some guidelines that may help for adjusting both one-on-one and group:

### One-On-One Guidelines

1. RVCP needs to be adjusted in all tasks receptive or expressive depending on the individual's
  - Processing speed (*Examples: verbal, non-verbal, auditory, etc.*)
  - Efficiency of processing
  - Attention controls
  - Depth and detail of processing
  - Presence of a learning disability
  - Environmental distractions
  - Comprehension/higher order thinking
  - Executive function skills
  - Language/vocabulary (receptive)
  - Regulatory systems
  - Strengths and challenges
2. Adjustment of these factors is highly individualized, and often each factor must be adjusted separately.
3. Each person is different in terms of RVCP needs for optimal absorption, meaning, and output to take place. Even within each individual, the need to adjust these can vary greatly depending on range of capability in each domain (*Examples: verbal reasoning, non-verbal reasoning, motor memory*).
4. RVCP levels for an individual can also vary greatly across subject areas (*Examples: student may have strong nonverbal reasoning and procedural memory skills and excels at math taught at a fast pace, whereas due to weak auditory discrimination, auditory processing, and language functioning foreign language RVCP will need to be decelerated*).
5. RVCP should be reduced for many learners initially and as understanding and movement towards mastery occurs, RVCP can be increased.
6. Break things down into manageable chunks, build in ways to check in, and adjust accordingly. If RVCP is too accelerated and you have gone deeply into the material, it is harder to back up because you are not only dealing with a lack of comprehension and poor retention but also with frustration, anxiety, confusion, learned helplessness, and negative mindset (*Example: "I can't do this, I don't get it"*). This dynamic can further disenfranchise slower or weaker learners.
7. The stronger the skill and capability in a given area, the more one can increase RVCP; the weaker the skill the more those controls will need to be decelerated.
8. For those individuals with a slow processing speed, the RVCP may always have to be reduced, despite frequency of exposure.



9. Individuals with a fast processing speed can handle more intensity. However, if the processing speed is fast but inefficient then the rate, complexity, and volume should be decreased even if it is uncomfortable for the individual.

**Example:** An individual knows a lot about foreign governments and is very opinionated. She is in a current events group discussion and the group is discussing a decision Russia made regarding their military. The student talks over the group leader and begins spouting random facts about Russian military history that are not salient to the article. She jumps to false conclusions before staff is able to get through reading the article to the whole group. She is not really processing what the group is talking about or absorbing the news information, and instead of activating critical thinking her brain has activated a memory dump of facts. The student needs to be slowed down and work on listening to the information first and THEN adding to it what she knows as it is relevant. She is bright but her own capacity to really learn is impinged by her racing mind.

10. It is important to make it clear that RVCP are not associated with intelligence. Faster does not mean smarter or more skillful.

**Application Example:** Making a Model Car

**Situation:** Student cannot manage a rapid pace (rate) for instruction delivery because of weak language processing but non-verbal reasoning is strong.

**Analysis:** Higher order thinking is strong and prioritization is not an issue so student does not need support.

**Remedy:** Decelerate RVCP during the language-laden part of the activity. (*Examples: looking at the box, reading directions, receiving oral directions, and discussing making of the model car*)

Once that is established, the RVCP can increase as the student moves to an area of strength (assembling the model). RVCP may need to be decelerated again at times when the student needs to reference the written directions or receive oral directions to accommodate to slow language processing.

## Group Guidelines

With a group of learners with varying capabilities (both in general and subject or domain specific) it can be tricky to determine the RVCP. All of the above guidelines apply to members of a study group with the following additions:

1. Goal is to keep attention and interest of both slow and fast processors. Aim for the middle and be ready to group individuals who need more or less through accommodations, strategies, small group, and 1:1 work.
2. Optimally, present the given topic, task, or activity in a supported and clear manner at beginning. Then build in a way for individuals to express or otherwise demonstrate what they understand. From that you can evaluate quickly who is keeping up, who is ready for more, and who is lagging behind.
3. Accelerated learners can be either separated out and given a venue to move at their preferred pace with a small group or additional solo work, or put in a mentorship role to support slower moving or struggling peers. When it comes to splitting large groups into smaller work groups, slow to middle learners can be grouped together and middle to fast learners can be grouped together. It can prove very challenging to meet the needs simultaneously of both challenged and accelerated learners in the same grouping.
4. The small groups should reconvene intermittently throughout the project as a whole group despite variations in their pacing. By doing so, all participants have the same big picture of the project reinforced, small groups can share their progress with each other and seek feedback. Any details that need changing mid-project can be done by whole group consensus.

### **Application Example:** Group Gardening Project

There are a wide variety of learning styles among group members. The RVCP are slowed down for the whole group as the project is laid out and planned so all members are able to grasp the scope and sequence of it. Once these are understood, there is a discussion of how to divide the labor, tasks, and responsibilities.

Staff folds into the discussion individual strengths and challenges so assignments are made based on individual strengths. Detail oriented, slower workers could do the weeding and picking because of the ongoing need, methodical nature, and repetitive qualities of these tasks. If these students work slowly, it does not hold up others.

Faster, more independent individuals could spearhead the planting and watering as these are more finely tuned, time-sensitive, and detailed tasks.

Artistic individuals will make the signs telling what the various plants are.

Intermittently the group gets together as a whole, at which time the RVCP will need to be slowed down to not lose the slower processors.

### 5.08 Lesson Plan Development Process

The goal of individualized lesson planning is:

- To draw upon a student's interests, goals, and strengths while at the same time accommodating challenges and limitations. In this way, instruction becomes compatible with and capitalizes on how the student processes, retains, and makes meaning of information.

The scope and sequence of information contained in a lesson plan and the activities should be designed to create understanding and apply the information, and should be dictated by the type of learners for which the lesson is intended.

By using the process and lists cross-referenced within it as guidelines, an instructor can create lesson plans students will find dynamic, energizing, and meaningful.

#### The Process

1. For each topic or subtopic in a module, determine based upon the SIP and resources available whether to deliver it in an INDIVIDUAL or GROUP context, or using a combination of the two.
2. For GROUP contexts, use the Group Context Learning Experiences List to help decide which types of experiences might best apply for the topic or subtopic.
3. For INDIVIDUAL contexts, use the One-On-One Context Learning Experiences List to help decide which types of experiences might best apply to the topic or subtopic.
4. For each experience, explore where opportunities may exist for teaching executive functions using the Identifying Opportunities to Practice Executive Functions Skills List.
5. Select activities appropriate for each executive function you plan to teach using the Executive Functions Activities List. **[Note:** This list will be released in a later phase.]
6. When preparing the lesson plan, implement *each lesson* using the Core Teaching Principles.
7. When preparing the lesson plan, implement the Whole Brain Learning Ideas and Suggestions List as applicable and wherever possible.

### 5.09 Group Context Learning Experiences List

Group work offers rich opportunities to build reciprocity, engagement, social cognition, and expressive and receptive language in addition to the pursuit of a specific goal or lesson plan.

Unstructured group time enables staff to observe:

- The quality and depth of peer interactions
- Each participant's regulatory experiences when in a group
- Self-management, engagement, and initiative of participants in a group context
- The extent to which participants engage in purposeful, attention-seeking, or other significant social behaviors

- How well each student can stay organized (*Examples: cognitively, emotionally, sensorially, physically, and socially*) in an unstructured setting
- Pairings and triads that may be good for future small group work or projects and conversely those students who are not appropriate for collaborative work

Structured group time enables staff to observe:

- Each participant's ability to follow explicit expectations, rules, and guidelines
- Social cognition skills
- Participant's self-management skills when having to wait, listen, take a turn, provide feedback, etc.

To assist in developing lessons in the context of a group experience consider the following options:

### In-classroom structured exercises

- Group dynamics exercises that introduce experiential components
- Teamwork and required collaboration activities
- Discussions, debates, lectures, presentations
- Games
- Team competitions
- Timed activities
- Logistical (*Example: plan and execute a trip – not important where – key is planning and execution*)

### Non-verbal games and activities

- Assist in developing lessons in the context of a group
- Movement (*Examples: mirroring, pantomime, dance*)
- Art and creative expression (*Examples: drawing, painting, taking photographs, etc.*)
- Group collaboration activities (*Example: build a tower with a stack of index cards, a box of paperclips, and a roll of tape but cannot talk*)
- Communication games (*Examples: pantomime, gestures and facial expressions*)

### Supervised mentorships

Supervised mentorships are when peers are matched to another peer who can act as a mentor, guide, friend, etc. This enables the mentor to learn important social skills, an opportunity to be a leader, and take on more responsibilities. It enables the mentee to work on social relationships, receive feedback from peers, and trust building. The relationship needs to be supervised by staff to make sure the relationship is healthy and productive and there are good boundaries. Staff also provides mentorship to the mentors as they learn to take on a leadership role and perform with grace.

**Example:** Charles has a lot of experience going to job fairs. He has learned how to navigate the crowds, decide what lines to stand in and what conversation starters he can use with the people at the booths. Jack has never been to a job fair. The two are paired together throughout the entire process.

**Pre job fair:** planning, discussing what to expect, role playing interviews, etc.

**During:** Charles is Jack's "buddy" at the job fair; all during it Charles can be giving Jack "pointers"

**After:** Charles gives Jack feedback on what went well, what he saw him struggle with, etc.

### External experiences

- Non-human community or environment, observing and/or participating (*Examples: ecology, geology, weather, etc.*)
- Human community or environment, observing and/or participating (*Examples: events, field trips to workplaces and museums, community service*)

### Cooperative projects

- *Examples: art, construction, film-making, cooking, operating a commissary*

### Task analysis

- Participate in an activity and then investigate with them what happened internally during the activity

### Media experiences

- *Examples: films, plays*

### Guest speakers

(See 5.16 Innovative Learning Approaches List)

### 5.10 One-On-One Context Learning Experiences List

Interacting in the context of a one-on-one relationship provides abundant opportunities for staff to work with students with ASD on multiple needs simultaneously.

One-on-one work provides staff with the freedom to:

- Follow the student's lead to maximize participation and engagement
- To be more responsive to a fuller range of emotional and relational needs and thereby reduce emotional dysregulation and increase emotional safety
- Accommodate a student's sense of humor, increase opportunities to have a positive shared experience, and create moments of shared joy and enthusiasm
- Tailor the process to a student's interests and passions and thus increase mental stamina, enthusiasm, and curiosity for the task at hand
- Accommodate to physical, sensory, and environmental needs
- Manage distractions better
- Build rapport and strengthen interpersonal relationships
- Adjust the language, rate, volume, complexity, and priority according to the student's processing systems
- Employ strategies and accommodations that suit a student's profile without impacting learning by others

For students who struggle with basic engagement, regulation, and reciprocity, one-on-one work provides the milieu in which staff can best assess their readiness to join a group context. For those who are able to join peer groups but the experience is rife with significant social and emotional issues, one-on-one time offers a refuge for and a place to process difficulties with peers and group experiences in a safe, confidential context. For those with learning disabilities or in need of significant learning accommodations, one-on-one work might be helpful to make it easier to individualize approaches and enable participants to learn in an emotionally supportive, distraction-free environment.

The benefits to one-on-one activities, particularly if done in a natural setting, are abundant and regardless of the student's level of functioning should be considered an important component of the program experience.

#### Examples of One-On-One Experiences

- Internal reflection
- Self-portraits
  - journal of self
  - quizzes, tests, worksheets
  - mindfulness exercises (students should be taught techniques by a trained professional)

- External experiences
  - non-human community or environment (*Example: studying the behavior of insects in a natural setting*)
  - human community or environment (*Example: watching how passersby respond to someone doing a street performance*)
- Career development activities
  - personal projects that manifest personal goals (*Example: taking apart and rebuilding a computer, etc. and then investigating what happened internally during that activity*)
  - task analysis
  - media experiences (*Examples: films, plays, interactive media, online tutorials, etc.*)
- Cognitive activities
  - creating empathies with a historical or fictional character or circumstance using literature or historical material
  - questionnaires that provoke thought and insight
  - structured exercises
- Innovative learning methods  
(see 5.16 Innovative Learning Approaches List for more complete list of ideas)
  - storyboarding
  - improvisation/drama/role play
  - art/creative expression
  - games and simulations
  - physical activity/movement games
  - guided imagery
- One-on-one dialogues

**Example:** A student with one staff member having a discussion with no interference. This is a very important component of rapport building and establishing a safe environment to discuss private/difficult things.

## 5.11 Community Learning Process

### 5.11.1 Purpose and Use

Community learning provides participants, when ready, with opportunities to try out their newfound insights, opinions, preferences, curiosity, and interests in the context of the outside world. In addition to deepening self-exploration through experience and trial and error, community-based experiences introduce an element of the unexpected often not found within the program building but is an element of the life each student will inevitably face.

Many individuals with ASD experience dysregulation, emotional hijacking (*getting emotionally triggered and overwhelmed by sensitivity to something, such as a noise in the environment*), confusion, panic, withdrawal, and other distressing sensations when exposed to the unexpected. Since an ability to manage the unexpected is tied directly to one's level of adaptability and flexibility, it's important that students have many opportunities to build this skill to the extent they are able. It is helpful when planning a community outing to have clear goals in mind, to have realistic expectations, and contingency planning if any participant or the entire group needs to retreat to the familiarity of the program building.

**Example:** Three students are taken to a mall. They are given four goals:

- Physical goal ("Be aware of and manage your body as you navigate amongst people, isles, and store displays")
- Sensory goal ("Stay regulated in the large open food court")
- Emotional goal ("Be tolerant and patient")
- Cognitive goal ("Find XYZ store on the mall map and go to it").

This approach:

- Helps keep boundaries around the outing
- Reduces any sense of chaos or feeling overwhelmed
- Gives students concrete goals to hold onto
- Provides a basis for pre/during/post analysis with the students
- Offers a method for tracking progress

### 5.11.2 The Process

1. Make a comprehensive list of the student's community-based goals and affinities using her input, family's input, and the SIP.
2. Assess strengths and challenges of skills needed for community experiences using the Transition from Classroom to Community Learning Assessment List.



3. Build community skills on-campus.
  - Use the One-on-One Context Learning Experiences List and/or the Group Context Learning Experiences List
  - Use the Community-Based Learning Suggestions List to help choose an activity that is appropriate for the group or individual
  - Recommended on-campus activities include:
    - group discussions
    - role playing
    - improvisation
    - analyzing scenarios
    - watching media clips
    - movement-based activities (*Examples: yoga, dance, Wii, movement therapy*)
  - Determine when a student is ready to bridge from classroom experiences to being out in the community using Transition from Classroom to Community Learning Guidelines.
4. Conduct well-planned and supported community experiences by previewing.
5. Use the Executive Functions List as prompters of planning actions to take.
6. Use the Community-Based Learning Support List as a comprehensive list of support actions. [**Note:** This will be completed in Phase 2.]
7. For groups, create compatible groupings (*Examples: based on size, personality, ratio of support staff to clients, logistics*)
8. Use the Community-Based Activity Evaluation and Follow-up List as a guide for follow-up on the outing. [**Note:** This will be completed in Phase 2.]
9. Use the outcome of the *post-activity evaluation* to create a *follow-up plan* for how to expose the participant to increasingly more natural and unscripted community opportunities, repeating this process as needed. (A post-activity evaluation is done with a teacher about how the activity went for the student. The follow-up plan results from the post-activity evaluation and takes advantage of what was learned or experienced; it may include planning follow-on activities.)

**Previewing: The act of anticipating what to expect, what you may need, and how you might feel before entering a task, environment, activity, or situation. Most individuals on the autism spectrum do not preview so they tend to get taken off guard, anxious, and**

## 5.12 Community-Based Learning Suggestions List

Much self-understanding arises when we are in relationships with others. Reactions, feelings, thoughts, and actions resulting from interactions provide rich data that can be used to increase self-awareness. Social and community interactions allow for a perspective that is not possible when one stays in isolation or in predictable, limited relationships and environments.

At minimum, an individualized community-based learning approach should incorporate Navigation of Systems, Pursuit of Interests, Social Networking, and Career Development.

Continuing community exposure in manageable bites avoids the trap of placing a high-stakes mentality on a single outing or experience, reduces anxiety over time, and is invaluable for building and strengthening independent living – one of the highest priorities in transition work.

### Navigation of Systems

Teaches the student how to utilize various complex social systems such as:

- Medical/dental: doctor's offices, clinics, hospitals
- Services: filling prescriptions, making and navigating doctor appointments, getting haircuts, dining out, dealing with utility company, arranging for car repairs
- Public transportation: bus, train
- Money and banking: checking and savings accounts, debit and credit cards
- Commerce and merchant exchanges: returning items, comparative shopping, grocery shopping, clothes shopping
- Public safety: tour police/fire station, do mock traffic court improvisation, sit in police car, attend a public trial
- Education: schools, training, apprenticeships, volunteer, classes

### Pursuit of Interests, Practical Knowledge, General Awareness

Teaches how to find and involve oneself with aspects of the community having to do with:

- Outings to get acclimated to being in public: destination not as important as process
- Comparing places: style, environment, feel, etc.
- Events: a dedication, scavenger hunt, celebration, art opening, rally or protest, community clean-up, concert, hand out water at a bike race or walk-a-thon
- Volunteer opportunities: hand out fliers, distribute food, work at community garden, cheer up sick children
- Internship opportunities: art school, newspaper, landscaping company, hospital
- Shopping: items for a project, ingredients for a recipe, school supplies
- Groups: church/temple services or groups, clubs, playing music with group, choir, going on a tour, paintball group
- Arts, artisan, and entertainment: glassblowing, making doughnuts, outdoor performances

- Recreation: exercise at a gym or park; go hiking; attend theater, improvisation, concert performance
- Hobbies and creative outlets: history, photography, art, music, dance, crafts, culture, etc.
- Classes / lectures / demonstrations: audit a class; attend a public lecture, demonstration of how to change a tire, firemen showing how to check batteries in a smoke detector, how to build a tool shed
- Meet a professor/someone with expertise in an area of interest: tour robotics lab at local university

### Social Exposure and Networking

Teaches about:

- Establishing ongoing relationships with merchants, tellers, etc.
- Initiating and maintaining purposeful social interactions (meeting a specific need, social maneuvering with intent, seeking a mentor, finding information, networking)
- Initiating and expanding on spontaneous social interactions
- Finding socially focused places to hang out: coffee shops, parks
- Finding people with shared interests and hobbies
- Community service

### Career Development

Teaches about:

- Information seeking/education: go to army recruitment center to ask about being in military, tour a chemistry lab, watch an assembly line at a manufacturing plant
- Exposure to various possible career environments: what does it feel like being in a factory during peak and down times
- Job seeking: how to navigate online, over the phone, and in person; social expectations of dress, behavior, language – how to present self, resume building
- Interviewing: mock interviews, actual interviews, reporter-type interviews with a local celebrity for the school newsletter
- Shadowing: following an emergency medical tech or carpenter through his day
- Task building: activities designed to build concrete skills associated with an interest or potential career; take online tutorial on how to use an animation program to see if one has the skills to do that kind of work, take cooking class to build skills and then make dinner for family at home

### 5.13 Reasons to Use Community-Based Learning

Many positive outcomes result from using well-timed, well-planned, and well-supported community experiences. Even difficult experiences provide opportunities for reflection, raising self-awareness, and change. These positive outcomes include:

- Increased adaptability
- Greater flexibility and wider range of problem solving
- Opportunities to flex creativity
- Reduced anxiety around strangers and unfamiliar places
- Strengthened ability to manage the unknown and unexpected
- Refinement of social, environmental, and self-management coping skills
- Increased opportunities to strengthen resiliency
- Practice with verbal and behavior improvisation needed during spontaneous social interactions
- Meaningful application of knowledge about how systems work
- Increased social interaction
- Opportunities to re-frame distortions or negative biases about places and people through positive experiences
- Practice with trial and error
- Affinity exploration
- Career development
- A wider range of milieus to practice self-reflection
- Strengthened ability to acquire lasting insight from experiences and interactions
- Ongoing exposure to self-advocacy scenarios
- Increased opportunities to build self-confidence
- Practice with expressive language (*Example: spontaneous and planned social exchanges*)
- Increased willingness to try and risk new relationships and experiences
- Increased possibilities to gain motivation and momentum
- Increased sense of continuity between program and “real life”
- Increased opportunities to do big picture thinking
- Increased success with decision-making
- Increased success with social experiences and in life
- Better matched internship, job, and educational experiences

## 5.14 Transition from Classroom to Community Learning Assessment List

The transition from classroom to community learning is an exciting yet anxiety-producing time for both staff and students. Through a marriage of realism and optimism, we design community experiences that progress in challenge at a rate that matches the student's emerging capabilities. We prepare our students as best we can as we move them gently from scenarios where we have a lot of logistical and environmental control to those in which we do not.

Preparedness and coping skills become very important as students attempt to self-manage in the face of change and variability. In the classroom environment, teachers provide support to students in the areas of regulation, communication, appropriateness, readiness, resiliency, independence, etc. When the student begins to operate in the outside world, providing supports will require some re-thinking.

Ideally we want each student to step into the community feeling equipped with the needed self-care and self-management tools. We want each person to possess the skills to engage in meaningful social interactions. We want them to have the resiliency to endure the unexpected and the uncomfortable. We want them to draw meaning and have fun. To work towards these ends, we must help them find their own means to enter community life at a pace and style that works for them.

The following points should be assessed carefully when determining if a student is ready to transition from classroom or one-one-one learning to community-based experiences:

### 1. Self-regulation

- Sensory self-regulation
  - Degree of self-care and self-soothing (*Examples: How well can the individual manage her sensory sensitivities when they arise? Is she able to self-soothe?*)
  - Degree of intensity (*Examples: How intense is the individual's reactions to unpleasant sensory stimuli? Is she available to receive help or is she inconsolable?*)
  - Degree of resiliency (*Example: How able is the individual to rebound after being exposed to a sensory sensitivity?*)
  - Degree of social acceptability (*Examples: Are the methods of self-care, reactions, behaviors, and expressions in the face of sensory sensitivities socially appropriate? Will they draw unwanted/unhelpful attention to the individual?*)
  - Degree of functionality (*Example: How well is the individual able to function while under sensory duress?*)
- Emotional self-regulation
  - Degree of self-care and self-soothing (*Examples: How well can the individual take care of her emotional needs when they arise? Is she able to self-soothe?*)
  - Degree of intensity (*Examples: How intense are the individual's emotional reactions? Is she available to receive help or is she inconsolable?*)

- Degree of resiliency (*Example: How able is the individual to rebound after being emotionally dysregulated?*)
- Degree of social acceptability (*Examples: Are the methods of self-care, reactions, behaviors, and expressions in the face of emotional reactivity socially appropriate? Will they draw unwanted/unhelpful attention to the individual?*)
- Degree of functionality (*Example: How well is the individual able to function while under emotional duress?*)
- Cognitive self-regulation
  - Degree of self-care and self-soothing (*Examples: How well can the individual take care of her own distressing thoughts when they arise? Is she able to self-soothe?*)
  - Degree of intensity (*Examples: How intense are the individual's thoughts? Is she available to receive help?*)
  - Degree of resiliency (*Example: How able is the individual to rebound after becoming cognitively derailed or dysregulated?*)
  - Degree of social acceptability (*Examples: Are the methods of self-care, reactions, behaviors, and expressions in the face of cognitive distress socially appropriate? Will they draw unwanted/unhelpful attention to the individual?*)
  - Degree of functionality (*Example: How well is the individual able to function while under cognitive duress?*)

## 2. Social engagement skills

Successful social interaction requires both engagement and reciprocity. Connection and compromise are important for successful social and community experiences. Some community experiences can be shaped to control the range of social interactions, which makes previewing and preparing an individual more straightforward. Most community experiences, however, have inherently unexpected aspects that require a more adaptive and sophisticated level of engagement and reciprocity (*Examples: waiting in line, riding a bus, ordering food*). Selection of community experiences needs to factor the individual's level of development with engagement and reciprocity to identify those that offer an appropriate level of challenge.

- Engagement  
Observe the frequency, depth, length, affect, and non-verbal cueing present in the individual's attempts to engage and reactions to those attempting to engage her (staff, peers, public).
- Reciprocity  
Observe the extent to which an individual can be reciprocal both initiated by her and in response to another individual. Note how long the individual is able to extend the back-and-forth flow of communication.

- Connection

Observe the extent to which the individual appears and expresses a sense of connection to those around her, to the environment, and to the activity.

**Examples:** Some students simply co-exist in the room and do not engage others around them (off in their own world, shut down, etc.). Some will engage initially but then disengage as the interactions build in complexity. Some only engage to get what they want or exert their will. Some will only engage with staff and talk to peers through them. Some will only respond to a single peer. Some are over engaged, dominate, etc.)

- Compromise

Observe the extent to which the individual can negotiate, socially problem solve with others, coordinate, take turns, delay gratification, show interest in the choices of others, etc.

### 3. Social problem solving

Social problem solving is the ability to engage others in a shared dialogue to address a problem or concern collaboratively. It takes critical thinking skills to solve a problem independently, but when a problem is approached collaboratively the dynamic changes significantly and the demands on the individual increase because the additional challenge of social relating and all it entails is added to the mix. Successful social problem solving includes:

- Sustained engagement;
- Reciprocity;
- Negotiation and compromise;
- Perspective-taking;
- Understanding competing needs and an ability to prioritize one's needs in relation to the needs of others;
- Expressive language;
- Emotional regulation;
- Social appropriateness;
- Timing;
- Social awareness (*Examples: etiquette, protocol, overt and covert rules of social interactions*); and
- Understanding social cues (verbal and non-verbal).

Navigating public places and being out and about in the community are linked to two overarching goals of the transition process: building independence and strengthening social cognition. Therefore, it is of paramount importance that social problem-solving skills be worked on in conjunction with community-based learning experiences. By reinforcing independence and social cognition simultaneously an

individual with ASD is more likely to understand that social navigation is a necessary part of being an independent person.

Community-based learning experiences incorporate both planned and spontaneous opportunities to practice social/shared problem solving. It is wise to select community-based learning experiences that acknowledge the individual's level of skill in this area so the problems presented are appropriately challenging but not passing a threshold at which the situation is overwhelming.

- Getting needs met, seeking information, and locating resources is a good place to start since the social interactions are limited in nature and goal-driven, which reduces a demand on more sophisticated social relating. In order for the experience to be meaningful, ideally the individual should:
  - show some basic skills in engagement and reciprocity;
  - be able to self-regulate (at least moderately), and when unable to do so independently can receive the help of staff to become regulated;
  - have moderate awareness of social appropriateness;
  - demonstrate moderate ability to control behavior and when unable to do so independently is receptive to staff intervention; and
  - understand purposeful actions and goals (*Example: “the purpose of this trip is to pick up supplies for the school party”*).
- Activities focusing on social engagement with a specific goal or purpose:
  - comparison shopping
  - scavenger hunts
  - finding items for a project or plan
  - public transportation practice
  - other goal-directed outings where the focus is a specific purpose but to fulfill it requires basic interaction with others (*Example: goal is to take train to airport and back but it will require asking someone for directions, buying the ticket, etc.*)
- Practicing social engagement regulation, self-marketing (being able to control the persona one projects to others), social rules, and niceties. In order for the experience to be meaningful to the student, ideally the individual should:
  - display an interest or desire to connect with others;
  - have an emerging sense of self and a sense of self in the context of another person;
  - have some reciprocity skills during social dialogues;
  - find some meaning and enjoyment in social interactions;
  - show moderate level of social awareness;
  - possess some self-regulation skills; and
  - demonstrate moderate impulse control (verbal and behavioral)



- Opportunities to meet new people, practice engaging in small talk and social niceties, etc.
  - scavenger hunts
  - shopping
  - restaurants
  - parks and community events
  - rallies and protests
  - volunteering for a cause, getting signatures
  - posting or distributing flyers for an event
  - other scenarios involving light social interactions
- Meaningful social relationships, relationship building, depth and quality to social relating. In order for the experience to be meaningful, ideally the individual should:
  - have intrinsic motivation to fulfill personal and social goals;
  - have some developed affinities, passions, and interests;
  - possess a level of self-control and independence;
  - have moderately to well-developed communication skills;
  - experience a sense of pleasure from social interactions or, at minimum, see the meaning in having them even if they are challenging;
  - have a working ability to engage in perspective-taking negotiating, collaborating, and compromising;
  - be able to self-regulate with socially acceptable coping strategies;
  - be able to ask for help, receive feedback, and receive guidance and input from others without getting defensive, resistant, angry, or emotionally dysregulated; and
  - have developed a level of resiliency to rebound and regroup while out and about.
- Practice going beyond superficial social relating, adding depth and meaning to interactions and relationship building via:
  - interviewing
  - planned peer outings to create shared experiences with known peers that include solving a problem together
  - entering into a mentor relationship with someone in the community
  - internships
  - other opportunities to capitalize on relationship building with members of the community

#### 4. Executive Functioning

Participating in community-based learning opportunities requires varying degrees of executive functioning skills such as researching, previewing, planning, predicting, evaluating, problem solving, strategic thinking, self-monitoring, time-management, and organization. At the point where the

instructor considers transitioning an individual from one-on-one or classroom activities to community environments, the individual's executive functioning competencies should be re-assessed.

- What tools, aids, and staff supports are needed to help enable the individual to accomplish the goal successfully?
- What degree of specificity is needed in activity and contingency planning to anticipate the needs of the individual for a successful outcome?
- How much and to what level of detail does the individual need to preview upcoming events to reduce anxiety and disorganization and increase preparedness?
- How much staff support will the individual need throughout tasks? Some need a lot of support at the beginning and then can become more independent once oriented, whereas others need support throughout.
- What needs to be anticipated regarding the environment where activities will take place to ensure organization and support, and to reduce logistical and environmental interference?

## 5.15 Whole Brain Learning Ideas and Suggestions List

### 5.15.1 Purpose and Use

Whole Brain Learning theory takes advantage of modern science's recent advancements in brain research to design teaching methods compatible with how the brain functions and transmits information naturally between the right and left hemispheres. The most important qualities of Whole Brain Learning approaches are that they incorporate:

- Active learning
- Multi-sensory learning
- Visualization
- Emotion regulation
- Experiential learning
- Movement
- Creativity

There are many resources and websites available to teachers that outline the connection between brain research and correlated educational practices, as well as a tremendous volume of strategies and activities. Below are some prompts to consider when incorporating whole brain learning techniques into lesson planning, teaching style, content delivery, and curriculum development.

### 5.15.2 The Process

#### 1. Identify an individual's natural learning cycles.

Work with the individual to identify and understand her natural learning cycles and ways to capitalize on this knowledge to design optimal learning environment:

- Physical environment
  - sound and noise level needed for ideal concentration
  - lighting
  - visual stimulation supportive or distracting
  - seating comfort, seating arrangements
  - visual stimulation (supportive or distracting)
  - physical distractions
- Emotional factors
  - emotional triggers
  - reducing, preventing, and managing emotional hijacking/meltdowns
  - awareness of how emotions impact learning positively and negatively

- Cognitive factors
  - optimal times of day when mind is sharpest and how to capitalize on these opportunities
  - ideal concentration duration
  - awareness of indicators (cues) that concentration is failing
  - what to do when the mind wanders or gets stuck
  - keep a journal of what times of day certain tasks feel easier or harder
- Physical factors
  - times when she needs to fidget with hands
  - times when she needs to get away from desk and move body
  - recess and other physical break timed to support learning
  - how medical conditions and physical sensations affect learning and attention

**2. Create a classroom culture that includes the use of emotional language and stresses the importance of emotional regulation.**

- Establish shared language and definitions for emotions through group discussion.
- Present material with high affect (*Example: enthusiasm, etc.*), gestures, and movement (*Example: move around the room*).
- Post emotional words, prompts, or emotional self-care visuals on classroom walls.
- Embed discussions of emotions into academic work (*Examples: literature/character development; history/emotional toll of war; social issues/current events, emotional toll*).
- Set up scaffolded discussions about controversial issues or current events that allow students to display a wide range of emotions and viewpoints and learn to tolerate the emotions and viewpoints of others.
- Discuss the role anxiety plays in learning (*Examples: forgetting something, test taking, public speaking*) and brainstorm strategies for managing and self-soothing.
- When appropriate, engage class in group discussions to resolve emotional conflict or interpersonal disputes among class members.

**3. Incorporate physical activity to stimulate both sides of the brain, activate visualization, and energize thinking.**

- Build in stretch breaks during lectures and tests.
- During brainstorming sessions (group or individual) let student pace, sit outside, move around, etc. to improve creativity.
- Build movement into sedentary classroom activities (*Example: stations around the room so after each task student or group has to get up and move*).
- Allow students to incorporate movement, improvisation, role-playing, pantomime, and other movement into class discussions.
- Build in movement during review sessions to bolster memory.
- Incorporate energizers every 20 minutes or so that activate the senses, emotions, and/or body.

- Provide manipulatives and 3D objects students can hold that support the content (*Examples: pass around a 3D model of the brain, use balls to have students demonstrate Newton's Laws of Physics*).

**4. Capitalize on variety, creativity, affect, and novelty to bolster learning.**

- Vary the timing during the day for presentations, lectures, and other activities.
- Change the modality of presentation of ideas (*Examples: tactile, kinesthetic, visual, auditory, etc.*).
- Be sensitive to individual and group attention waning and accommodate duration of lectures accordingly.
- Explore different times of day to place activities that require high concentration, such as tests or lectures, to take advantage of individual's best times to focus.
- Use activities and physical movement as energizers to support more sedentary learning. Alternatively, use activities during lower energy times of day such as post lunch.
- Break up sedentary learning by building in related activities that engage emotions and body.
- Engage students in post-activity discussions about timing and duration of a given activity and how it impacted their learning.
- Make lesson content more memorable and interesting by using objects, pictures, graphs, charts, graphics, slides, video clips, and colorful bulletin board displays. Change media types frequently, alternating between videos, posters, mind maps, drawings, and symbols.
- Change teaching locations (*Examples: field trips, going outside for a discussion, visiting a new room in the building, etc.*) to refresh and foster new perspectives.
- Use colorful handouts and other images. Include colors in classroom and allow students to use color while creating mind maps, paintings, projects, time lines, and posters.
- Create a more multi-sensory environment by adding visuals, music, aromas.
- Encourage students to express themselves and their knowledge through art, dance, poetry, singing, sharing, journal writing, sports, debate, and group activities.
- Act as a role model to show enthusiasm about learning.

**5. Encourage students to create learning goals and ideas.**

- Include drafting of goals and ideas in the student's initial activities and acclimation to the school/program/class.
- Enlist students in creative brainstorming, executive functioning, and implementing steps towards goals (see Executive Functioning List).
- Utilize a system for enabling both student and instructor in tracking progress that includes a visual component. (*Examples: chart, ladder, path with visual pictures or checkpoints along the way, graph, etc.*)
- Build discussion of goals and ideas, integrating them into class discussions and activities on a regular basis.

- Allow students throughout the year to stop and assess goals intermittently and make any changes they wish to make.
- Provide opportunities to evaluate and celebrate progress. (*Example: 1:1 and whole group*)
- Sort goals into categories to encourage being more specific and addressing multiple needs. (*Examples: personal, social, physical, academic, career*)
- Encourage and model a mindset of non-judgment.
- The importance of this is linked to resiliency. In learning how to put boundaries around the mistake instead of beating himself up, he is less likely to fall apart and disengage from doing whatever is causing him difficulty. It is also easier for the student to ask for help if he thinks he is not good at a specific thing, rather than being generally stupid. There is no roadmap for stupid.

**Example:** When Michael makes a mistake he cries out "I'm so stupid", hits his head, becomes inconsolable, and won't continue. The teacher works with Michael to understand that his inability to do well is connected with some particular task, not his overall intelligence. Michael finally arrives at a state where he can say "Yikes! I made a mistake again. Boy, math sure is hard for me!"

- Focus on process over end result.
- Encourage use of creativity, humor, flexibility, and optimism in goal setting.

#### **6. Incorporate stress management into class discussions, planning, and approaches to work.**

- Define and examine in extensive and useful detail the subject of stress and the wide variety of ways it manifests. (*Examples: physical, emotional, cognitive*)
- Individual and group generate list of stressors and coping techniques
- Practice a variety of stress management and relaxation exercises so the student may discover first hand which of the many techniques available are effective for specific stressors and needs.

##### Sensory and physical

- breath work
- yoga
- sensory breaks
- touch (*Examples: hug, pat on shoulder, massage*)
- walk break to talk and process through stress or to simply down-regulate (*Examples: fresh air, nature, change of scenery*)
- physical exercise
- fidget toys and stress balls

### Emotional

- process feelings surrounding stress
- laughter/humor break
- venting – creative ways to express emotions (*Examples: yelling, laughing, over-emoting*)
- seek comfort in something associated with a positive emotion (*Examples: hug teddy bear, wear favorite shirt during a test, have an item from a favorite person*)

### Cognitive

- visualization/meditation/guided imagery
- affinity break (*Example: spend a designated period of time engaging in a favorite activity that helps to sooth, redirect, or re-energize*)
- verbally process stress experience and what to do
- cognitive shift to engage mind in something different
- Increase students' sense of safety (hence decreasing potential stressors) by encouraging discussions about fears, worries, and causes of stress.
- Teach students about the importance of sleep and its relation to stress—help students to explore appropriate amounts of sleep for their bodies.
- Reduce stress associated with learning by activating known information prior to presenting new information.
- Always begin a new task by setting the scene: What are we about to do? Why are we doing it? What do we already know/understand?

### **Examples:**

Teaching long division: Show student the parts of the process they already know (subtraction, carrying numbers, etc.).

Putting a model car together when they have never done it before: Have them preview what they know will help them start (put parts into piles by type or color, read directions, look at the picture on the box, remind them of something they have followed directions and put together, such as a puzzle).

## **7. Encourage and model a respectful, positive learning environment.**

- Incorporate bonding activities into curriculum.  
(*Examples: Rituals in class like check-ins to start the day sharing thoughts, feelings, etc.; finding shared interests to bond over; show and tell; games that align like to like such as “never have I ever” where one person says “zip-lining” and everyone who has done it stands up; fun activities; positive sharing; giving compliments to peers.*)

- Provide students the opportunity to participate in creating rules, values, and standards for the classroom environments in which they spend the most time. Use peer mentoring.  
*[Examples: Have students show other students how to do something/share their expertise (play a video game, find a website, solve a math problem, be their editor if they are bad at spelling), group games that require group collaboration.]*
- Help students pick groups or teams based on common interests or compatible learning styles.
- Have explicit protocol for peer conflict resolution.  
*[Examples: Establish classroom rules of conduct with whole group. Post on wall for reference. Establish a class court system and protocol to resolve conflicts (rotating offices, filing charges, jury of peers, etc.). Incorporate conflict resolution techniques into classroom culture.]*
- Create classroom climate that welcomes a wide variety of learners and personalities and encourages productive group problem solving and decision-making (*Examples: perspective taking, reciprocity*).
  - team building games (verbal and non-verbal/physical)
  - small and whole group projects
  - case studies (small and whole group discussions)
  - debates
  - outings
  - scavenger hunts
  - mock trials
  - low stakes group competitions
  - Discuss learning styles in group and have students identify which type of learner they are.
  - Discuss personality types and engage in personality-based exercises and quizzes.
  - experiential activities aimed at highlighting preferences: taste tests, music sharing, exploring different forms of humor, engage in an activity, then have students rate their experience on a scale and share as a group.
  - conduct activities that highlight individual differences and perspectives, follow up with discussion and reflection: games (verbal and non-verbal), debates, experiential activities that handicap or highlight a particular skill or style (*Example: build a tower with a group without using words*)
  - encourage diversity in all its forms through discussion and activities
  - group check-ins where each person gets to share her thoughts, opinions, or feelings without anyone responding or challenging
- Offer roles within classroom to students that capitalize on their strengths.



**Examples:**

- An individual who has difficulty staying focused in lecture and loves computers can be the fact checker during current event discussions
  - An individual who needs to move around a lot can be teacher's assistant
  - An artistic individual can be the resident artist and do the drawings on a classroom timeline (history, literature)
  - An individual who has trouble speaking up in class and generating ideas on the spot can be the note taker during a group discussion and then read back what was said so she doesn't have to generate spontaneous language
  - A highly emotional individual can be designated the expert on character emotions (have her describe them, act them out, or otherwise profile the emotions of characters)
- 
- Incorporate reflection and feedback as a follow-up to all activities and outings, as it supports the ongoing development of executive functioning and self-awareness.
    - brief check-in
    - facilitated discussion
    - facilitated exercise
    - 1:1
    - small group
    - whole group
  - Increase the amount of social interaction and group activities.
  - Allow students and learners to celebrate each other's accomplishments.
  - Build rotating leadership roles into classroom environment.

### 5.16 Innovative Learning Approaches List

In partnership with more traditional approaches, innovative teaching methods can be very effective in reaching a wide variety of learners – in particular those who historically have not responded well to traditional education or who have significant anxiety associated with traditional approaches to learning.

Reaching beyond expected approaches enables practitioners to capitalize on elements that energize struggling or non-traditional learners: creativity, variety, novelty, enthusiasm, affinities, high affect, passions, and more.

Reluctant learners will often become more receptive to traditional teaching methods if they are first exposed to and engaged by approaches that ignite interests, spark enthusiasm and motivation, increase opportunities to build relationships through sharing and collaboration, and reduce anxiety.

Additionally, innovative learning approaches are a good fit for struggling learners and those with disabilities because they tend to be more flexible, individualized, and easily tailored to accommodate to the individual's strengths and challenges.

These may include:

- **Games, activities, and simulations**
  - experiential
  - verbal
  - nonverbal
  - in classroom
  - in community
  - computer-based
- **Movement-based**
  - sensory breaks
  - dance
  - yoga
  - improvisation
  - role playing (*Example: to learn about social interactions*)
- **Creativity-based**
  - art (*Example: to learn about history*)
  - music (*Example: to learn mathematics*)
  - computer graphics, animation
  - models, building projects
  - visual representations of ideas
  - acting
  - concept maps, timelines, charts, graphs (crossover with cognitive)
  - writing (*Examples: journals, poetry, plays*)

- costumes (*Example: to learn about historical gender roles*)
- photography
- **Emotionally-based**
  - discussions (*Example: characters in literature*)
  - acting, role playing, improvisation
  - morals, values
  - characters in literature
  - current events, controversial topics
- **Sensory-based**
  - multi-sensory
  - sensory breaks
  - enlisting the senses in learning (*Example: food choices and preferences*)
  - explicit discussions, lectures, and exercises to deepen understanding of each sense
  - experiential learning through the senses
- **Cognitive-based**
  - concept maps, timelines, charts, graphs
  - research
  - debates
  - writing (*Example: papers, articles, interviews, research*)
  - reading
  - discussions
  - negotiations
  - morals and values
  - classroom court system
  - analysis
- **Peer-based**
  - group activities and discussions
  - peer-facilitated learning
  - group projects involving planning, decision making, and negotiation
  - feedback exercises
  - peer editing
  - show and tell
  - student presentations
  - murals
  - collaborative ventures

**Examples of collaborative ventures**

Class project, class fund raising, group volunteer project, building, court system, class theme and name, voting to help make class decisions, enter contest as a group)

- **Media-based**
  - current events
  - research
  - online tutorials
  - sharing (*Examples: YouTube clips, videos, cool sites, etc.*)
  - PowerPoint presentations
  - movie, short film
  - film or audiotape interviews
  - student newsletter
  - student radio show/TV show
  - photography

### 5.17 Executive Functions List

Executive functions is a general term for cognitive processes that permit us to manage both our thinking and physical activities in our lives. In many ways executive function skills dictate the quality of our experiences. They inform and guide us on how we think about and approach a task at hand.

- Without the ability to **preview**, each experience and the demands it makes on us will feel surprising and unsettling.
- Without the ability to **think strategically** we would think and act randomly, our intentions would not be incorporated well into our decisions, we would be reactive instead of proactive, and the demands placed upon us would feel overwhelming and unmanageable.
- Without an ability to **plan** we would constantly feel unprepared, both literally and emotionally.
- Without **step wisdom** we would not know the wisest order in which to do things and the list of demands will feel unending and insurmountable.
- Without **time management** skills we would feel lost, and tasks would feel exhausting and unbearable.
- Without **internal organization** our thoughts, feelings, and behaviors would be as jumbled as the external experience in which we are involved. Anxiety, embarrassment, and confusion would derail us from our focus.
- Without **plan implementation and execution** skills we would never see our goals come to fruition and feel utterly dependent on others to make the things we need and want to happen.
- Without **self-monitoring** skills we would have no mechanism for reflection, refinement, improvement, and ownership of our choices, feelings, and behaviors.
- Without **reinforceability** we would not learn from our mistakes or the mistakes of others and fall prey to a constant cycle of failure, frustration, and powerlessness to effect change.

Improving executive function skills is critical for students to become more independent, self-determined, and self-advocating. They are of such importance we have embedded executive function support across all curriculum modules.

#### Previewing

- Thinking about and visualizing upcoming events
- Previewing is required to plan appropriately, therefore linked to preparedness.

#### Strategic thinking

- Parts-to-whole thinking
- Brainstorming
- Problem solving
- Anticipation and prediction
- Generating multiple possible outcomes
- Prioritization
- Step wisdom
- Evaluative thinking

### Planning

- Identifying known and unknown
- Research to fill in unknown
- Variables to consider to reduce the unexpected
- Financial requirements and constraints
- Personnel requirements and constraints
- Material and financial logistics
- Clarifying goals for activity
- Prioritizing
- Scheduling and sequencing big picture and details ("when and in what order?")

### Step wisdom

- Sequencing (ability to order steps, tasks, and priorities in a logical sequence to complete a task successfully)
- Visualization (ability to visualize the sequence in which one is to perform a task. To be able to source information from visualization to increase one's ability to anticipate potential problems and generate possible solutions.)
- Prioritization (ability to itemize all the demands, expectations, and parameters of a task and detect priorities. Links with time management, as time often sets parameters, and decisions will often need to be made that change the plan midway based on amount of time remaining.)

### Time management

- Predicting amount of time needed to complete task successfully
- Am I under any time constraints that will make this difficult?
- Incorporating time needs and parameters into planning

### Organization

- Materials
- Self
- Approach to tasks

### Plan implementation/execution

- **Pacing**  
Ability to adjust and control the rate at which one approaches, engages, and performs a task.  
(*Examples: not rushing, not moving too slow, not running out of time*)
- **Step wisdom**  
Ability to adhere to the steps and sequences established in the planning phase during the implementation of the plan
- **Organization**  
Ability to manage and organize materials, actions, decisions, and oneself during the implementation of a plan

- **Strategic thinking**

Ability to access strategic thinking skills (see above list) while implementing a plan and to accommodate to any unexpected changes

- **Time management**

Ability to be aware of, and comply to, time passage and limitations while implementing a task

### Self-monitoring

- Planning phase

Am I keeping track of everything I need to plan this activity? Am I prepared? Do I need to seek assistance to make this go well, on what and from whom? Have I taken advantage of the resources available to me? Have I communicated my plan to the necessary players?

- During (execution)

- Self-evaluation: How am I doing? Am I on track to meet my goal? In what ways am I doing well? In what ways am I struggling?
- Self-assessment: Based on how I think I am doing, do I need help?
- Identify needs: What kind of help do I need – materials, assistance, guidance or feedback from others? Who?

- After (evaluating)

Big picture:

- How did the activity go overall?
- How did I do?
- Did I stay calm?
- Was I organized
- Did I feel prepared?
- Did I manage my time well?
- Did I have the support from others that I needed? If not, did I ask for the help I needed?
- From a scale of 1-10, how successful was I?
- Did I enjoy myself?
- Would I do this again? If so, what would I do differently? If not, why?

Details:

- Specifically, what went well?
- Specifically what broke down?
- What specifically should I have done differently?

### Reinforcibility

- Ability to draw information and meaning from past mistakes
- Ability to use insight to change one's behavior moving forward to avoid the same mistake occurring

### 5.18 Identifying Opportunities to Practice Executive Functions Skills

As discussed in the Executive Functions List, all opportunities, experiences, and interactions make demands on our executive function. The information below guides teachers through how to examine any task, request, or activity using an executive function lens. By doing so, teachers can better assess the extent to which executive function demands will add challenges for which the student may need support. Through both explicit support and taking advantage of teachable moments as they arise, we can help our students to improve their executive functioning in connection with their other program goals.

**Definition of previewing:** The act of anticipating what to expect, what you may need, how you might feel, etc. before entering a task, environment, activity, or situation. Most individuals on the autism spectrum do not preview so they tend to get taken off guard, derailed, anxious, and confused. The unexpected is not easy for them, so the more they can preview, the better they can prepare and self-care. Helps with preparedness, organization, and strategic thinking (contingency plans and possible outcomes).

#### Previewing

- Skills
  - What skills does this activity draw upon?
  - What demands will this activity make on the individual’s planning, previewing, time management, self-monitoring, and organization skills?
  - What strengths does the individual possess that will be an asset in navigating this activity?
  - What weaknesses does the individual possess that might pose challenges and barriers to successful completion of this activity?
- Environmental factors
  - What demands will the environment make on the individual’s sensory, physical, cognitive, and emotional systems?
  - Based on the SIP, what potential difficulties might the individual face that could interfere with successful completion of the activity?
  - Do the activity and the environment have the support, organization, or explicit sequences in place for the individual to navigate the activity successfully?
- Attention, memory, and energy levels
  - What demands will this activity make on the individual’s attentional systems (duration, level of concentration, volume of details to keep track of)?
  - What demands will this activity make on the individual’s memory systems?
  - What amount of energy does the activity require (sedentary, moving around, at own pace, speed is a factor)?
  - Based on the SIP, what potential difficulties might the individual face from an attention, memory, and energy level standpoint that could interfere with successful completion of the activity?



- Language and higher order thinking
  - What demands will this activity make on the individual’s language systems (receptive and expressive – understanding directions, expression)?
  - What demands will this activity make on the individual’s higher order thinking (analysis, drawing conclusions, strategizing, brainstorming, creativity, problem solving)?
  - Based on the SIP, what potential difficulties with receptive or expressive language might the individual face that could interfere with successful completion of the activity?
  - Based on the SIP, what potential difficulties might the individual face with higher order thinking demands that could interfere with successful completion of the activity?
- Social cognition
  - What demands will this activity make on the individual’s social cognition (social understanding, social communication, social behaviors)?
  - Based on the SIP, what potential difficulties might the individual face with social understanding, communication, or behavior that could interfere with successful completion of the activity?
- Emotional reactivity and stress
  - What demands will this activity make on the individual’s emotions?
  - What triggers are inherent in the environment or the specific tasks that might result in emotional dysregulation or distress?

### Strategic thinking

- What strategies are key to successful completion of this activity?
- Do the strategic needs associated with this activity line up with the individual’s strengths, challenges, or both?
- What strategic support needs to be in place? What form does it need to come in based upon the SIP and how information is processed?
- Are there areas in the individual’s life that demonstrate strategic thinking? Can analogies be made that help this individual see what skills are transferable? (*Example: I noticed you paused and waited until it was your turn to go up to bat. That is a lot like waiting for the right time to talk in a conversation.*)

### Planning

- Support
  - Given the individual’s SIP, what systems, strategies and accommodations need to be in place to capitalize on strengths and minimize the negative effect of challenges?
- Environmental needs
  - Given the individual’s SIP, what systems, strategies, and accommodations need to be in place to accommodate for and minimize the negative effect of environmental interference?
  - Is there a way to capitalize on a sensory sensitivity to make it an asset during activity?

- Attention, memory, and energy levels
  - Given the individual’s SIP, what systems, strategies, and accommodations need to be in place to accommodate for and minimize the negative effect of attention demands (breaks, steps broken down)?
  - Given the individual’s SIP, what systems, strategies, and accommodations need to be in place to accommodate for and minimize the negative effect of memory demands? If attention, memory, and/or sustaining energy level are strengths, what are ways to capitalize on them during the activity?
- Language and higher order thinking
  - Given the individual’s SIP, what systems, strategies, and accommodations need to be in place to accommodate for and minimize the negative effect of language demands?
  - Given the individual’s SIP, what systems, strategies, and accommodations need to be in place to accommodate for and minimize the negative effect of higher order thinking demands?
  - If receptive and/or expressive language are strengths, what are ways to capitalize on them during the activity?
  - If higher order thinking is a strength, what are ways to capitalize on it during the activity?
- Social cognition
  - Given the individual’s SIP, what systems, strategies, and accommodations need to be in place to accommodate for and minimize the negative effect of social cognition (understanding, communication, behavior) demands?
- Emotional reactivity and stress
  - Given the individual’s SIP, what systems, strategies, and accommodations need to be in place to accommodate for and minimize the negative effect of dysregulating emotional demands?
  - Given the individual’s SIP, what systems, strategies, and accommodations need to be in place to accommodate for and minimize the negative effect of stress related to the environment or task?

### Step wisdom

- Sequencing
  - What is the individual’s sequencing capability?
  - Given an understanding of sequencing capability and learning style, what supports need to be in place (*Examples: visual, auditory, etc.*)
- Visualizing
  - What are the individual’s visualization capabilities?
  - What is the best way to co-create visualization with this individual in the absence of one that corrects distortions in thinking or fills in gaps?

- Prioritizing
  - How well can the individual identify priorities? Can she rate and sequence them according to importance?
  - How can the individual most effectively be reminded of these priorities while the task is going on to keep pacing and momentum smooth?
  - How will time parameters affect the need to prioritize during this activity?

### Time management

- How long is this activity expected to take? Are there limitations due to the environment, logistics, or the student's schedule that need to be addressed?
- Given the SIP, how much time does the individual need to accomplish the activity successfully?
- Given the individual's SIP, is there an optimal time of the day for this activity (*Example: more alert in morning*)?
- Given the SIP and the environment where the activity will take place is there an optimal time of the day best suited for the individual (*Examples: less crowded, not during lunch rush, etc.*)?
- Given the individual's SIP, what time-based accommodations and strategies need to be put in place to adjust for the activity (*Examples: broken down into phases, shortened, interspersed breaks, or elongated*)?

### Organization

- Environment
  - What steps need to be taken to organize the environment to support an optimal experience during this activity (*Examples: space, logistics, ambiance*)?
- Materials
  - Are all the materials needed for the successful execution of this activity attained?
- Instructions
  - Are the sequence and steps for the activity organized in a way that is optimal given the individual's SIP?
  - Has the individual been shown what the end result of the activity should look like (*Examples: charts, manipulatives, models, examples, pictures*)?
- Support
  - Have the appropriate systems and support been organized ahead of time so the individual is able to engage in the activity and experience flow and momentum?

### Execution - pacing

- What is the student's pattern for pacing?
- In what ways can feedback be tailored with the frequency and immediacy needed?

- Am I missing anything that might be affecting the individual's pace?
  - anxiety
  - a sense of competition
  - not wanting to be last
  - perfectionism
  - poor concept of the passage of time
  - thinks faster is better
  - fear or anxiety about what is coming next

### Self-monitoring

- Based on the SIP, how aware is the individual of her strengths, challenges, needs, and preferences?
- Is the individual able to assess how she is doing during a task?
- How successful is the individual at evaluating performance after a task?
- How successful is the individual at receiving feedback and incorporating it into her work?
- Given the individual's SIP and answers to the above questions, what self-monitoring-based accommodations and strategies need to be put in place (*Examples: check-ins, level of supervision, style and frequency of feedback*)?

### Reinforcibility

- According to the SIP, what is the individual's history of reinforcibility?
- With what method does the individual learn best? Am I capitalizing on this modality in building support for reinforcibility? (*Example: If the individual is a visual learner, she can see her mistakes by watching a video of herself. If the individual is an auditory learner she may need to hear back what she or others said.*)
- Does the feedback given during or immediately after an activity bolster the individual's ability to pair the feedback with the activity?
- Embarrassment and anxiety can spike when someone is aware of making errors, especially in front of peers. Does the approach help reinforce wise choices and actions, and take embarrassment and anxiety into account? (*Example: develop a hand signal or code for giving feedback in peer groups*)

### Evaluative thinking

- What systems need to be put in place to discuss and analyze the experience afterward (*Examples: thoughts, emotions, difficulties, successes, problem solving, level of support, what worked/what didn't, points of stress*)?
- Does the post-analysis approach include: rating the experience on an external scale (1-10, etc.), deciding if individual wants to do it again and if any changes ought to be made first, where to go from here to build on the experience, etc.?
- Use movement and emotion to bolster memory of the experience through role-playing.

- Use visuals such as a chart, concept map, story board, or other visual representations of event details, reactions, and outcomes.
- Brainstorm and visualize how the individual would like things to play out and conclude differently than the present outcome.

### 5.19 Advising

Students entering into the transition program should be assigned an advisor from the outset. This advisor will serve many roles throughout the student's program experience, most importantly providing ongoing mentoring in an authentic relationship that acknowledges the whole individual and her needs, goals, hopes, and dreams.

This relationship will evolve over time as the student's needs change but it will also provide a consistency, organization, predictability, and security to the student's program experience that reduces anxiety, confusion, and lack of direction. The advisor provides great value to the student's transition experience by:

- Guiding the student's experiences and progress as she makes her way through the curriculum modules, activities, and community experiences
- Collaborating with and facilitating communication amongst the program team, instructors, family, internship/job sites, and the student
- Tracking her evolution
- Identifying and prioritizing individualized goals; coordinating timing, planning, design, and implementation of these goals
- Monitoring and collaborating with staff to assure the student's program reflects and addresses her changing needs over time
- Engaging with her in collaborative problem solving and decision-making
- Sharing in her successes
- Mediating her difficulties
- Modeling emotional regulation and social engagement skills
- Advocating on behalf of the student while collaborating with her as possible to reinforce her self-advocacy skills
- Providing her with increasing opportunities to be self-directed and independent as her readiness to step into her own strengths

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## Section 6.0

# AWARENESS DEVELOPMENT AND EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONS (ADEF) MODULE

**“The most socially useful learning in the modern world is the learning of the process of learning, a continuing openness to experience and incorporation into oneself of the process of change.” ~ Rogers, 1969**

**“Study the heart and the mind of man, and begin with your own. Meditation and reflection must lay the foundation of that knowledge, but experience and practice must, and alone can, complete it.” ~ Dornier & Carey, 1872**

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## 6.01 Introduction

The ability to lead a purposeful, meaningful, self-determined, satisfying life depends greatly upon one's level of self-awareness and executive function capability. Self-awareness is the process through which we reflect on ourselves and identify our needs, difficulties, and desires. Executive function capability enables us to use this knowledge to make good decisions, solve problems, evaluate ourselves in a wide variety of contexts, and act in our own self-interest in a socially appropriate manner.

The Awareness Development and Executive Functions (ADEF) Module is designed to build self-awareness and strengthen executive functioning. Through an individualized process, students are exposed to experiences, concepts, activities, and interactions designed to strengthen the skills needed to become as independent as possible. The sequence, scope, depth, detail, and instruction methods used in delivery of the ADEF module should be adjusted according to the Student Individual Profile (SIP) to ensure that content is delivered at a rate, volume, and complexity that suits individual learning and emotional needs.

Self-discovery is a journey some find exciting, while others experience anxiety and trepidation. Staff must be sensitive to the individual's cognitive, emotional, sensory, and physical states.

When taking students through the ADEF module, keep in mind the Core Principles:

### **Effective Learning Occurs When Learners are Calm and Regulated.**

When a student is dysregulated, his ability to access insight is restricted and examination of oneself might be too difficult or emotionally threatening. In this case, the focus should shift to activities and interactions that support regulation until the student is cognitively, emotionally, sensorially, and physically receptive to resume work with the ADEF module.

### **Communication Provides the Foundation for Effective Learning and Making meaning of the World.**

In order to take a student through the ADEF module successfully, it is necessary to create an environment where healthy self-evaluation and meaningful reflection can take place. Only in that way will he be able to process experiences, share feelings and reactions, self-regulate, and try out new ideas. Therefore, for each topic within the ADEF it will be necessary to assess how best to get the student to do this. There may be several approaches that will work, including self-talk, interactions with intimates and friends, exchanges with teachers and supervisors, acts of creative expression, social relating, and casual interplay with others.

Having selected one or more approaches, it will then be necessary to determine which means of communication would work for the student – for example using speech, written language, a technological device, artistic expression, movement, or some other form of non-verbal communication.

**Learning Occurs Most Easily When Topics are Approached Using the Student's Preferences and Natural Affinities.**

Preferences, affinities, and interests are excellent routes to self-exploration and provide motivators for executive function work. Analogies, metaphors, and comparisons can help concretize abstract concepts (examples: present the executive functioning part of the brain as the conductor or traffic cop for the rest of the brain; use an affinity for circuses as an example for how to breakdown all the sensory input one can experience in a given environment – smells of the animals, sights, circus music, crunch of peanut shells underfoot, etc.). Furthermore, since executive functioning is action-oriented (planning, decision making, etc.), affinities and interests can be used to design high interest projects with which to practice executive function skills.

**Meaningful Learning Arises More Easily from Emotionally-Based Experiences.**

An examination of the self is unavoidably an emotional experience. The trick in working with individuals in this realm is to anticipate difficult feelings and associated negative thinking might arise (“I struggle with balance, negative thought; I am a clumsy oaf.”). This dynamic muddies the process, weighing down the insights with self-criticism, self-judgment, or negative thinking. Staff should be prepared to do a lot of neutralizing, normalizing, and reframing to ensure the self-awareness process is approached in a productive, positive, healthy manner.

As much as possible, the work should also be infused with optimism and humor. Self-disclosure on the part of staff can also mediate any negative thinking and model positive ways to frame personal challenges (“I struggle with math too!; My friends won't go skiing with me; they are afraid I will get hurt because my balance is not good. So I just have fun hanging out at the lodge and drinking hot chocolate while they ski.”)

Executive function work tends to elicit fewer self-negative thoughts but is prone to ushering in anxiety or fear of failure because of its action-oriented nature and link to performance. In this case staff must be prepared to model, coach, and co-navigate executive function exercises until the individual displays readiness to try some of the techniques on his own.

**Effective Learning Happens in the Context of a Warm, Empathetic Relationship.**

Because the ADEF module addresses highly personal topics, it is an ideal vehicle for staff to use as a springboard for building and solidifying relationships as well as introducing and reinforcing empathy. When done in the context of an empathic relationship, the process of sharing and personal reflection is more likely to feel safe and compelling to the individual. There will still be pockets of difficulty, intimidation, hesitancy, and in some cases denial and refusal to explore certain aspects of self. These reactions are part of who the individual is and must be met with compassion, patience, flexibility, and non-judgment. Staff should remember that all reactions are simply more data through which they can better understand the complex individuals they are serving.

### **Effective Teaching Encourages Students to Become Independent Seekers and Users of Knowledge.**

By placing a priority on motivation, personal responsibility, self-awareness, and active engagement the Transition Curriculum creates a learning climate that

- Is fueled by high energy, enthusiasm, and momentum
- Energizes students to interact with information and ideas rather than receive them passively
- Pairs fun and creative expression with learning rather than associating it with anxiety and confusion
- Is safe enough to risk trying new ways of expressing ideas and thinking critically because of the underlying support and strength of a consistently empathic and authentic teacher-student relationship
- Celebrates learning differences, alternative perspectives, and individual passions and interests and sees them as opportunities to enliven, expand, and enrich learning
- Encourages diversions into unexpected ideas, enthusiastic debates on unusual topics, and slowed down discussions to fully establish meaning because they are seen as valuable essential additions to learning rather than distractions from a fixed plan
- Student and teacher are free to pursue process and meaning at a pace and depth compatible with individual cognitive abilities
- Understands the emotional, sensory, physical, and cognitive regulatory issues of students with ASD or other developmental disabilities dictate their ability to process information meaningfully; and places great value on regulation, engagement, and reciprocity as indicators of one's availability to learn in a given moment

The positive effects of using teaching methods that support independent learning extend well beyond the students' program experience. They also encourage the student to seek information on his own at home and out in the world. Examples of this could include activities such as:

- Seeking continuing education for job skills or career development
- Navigating public transportation
- Engaging in comparative shopping
- Understanding one's acting part in a community theater play
- Researching the side effects of a new medication
- Getting ideas for a creative writing story
- Understanding how the caterpillar in the backyard became a butterfly
- Identifying topics for conversation
- Learning how to use a new animation program

Whether it is in pursuit of a specific goal, an attempt to widen one's life opportunities, a means to satisfy curiosity, or a way to share interests with others, the positive effects of having a level of independence in seeking information are immense.



### Module Goals

- Define self-awareness and establish the process of achieving it as a discrete activity
- Establish an understanding that increased self-awareness results in self-knowledge, which is a tool for empowerment and independence
- Establish the vast variety of ways in which self-knowledge can be applied to improve one's functioning, regulation, decision-making, and overall well-being
- Identify, model, and practice methods for raising self-awareness and gathering self-knowledge in a wide variety of environments, situations, and relationships for positive results
- Assist individuals to internalize the process of developing of self-awareness so they are able to use it as a tool as independently as possible given their limitations
- Define executive function (big picture and parts)
- Establish understanding of how improved executive functioning results in increased success in achieving tasks, empowerment, and independence
- Establish the vast variety of ways in which executive functioning can be applied to improve one's overall functioning, task completion, goal setting, reduced stress, and overall well-being
- Identify, model, and practice methods for using executive function tools and strategies in a wide variety of environments, situations, and relationships for positive results
- Assist individuals to internalize the process of developing executive functioning strategies so they are able to use them as a tool as independently as possible given their challenges
- Continuously provide individuals with meaningful experiences and opportunities that will lead them to be more independent, resilient, and engaged with people and surroundings

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**Note regarding ADEF Students with Low or No Verbal Ability:** Please see Appendix: "Communication Strategies and Accommodations for Students with Low or No Verbal Ability."

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### 6.02 "This Is Me" Journal

The process of building self-awareness incorporates information gathering, discussion, reflection, experiential learning, and observation in a dynamic and non-linear fashion. Information gathering and research provide the individual with concepts to reflect on and discuss, providing opportunities to build language and higher order thinking skills. Experiential learning (examples: activities, experiments, physical and sensory exposure, etc.) offers the individual chances to try out new knowledge and draw conclusions and insights from real experiences. The experiential learning dimension takes information gathered off the page/computer screen and from discussions, and places it into the real world context so it can be applied, tested, reconfigured, and evaluated for its merit and direct application to the self.

This process offers many opportunities to strengthen the connection between thoughts, sensations, and feelings. It also supports the expansion of expressive language as the individual is challenged to articulate

his internal experience so it can be evaluated and discussed. Experiential learning is followed by more reflection and discussion, and sometimes more information gathering, in order to identify what knowledge, meaning, and conclusions can be drawn.

Language, abstract thinking, and critical analysis skills are further reinforced as experiences, concepts, and ideas are assessed for their merit and application in managing real life experiences. As this process unfolds and deepens over time, the individual begins to establish an emerging understanding of self—preferences, habits, styles, needs, desires, strengths, weaknesses, etc., he previously did not have. These pieces of meaning and insight are woven together into a *gestalt* (an organized whole that is perceived as more than the sum of its parts) – *This Is Me*.

The rich process of self-discovery described above results not only in raising overall awareness and building vital processing, language, and higher order thinking skills but also addresses other core transition goals and concerns. Key knowledge and insights that emerge from this process enable the individual to have important information about the self that has significant practical application.

The individual builds self-knowledge to draw upon that enables him to strengthen executive function skills and...

- Make good decisions
- Manage regulatory needs
- Self-advocate
- Select environments and people who support one's functioning
- Construct realistic goals
- Problem solve effectively
- Better manage and organize

All lead to the ultimate goals of a transition program: **increased independence and success.**

### Having the individual develop his personal ADEF journal

Since the process of building self-awareness includes such a vast array of information, experiences, emotions, ideas, insights, and conclusions it is important to have a way to organize and catalog the information. Providing the individual with a method for capturing the process and placing it somewhere accessible for future review and reference serves several purposes:

- Supports executive functioning
- Lessens anxiety to remember everything
- Imposes structure for individuals who routinely jumble information, making it difficult to draw meaning and access it when needed
- Enables more opportunities for review, reflection, connection, and changing perspectives as new information is layered over previous information
- Supports parts-to-whole thinking (the notion that understanding the parts of a subject is important to understanding the subject as a whole)

- Supports the idea that sometimes conclusions cannot be drawn until there is enough information, as many of the individuals we work with jump to conclusions impulsively with inadequate information that becomes fixed and difficult to reconcile when faced with change

An organizing, cohesive, and engaging method for capturing and cataloguing the self-discovery process is through a journal format. The journal can include:

- Questionnaires that reveal insight
- Reflections on the thoughts, emotions, physical sensations, and overall impressions of activities, experiments, trial and error, and other experiential-based learning tools
- Drawings, collages, photographs, and other creative modalities
- Book titles, quotes, web pages, etc. that contain information or insight the individual may want to reference at a later date
- Creative writing
- Personal thoughts or stories
- Notes from discussions, lectures, videos, etc.

This journal should be used actively throughout the ADEF module. Some individuals may choose to continue to add to their This Is Me Journal as a continuing self-awareness building tool. The journal should be kept active throughout the student's time in the transition program for the following purposes:

- for the individual to reference
- for staff to reference
- as inspiration for activities and outings
- as an informational tool to help students anticipate how they will react to an upcoming situation
- as a guide for selecting appropriate internships and career matches

### 6.03 Executive Functions

Executive functions (EF) are *meta-cognitive skills* – the skills we use to maintain awareness of and regulate our own thinking and knowingness. It is these functions that help us determine how to approach, navigate, and evaluate our experiences. In turn, this affects our present and future choices and behavior. Executive functions are what enable us to change, evolve, set, and accomplish goals; make good decisions; adapt successfully to changes; make higher level connections; think expansively and understand the big picture; accept personal responsibility; become independent; and most importantly, find a sense of meaning and joy in our lives. The presence of well-developed executive functions increases our potential to lead successful, independent, and fulfilling lives.

The executive functions could also be considered those cognitive processes involved in handling *novel situations* – that is, situations that require the person to think things out rather than just automatically respond using learned behaviors or otherwise set patterns.

For example, if you have walked down the street to your neighborhood park several times per week for most of your life, little or no executive functions would be used on your part to do this. However, if you suddenly decide to go somewhere several hundred miles away that you've never been to before, you will almost certainly do some thinking about how to execute the idea. This **thinking about how to do it** is the basic notion of executive functions.

Executive functions permit us to:

- Problem solve
- Make decisions that factor in our needs, desires, limitations, and strengths
- Self-monitor and self-correct
- Evaluate experiences to be able to draw meaning and learning that can be applied moving forward
- Shape behavior according to rules, expectations, guidelines, and goals
- Maintain an appropriate level of organization and functionality given the context of a situation
- apply an understanding of cause and effect to adjust thinking, behavior, and emotions
- Navigate situations, difficulties, and obstacles strategically
- Anticipate potential outcomes and shape plans and approaches to target a desired outcome
- Manage time appropriately according to context, parameters, and goals
- Implement and execute according to a plan, vision, or goal
- Regulate the pace and quality of our performance, adjusting accordingly
- Manage the unexpected
- Learn from past experiences
- Feel a sense of control over our experiences

Biologically, the seat of executive function lies in the prefrontal cortex of the brain. Even in typically developing brains it is the last area to develop, usually in late adolescence and early adulthood; and the

reason many teens and young adults are plagued by impulsive decisions that lead to unwanted consequences and difficulty setting and accomplishing their goals. Since it is not just individuals with ASD who struggle through the growing pains of developing executive functions, it is important that all educational approaches, curriculums, and lesson plans include executive function development and strengthening.

These functions include the following:

**Previewing** – anticipating what to expect, what you may need, how you might feel, etc. before entering a task, environment, activity, or any situation. Most individuals on the autism spectrum do not preview so they tend to feel caught off guard, get anxious, and confused. Dealing with the unexpected is not easy for individuals on the spectrum so the more they can preview, the better they can prepare and engage in self-care.

**Planning** – being able to come up with an approach to solving a problem

**Strategic thinking** – being able to think in a manner that best exploits existing or emerging resources or possibilities

**Step wisdom** – the ability to visualize what one is trying to accomplish and the steps or sequences of actions needed to arrive at that objective

**Organization** – to arrange resources and events in such a way as to obtain a desired result efficiently

**Time management** – the ability to use time in a way that makes work more efficient, easier to complete, etc.

**Self-monitoring** – being able to watch, analyze, and evaluate self as one is doing a task

**Plan implementation/execution** – the carrying out of a plan

**Pacing** – ability to adjust the speed of work to make it appropriate for the circumstance

**Causal relationships** – ability to understand events in terms of cause and effect; because X happened, Y was able to begin.

**Evaluative thinking** – ability to reflect upon or judge the value (positive or negative) of some event or experience

**Reinforcibility** – ability to use previous experience to guide or correct behavior and work output; learning from experience.

Since meta-cognition is essentially *thinking about thinking*, it can be difficult to teach these non-obvious skills to individuals who lack self-awareness, have difficulty thinking abstractly, have low levels of self-reflection, and struggle with making higher order connections.

A certain level of self-awareness and critical thinking is needed to conceptually understand executive functioning and those skills are often slow to evolve in individuals with ASD. For this reason, *it is very important to adjust expectations and approach the building of these meta-cognitive skills as a process rather than an end goal.*

For example, one can make the goal of moving an individual from spelling single syllable words to multi-syllable words. That goal has a concrete pathway for measuring mastery through practice, exercises, spelling drills, and testing. But if the goal is increasing one's ability to manage time and pacing, it becomes abstract, contextual, and more difficult to measure and assess mastery. It is through ongoing support, reinforcement, trial and error, and the passage of time that staff is able to assess the extent to which the student's relationship to time and ability to self-pace has improved.

Therefore, an approach to executive function building must include a wide range of approaches:

- Explicit executive function building activities
- Frequent exposure to and practice with executive function strategies, tools, and accommodations
- Ongoing executive function exposure embedded into all lesson planning and activities

Explicit executive function building activities include:

- Exercises and activities aimed at raising self-awareness and self-evaluation
- Time-management activities
- Rubrics (standards of performance), outlines, charts, journals, and other tools and strategies to support organization, step wisdom, and strategic thinking
- Formal, facilitated meta-cognitive discussions (evaluating, identifying causal relationships)
- Goal-setting exercises
- Planning exercises
- Previewing before an event and conducting post-analysis discussions after an event
- Brain teasers, scenarios, and other strategic thinking exercises

Executive function strategies, tools, and accommodations include:

- Planners, schedules
- Charts, reminders, lists, and other vital information visually represented on the classroom walls for reference
- Reminders and prompts
- Breaking down tasks and projects into manageable chunks
- Vocalizing the goal and steps in one's own words after having received instruction receptively
- Check-ins and reflection pauses built into a project to have a chance to stop and evaluate how it is going
- Procedures written out to reinforce step wisdom
- Strategic planning guidelines and checklists

Executive functions could be embedded into all lesson plans and activities in the form of:

- Feedback during an activity to raise awareness for the need to self-monitor
- Guidance and suggestions for strategies and approaches before, during, and after
- Vocalizing previewing skills (*Example: "I wonder if we ought to take an umbrella in case it rains." "Will we be gone long enough that we need to take snacks with us?"*)
- Modeling approaches and vocalizing strategic thinking (*Example: "Let's try sorting all the parts by color before we begin assembling the model so we have a chance to see what we have and can find parts easier."*)
- Naming the executive functions as their need surfaces (*Example: "I wonder if it would be a good time for us to stop and look at our pacing – are we going at the right speed or do we need to slow down/speed up?"*)
- Naming and reinforcing when a student exhibits executive function skills (*Example: "I loved your strategy of writing down the things you were afraid you would forget to do. That really helped you keep your stress level down and make fewer mistakes."*)
- Including students in planning activities and approaches

Although in theory all of the executive function domains are applied continuously in all stages of an experience, some functions fall into a natural *before-during-after* flow that helps to highlight the importance and contribution of each. The following list may assist you in developing executive function-building activities.

Keep in mind, executive functioning are abstract skills, so the approach, presentation, vocabulary, and level of complexity should be adjusted according to the individual's cognitive and language processing abilities.

### BEFORE Skills

These skills should be used *before* executing a novel or complex activity.

- **Planning:** The ability to combine visualization, brainstorming, creativity, parts-to-whole thinking, sequencing, and logic together to mentally map out a process aimed at accomplishing a specific goal and/or approach to a task or event.
- **Previewing:** The ability to project into the near future to estimate, evaluate, anticipate, and predict comprehensively:
  - how an upcoming event, plan, task, or activity will play out
  - what reactions, feelings, thoughts will result from engaging in the activity, goal, task, or event
  - multiple possible outcomes
  - what is needed to navigate the experience successfully
  - what could potentially derail or negatively impact the experience

Successful **planning** and **previewing** are linked to one's ability to

- Assess one's needs accurately
- Slow down, attend to, and incorporate the salient details related to the upcoming event
- Visualize/conceptualize
- Regulate excitement, anxiety, overwhelming feeling, and other emotions that could potentially interfere or skew perspective
- Think abstractly
- Understand the concept of contingency (*Example: if this happens it will change the plan/experience in this way*)
- Understand and apply cause and effect
- Sequence
- Prioritize
- Understand and undertake a goal directed approach (*Example: The goal of me going to the car show is to evaluate whether I want to work in the car industry. So given that goal, I need to make sure I don't get so distracted by the free stuff and cool displays that I forget to look at the cars and talk to people in the car industry to ask them questions.*)
- Become independent and self-sufficient

An individual lacking **planning** and **previewing** skills will likely experience:

- Chronic disorganization
- Lack of preparedness
- Confusion and distress by the unexpected
- Poor reinforceability (learning from previous mistakes and changing accordingly)
- Anticipatory anxiety related to upcoming tasks, events, activities, and responsibilities
- Anxiety, overwhelming feeling, and frustration
- Lowered success with task completion, personal satisfaction, producing results, making changes in behavior and approaches
- Delineating the boundaries of personal responsibility when a situation goes poorly (what was in my control and what were environmental circumstances beyond my control)
- Inability to meet personal and life goals
- Dependency on others
- Avoidance



## DURING Skills

- **Self-monitoring:** The ability to step outside of one's self to observe neutrally how one is performing a task or navigating an experience. Self-monitoring gives clues to how successful one is being in a given context and whether any modifications are needed to improve the experience or increase chances of a successful outcome.

**Successful** self-monitoring is linked to one's ability to:

- receive feedback and incorporate it into one's approach
- understand what changes can be made to improve a situation
- draw conclusions that support future choices positively
- be realistic with ideas, approaches, choices, and goals
- make decisions successfully
- problem solve effectively

An individual **with limited** self-monitoring will likely experience:

- lack of insight (self-and others)
  - poor decision-making
  - difficulty making changes in approach or style
  - ongoing anger, frustration, anxiety, discouragement, and other dysregulating emotions (directed inward or externalized)
  - weak understanding and estimation of one's skills, strengths, and weaknesses
  - difficulty drawing meaning from an experience
  - difficulty understanding what is and is not in one's own control
  - underdeveloped sense of personal responsibility
- **Step wisdom:** Using a logical, sequenced approach to a task, activity, or experience that increases the likelihood of a successful outcome. Step wisdom combines visualization, sequencing, and higher order thinking skills.
  - **Strategic thinking:** The ability to access and apply strategy, logic, and problem solving to one's approach, performance, and decisions to increase the likelihood of a successful experience and outcome. Strategic thinking includes the ability to incorporate the unexpected and contingencies that might arise in a situation. Directly linked to flexibility and adaptability.
  - **Organization:** Ability to organize, manage, and maintain all the necessary components of an experience to ensure its success including:
    - materials – having the right materials accessible when you need them
    - sequencing – ordering the steps of one's approach to a task
    - thoughts – having clear thinking
    - emotions – emotion regulation
  - **Time management:** Ability to manage one's own time successfully incorporating:

- an overall awareness of the passage of time
- specific awareness of how much time is needed to complete a specific task
- ability to predict how much time something will take
- ability to monitor the passage of time while engaged in an activity
- ability to adjust one’s rate or adjust the plan according to time restrictions
- **Plan implementation and execution:** Ability to apply a pre-established plan successfully, incorporating the important steps, details, materials, and other components inherent in the plan.
- **Pacing:** Ability to adjust and control the rate at which one approaches, engages, and performs a task.

Successful step wisdom, strategic thinking, organization, time management, plan implementation and execution, and pacing result in:

- reduced anxiety
- increased overall success
- increased willingness to take on more complex plans and goals
- increased optimism about one’s capabilities and future possibilities
- increased self-esteem related to accomplishments
- increased value and depth of learning from direct experiences and outcomes
- increased independence
- increased motivation
- increased knowledge about strengths, weaknesses, and preferences
- improved job and school performance
- improved ability to engage in projects, individual and group

An individual lacking skills in step wisdom, strategic thinking, organization, time management, plan implementation and execution, and pacing will likely experience:

- repeated
- failures
- low self-esteem
- dependency on others
- low motivation
- increased anxiety, frustration, or overwhelming feeling
- avoidance of projects, tasks, and activities because they seem insurmountable or “too hard”
- skewed sense of one’s capability due to chronic failure - feeling stupid and incapable of accomplishing things, over-generalizing failures because you do not see them as related to executive functioning (*Example: student makes a cake that tastes awful or caves in. Instead of realizing he forgot a key ingredient, he comes to the conclusion “I am bad at cooking.”*)
- struggles with job performance and school work

- reduced exposure to the satisfaction and learning experiences related to completion – pattern of quitting midway, leaving a trail of half-finished projects
- confused or jumbled thinking
- poor memory of the experience
- difficulty summarizing the experience
- difficulty drawing meaning from the experience

### AFTER Skills

1. **Causal relationships:** The ability to recognize and understand the relational aspects of an experience in terms of cause and effect. As a result of X, Y happened.
2. **Evaluative thinking:** The ability to evaluate all aspects of an experience, form opinions and perspectives based on those observations, and then draw conclusions. Operates on a small detail to big picture level. Includes an ability to remove oneself from a situation to get perspective needed to self-evaluate, to apply parts-to-whole thinking, ability to delineate and separate out parts to examine them singularly, compare and contrast, source from past experiences, good episodic and detailed memory recall.
3. **Reinforceability:** The ability to draw information and meaning from past mistakes and use that insight to change one's behavior moving forward to avoid the same mistake occurring.

Successful causal relationships, evaluative thinking, and reinforceability lead to:

- increased overall success at task completion
- increased ability to receive feedback and incorporate it into future actions
- strengthened self-esteem and confidence
- strengthened higher order thinking skills
- strengthened big picture analysis skills
- increased self-awareness

Individuals lacking skills in causal relationships, evaluative thinking, and reinforceability will likely experience:

- chronic feelings of failure
- low insight (self, experiences)
- reduced meaning gained through experience
- pattern of making the same mistakes repeatedly
- increased frustration, anxiety, and overwhelming feelings
- sense of loss of control or personal responsibility over events, situations, feelings, and results; an increased sense that one's successes and failures are a result of the actions of others or due to "uncontrollable circumstances"
- inability to make valuable connections leading to insight.

An important part of strengthening **evaluative thinking** (both detail and big picture) is supporting individuals to reassess other areas of executive functioning to see how well they performed:

- Did I **preview** all of the important factors? How did this affect my experience? How did this affect my success?
- Did I **plan** well? What aspects of the experience did I feel prepared for? What aspects of the experience did I feel unprepared for? Did my planning help guide me to a successful experience or outcome? What would I like to do better when planning the next time?
- Was I able to **self-monitor**? If so, was it helpful in changing what I was doing during the experience to improve the experience? Was I distracted from being able to observe how I was doing in real time? If so, what got in my way (examples: emotions, thoughts, forgot, overwhelmed, sensory, etc.)? Could I have improved the experience or my performance if I had been more observant of myself?
- Did I apply **step wisdom** and approach the task, experience, or activity in an order/sequence that was successful? Did I miss important steps or do things in an order that did not work well? How did those missed or out-of-order steps affect the end result?
- Did I use **strategic thinking** in how I approached the task? Were there times I had to adjust my plan? How did that go? Looking back, were there strategies I should have used/want to use next time? How would that improve things?
- , or interfere with my focus? What would I do differently or the same next time to be more organized?
- How accurately did I predict ahead of **time** how long this experience would last? Did I allow enough time in my planning? Did I feel rushed or pressured for time? How did that affect my experience? Knowing what I know now, how much time should I set aside if I do this activity again?
- How well did my plan go? Did I forget, skip, cut out, or change anything? How well did I manage myself and my materials? What would I do the same because it worked well and what would I do differently the next time? (**plan implementation and execution**)
- Did I move at the right **pace** to complete the task or have a full experience? Was I rushing? Was I dragging? Looking back, should I speed up or slow down next time and if so, during what parts? How **organized** was I with my materials? How did that affect my experience? How organized was my thinking? Did I get disorganized or confused? Was I clear headed? How did my thought organization affect the experience? Did my emotions derail me, throw me off my plan

## 6.04 Executive Function Strategies and Accommodations

Here are some examples of how to support executive function activities:

### Context: One-on-One

When working on executive function support in a one-on-one context, the teacher has the luxury of tailoring the support, strategies, and accommodations to the individual. Refer to the SIP if additional data is needed on the individual's executive functioning strengths, weaknesses, and goals. This should be a highly individualized process.

#### **Example: Exploring Sleep Difficulty**

Chris does not understand why he is so tired all the time. He will need executive function and higher order thinking support to:

- Understand what impacts sleep (nutrition, exercise, medication, etc.)
- Generate a list of the things that might be impacting his sleep (examples: drinking a lot of soda, staying up late playing video games, lack of exercise, bad mattress, anxiety, etc.)
- Discuss each and narrow down the most likely contributors

### Context: In-Program Group Discussions and Activities

One of the greatest challenges in designing group executive function support is accommodating to the wide variation in executive function strengths and weaknesses among the participants. The most efficient way to approach group executive function design is to identify the executive function weaknesses in the most challenged individual and use his needs as a starting point.

Since all young adults need executive function support, the entire group can benefit from exposure to the strategies available, which opens up an opportunity for them to pick and choose (with support) those that suit their needs and bypass those that do not.

In addition, the group leader should also identify individuals with specific executive functioning strengths and use them to either mentor and support their peers or to help balance out the weaknesses of others.

In a discussion-based group, executive function support will largely be in the verbal realm with some non-verbal cueing as needed. In activity-based groups there may be an even more clearly defined division of labor according to strengths and weaknesses and a larger variety of strategies and accommodations so each participant is able to contribute as successfully as possible.

## Example: Group Field Day Planning

### Session 1:

- Setting the climate and expectations by **previewing** the goal of the discussion: selecting the games and activities that will occur on Field Day.
- **Strategic thinking:** Ask group members for ideas on the best, most efficient way to decide. The leader also lets them know how much time they have to make the decision (**time management and organization**). Today they are responsible for getting the list of ideas generated. Next time they will discuss the list and see if they can shorten it. Third session they will vote. The leader will keep track of time so participants can relax and not clock watch.
- **Step wisdom:** The facilitator provides the structure and sequence for how to generate a brainstorming list – go around the room and everyone says an activity they want to do. Go around three times so each person gets a chance to give three ideas. If someone takes your idea or you run out of ideas you can say “pass”. The facilitator establishes the rule that nobody is to make comments about each other’s ideas, as the time to evaluate each idea will be next week. This rule cuts down on negative comments and also helps keep the group on task and on time. The facilitator assigns a group member with strong handwriting and spelling skills to write down the ideas on a white board.
- **Plan implementation and execution** – group brainstorming ensures difficulties that arise are negotiated and facilitated.
- The leader saves some time at the end of the session for reflection and feedback on how the activity went in terms of fairness, efficiency, success, variety, etc. (**evaluative thinking**).
- The leader closes the session by reminding the group that next time they will go through each idea and assess each one for cost, time, feasibility, etc. (**previewing**).

### Session 2:

- Setting the climate and expectations by **previewing** the goal of the discussion: to discuss and narrow down the list before voting.
- **Step wisdom:** The facilitator sets the process, expectations, and ground rules for the discussion so individuals feel their ideas and opinions are heard. The group is told there is not enough time to have long discussions on each so the facilitator will lead the discussion and stop anyone if needed to ensure all participants are heard (**strategic thinking, time management**). An individual who has strong handwriting, spelling, and visual spatial skills will stand at the white board writing down each idea that the group decides should be on the ballot.
- **Plan implementation and execution** discussion ensues. If students violate the rules and guidelines established, the group will stop to address it. Safety will be re-established, consequences stated, and the group will re-negotiate needs and problem solve how best to continue with the discussion.
-

- The leader reserves time at the end of the session for reflection and feedback on how the activity went in terms of fairness, efficiency, and success in reducing the list, etc. (**evaluative thinking**).
- The leader closes the session up by reminding the group that next time they will be voting (**previewing**).

### Session 3:

- Setting the climate and the expectations by **previewing** the goal of the discussion: to vote on the pre-agreed list.
- **Step wisdom:** The facilitator shows them a sample ballot and walks group through how it works. Facilitator explains the voting process.
- **Plan implementation and execution** – voting ensues. If rules are violated or individuals try to unduly influence others' votes the group will stop to address and problem solve. The facilitator is available to anyone needing help, reminders, or clarification.
- The leader saves time at the end of the session for reflection and feedback on how the voting experience was in terms of difficulty choosing, fairness, efficiency, etc. (**evaluative thinking**).
- The leader closes the session by reminding the group that next time they will learn which top 10 activities will go to the program director for feedback (**previewing**).

The process continues all the way through the final decision, planning the field day, and then conducting it. Again, individual variations should be folded into the planning to make sure significant executive function weaknesses are supported adequately and students with executive functioning strengths can be assigned a group task or a mentorship role.

### 6.05 Guidelines for Teaching ADEF Content

The depth and detail within each section will depend on the individual's level of comprehension, language, regulation, engagement and reciprocity, and cognitive functioning.

Instructors should anticipate that students have wide variations in their degree of knowledge within each section of the module. Therefore, before layering on new content in each category, time first needs to be spent allowing the individual to share what he knows and understands. This will enable teachers to get a sense of appropriate language level and complexity needed to individualize the learning process, seek out misperceptions, and identify curiosities to capitalize on what should be incorporated into the work.

A **concept or mind map** is a diagram created to help visualize ideas, concepts or words associated with some topic. See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mind\\_map\\_for\\_examples](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mind_map_for_examples).

Visual, experiential, and hands-on teaching aids such as charts, concept maps, coloring books, 3D models, small experiments, movement games, interactive media, field trips, etc. are highly recommended to provide information and provide a concrete cognitive framework.



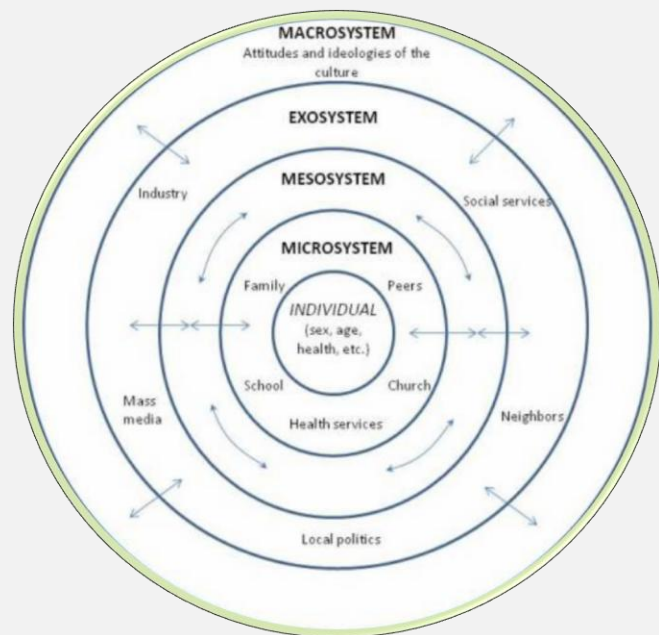
## 6.06 The Self-Awareness Building Process

The Transition Curriculum approaches self-awareness building by starting with the self and proceeds outward to others, the local and global community.

**Ecological systems theory**, as it is called in developmental psychology, provides a useful understanding of this pattern of influences. Ecological systems theory holds that human development can be better understood by viewing the various layers of human context and experiences as a set of concentric (nested) circles. These layers start at the center with those factors most obviously influential upon the individual such as age, sex, health, etc., and work outward to encompass influences from:

- The “microsystem”, which is his immediate external environment and includes his family, school, peers, etc.
- The “mesosystem”, which is defined as the relationships amongst the various elements of the microsystem such as between his family members and his teachers, his teachers and his peers, etc.
- The “exosystem”, which includes more remote social structures and influences which affect his life but indirectly, such as his father’s employer making changes which causes the family to have to relocate, etc.
- The “macrosystem”, which includes all the complex cultural influences, such as ethnic beliefs, social heritage and values, etc.

**The individual is usually more aware of elements closer to the center of the diagram. For this reason, it is usually best to begin the process of building self-awareness at the center of the diagram and work outward.**



Source: [http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/en/a/af/Bronfenbrenner%27s\\_Ecological\\_Theory\\_of\\_Development.jpg](http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/en/a/af/Bronfenbrenner%27s_Ecological_Theory_of_Development.jpg)

Every aspect of the curriculum is designed so all content can be individualized to meet specific cognitive, social, emotional, sensory, and physical needs of each individual.

The rate, volume, and complexity of the approach are adjusted accordingly throughout the work to suit the individual's processing capability and readiness.

The process incorporates a variety of approaches such as reflection, supported experiences, discussion, visualization, creative expression, humor, role playing, and more – to keep the process dynamic and ensure a wide range of learners can benefit and draw meaning from it.

By starting with the self, we aim to awaken awareness, enthusiasm, connection, curiosity, and a passion to learn. These qualities are then used to fuel the self-exploration process and establish engagement, reciprocity, and shared language.

As the capacity to understand “the self” strengthens, we expand the scope of exploration to incorporate others – peers, family, support personnel, and members of the community. An examination of the self in relation to an “other” invites opportunities to build social cognition, awareness, and skills. Social problem-solving skills, humor regulation, expression, and friendship can then be catalyzed, strengthened, and expanded.

Once the individual demonstrates an ability to expand and see himself in relation to others, we then explore relationships to his surroundings. The curriculum begins with immediate and familiar surroundings and works its way to familiar surroundings that elicit discomfort or dysregulation.

The incorporation of problem solving, brainstorming and identification of coping strategies supports the individual in strengthening self-care, self-advocacy, and coping skills in surroundings he finds challenging. The emphasis at this time on anticipation of needs and previewing what to expect helps reduce the frequency of dysregulation due to the unexpected when out and about and increases preparedness across a wider range of environments.

As the individual's foundation of self-awareness, awareness of others, and awareness of environments becomes increasingly more solid we begin to branch out into the individual's awareness of his community at large. This step generates increased opportunities for community experiences, *internships*, and practice with social and independence skills.

For those who are able, the curriculum offers the option to reach further to raise curiosity and interest in exploring one's country and the world to the extent it is meaningful.

### 6.07 The Parts of Self

The process of self-discovery is a complex one for all individuals, but for those on the autism spectrum or with other developmental disabilities it poses additional challenges. Individuals with ASD traditionally lack the skills necessary for successful self-awareness to take place: low self-reflection; difficulty articulating one's experience; inconsistent and distorted experience of others and one's surroundings; weak parts-to-whole thinking; impaired ability to evaluate self and others; and inconsistent engagement. These difficulties limit the ability to connect ideas consistently to create larger concepts and build upon prior knowledge as do interference from dysregulation and increased sensitivity, weak abstract thinking, and more.

In addition, many of these individuals also struggle with learning disabilities, processing difficulties, emotional diagnosis, behavioral problems, and other issues that profoundly impact comprehension, sustained learning, relationship building and engagement.

**Great care** should be taken to determine the best way to introduce the ADEF process and set expectations. The goal is to set the climate for the endeavor in a manner that will enable the individual to conceptually understand the process, elicit curiosity and interest, and keep anxiety at a manageable level. The SIP will provide valuable information to guide staff in setting the climate for the ADEF and modulating the rate, volume, complexity, and prioritization of the ADEF content. Care should be taken to use language, analogies, and metaphors that are understandable and have meaning in the individual's life.

The first part of the ADEF breaks down into three sections, which enables the teacher to present the information in a categorized and clear manner that starts with the most concrete (physical), moves into more abstraction but is tied to physical sensations (emotions), and then concludes with the most meta-cognitive and abstract part of the self (cognition).

The second part of the ADEF is designed to help individuals begin to make connections amongst the various parts of self, a cognitive leap they are unlikely to do independently. This section may require a slowing down of pace and a lot of visuals to develop the concepts. This part is also more flexible in terms of sequencing. (For example, if the individual shows an affinity or strength in a particular domain it may be wise to change the order of the outline to begin with his strength. If the student has relatively good emotional intelligence, exploring how the emotions affect the mind and the senses is a good place to start).

The third part of the ADEF provides the individual with a bridge from self- knowledge/awareness to others and the environment. To support this difficult abstract concept, the information is sequenced in concentric circles, starting with Me and You, then moving out to Me and My Environment.

At this juncture the individual is supported in moving into the more difficult exercise of projecting into less familiar territory – Me and My Community, and then to the most open-ended aspect of his experience,

Me and the World. Depending on the individual's capability, fund of knowledge and experience base, it might prove quite challenging to move from Me and My Environment to Me and My Community and/or Me and the World. The latter two introduce higher order thinking skills such as visualizing, projecting, guessing, hypothesizing, and other abstract thinking capabilities.

If a student reaches Me and My Community and is unable to benefit meaningfully from the content, it is wise to stop the process, add some community experiences, and then return to that section of the ADEF once he has concrete experiences from which to draw.

Conversely, individuals who struggle with establishing and maintaining relationships might excel with Me and My World but hit a wall with Me and You and possibly Me and My Community. In this case it is recommended that the individual engage in a series of peer-based activities followed by reflection and explicit feedback sessions. Once awareness, language, and experiences surrounding relating to peers have accumulated, the student may be far more equipped to navigate the Me and You section.

In summary, the tools a practitioner will value most in working through the ADEF module with an individual on the autism spectrum or with other developmental disabilities are:

- SIP and other background information
- Wide-range of experiential-based activities available
- Willingness to self-disclose when helpful to the learner
- Use of analogies, metaphors, visuals, and other learning enhancers
- Creativity
- Flexibility
- Sense of humor
- Patience
- Enthusiasm
- Empathy and compassion

### 6.07.1 The Physical Body

#### The Brain – Mind-Mapping Important Regions of the Brain

The brain section is meant to provide a context for each individual to begin reflecting on himself as a thinker and a learner. It is not intended to become overly involved in great scientific detail. Many of the functions introduced here will resurface later in the ADEF and be further explored in other Transition Curriculum modules.

Activities will need to be included for each sub-section below to develop awareness of how the student thinks, how things go wrong, and how to improve or solve the difficulties. Activities may include: brain games and exercises; art, coloring books, models; videos, media clips, guest speakers, field trips.

- Right brain vs. left brain
- Information processing – how information comes in and is received:
  - regulatory functions
  - emotional regions and responses
  - sensory regions and responses
  - visual-spatial regions and processes
  - temporal-sequential regions and processes
  - language: verbal and non-verbal regions and responses
  - movement regions and responses, including reflexes
  - executive functioning regions
- Memory: different kinds of memory, stored in several places
- Things that affect brain functioning
  - nutrition
  - sleep
  - stress
  - medication
  - learning disabilities
- How MY brain works – tailored to individual
  - General brain-based activities such as testing reflexes, right/left brain games, memory games, etc. (there are more activities later in the curriculum when the information becomes more individualized and detailed)
  - Beginning to identify strengths and weaknesses and how they may be related to brain functioning
  - Additional personal factors – address these if the student has brain functioning issues such as seizures, learning disabilities, medication side effects, or other issues that can be linked with the brain for deeper understanding

- Making connections between my brain and my habits:
  - ✓ my nutrition
  - ✓ my sleep
  - ✓ my exercise
  - ✓ my stress
  - ✓ my medication
  - ✓ my learning issues
- Personal goals: Are there things I would like to do to improve my brain functioning (examine habits above)

### Gastrointestinal (GI)

The gastrointestinal section is designed as a broad overview to provide context for individuals to understand how their own gastrointestinal systems affect their regulation and quality of life, and is not intended to become caught up in great scientific detail. Activities can include taste testing, mindful eating practice, food journals, etc.

- Basic explanation of how the gastrointestinal system works
  - chewing, swallowing, and esophagus
  - digestion and intestines
  - elimination
- Things that affect gastro functioning
  - stress
  - nutrition (healthy, unhealthy foods)
  - eating habits (slow down, chewing well, not eating too much, etc.)
  - exercise
  - medication
  - medical disorders (irritable bowel syndrome, ulcer, dysphasia, etc.)
- How MY gastrointestinal system works
  - Address if individual has chewing and swallowing issues, personal GI problems (typically associated with individuals on the autism spectrum) or a GI disorder diagnosis.
  - Link to sensory issues with food textures and how can affect diet
  - Do my habits and behaviors support my gastro system?
    - ✓ Is my diet healthy for me?
    - ✓ Are there things that make my gut feel bad after I eat them
    - ✓ Are my eating habits healthy for me? (Rush, eat late, etc.)

### Other Personal Medical Conditions

This section is meant to provide context and meaning to other individual medical issues and conditions affecting their lives without becoming burdened by excessive detail or statistics. Care should be taken to acknowledge the anxiety that accompanies having a medical condition.

Activities can include: internet research, guest speakers, field trips, and talk with others with condition.

- List and define chronic medical conditions and diagnosis not addressed in brain and gastro sections

For each condition, explore:

- How did I get it/develop it?
- How common is it?
- prognosis (difference between a condition and a chronic illness)
- How do I manage it? (doctors, medication, lifestyle)
- questions, fears, and emotions
- restrictions and limitations
- How do others who have it manage and cope?

### Muscles

The muscles section is meant to provide a context for individuals to understand how they move, coordinate, and balance their bodies. Keep this purpose in mind; do not allow this section to become burdened with excessive details. Activities can include movement and experiential-based games and experiments; models, charts, visuals, art, coloring books, media, guest speakers, field trips.

- Basic understanding of how muscles work. Introduce the following concepts:
  - rigidity/flexibility
  - stamina
  - strength
  - reflexes
- How MY muscle system works – tailored to individual
  - my level of rigidity/flexibility
  - my stamina
  - my strength
  - my reflexes

### Sympathetic/Parasympathetic Systems

The parasympathetic/sympathetic nervous systems are the two main divisions of the nervous system responsible for the automatic (unconscious) regulation of the internal glands and organs. This section is meant to provide a context for individuals to understand how they react to stimuli and how this process affects their regulation. Keep this purpose in mind; do not allow this section to become burdened with excessive details. Activities can include games and exercises, videos, media clips, guest speakers, practice relaxation techniques, and evaluate and compare.

Metaphors, analogies and scenarios are highly effective teaching tools for grounding this information and provide a concrete cognitive framework

- How it works – fight, flight, freeze, or submit (examples from nature)
- How MY sympathetic/parasympathetic systems works
  - which do I do (fight or flight, etc.) and under what types of stressors
  - tie in stress response and relaxation - ways to relax

### Immune System

The immune system section is meant to provide a context for individuals to generally understand how immunity works, how it affects their personal health and their frequency of illness. It is not intended to get heavily detailed or scientific.

Metaphor, analogies, and visual aids are highly recommended teaching tools to ground the information and provide a concrete cognitive framework, as the concept of immunity is abstract. Activities can include 3D models, charts, science experiments on bacteria, videos, media clips, guest speakers, and field trips.

- How it works – basic
- Things that interfere with the immune system:
  - genetics
  - allergies
  - immune disorders (PANDAS/PANS, Lyme disease, and other chronic inflammatory diseases, etc.)
- Ways to support the immune system:
  - sleep
  - nutrition
  - hygiene/hand washing
  - exercise
- How MY immune system works
  - How often am I sick?
  - Things I do to stay healthy



## Sleep

The sleep section is meant to provide a context for individuals to understand their sleep patterns and how they affect overall energy levels, thinking, emotions, and health. It is not intended to be detailed or scientific.

Activities can include a sleep log, dream discussions, and experimenting new sleep habits (naps, different bed times/nighttime routines).

- Stages of sleep
- How adequate sleep affects overall health
  - mood
  - stamina
  - cognition
  - creativity
  - regulation
  - reactivity
  - other
- Ways to improve sleep
- My sleep patterns
  - quality: ability to fall asleep, stay asleep
  - habits and preferences (dark room, body pillow, soft sheets, etc.)
  - dreaming
  - energy level
  - sleep issues and disorders (sleepwalking, restless leg, etc.)

## Physical Senses

The senses section is meant to provide a context for individuals to understand how they react to sensory input, identify sensory sensitivities and soothing experiences and raise environmental awareness.

There is a significant amount of focus on sensory sensitivity and sensory integration woven throughout the Transition Curriculum. This section is intended to create a context and knowledge base for further discussions, reflection, and activities aimed at raising awareness, building coping skills, and overall management of one's sensory experiences and reactions.

Experiential teaching aids that provide firsthand sensory experiences are highly recommended to ground the information and provide a concrete cognitive framework.

Activities can include experiential games and exercises (smell test, taste test, tactile test, etc.), models, videos, media clips, guest speakers, and field trips.

**Concept mapping** (also called mind mapping) is a means of visually representing information using words and pictures related by lines drawn amongst them in a similar way to how sentences are diagramed in English grammar textbooks. See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Concept\\_mapping](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Concept_mapping)

- Identify and establish an understanding of the senses
  - auditory
  - visual
  - tactile
  - olfactory
  - smell
  - proprioceptive
  - vestibular
- *Concept mapping* where senses are located in the brain (charts of the brain regions and what they do)
- Normalize how sensory experiences can be different for individuals with ASD or other developmental disabilities (sensitivities, etc.)

- How MY sensory system works
  - auditory
  - visual
  - tactile
  - olfactory
  - proprioceptive
  - vestibular
  - create sensory list of sensitivities, preferences, dislikes, and strong aversions
  - coping mechanisms
    - ✓ when sensory system is overloaded
    - ✓ when under-stimulated or bored
    - ✓ when seeking soothing

**See section 6.14 Activity 1:**  
Experimenting with the  
Senses: Smell

### Basic Anatomy

The basic anatomy section is meant to provide a big picture context for students to understand their bodies. Since quite a bit of anatomy will have been covered at this point in the process, the goal is to fill in the gaps so there is a cohesive sense of the physical body. Avoid getting into great detail; keep it as simple as possible.

Information is best shared through art, models, visuals, and experience as well as explanations.

Activities can include coloring books, videos, media clips, guest speakers, and field trips.

- Bones and skeletal system
- Circulatory system
- Any other parts still needing to be covered
- Address questions

### Sexual Development and Hormones

This sexuality section is meant to provide a big picture context for students to understand that sexuality is an integral aspect of the self. It is an introduction to a personal concept that will be examined in more depth later in the program when the student shows developmental readiness.

Because of its importance to overall independence and adult self-awareness, Sexuality is a stand-alone module in the Transition Curriculum. Teaching approaches, scope and sequence, guidelines, and content will be detailed in greater specificity in the Sexuality module.

Sexuality is a highly personal topic – the timing, depth, and approach should be aligned with the individual's developmental, social-emotional, and maturation levels.

Activities are highly individualized to the individual's language, higher-order thinking capabilities, social-emotional development, and maturation levels. May include coloring books, models, and videos.

Depending on readiness possible topics include:

- Anatomy
- Puberty and sexual development
- Masturbation
- Gender differences
- Sex hormones
- Pregnancy
- STDs

Depending on readiness, the My Sexuality section might include

- Answering questions
- Debunking myths
- Dispelling anxiety
- Normalizing feelings and behavior

### 6.07.2 The Emotions

This section on emotions, feelings, and emotional experiences is meant to introduce and establish a context for students to understand the role emotions play in their life. It provides an opportunity at the beginning of the individual's program experience to establish a repertoire of emotional language the individual will then be able to use in a wide variety of program contexts relating to his emotional work.

This module is intended to raise awareness, strengthen understanding, and elicit curiosity about one's emotions. It is designed to be approached with a sense of curiosity and to be seen as an opportunity for exploration (rather than an opportunity to process difficult emotions or become a counseling session).

#### Emotions and the Body

- Emotions and the brain

Review content covered earlier in the brain section and expand to greater detail as needed to get it well understood. Helpful activities might include: coloring books, models, visuals, and media clips.

- emotional regions of the brain and their function
  - ✓ amygdala and mood, aggression, fight/flight
  - ✓ hippocampus and emotional memories
  - ✓ hypothalamus and reward center, pleasure, rage
  - ✓ activities: coloring books, models, visuals, media clips

- Biochemistry and how medication helps

- stress hormones - cortisol and *emotional hijacking* when anxious or panicked
- serotonin and feeling good
- norepinephrine and fight/flight, heart rate, blood pressure
- medications for mood stability
- my mood medication (if applies)
  - ✓ what I take
  - ✓ why I take it
  - ✓ how does it help?

- Hormones

- adolescent/young adult patterns
- how hormones affect moods

- Physical toll of emotions

- stress, intense and difficult emotions
  - ✓ muscular tension
  - ✓ gastrointestinal upset, ulcers, etc.
  - ✓ headaches

#### Emotional hijacking

is a condition where one's emotional reaction to some stimulus overwhelms cognitive abilities and self-control.

- ✓ sweating
- ✓ heart rate increases
- ✓ blood pressure raises
- ✓ dysregulation
- ✓ other stress-related physical effects
- ✓ activities: experiential games, reflection/recalling emotional experiences, and identifying body reactions, journaling
- The physical toll stress has on MY body
  - generate personal list
  - identify experiences, environments, sensations, and situations that cause my body to feel physically stressed
  - resiliency
    - ✓ How long does it take me to bounce back and feel better when I feel this kind of stress?
    - ✓ When I am feeling physical stress from my emotions, are there things that help me feel better?
    - ✓ activities: experiential games, reflection/recalling emotional experiences, and identifying body reactions, journaling
- The physical benefit positive emotions have on the body
  - muscle relaxation
  - increased brain functioning (attention, memory, etc.)
  - increased physical health, less illness
  - increased physical energy
  - stay regulated
  - strengthened immune system
- The physical benefits I experience from positive feelings
  - generate personal list
  - identify experiences, sensations, environments, and situations that make my body feel good
  - activities: experiential games, reflection/recalling emotional experiences, and identifying body reactions, journaling
- Drawing conclusions and making goals
  - What do I feel more often in my body, negative or positive effects of my emotions?
  - Do I feel too much emotional stress in my body? What can I do to feel less physically stressed?
  - Do I want to experience more positive emotions in my body? What can I do to help myself feel better physically?

## Feelings

Activities for this section may include discussions, watching media clips (YouTube, movie scenes), acting, role playing, improvisation, creative writing, art, looking at pictures of faces with emotion, watching soap opera with sound muted and track emotions of characters.

- Difference between emotions and feelings
- Using language to describe feelings
  - Generate general list of feeling words
  - What words do I use to describe my feelings? (personal list)
    - ✓ Do people understand when I use these words?
    - ✓ Do I need new feeling words to better express myself?
- Linking feelings to sensations
  - match sensations to personal feeling word list
- Linking feelings to activities
  - match activities to personal feeling word list
- Linking feelings to people
  - match people to personal feelings list
- Linking feelings to environments
  - match known environments to personal feelings list

## How Facial and Body Expressions Display Feelings

- Generate list of facial and body expressions and their associated feeling words
- What facial expressions and body language do I use to express my feelings? (refer to personal feelings list above)
  - Do these non-verbal displays communicate my feelings well to others?
  - Do I want some new/other non-verbal ways to express my feelings?

## Internal Sensations Associated with Feelings

- Generate general list and match with associated feeling words (examples: giddy, dizzy, itchy, etc.)
- What internal sensations do I have when I have feelings? (refer to personal feelings list above)
  - Which sensations are pleasurable?
  - Which sensations do not feel good?
  - How do my feelings affect my regulation

- Behaviors and physical reactions that express or represent a feeling
  - Generate list of behaviors people do associate with feeling words (*Example: what do people do when they are angry*)
  - Behaviors I do and the feelings associated with them (refer to personal feeling list above)
    - ✓ Do my feeling-driven behaviors accurately communicate what I am feeling?
    - ✓ How do people respond to me when I act out my feelings?
    - ✓ Do I want new/other ways to show people my feelings with my behavior?
    - ✓ How do my feeling-driven behaviors affect me?
    - ✓ How do my feeling-driven behaviors affect others?

### My Emotional Profile – What Have I Learned?

This section allows the teacher to help students review and summarize what they have learned about themselves and their emotions through all the previous discussions and activities. The goal is expanding and raising awareness, applying meaning, and drawing conclusions.

To reduce feeling overwhelmed and assist with seeing connections and parts-to-whole thinking, use visual aids such as a concept map, chart, color coding on a white board, or large poster board.

- **My feelings**

What are the major feelings affecting me and my life? What are the ways in which they manifest? Source from information gathered above as well as generate new ideas as the profile is built.

Activities may include discussion, media clips, role playing, storyboarding, creative and journal writing, improvisation, emotionally-based games, mirror exercises, watch video clips of self-expressing emotions and discuss.

  - **My internal emotional experiences (what I feel inside)**
    - ✓ positive
    - ✓ difficult
    - ✓ patterns and trends
    - ✓ changes I would like to make in how I handle my feelings on the inside
  - **My external emotional experience (what I show)**
    - ✓ positive
    - ✓ difficult
    - ✓ patterns and trends
    - ✓ how others react to my feelings (raising awareness to perspective taking and effect on others)
    - ✓ changes I would like to make to how I show my feelings to others



- **My emotional reactivity**
  - Defining emotional reactivity, connecting to other information covered in the ADEF related to reactivity such as the brain
  - How I emotionally react to my internal experiences?
    - ✓ thoughts
    - ✓ physical sensations
    - ✓ fears and anxieties
    - ✓ other
  - How I emotionally react to my environment?
    - ✓ sensory stimuli
    - ✓ environmental stressors
    - ✓ the unexpected
  - How do I emotionally react to other people?
    - ✓ in general
    - ✓ when they make demands on me (being rushed, asked to do things)
    - ✓ when I have limits put on me (told no, restrictions)
    - ✓ when they touch me
    - ✓ when I want to be their friend
    - ✓ when I need my space/to be left alone
  - Making meaning and drawing conclusions about my emotional triggers and patterns
    - ✓ summarize list of triggers based on discussion above
    - ✓ how I react to each of my triggers – intensity, duration, reactivity/sensitivity, predictability, coping mechanisms currently used (if any)
    - ✓ identifying patterns of emotional reactivity
    - ✓ big-picture thinking - What effect does my emotional reactivity have on my life, my choices, and my relationships?
  - Developing strategies - What coping mechanisms could be refined or established to help me feel more in control of my emotional reactions?
    - ✓ self-driven (what I can do for myself)
    - ✓ other driven (what others can do to support or calm me)
    - ✓ object driven (soothing and calming objects)
    - ✓ activity driven (soothing and calming activities)

- **Emotions and my behavior**

Activities for this section can include: experiential games, reflection/recalling emotional experiences and identifying behavioral reactions, explicit tying of emotions and common behavioral reactions associated with it, improvisation, mime, charades, and media clips.

- What do I typically do in response to my feelings?
- What reactions do my emotional-based behaviors have on others?
- Identify patterns and trends in behavior
- Self-evaluation
  - ✓ Do the ways I act in response to my feelings work for me/get my needs met?
  - ✓ How do my emotional behaviors affect my relationships with people?
  - ✓ Am I okay with the ways I express my emotions through my behavior?
  - ✓ What changes do I want to make?

- **Emotions and my thinking**

- When I have a strong emotion, what thoughts does it bring up?
  - ✓ generate personal list
  - ✓ What effect do these thoughts have on me?
- Drawing big picture conclusions about my thought patterns, and my world view  
Now that I understand a lot more about how my emotions, thoughts, and behaviors are connected...
  - ✓ How does my emotional thinking affect how I view myself?
  - ✓ How does my emotional thinking affect how I view others?
  - ✓ How does my emotional thinking affect my ability to solve problems and make decisions?
  - ✓ How does my emotional thinking affect my ability to connect to other people?
  - ✓ How does my emotional thinking affect my opinions and beliefs?
  - ✓ How does my emotional thinking affect my view of the world?

- **Emotional resiliency**

- Establish concept and link to their individual levels of emotional reactivity. Define with examples, role play, and metaphors
- How resilient am I emotionally?
  - ✓ Generate concrete examples and experiences from the individual's life and evaluate intensity, duration, and effect
  - ✓ What helps me bounce back? (*Examples: soothing/calming objects; things people say; things people do; things I do, think, or feel that make it better*)
  - ✓ What makes it hard for me to bounce back? (*Examples: things that keep me agitated; things people say that make it worse; things people do that make it worse; things I do, think, or feel that make it worse*)
  - ✓ What effect does my emotional resiliency have on me? (*Examples: my social life/relationships, my choices, the quality of my experiences*)

- ✓ What can I do to increase my emotional resiliency? *(Examples: things I can do, think, feel to take better care of me; things people can do or say to help)*
  
- **Emotional goal setting**  
Given what I now understand about myself, my emotional makeup, how I experience and express feelings, how others experience me when I am emotional, and the effect emotions have on my life – what personal goals do I want to make? *(Examples: seek to reduce reactivity, seek to expand resiliency, react to my emotions/behave differently, experience more joy, etc.)*

### 6.07.3 The Mind

#### Elements of the Mental Structure

##### Mindset

Mindset is broadly defined as a set of attitudes or beliefs about the self, others, and the world that dictates the perspective one uses to interpret information and draw conclusions about one's experiences. It is a relatively new concept in the research world and we are only just beginning to understand the vital role it plays in shaping perception, self-concept, self-esteem, behavior, and motivation.

The preponderance of definitions, material, and research currently available about mindset tend to focus on the idea of a "fixed" mindset, which locks individuals into a limited way of interpreting and perceiving themselves, others, and the world around them. Carol Dweck, Stanford University professor and leading researcher on mindset, qualifies the term by illustrating that individuals have either a "fixed" mindset ("I was born with whatever skills I have, things are the way they are and I cannot change them") or a "growth" mindset ("with effort and time I can develop skills"; "I have the capacity to learn, change, and grow") when it comes to their own intelligence and achievements. Her research shows that individuals with "fixed" mindsets tend to get stuck in their thinking and beliefs, and thus their mindset is a limiting factor in their ability to succeed. Individuals with a "growth" mindset tend to be more resilient to failure and difficulty and have increased motivation. (Dweck, 2010)

We believe many individuals with ASD or other developmental disabilities tend to be either unfamiliar with the concept of having a mindset or are entrenched firmly in fixed or negative mindsets. Often this is due to long histories of accumulated failures and struggles and tendencies to be reactionary when drawing conclusions (as opposed to reflecting and weighing multiple possible perspectives one could take). Exploring mindset provides enormous opportunity to investigate distortions and negative belief systems and replace them with more flexible, compassionate, resilient, and productive thinking.

Due to the abstract nature of this material, it is important to evaluate the individual's cognitive ability to engage in a meaningful discussion. The content will need to be accompanied by visuals, charts, and metaphors to establish an understanding of the process, may need to be simplified in language and complexity, or presentation of the concept delayed until the individual is cognitively ready for it to be meaningful.

A general procedure for exploring mindset and building the capacity to have growth mindsets that will increase optimism, self-esteem, motivation, and resiliency is as follows:

1. Define mindset (as given above).
2. To help establish the concept of mindset, it is suggested that the individual get practice and experience identifying mindsets in others such as familiar and favorite characters (cartoon, TV shows, super hero, movies, etc.) or a movie star or historical figure he knows well. By observing video clips, individuals can be supported in identifying the characters' mindset: identifying and

listing their actions and what they say, and then making guesses about how the characters might view themselves, others, and the world. By using high affinity and very familiar characters, students can more easily comprehend what mindset is and how to identify it. The characters can then be used as reference points of comparison to begin reflecting one's own mindset.

3. Generate a few examples of mindsets from the individual's life, both positive and negative.
  - Example: Mindset – I am not safe.
4. Identify the emotions that connect with that mindset.
  - Example: Feelings of anxiety and fear
5. Make connections between the mindset and emotions and the correlating reactions and behaviors.
  - Example: Behaviors such as withdrawal or heightened reactivity, obsessive thoughts, and phobias
6. Use the Ladder of Inference (Robinson & Lai, 2006) to introduce a broader framework for understanding mindset (graphically organized way of presenting how we draw data from our experiences to shape our thinking and reinforce our beliefs)
7. Selecting data (introduce idea of subjectivity)
  - Ground it well with experiential exercises aimed to highlight subjectivity and different levels of observation
  - Example of selecting data: noticing things in your surroundings that feel unsafe, over-focusing on things related to safety.
8. Drawing conclusions
  - Establish with concept mapping and other visuals that highlight the process of using data to draw conclusions
  - Example of drawing conclusions: "There is a lot of danger in the world."
9. Making assumptions
  - Define the difference between drawing a conclusion and using it to then make assumptions
  - Establish the ideas with concept mapping and other visuals that highlight the process
  - Example: making assumptions – because of all the danger out there, going out of the house is not safe
10. Creating biases
  - Define concept of bias, using examples
  - Make connection to how assumptions lead to biases and how bias affects perspective and decision making
  - Establish the ideas with concept mapping and other visuals that highlight the process

*Example of creating biases: "I am only safe if I stay at home, I only want to do things at home. Leads to rejecting opportunities, anxiety/panic attacks when think of or made to go out," etc.*

11. Reinforcing noble certainties

- Define noble certainties (fixed beliefs one has about the world that one will go to great lengths to defend as absolute truths) (Robinson & Lai, 2006)
- Establish the ideas with examples, concept mapping, and other visuals that highlight the process

*Example of reinforcing noble certainties: "Anytime I go out and something bad happens it reinforces my belief that the world is unsafe. I look for bad things to happen, even sometimes set myself up for bad things to happen and then I use them as proof I was right (I should have stayed at home, going out of the house is always hard and stressful). I start to notice good things less and less because I am only focusing on the bad."*

- Drawing big picture conclusions about my thought patterns, my mindset, and my world view  
"Now that I understand a lot more about how my emotions, thoughts, and behaviors are connected..."

12. Continue running mindset examples from the individual's life through this Ladder of Inference as needed until the student has a good working understanding of *mindset* and how beliefs get reinforced.

### Values, Ethics, Morals

The cognitive and developmental level of the individual will dictate the language, depth, and scope of exploration into value, ethics, and morals. For those struggling with cognition, categorization, and abstract thinking it is suggested that the information be reconfigured into more simplified categories such as what the individual believes is "the right thing to do" vs. "the wrong thing to do" in concrete scenarios that can be easily generalized (taking someone's cookie and stealing, etc.).

1. Establish the definition of ethics, values, and morals

- Use examples of ethically driven, morally clear fictional and non-fictional characters (historical figures, superheroes, etc.) with easily identifiable ethics to establish the ideas before asking the individual to reflect on himself.
- Use examples of clear and concrete scenarios to practice generating ethics/value/moral-based opinions and reactions (example: someone knocks over your ice cream, laughs, and walks away: it isn't right to ruin someone else's things, it is not good to be mean, if you ruin something belonging to someone else you must replace it)

- Watch an episode of a moral-based story, cartoon, or sitcom that has easily identifiable ethical dilemmas in play.
- If capable, introduce more moral ambiguity that challenges the person to think more abstractly (morally ambiguous fictional characters, movie or TV video clip)

## 2. My ethics

Helps identify his own ethical framework, whether based on the theories of others (see below) or one he created on his own.

- Ethics of behavior
- Ethics of friendships
- Ethics in families
- Ethics of right and wrong
- Other ethical sub categories that help the individual break down a broad concept into manageable chunks
- Explore how your mindset and ethics affect decision making, preferences, and lifestyle choices
- Explore how ethics, values, and morals change over time
- Use concrete examples from individual's life (example: "when I was a young child I believed \_\_\_\_\_ and now that I am a teenager I think \_\_\_\_\_")
- What aspects of my ethics, morals, and values have stayed the same and what has changed?
- Discuss some of the major ethical theories and frameworks

The discussion on ethical theories and frameworks might need to be modified, delayed, or omitted depending on the individual's ability to grasp and analyze abstract and philosophical concepts.

Each theory should be grounded with developmentally appropriate scenarios and examples, and then reflected upon in terms of whether the individual agrees or disagrees with the theory.

- stoicism (Epictetus)
- ethics of duty and respect (Kant)
- utilitarianism/ethics of Consequence (Mill)
- ethics of rights (Locke, Jefferson, Thoreau)
- religious-based ethics
- ethics of character (Aristotle)
- ethics of the family (what inherited from family system)

### 3. "Everyday" ethics

All individuals will benefit from everyday ethics discussions, even if they struggle with ethics on a more conceptual or philosophical level. Everyday ethics would include such topics as:

- Ethics of truth telling: telling the truth, lying and omission, white lies, etc.
- Observer ethics: when to speak up/get involved if you witness something you feel is "wrong", hear about something someone did or someone confides in you
- Ethics of friendship: loyalty, honesty, secret keeping, gossip, taking sides, loaning money, covering up
- Ethics of ownership: stealing, shoplifting, what do when you find money
- Ethics of personal responsibility: what is my responsibility in a given situation, who is depending on me, admitting you damaged something when there were no witnesses, etc.
- Ethics of money: someone else's money, found money, taking parent's credit card to use online (gaming, purchases)
- Ethics of social behavior: dating, at public events, parties; gift giving, re-gifting (taking a gift that has been received and giving it to somebody else), cheating on a test or in a contest, respecting other people's belongings, how we treat service people, etc.

### Mental and Intellectual Interests, Hobbies, and Affinities

- Things, ideas, and topics I love to think about and/or talk about
- Things, ideas, and topics I know a lot about
- Share what you know
- Discuss how the knowledge was accumulated
- Things, ideas, and topics that have become hobbies and activities
- Things, ideas, and topics I want to learn more about
- What can I do to find out more about things, ideas, and topics
  - internet research
  - reading
  - ask questions
  - going to places to learn more (zoo, aquarium, museum, library, etc.)
  - watching movies, television, etc.
- Seeking information and learning more - goal setting and brainstorming
  - identify things, ideas, and topics I want to know more about
  - ways my mental interests could be used for community activities and outings
  - ways my mental interests could be used for social interaction and connecting with others (affinity clubs, group discussions, topics of conversation, etc.)



## Playing with My Cognitive Skills

This section is designed to be an activity-based, experiential approach rather than lectures. Through experience the individual is exposed to the different ways people use cognition without getting heavily into details and scientific labels. The activities should be low stress, non-competitive, and not timed to reduce anxiety

- Concept formation
  - visualizing and verbalizing exercises to show how words are turned into pictures and parts to whole thinking (concept formation with language)
  - nonverbal concept formation exercises and games to use gestures, facial expressions and movement to represent ideas
  - process – understanding something by its process (how something works). Activities and experiences that elicit understanding through a process (science experiment, acting out/miming a process such as planting a garden or making a phone call)
  - parts-to-whole thinking – understanding something by examining and putting together its parts (puzzles, connect the dots, and other games and activities that emphasize parts to whole)
- Critical thinking/analysis
  - activities and experiences focusing on drawing conclusions, compare/contrast, and making evaluations (riddles, short mysteries, brain teasers, etc. all in alignment with the individual's language, cognitive and developmental levels)
- Creativity and brainstorming
  - activities and experiences that require the use of creativity and brainstorming (art, creating a story, brain teasers, what I would take with me to a desert island and other fantasy scenarios that call upon the individual to generate ideas and be creative)
- Concrete vs. abstract thinking

Through examples that are developmentally appropriate, generate a list of concrete and abstract concepts and how they are related

  - example #1 simplified: concrete words = ice cream, candy; associated abstract words: sweets, fattening food
  - example #2 more complex: concrete words: voting at the polls, politician standing at a podium to debate; associated abstract word = democracy

**See section 6.15 Activity 2:**  
Playing with My Cognitive Skills: Visualizing and Verbalizing

**See section 6.16 Activity 3:**  
Playing with Cognitive Skills: Creativity and Brainstorming

- Categorizing
  - games and activities aimed at different ways to categorize objects, ideas, feelings, etc.
- Interpretation, multiple possibilities and drawing conclusions
  - games, role play, scenarios, brain teasers and other activities which challenge the individual to examine a behavior, statement or situation; generate multiple possibilities for interpreting; and drawing conclusions based on the known evidence
  - characters from books, cartoons and video clips also provide excellent fodder for interpretation-based activities. Turning the volume off will make the activity even more nuanced as the individual is left to interpret non-verbal language and has more nuanced clues to detect.
  - discussion of controversial issues, debates, examples from pop culture or the news (if the individual is able to become more complex in his thinking).
- Strategic thinking, problem solving, and decision-making
  - activities and experiences that draw upon one's ability to think strategically, solve problems, and make decisions (movement, creative, verbal, and non-verbal exercises)
  - technology such as computer games helpful in activating domain, in particular for individuals who are not strong in language or who are non-verbal (Logical Journey of the Zoombinis)
- Rule use
  - exercises and activities that require following a list of external rules and a specific sequence (board games, lab experiments, etc.)
  - movement and non-verbal games integrated with verbal-based activities (Twister, Simon Says)
- Reasoning and logical thinking (generating own thoughts based on information and what can be inferred, critical thinking, creativity, brainstorming)



**Note:** Individuals with stronger language and cognition will have a wider range of activities from which to draw.

## 6.08 Developing Awareness

### 6.08.1 Developing Awareness of the Physical Body's Influence on Sensory, Emotional, and Cognitive Experiences

This section is designed to help individuals understand the connection between a sensory experience and the body's physical reaction to it. By raising one's awareness of having a physical reaction to sensory input, the individual can then begin to predict his body's responses in various environments. He learns that the body gives signals when it is in distress and those signals act as warning signs that tell us we need to act to take care of our needs. Once an individual's awareness is increased to his personal physical "warning signs", he can begin to anticipate his needs, generate plans to accommodate for them, and make decisions that incorporate his sensory sensitivities.

The underlying goal of this process is to reduce the dysregulation and distress. It will also equip them with strategies to anticipate and manage uncomfortable or surprise physical reactions they feel when exposed to sensory stimuli to which they are sensitive.

**Example:** Charlie displays acute sensory sensitivity to loud noises. As a result, he often experiences dysregulation in public places when loud noises occur. He has become very resistant to going out in public, and when he does venture out he often has to be taken home when a loud noise occurs. He is inconsolable until he is back home in familiar surroundings that he can control, and once calmed does not want to discuss what happened. This pattern has compromised his ability to practice social skills in his community and to learn adaptive strategies for handling his dysregulation in public places.

Earlier in the ADEF, Charlie explored his sensory system and had many discussions and experiential activities that helped him understand that his hearing is extremely sensitive and the culprit for why a lot of outings go wrong. He explored the types of noises that upset him and also learned that if the noise is unexpected, his negative reaction is even stronger.

This section of the module helps Charlie to identify more explicitly that in reaction to loud noises he tenses up the muscles in his entire body and he has a strong startle reflex that makes him feel jumpy. He can then work to understand that when he feels this way he gets hijacked and he just wants to get away

Materials for this section would include experiential-based games and exercises followed by reflection. This would be excellent for group work so different experiences can be compared.

It is most effective at this point to tailor activities to the individual or individuals in the group rather than try to cover all possibilities. By this time the students will have identified their personal profiles in these domains and have the information available to them for planning purposes.

Activities would also include flow charts and concept mapping to make visual representation of connections.

and hide somewhere quiet. With this connection and reaction chain understood, he can then work to see that he has some choices. He can still choose to leave, but he learns there are middle grounds and other options:

- Wearing earplugs or noise canceling earphones
- Having his iPod with him with soothing music that he can listen to
- Asking to step outside or away from the noise until he feels calm enough to return
- Having a squeeze ball in his pocket so when he feels his muscles tense he squeezes the ball really hard,
- Anticipating noises before he goes out to reduce surprises
- Engaging in exploring “quiet” places in public he might enjoy such as a library or park, etc.

Through discussion, activities, carefully planned social experiments, and more, Charlie begins to realize it is not being out in public that causes him to become dysregulated, but the sounds that sometimes occur. He gets support in getting in the habit of previewing what sounds to expect before he goes out and deciding what his plan will be for managing them if they arise.

### Emotional Experiences

This section is designed to help individuals understand the connection between an emotional experience and the body’s physical reaction to it. By raising one’s awareness to the dynamic of having a physical reaction to emotions, the individual can then begin to predict his body’s responses in various environments. He learns that our emotions signal we are in distress and those signals act as warning signs that tell us we need to act to take care of our needs. Just as in the last section, once an individual’s awareness is increased to his personal *emotional* “warning signs”, he can begin to anticipate his needs, generate plans to accommodate for them, and make decisions that incorporate his sensory sensitivities.

The underlying goal of this process is to reduce the dysregulation and distress that many individuals with ASD or developmental disabilities experience in response to the unexpected, and to equip them with strategies to both anticipate and manage uncomfortable or surprise physical reactions they feel when intense emotions arise.

**Example:** Craig has a lot of anxiety when he is with young adults of his own age. He tends to stay calm and regulated around younger children and adults, but in peer social interactions he gets derailed by anxiety. As a result he rubs his hands together in a frantic motion that is off-putting to his peers, which further spikes his anxiety. He has become hesitant to try any social outings and activities, and thus is increasingly socially isolated despite his intense desire to have friends his own age.

Earlier in the ADEF Craig did a lot of work on understanding his emotions and emotional reactions in social situations. In this section he gets to take that knowledge to a deeper level and begin to understand that it is not his entire self that pushes peers away but the physical behavior of wringing his hands that they do not understand and see as “weird”. He can begin to realize that the urge to wring his hands is a warning sign that he is anxious.

This awareness opens the door for Craig to work on getting support identifying what social situations are anxiety-producing enough to cause the handwringing to surface. He can then strategize and practice ways he can substitute other, less socially off-putting physical responses when he feels his anxiety spike:

- Holding onto a worry stone
- Having a squeeze ball
- Keeping his hands in pockets or behind his back
- Fidgeting with a bracelet or necklace, etc.

Concurrently, this work enables him to also address more directly the real culprit at play – his social anxiety.

As with the last section, it would be important to include experiential-based games and exercises followed by reflection. This would be excellent for group work so different experiences can be compared.

It is most effective at this point to tailor activities to the individual or individuals in the group rather than try to cover all possibilities. By this time the students will have identified their personal profiles in these domains and have the information available to them for planning purposes.

Activities could also include drama and improvisation, various other forms of art, flow charts, and concept mapping to make visual representation of connections.

### Cognitive Experiences

This section is designed to help individuals understand the connection between a mental experience and the body's physical reaction to it. By raising one's awareness to the dynamic of having a physical reaction to a thought, the individual can then begin to predict his responses in various environments. He learns that the body gives signals when we have thoughts, and those signals act as warning signs that tell us we need to act to take care of our needs. Once an individual's awareness is increased to his personal physical "warning signs", he can begin to anticipate his needs, generate plans to accommodate for them, and make decisions that incorporate his sensitivities.

The underlying goal of this process is to reduce the dysregulation and distress that many individuals with ASD or other developmental disabilities experience in response to the unexpected, and to equip them with strategies to both anticipate and manage uncomfortable or surprise physical reactions they feel when having a thought that is intense or difficult.

**Example:** Asher has a habit of falling asleep in the middle of or immediately after a complex or difficult discussion. When he is exposed to a high volume of language, much of which he does not understand, his body reacts by getting sleepy and falling into a very deep sleep from which it is very hard to rouse him.

Asher has not made this connection and has a long history of getting into trouble with teachers and peers who felt he was faking sleepiness or pretending to fall asleep. Sleep disorders such as narcolepsy have been medically ruled out but falling asleep does not appear to be in his control.

In this section of the ADEF Asher gets support in raising his awareness to when the sleepiness onset begins so he has an opportunity to catch himself earlier and try different strategies:

- Ask for a break
- Scale down language load and simplify the discussion
- Stop and have him paraphrase what has been discussed thus far
- Engage in movement to wake up
- Have difficult conversations on a walk or while engaging in physical activity so his body is more alert
- Practice building endurance for receiving language through exercises
- Give him written information to read and reflect on at his own pace and then follow up with a conversation

Asher continues to fall asleep after complex discussions but now he has strategies for stretching his endurance and taking breaks so he is less disruptive by “checking out” in the middle of a discussion. He is also able to tell people before a discussion that he may need a break or get sleepy, which allows him to negotiate and problem solve with others.

Materials for this section would include experiential-based games and exercises followed by reflection. This would be excellent for group work so different experiences can be compared.

It is most effective at this point to tailor activities to the individual or individuals in the group rather than try to cover all possibilities. By this time the students will have identified their personal profiles in these domains and have the information available to them for planning purposes.

Activities could also include drama and improvisation, various other forms of art, flow charts, concept mapping, and flow charts to establish connections.

### 6.08.2 Developing Awareness of the Sensory System's Influences on the Physical Body, Emotional Experiences, and Cognitive Experiences

This section is designed to help students understand the connection between a physical experience and the body's sensory reaction. By raising one's awareness to the dynamic of having a sensory reaction to a physical sensation, the individual can then begin to predict his body's responses in various environments. He learns the senses give signals when we are in distress and those signals act as warning signs that tell us we need to act to take care of our needs. Once an individual's awareness is increased to his personal sensory "warning signs", he can begin to anticipate his needs, generate plans to accommodate for them, and make decisions that incorporate his sensitivities.

The underlying goal of this process is to reduce the dysregulation and distress many individuals with ASD or other developmental disabilities experience in response to the unexpected, and to equip them with strategies to both anticipate and manage uncomfortable or surprise sensory reaction they feel.

**Example:** Alfred has significant issues regulating his eating at mealtimes, often stuffing himself to the point of gagging and throwing up. When he overeats to such an extreme, he becomes extremely emotionally dysregulated. His peers do not like eating with him and they tend to get very dysregulated when he overeats, especially in public restaurants when he causes a scene. As a result, he finds himself socially ostracized during food-based school events, outings, and lunchtimes.

Alfred swears it is not the overeating that causes him to gag and throw up, but rather he feels "claustrophobic" all of a sudden and he panics. Because of his intense embarrassment, Alfred will only discuss his eating problem with one trusted staff member to whom he feels particularly close. This staff member explores his eating problem slowly and gently through a series of discussions, reflections, and supported activities.

Alfred begins to eat lunch with the staff member so he can get feedback if he begins to eat too quickly so he can start noticing when he gets overstimulated. He begins to learn the sense of claustrophobia that arises in him and causes panic is his sensory system alerting him his stomach is full. He begins to see the "claustrophobic" sense as a warning signal his body wants him to stop eating. What was once a panic button sensation becomes reframed as a welcome signal to stop and step away from food. He also embarks on many different experiential activities to increase general body awareness and how his senses can be enlisted to help him know what his body needs.

Experiential-based games and exercises followed by reflection. This would be excellent for group work so different experiences can be compared. It is most effective at this point to tailor activities to the individual or individuals in the group rather than try to cover all possibilities. By this time the students will have identified their personal profiles in these domains and have the information available to them for planning purposes.

Activities could include: flow charts and concept mapping to make visual representation of connections.



## Emotional Experiences

This section is designed to help individuals understand the connection between an emotional experience and the body's sensory reaction. By raising one's awareness to the dynamic of having a sensory reaction to emotions, the individual can then begin to predict his body's responses in various environments. He learns that our senses signal when we are in emotional distress and those signals act as warning signs that tell us we need to act to take care of our needs. Once an individual's awareness is increased to his personal sensory "warning signs", he can begin to anticipate his needs, generate plans to accommodate for him, and make decisions that incorporate his emotional sensitivities.

The underlying goal of this process is to reduce the dysregulation and distress that many individuals with ASD or other developmental disabilities experience in response to the unexpected, and to equip them with strategies to both anticipate and manage uncomfortable or surprise sensory reactions they feel when intense emotions arise.

**Example:** When Nick becomes anxious he becomes immediately overwhelmed by sensory input, which further agitates him. He will begin to see dirt everywhere, even particles floating in the air. He complains that the room smells bad. On occasion he even feels itchy "like there are ants in my skin." He becomes so reactive to his sensory experience he is unable to process his anxiety, demanding staff to "make the smells, dirt, and itching go away." As a result, he has made extremely little progress in anxiety management and coping skills and has become resistant and avoidant towards anything he thinks might make him feel anxious.

Nick is unaware that the sensory sensations he feels are in reaction to his emotions and has developed a bias that most places are too dirty and smelly for him to be in. This negative feedback loop has impaired his ability to try new things and be in a wide variety of environments, and he has become heavily dependent on others to manage his anxiety.

Nick works to understand the relationship between overstimulation in his sensory processing and his anxiety. Slowly, the phenomenon is teased out and examined so he can begin acknowledging and addressing the underlying anxiety that has limited his choices and ability to function. He began the process of learning that when he started seeing particles in the air, smelling bad smells, and feeling itchy it was a sign that his anxiety was elevated and he needed to address it.

Materials for this section would include: experiential-based games and exercises followed by reflection. This would be excellent for group work so different experiences can be shared.

Most effective at this level is to focus on the individual or individuals in the group rather than trying to imagine all the possibilities. Since at this point the students will have identified their personal profiles in these domains the information may be available to use for planning purposes.

Activities could include: drama, improvisation, art, flow charts, and concept mapping to make visual representation of connections.



## Cognitive Experiences

This section is designed to help students understand the connection between a thought and one's sensory reaction to it. By raising one's awareness to the dynamic of having a sensory reaction to a thought, the individual can then begin to predict his responses in various environments. He learns senses give signals when we have thoughts, and those signals act as warning signs that tell us we need to act to take care of our needs. Once an individual's awareness is increased to personal sensory "warning signs", he can begin to anticipate his needs, generate plans to accommodate for them, and make decisions that incorporate his sensitivities.

The underlying goal of this process is to reduce the dysregulation and distress that many individuals with ASD or other developmental disabilities experience in response to the unexpected, and to equip them with strategies to both anticipate and manage uncomfortable or surprise sensory reactions they feel when having a thought that is intense or difficult.

**Example:** Susan is sensitive to light. She also struggles with comprehension and abstract thinking. She is in a small book club with peers who have similar cognitive levels and the facilitator paces accordingly, anticipating difficulty and helping when she feels lost or confused in the discussion. Despite many strategies and accommodations in place, she still experiences difficulty understanding the plot of the story.

Often, in the middle of a discussion about the book, Susan will suddenly complain that the room is too bright and she wants the blinds pulled down. She hides her head in her hands or retreats behind sunglasses and it is very hard to re-engage her in the discussion.

Susan begins to understand there is a link between getting confused in a discussion and a spike in light sensitivity after being given consistent feedback about her pattern of withdrawal. She begins to reflect that this dynamic does not only happen at the program, but also when she is out in the community and gets lost. With help she is able to see that a lot of places she coded as "too bright for me to be in" were actually places where she felt lost or confused such as the mall and restaurants when she tried to read the menu and could not decipher it. Susan works with staff to see that when things start feeling too bright it may be a signal she is confused with language and needs to ask for help.

### Materials for this section

**include:** experiential-based games and exercises followed by reflection. This would be excellent for group work so different experiences can be shared.

It is most effective at this point to tailor activities to the individual or individuals in the group rather than try to cover all possibilities. By this time the students will have identified their personal profiles in these domains and have the information available to them for planning purposes.

### Activities could include:

drama, improvisation, art, concept mapping, and flow charts to establish connections.

### .08.3 Developing Awareness of the Emotional Influences on the Physical Body, Sensory Experiences, and Cognitive Experiences

This section is designed to help individuals understand the connection between physical need and an emotional experience. By raising one's awareness to the dynamic of having a physical reaction to an emotional experience, the individual can then begin to predict his emotional responses in various environments. He learns emotions gives signals when we experience something physically unpleasant and those signals act as warning signs that tell us we need to act to take care of our needs. Once an individual's awareness is increased to his personal emotional "warning signs", he can begin to anticipate his needs, generate plans to accommodate for them, and make decisions that incorporate self-care. The underlying goal of this process is to reduce dysregulation and distress many individuals with ASD or other developmental disabilities experience in response to the unexpected, and to equip them with strategies to both anticipate and manage uncomfortable or surprise emotional reactions they feel.

**Example:** When Tim has low blood sugar he tends to get extremely irritable, causing him to become rude to staff and peers, impatient and disruptive in learning and other group settings. He is not aware of his irritability or the negative effect it has on the group. It took staff a while to recognize the possibility of a blood sugar-mood connection, after they had exhausted endless strategies to manage his irritability without success and a staff member asked one day, "Have you eaten breakfast?" He had not and agreed to eat a granola bar the staff member offered. His mood improved significantly in a relatively short period of time.

Many discussions followed to help Tim see how irritable he can be when he skips a meal. His morning routine was adjusted to make room for a light breakfast and was given reminders mid-morning to eat a snack. Through trial and error, discussion, feedback, and much reinforcement he began to eat snacks sometimes without reminders and on occasion was able to stop himself when he felt irritable and announced "I am being a jerk because I forgot to eat breakfast". He then excused himself from the group to get a snack.

Materials for this section would include: experiential-based games and exercises followed by reflection. This would be excellent for group work so different experiences can be compared.

Most effective at this level is to focus on the individual or individuals in the group rather than trying to cover all the possibilities. Since at this point the students will have identified their personal profiles in these domains the information may be available to them for planning purposes.

Activities can include color-coded chart – color in body parts with corresponding emotion; flow charts, and concept mapping to make visual representation of connections.

## Sensory Experiences

This section is designed to help individuals understand the connection between a sensory experience and an emotional reaction. By raising awareness to the dynamic of having a sensory reaction to what one feels the individual can then begin to predict his responses in various environments. He learns that our senses give signals when we have strong emotions, and that those signals act as warning signs that tell us we need to act

to take care of our needs. Once an individual's awareness is increased to his personal emotional "warning signs", he can begin to anticipate his needs, generate plans to accommodate for them, and make decisions that incorporate his sensory sensitivities.

The underlying goal of this process is to reduce dysregulation and distress many individuals with ASD or other developmental disabilities experience in response to the unexpected, and to equip them with strategies to both anticipate and manage uncomfortable or surprise emotional reactions they feel when they have upsetting sensory sensations.

**Example:** Joe is extremely tactile sensitive. He goes to great lengths to keep his distance from even people he likes. There are a few staff members with whom he has bonded closely, and he shows his affection by standing alongside them, touching shoulder to shoulder.

Joe is very aware of his sensitivity to touch and, when regulated, he can state his preference calmly. However he does not have the insight to realize when he is touched either accidentally or on purpose he slips immediately into sensory dysregulation and becomes enraged (fight, fright, or flight). As a result, he has had several unfortunate rage incidences at the program and in public and his peers say they are "scared of him". He does not understand why.

This section creates space for Joe to receive feedback and reflect. Eventually he agrees to watch a video of one of his rages and is able to see firsthand why his peers are scared of him. He begins to work on how to establish the no-touch rule in his relationships with people ahead of time, and to work on strategies for how to manage himself in public so he does not become scary or threatening to a stranger who has accidentally brushed by him.

Materials for this section would include: experiential-based games and exercises followed by reflection. This would be excellent for group work so different experiences can be compared.

It is most effective at this point to tailor activities to the individual or individuals in the group rather than try to cover all possibilities. By this time the students will have identified their personal profiles in these domains and have the information available to them for planning purposes.

Activities can include: flow charts and concept mapping to make visual representation of connections.

## Cognitive Experiences

This section is designed to help individuals understand the connection between a thought and emotional reaction to the thought. By raising one's awareness to the dynamic of having an emotional reaction to what one thinks, the individual can then begin to predict his responses in various environments. He learns emotions gives signals when we have distressing or dysregulating thoughts, and those signals act as warning signs that tell us we need to act to take care of our needs. Once an individual's awareness of his personal emotional "warning signs" is increased, he can begin to anticipate his needs, generate plans to accommodate for them, and make decisions that incorporate his emotional sensitivities.

The underlying goal of this process is to reduce dysregulation and distress many individuals with ASD or other developmental disabilities experience in response to the unexpected, and to equip them with strategies to both anticipate and manage uncomfortable or surprise emotional reactions they feel when they have upsetting thoughts.

**Example:** Whenever Alexis thinks about Cirque de Soleil it makes her very giddy and silly. All the excitement she felt seeing the acts, dramatic lighting, and fancy costumes comes rushing back and she becomes very dysregulated and disruptive. She loves feeling giddy and has not made the connection she is actually conjuring up the feeling with her own thoughts.

This section of the ADEF opens the door to examine, reflect, and discuss the pattern Alexis has gotten into and to generate strategies and solutions including: designate a time during the day when she can talk about Cirque and immerse herself in feeling giddy so she can get that need met but at a more appropriate time, explore with her whether she is activating the Cirque-giddy cycle to avoid facing difficult topics or activities by charting when it happens and looking for patterns, examine more deeply what it is about Cirque that makes her feel giddy to increase insight, try techniques for thinking about Cirque without getting so giddy, and explore why she is seeking excitement so often to understand what else she might be feeling.

With a lot of discussion, activities, and reflection Alexis has begun to ask for a "giddy break" when she feels the desire coming on so she can have a private moment and get it out of her system instead of disrupting group activities. Staff also discovered she has an affinity not only for Cirque de Soleil but all circuses and she began an affinity-based class on the history of circuses and their costumes and has signed up for a circus arts class.

Materials for this section would include: experiential-based games and exercises followed by reflection. This would be excellent for group work so different experiences can be compared.

It is most effective at this point to tailor activities to the individual or individuals in the group rather than try to cover all possibilities. By this time the students will have identified their personal profiles in these domains and have the information available to them for planning purposes.

Activities can include: debate, discussion of controversial subjects, flow charts, and concept mapping to make visual representation of

#### 6.08.4 Developing Awareness of the Mind's Influences on the Physical Body, Sensory Experiences, and Emotional Experiences

This section is designed to help individuals understand the connection between a physical sensation and the mind's reaction to it (thoughts). By raising one's awareness to the dynamic that body sensations can elicit thoughts, the individual can then begin to predict his responses in various environments. He learns thoughts give signals when we are physically uncomfortable and those signals act as warning signs that tell us we need to act to take care of our needs. Once an individual's awareness is increased to his personal thought "warning signs", he can begin to anticipate his needs, generate plans to accommodate for them, and make decisions that address his physical needs.

The underlying goal of this process is to reduce dysregulation and distress many individuals with ASD other developmental disabilities experience in response to the unexpected, and to equip them with strategies to both anticipate and manage uncomfortable or surprise thoughts they have when experiencing a physical sensation.

**Example:** Sue has significant coordination, balance, and motor planning issues. When she stumbles or moves too slowly during a game in PE she immediately begins to think, "Everyone is laughing at me". That thinking causes her to become self-conscious and distracted, which increases her difficulty moving and reacting in the middle of a game. As a result she either makes up excuses why she cannot do PE or quits in the middle of a game and walks off the field suddenly.

Her peers have become hesitant to select her for their team, not because of her physical obstacles but because she shuts down and ruins the game. Sue is unaware that her negative self-talk is what really stops the show and that her negative thinking is actually causing her to be even more uncoordinated and a "bad player".

This section of the ADEF allows Sue to work on raising awareness to how her negative thoughts distract her focus and cause her to play more poorly. Through activities, discussion, and strategies she begins to learn her thoughts affect her response time and her awareness of where the ball is or what direction she should be running. She does many movement and mind-body activities that enable her to practice clearing her mind and thinking positively when she has a physical task at hand. She gets support from staff and team members on thinking positively, and slowly her resistance to attending PE lessens and she is able to experience some enjoyment from the game even if she is not a star player.

1. Establish the mind-body connection and how thoughts affect the body
  - Panic
  - Anxiety
  - Perfectionism
  - Low self-esteem, chronic discouragement
  - Pain and physical discomfort
  - Struggles with weight
2. My mind-body connection – examine how my thoughts affect my body
  - Power of positive thinking
3. Identify problem areas, move into goal setting if individual is able

## Sensory Experiences

This section is designed to help individuals understand the connection between a sensory experience and the mind's reaction to it (thoughts). By raising one's awareness to the dynamic of having a thought reaction to sensory input, the individual can then begin to predict his responses in various environments. He learns that the mind gives signals when it is in distress and those signals act as warning signs that tell us we need to act to take care of our needs. Once an individual's awareness is increased to his personal thought "warning signs", he can begin to anticipate his needs, generate plans to accommodate for them, and make decisions that incorporate his sensory sensitivities.

The underlying goal of this process is to reduce dysregulation and distress many individuals with ASD or other developmental disabilities experience in response to the unexpected, and to equip them with strategies to both anticipate and manage uncomfortable or surprise thought reactions they feel when exposed to sensory stimuli to which they are sensitive.

**Example:** Joe is extremely sensitive to people coughing. When someone coughs within earshot, Joe becomes angry immediately and accuses the person of doing it on purpose to bother him. It has reached the point where peers and staff are on high alert around him when they have allergies or a cold, and many group activities have been derailed because someone cleared his throat without thinking or coughed and forgot to warn him. His parents are extremely nervous when they take him out and about and to social events because one cough can cause an outburst that requires removing him quickly and taking him home.

In this section Joe is given the opportunity to reflect, discuss, and explore his thought reactions to people coughing. In a safe setting, he can explore that people are not intending to upset him and the thoughts of persecution he is having that make him so angry are really connected to a fear of getting sick.

Through role-play and other activities Joe can begin to explore alternative things to think when people cough, and things he can do to redirect himself or manage his thoughts that make him so angry at unsuspecting coughers. He practices strategies such as: asking when he first joins a group if anyone has a cold or might cough so he is not caught off guard, address more directly his fear of getting sick, asking people to warn him if they are going to cough, learning that coughing does not always mean someone is really sick and contagious by exploring all the benign things that can cause someone to cough, etc.

1. How thinking can bring upon fight/flight/freeze/submit response, which then heightens sensory sensitivity
  - How obsessive thoughts over the fear of something can send my sensory system into alert or overdrive
2. My sensory-thought connection – how do my thoughts affect my senses?
3. Identify problem areas, move into goal setting if individual is able



Joe remains very sensitive to coughing and does not like it, but he has stopped accusing people of doing it on purpose and if needed he will excuse himself for a minute to gather himself instead of yelling and making accusations.

### Emotional Experiences and Thought Reactions

This section is designed to help individuals understand the connection between an emotional experience and the mind's thought reaction to it. By raising one's awareness to the dynamic of having a thought reaction to emotions, the individual can then begin to predict his responses in various environments. He learns that the mind gives signals when it is in distress and those signals act as warning signs that tell us we need to act to take care of our needs. Once an individual's awareness is increased to his personal thought "warning signs", he can begin to anticipate his needs, generate plans to accommodate for them, and make decisions that incorporate his emotional needs.

See section 6.17 Activity 4:  
Emotions and Thinking: "The  
Loneliness Game"

The underlying goal of this process is to reduce dysregulation and distress many individuals with ASD other developmental disabilities experience in response to the unexpected, and to equip them with strategies to both anticipate and manage uncomfortable or surprise thought reactions they feel when experiencing a strong emotion.

**Example:** When Keith experiences social disappointment he has a pattern of sinking into despair he will never have friends and will die a lonely old man. His fallback position in the face of social disappointment is to spiral downwards in his thinking and become stuck, withdrawn, and inconsolable. Even an unintentional slight like someone not waving back can cause him to sink so quickly that it is hard for others to catch him before he goes down his path of negative thoughts. Consequently he is unable to problem solve or receive support that comforts him, causing peers to be overly cautious when interacting with him. He has rejected many opportunities to socially interact because "it always turns out bad, so why try?"

This section opens the door for Keith to examine his emotion-thought patterning when it comes to peers: uncover underlying fears of rejection and how to manage them, sorting through and making sense of past experiences, reframing cognitive distortions that tend to intensify his emotions, practice role play on new ways to interact with peers, confidence building, supported small group interactions designed to increase confidence, and experience being with peers, etc.

1. How thoughts and beliefs elicit emotional reactions
2. My mind-emotion connection – how do my thoughts affect my feelings?
3. Are there themes and patterns to the relationship between my mind and my emotions?
4. Identify problem areas, move into goal setting if individual is able

Keith continues to need staff support before, during, and after peer interactions but through his work has become slowly and incrementally more confident and resilient in social situations. He is also more likely to share the negative thoughts when they arise from an uncomfortable feeling so they can be addressed and he can receive assurance and support.

## 6.09 Me and You

### 6.09.1 Mindset's Effect on Social Relationships

1. What beliefs do I hold about others?
2. How do these beliefs affect my emotions, thoughts, and behaviors when I interact with others?
3. Examples from the individual's personal life – family members, friends, etc.

(Dweck, 2006)

### 6.09.2 Perspective Taking - Variance Awareness (Among Contexts and People)

1. Establish definition and concept of separation of self from others
2. Explore through both discussion and experientially:
  - Role playing, improvisation
  - Media, movie clips
  - Interviews
  - Self-quizzes and questionnaires
  - Scenarios and case studies
  - Debates
  - Creative writing
  - Scenes in plays and literature
  - Charts, graphs, color coding of differing options to help conceptualize and organize understanding visually
  - Reading biased articles and essays, discuss
  - Dissect a political, world, or current issue multiple perspectives

**See section 6.18 Activity 5:**  
Perspective Taking I:  
Guessing the Viewpoint of  
Others on Video

**See section 6.19 Activity 6:**  
Perspective Taking II:  
Guessing the Viewpoint of  
Others in Role-Play

**See section 6.20 Activity 7:**  
Perspective Taking III:  
Guessing the Viewpoint of  
Others through Real Life  
Observation



3. How do others see me?

- My behaviors when around others
- My expressions of emotion and reactions when around others
- My body language and facial expressions when around others
- My communication style when around others
- My temperament and personality when around others
- Detecting themes and patterns to how others see you based on your behaviors, expressions of emotions, etc.
- Drawing conclusions from reflecting on the above – help individual put parts together to assess from a big picture standpoint how others think and feel about them.
- Looking at me through someone else’s eyes

*People who know me well and see me frequently*

- ✓ What effect do I have on them?
- ✓ Are these the effects I intended to create/want?
- ✓ Is there anything I want to do less or more of to make it better?
- ✓ Is there anything the other person could do less or more of to help the interaction go better?
- ✓ Social goal setting if individual is able

*People I see occasionally*

- ✓ What effect do I have on them?
- ✓ Are these the effects I intended to create/want?
- ✓ Is there anything I want to do less or more of to make it better?
- ✓ Is there anything the other person could do more or less of to help the interaction go better?
- ✓ Social goal setting if individual is able

*Strangers*

- ✓ What effect do I have on them?
- ✓ Are these the effects I intended to create/want?
- ✓ Is there anything I want to do less or more of to make it better?
- ✓ Is there anything the other person could do more or less of to help the interaction go better?
- ✓ Social goal setting if individual is able

4. Evaluation of self in relation to others

- Overall, what is easy/goes well for me in relating to others?
- Overall, what is hard/falls apart in relating to others?
- When I am at my best I come across as \_\_\_\_\_
  - identify if possible contributing factors (emotional, sensory, physical, cognitive, etc.)
- When I am at my worst I come across as \_\_\_\_\_
  - identify if possible contributing factors (emotional, sensory, physical, cognitive, etc.)
- What do I like about how I relate to others?
- What would I like to be different?
- What kinds of people do I feel comfortable around? How does that affect the interaction?
  - identify if age, gender, size, tone of voice, level of authority, etc. play a part
  - identify if environmental factors play a part
- What kinds of people are hard for me to be with? How does this affect the interaction?
  - identify if age, gender, size, tone of voice, level of authority, etc. play a part
  - identify if environmental factors play a part
- Social goal setting if individual is able

5. How do I react around others? How do my thoughts, feelings, or behaviors change?

- In one-one and group formats
  - examine internal reactions and changes
  - examine external reactions and changes
  - examine self-control
  - Examine past experiences and interactions
- Examine interactions that went wrong the individual did not understand (lost a friend, made someone angry at them, etc.)
- Engage student in group experiences designed to highlight peer interactions (activities, games, and exercises incorporating negotiation and compromise)

Do debriefing/feedback session to reflect on experiences, behavior, and reaction to others, and how others responded/interacted with individual

- Examine reactions around strangers, peers, friends, family

Other activities can include: Play detective and journal or discuss; conduct experiments in community, then go back and debrief; improvisation, role playing scenarios; creative writing, art

6. How do I affect others?

- Activities can include: reflection on past experience; rigged experiences then debrief; examining experiences with strangers, peers, friends, family; playing detective and journal or discuss; role playing and improvisation

## 6.10 Me and My Current Surroundings

### 6.10.1 Evaluating Environments

List all the environments the student experiences on a frequent or semi-frequent basis. Have the student qualify them with descriptors. If he struggles with language (difficulty articulating or impoverished descriptive language) or has weak visualization skills use the concept formation structure words to help guide the individual – what, size, color, number, shape, where, movement, mood, background, perspective, sound – and encourage gesturing and movement to activate visualization.

- Bedroom
- House
- School/program
- Restaurants
- Stores
- Recreational locations
- Other

Evaluate each of the above in terms of:

- Immediate physical layout (crowded, big space, structured, chaotic, things moving around, very still)
  - Evaluate in terms of physical preferences and regulation
  - How do these physical elements affect my behavior?
  - How do these physical elements affect my mood?
  - Problem solving – generating coping strategies
  - Identifying areas of potential self-advocacy and self-care
- Sensory elements (sounds, smells, sights, tactile, etc.) inherent in environment
  - Evaluate in terms of sensory preferences and regulation
  - How do the sensory elements affect my behavior?
  - How do the sensory elements affect my mood?
  - Problem-solving – generating coping strategies
  - Identifying areas of potential self-advocacy and self-care

**Activities:** Use discussion and experiential activities, such as role-playing, geared towards developing awareness of one’s immediate environment; how it impacts physical/sensory, emotional, cognitive experiences, and reactions; and what one can do to self-soothe and regulate.

Since the topic is familiar places the individual feels positive about, introduce realistic elements of the unexpected to see how well he can manage and adapt. (Role-play scenario: One day you show up for bowling class and there is a very loud, very big birthday party at the alley disrupting the regular routine – can’t use the lanes you typically use and your favorite bowling ball is being used by someone else.)

- Emotional elements - elicited from or in reaction to aspects of the environment (examples: stressful because of the small spaces, scary because of the loud machinery, giddy because of the girls there, etc.)
  - Evaluate in terms of emotional preference and regulation
  - How do the emotional elements affect my behavior?
  - How do the emotional elements affect my mood?
  - Problem solving – generating coping strategies
  - Identifying areas of potential self-advocacy and self-care
- Cognitive elements
  - How do my thoughts, preferences, dislikes, fears/phobias, mindset/beliefs affect how I feel in this environment
  - How do my thoughts and mindset about the environment affect my behavior?
  - How do my thoughts and mindset about the environment affect my mood?
  - Problem solving – generating coping strategies
  - Identifying areas of potential self-advocacy and self-care

#### 6.10.2 Evaluating Difficult Surroundings

List all the environments the individual experiences that are heightened or are sources of dysregulation, anxiety, avoidance or meltdowns

Qualify them with descriptors. If he struggles with language – difficulty articulating or limited descriptive language – or has weak visualization skills, use the concept formation structure words to help guide the individual (examples of descriptors: what size, color, number, shape; where movement, mood, background, perspective, and sound). While he is doing this, encourage gesturing and movement to further activate visualization.

- doctor's offices and other treatment locations
  - recreational activities
  - obligatory activities (*Examples: church, Grandma's for Thanksgiving, etc.*)
  - places where the student wants to go but is scared OR a place he associates with something negative so he avoids or gets dysregulated while there.
- Evaluate in terms of:
    - Immediate physical layout (*Examples: crowded, big space, structured, chaotic, things moving around, very still*)
      - ✓ evaluate in terms of physical preferences and regulation
      - ✓ How do the physical elements affect my behavior?
      - ✓ How do the physical elements affect my mood?
      - ✓ problem solving – generating coping strategies
      - ✓ identifying areas of potential self-advocacy and self-care

- Sensory elements (sounds, smells, sights, tactile, etc.) inherent in environment
  - ✓ evaluate in terms of sensory preferences and regulation
  - ✓ How do the sensory elements affect my behavior?
  - ✓ How do the sensory elements affect my mood?
  - ✓ problem solving – generating coping strategies
  - ✓ identifying areas of potential self-advocacy and self-care
- Emotional elements - elicited from or in reaction to aspects of the environment (*Examples: stressful because of the small spaces, scary because of the loud machinery, giddy because of the girls there, etc.*)
  - ✓ evaluate in terms of emotional preference and regulation
  - ✓ How do the emotional elements affect my behavior?
  - ✓ How do the emotional elements affect my mood?
  - ✓ problem solving – generating coping strategies
  - ✓ identifying areas of potential self-advocacy and self-care
- Cognitive elements
  - ✓ How do my thoughts, preferences, dislikes, fears/phobias, mindset/beliefs affect how I feel in this environment?
  - ✓ How do my thoughts and mindset about the environment affect my behavior?
  - ✓ How do my thoughts and mindset about the environment affect my mood?
  - ✓ problem solving – generating coping strategies
  - ✓ identifying areas of potential self-advocacy and self-care



**Activities:** Use experiential activities geared towards developing awareness of one's immediate environment; how it impacts physical/sensory, emotional, cognitive experiences and reactions; and what one can do to self-soothe and regulate. Incorporate stressors into activities since the focus is on milieus in which individual is already reactive and needs to practice responses to unwanted or distasteful elements.

### 6.10.3 New Unfamiliar Places

This section offers a format for:

- processing new, recent experiences such as being new to the program milieu, unfamiliar activities, experiences, and outings (*Examples: new family activities, new internship or job site, attending an event for the first time, flying a plane for the first time, etc.*)
- previewing, predicting, and preparing for an upcoming new experience. (The language will need to be adjusted to make the questions future-oriented and to add conditional language such as “might”, “possibly”, “could” in terms of what they will see, feel, experience, etc.)
- Immediate physical layout (*Examples: crowded, big space, structured, chaotic, things moving around, very still*)
  - Evaluate in terms of physical preferences and regulation
    - ✓ What aspects of my physical environment did I find challenging?
    - ✓ What aspects of my physical environment did I enjoy?
    - ✓ How did the physical elements affect my behavior?
    - ✓ How did the physical elements affect my mood?
    - ✓ problem solving – generating coping strategies
    - ✓ identifying areas of potential self-advocacy and self-care
  - Evaluate sensory elements (sounds, smells, sights, tactile, etc.) inherent in environment in terms of sensory preferences and regulation
    - ✓ What parts of my sensory experience were uncomfortable for me/difficult to manage?
    - ✓ What parts of my sensory experience did I enjoy?
    - ✓ How did the sensory elements affect my behavior?
    - ✓ How did the sensory elements affect my mood?
    - ✓ problem solving – generating coping strategies
    - ✓ identifying areas of potential self-advocacy and self-care
  - Evaluate in terms of emotional preference and regulation emotional elements elicited from or in reaction to aspects of the environment (*Examples: stressful because of the small spaces, scary because of the loud machinery, giddy because of the girls there, etc.*)
    - ✓ What emotions connected to this experience did I find uncomfortable or distressing?
    - ✓ What emotions connected to this experience did I find pleasurable?
    - ✓ How did the emotional elements affect my behavior?
    - ✓ How did the emotional elements affect my mood?
    - ✓ problem solving – generating coping strategies
    - ✓ identifying areas of potential self-advocacy and self-care

- Evaluate in terms of mindset and regulation cognitive elements they brought into the experience with them or were elicited in the experience (*Examples: thoughts, fears, mindsets, biases, assumptions, etc.*)
  - ✓ How do my thoughts, preferences, dislikes, fears/phobias, mindset/beliefs affect my experience of this environment?
  - ✓ What thoughts related to this experience was upsetting to me?
  - ✓ What thoughts related to this experience was pleasant and positive?
  - ✓ How did they affect my behavior?
  - ✓ How did they affect my mood?
  - ✓ problem solving – generating coping strategies
  - ✓ identifying areas of potential self-advocacy and self-care



**Activities:** Experiential activities geared towards developing awareness of one's experiences, and reactions; and what one can do to self-soothe and regulate. Build in the element of the unexpected since the focus is on unfamiliar milieus.

#### 6.10.4 Drawing Conclusions

In this section, the student should draw some big picture conclusions about his environmental preferences and needs:

- Physical
  - When I am out and about, what physical elements do I like to have around me because they are calming, organizing, or soothing? (Things I can take with me or things I can seek out because they are comforting)
  - When I am out and about, what physical elements do I wish to avoid or handle better because they are upsetting and dysregulating?
  - Coping mechanisms and adaptive strategies
    - ✓ things I can do to help myself before/in/during/after preparation
    - ✓ things other people can do to help me before/in/during/after preparation
- Sensory
  - When I am out and about what sensory sensations do I like to have because they are calming, organizing, or soothing?
  - When I am out and about what sensory sensations do I wish to avoid or handle better because they are upsetting and dysregulating?
  - Coping mechanisms and adaptive strategies
    - ✓ things I can do to help myself before/in/during/after preparation
    - ✓ things other people can do to help me before/in/during/after preparation



- Emotional
  - When I am out and about, what emotions do I like to feel because they are calming, organizing, or soothing?
  - When I am out and about, what emotions do I wish to avoid or handle better because they are upsetting and dysregulating?
  - identify external emotional triggers
  - identify internal emotional triggers
  - Is there a pattern to my emotions that is predictable? (*Example: crowds make me anxious*)
- Coping mechanisms and adaptive strategies
  - ✓ things I can do to help myself before/in/during/after preparation
  - ✓ things other people can do to help me before/in/during/after preparation
- Cognitive
  - When I am out and about what mindset or thoughts help me remain calm, organized, or soothed?
  - When I am out and about what mindset or thoughts do I wish to avoid or handle better because they are upsetting and dysregulating?
  - Do I have sticky thoughts that make my experience harder I would like to get rid of?
  - Coping mechanisms and adaptive strategies
    - ✓ things I can do to help myself before/in/during/after preparation
    - ✓ things other people can do to help me before/in/during/after preparation



**Activities:** Since this section is a big picture overview, use strategies that help condense information into a visually clear format – flow charts, write in ADEF journal, concept maps, etc.

- Using my awareness to take care of my needs
  - What strategies can I put in place to help reduce anxiety, stress, and dysregulation before going into a new environment?
  - Do I need to gather information ahead of time/preview what to expect?
  - Would it help me to have a visual of what to expect (map of the place/layout, video of the venue, etc.)?
  - Do I need to build in time to prepare emotionally?
  - Should I identify who will be my support person/touchstone doing the event? Do I need to talk to them about my fears/concerns ahead of time?
  - Are there things I might want to take with me to help me stay calm and regulated?
  - Other ideas (make suggestions, brainstorm with individual)

- What strategies can I put in place to help reduce anxiety, stress, and dysregulation once I am already out and about?
  - ✓ seek comfort and support from staff
  - ✓ seek comfort/assistance from peers
  - ✓ hold a comfort object
  - ✓ self-soothing techniques that are socially acceptable in public
  - ✓ think about something comforting
  - ✓ take a break (let staff know)
  - ✓ get a drink of water
  - ✓ chew gum, suck on candy
  - ✓ other (make suggestions, brainstorm together)



**Activities:** Would be designed to practice and role play coping mechanisms and self-care in a wide variety of settings.

### 6.11 Me and My Community

The purpose of this section is to raise awareness of the self in relation to the community with the additional goals of:

- Personal and independence goal setting
- Career development
- Affinity and interest development
- Identifying potential community partnerships, internship opportunities and job sites
- Increasing social interactions and opportunities
- Executive function practice
- Building self-advocacy

This section is the beginning of an exploration into community participation. The topic will be addressed more extensively in the Understanding and Participating in Community module, which aims to build fund of knowledge, executive functions in the context of the local community, and independence skills.

Instead, it is an opportunity to collect information, identify and prioritize needs and goals, assess the individual's capability to expand skills and knowledge in this realm; and a starting point for longer range planning after discovery phase is complete.

Me and My Community takes a bigger picture look at the systems and structures inherent in the individual's community (whereas Me and My Environment focuses on an individual's direct relationship with the surroundings) and assesses:

- The extent to which the individual has a fund of knowledge for the systems and structures of the community in which he lives (examples: police, fire, public transportation, commerce, governing entities such as the DMV, etc.)
- Takes an inventory of those systems and structures the individual has current firsthand experience (examples: rides the train, has toured the fire department, went to the DMV with a parent when he renewed his license, etc.)
- Identifies those structures and systems the individual wants and needs to become more familiar with to increase community involvement and awareness

Possible structures and systems include:

- Grocery stores
- Public transportation
- Medical and pharmacy services
- Retail stores
- Restaurants
- Social venues and community recreation (examples: concert halls, museums, bowling alleys)
- Police, fire, and other public safety organizations
- Community events (examples: concerts in the square, parades)

- Local government and elections
- Public parks and other community-wide meeting places
- Local concerns and issues (examples: crime, pollution, river cleanup, etc.)
- Local industries
- Local history, famous figures, interesting local lore and facts
- Demographics: what is the people makeup of my community (examples: ethnicities, religions, race, gender, age)
- This list becomes the starting point for designing the community-based aspect of the individual's program after the discovery phase, which involves:
  - Community-based goal setting
  - Ways to embed executive function exercises into community work (examples: planning, execution, and evaluation of community outings)
  - Formation of activities such as online research, following local current events, discussions, guest speakers, and community outings

To get ideas for tailoring this part of the program, refer to Community-Based Experiences List.



**Activities:** Activities include developing awareness of navigating one's local community and how it impacts physical/sensory, emotional, cognitive reactions:

- How to navigate/logistics
- Coping mechanisms
- Anticipating potential difficulties and generating potential solutions
- Preferences
- Self-advocacy and getting needs met
- Managing the unexpected

### 6.12 Me and the World

The purpose of this section is to raise awareness of the self in relation to the world with the additional goals of:

- Goal setting
- Career development
- Affinity and interest development
- Strengthening big picture thinking
- Opinion development
- Expanding fund of knowledge and world view
- Strengthening research skills (*Examples: computer and news reports*)
- Widening potential topics for discussions and casual conversation with others

This section is not intended to take the place of the more extensive module on Understanding and Participating in Society, which aims to build fund of knowledge, executive function, and independence skills. It is an opportunity to collect information, identify and prioritize needs and goals, assess the individual's capability to expand skills and knowledge in this realm; and a starting point for the longer range planning after the Discovery phase is complete.

Me and the World takes a big picture look at the world, acknowledges the time period in which the individual lives and assesses:

- The extent to which the individual has a fund of knowledge surrounding his state of residence, his country, and the world
- Takes an inventory of aspects the individual has current firsthand experience (*Examples: has traveled within the state, around and/or outside the country, knows people from another country, parents from another state or country, has read books or seen movies, etc.*)
- Identifies aspects of his country and the world with which the individual wants to become more familiar
- Part 1 of this section focuses on the student's awareness and understanding of his state:
- Basic geography
- Significant historical facts, figures, and sites
- Major industries
- Culture and demographics

Activities should be selected that are relevant to the individual's life, interests, and goals, AND provides opportunities to strengthen critical thinking skills. This section is not intended to build lists of rote facts to store in memory, but rather aims to create:

- A general sense of awareness
- Peak interest for topics to explore deeper from an intellectual curiosity, social justice, or career standpoint

- Underscore the individual's overall understanding of social connections and how things work
- Part 2 addresses his awareness and understanding of his country
- Basic geography
- Significant historical facts, figures, and sites
- Major industries
- Culture and demographics
  - politics
  - pop culture
  - current significant news events

As with the last section, activities should be selected that are relevant to the individual's life, interests, and goals, and provides opportunities to strengthen critical thinking skills rather than build lists of rote facts to store in memory. It aims to:

- Create a general sense of awareness of the individual's state outside things that directly impact the individual on a daily basis
- Peak interest for topics to explore deeper from an intellectual curiosity, social justice, or career development standpoint
- Underscore the individual's overall understanding of his country's infrastructure, the aspects of his country that affects his life, larger social networks, and how things work

Part 3 addresses his awareness and understanding of his awareness and understanding of the world as a whole:

- Basic geography (*Examples: continents, hemispheres, etc.*)
- Significant historical facts, figures, and sites
- Major world issues (*Examples: war, environmental, etc.*)
- Culture, religions, and demographics
- Resources
- Politics
- Famous figures
- Current significant news events

Activities should be selected to:

- Create a general sense of awareness of the world outside things that directly impact the individual on a daily basis
- Peak interest for topics to explore deeper from an intellectual curiosity, social justice, or career development standpoint
- Underscore the individual's overall understanding of large social networks, how things work on a large scale, and the similarities and differences of people in general

### 6.13 ADEF Module Completion Exercises

At the completion of the ADEF, the student should be involved in activities that help to integrate and internally summarize what he has learned over the course of doing the module. Many types of activities can be devised locally by users. Here are a few you can include and/or use as models for others.

**Activities:**

- My Hierarchy of Needs
- Identifying Personal Goals Based on What I Know About Myself
- Designing My Personal Goals: Steps to Success and Change

**See section 6.21 Activity 8:**  
My Hierarchy of Needs

**See section 6.22 Activity 9:**  
Identifying Personal Goals  
Based on What I Know About  
Myself

**See section 6.23 Activity 10:**  
Designing My Personal Goals:  
Steps to Success and Change

### 6.14 Activity 1: Experimenting with the Senses: Smell

<b>Applies to:</b>	<b>6.07.1 Physical Body: The Physical Senses</b>
<b>Areas Targeted for Development and/or Objectives</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Exploring and identifying olfactory sensitivities, aversions, and preferences through experience</li> <li>● Following directions and guidelines</li> <li>● Verbalizing: putting sensory sensations into words</li> <li>● Categorizing (positive, negative, neutral)</li> <li>● Evaluative thinking (identifying gradations/rating preferences on a Likert Scale 1-6)</li> <li>● Managing stress and anxiety related to sensory input (smells)</li> <li>● Higher order thinking (matching a smell to its source, deductive reasoning, guessing, drawing conclusions)</li> </ul>
<b>Student Functional Capacities Engaged by Exercise</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Receptive language (understanding directions)</li> <li>● Active working memory and sequential memory (holding the directions and order of operations for the process – smell, think, describe, guess, rate)</li> <li>● Expressive oral language (verbalizing the experience and articulating the name of each scent)</li> <li>● Descriptive language (generating descriptive words for the smells – “sweet, sour, fruity, stale, burning, fishy”, etc.)</li> <li>● Sensory regulation (maintaining regulation when receiving unpleasant sensory stimuli)</li> <li>● Emotional regulation (managing anxiety and overall emotional regulation when facing anticipation, the unknown and the unexpected)</li> <li>● Critical reasoning (guessing and rating smells, big picture summary of the experience)</li> </ul>
<b>Time Required</b>	Approximately 1 hour: approximately 10 minutes to anchor topic (identifying and rating smells according to preference, having student list smells he likes and doesn’t like) and explain steps of the experiment (smell, think, describe, guess, rate).
<b>Number of Participants</b>	<p>Can be done with one individual or a small group (3-5). For individuals with slow processing, expressive language difficulty, strong reactivity to smells, high anxiety or impulsivity, the activity is best done 1:1 so the process can unfold at the student’s pace and time can be used as needed to calm and soothe if dysregulated.</p> <p>If done in a small group, students can write down their guesses or hold them in memory until each participant has had a chance to smell the same smell. Each student should have the opportunity to guess and rate each one by preference (on a whiteboard, a piece of paper, etc.)</p>
<b>Space Needed</b>	Distraction-free room with no interfering sensory stimuli (noises, competing smells, etc.)



<p><b>Materials Needed</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● 10-12 small bottles filled with different types of scents - preferably scents that are familiar to the age group's experience (example: sweet/flower, sour/vinegar, fresh/mint, spicy/nutmeg, strong/soap, etc.). Label the bottles with numbers. If student gets easily overwhelmed, dysregulated, or fatigued use fewer scents.</li> <li>● Create master key of smells (bottle #1 is peppermint, etc.)</li> <li>● Provide descriptive list of words from which individual can draw if having difficulty generating language</li> <li>● A visual chart of the 1-6 scale with accompanying language (1= awful, 3 = neutral/no reaction, 6 = awesome) for the student to reference as needed.</li> <li>● Paper or a white board to list each guess, accompanying descriptors, and the rating number the student has attributed to it.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Pre-activity Preparation and/or Discussion Topics</b></p>	<p>Discussion preceding exercise to anchor context and set the climate for the experiment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● The sense of smell</li> <li>● List smells the student likes, dislikes</li> <li>● Practice rating things from 1-6</li> <li>● Discussing student's overall reactivity and sensitivity to smells</li> </ul>
<p><b>Activity Steps</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Discuss rules and procedures for the experiment:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Students smell bottle, taking as many sniffs as needed/wanted</li> <li>● Reflect</li> <li>● Describe (disgusting, nice, strong, etc.), refer to word bank as needed</li> <li>● Identify the smell (vanilla, soap, pickles, etc.)</li> <li>● Rate from 1-6 (1=awful, 3=neutral, 6=awesome)</li> <li>● Repeat process with each smell</li> </ul> </li> <li>2. Answer any questions and clarify any confusion</li> <li>3. Begin experiment</li> <li>4. After students have described, guessed, and rated each smell they are told what the smell is to confirm whether their guess is right or wrong</li> <li>5. Take breaks as needed</li> <li>6. When finished             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Rate all smells from best to worst</li> <li>● Count how many guesses are correct and discuss how accurate they are</li> <li>● Discuss what was learned and to what extent students enjoyed or disliked the experience and why</li> <li>● Draw conclusions about students' overall sensitivity/reactivity to smells</li> <li>● Reflect on how this information is helpful and discuss if smells are a</li> </ul> </li> </ol>

<p><b>Situations and Remedies</b></p>	<p>dysregulating factor when in different environments</p> <p>If a student has significant regulatory issues or sensory sensitivity that impairs his ability to be fully engaged in this activity and draw meaning, scale the exercise back to (for example)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Working on readiness to <i>try</i> experiment</li> <li>• First identify smells he likes and doesn't like</li> <li>• When ready, start with a few smells that are drawn directly from the examples the student generated so they are familiar</li> <li>• If necessary prompt student by letting him know "this is one of the smells you said you liked", "this is one you said you didn't like"</li> </ul> <p>If a student has cognitive or conceptual difficulty understanding the complexity of gradations and rating things on a scale:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use a thumbs up/thumbs down or smiley face/unhappy face instead of Likert scale</li> </ul> <p>If a student has expressive language difficulty and/or difficulty with categorization:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Generate a list of familiar descriptive words and allow him to circle, point, or otherwise indicate which one he feels goes with the smell</li> <li>• Provide a list of the smells in a different order and see if the student can identify/recognize it from the list</li> </ul>
<p><b>Follow-up / Post-activity Discussions or Other Steps</b></p>	<p>Once the exercise is done and students are alerted to and able to identify smells and express preferences or dislikes, begin pointing out the smells inherent in various environments both at school and on outings to raise awareness (<i>"This car has a new car smell – can you smell it? Do you like it?"</i>; <i>"Wow, this bakery smells good. I can smell vanilla and cinnamon. What do you smell?"</i> )</p> <p>Preview and anticipate possible sensory difficulty, and generate coping strategies (Example: <i>"We are going into a gym and it will smell like sweat. Do you know what that smells like? Do you think it will bother you? If it does, what can we do once we are there?"</i>; <i>"This art project will include paint and paint has a very strong smell. Will that make it difficult for you to do the project? Would make it easier for you if we were to open a window or do the art project outside?"</i>)</p> <p>Help a student who is dysregulated by an environmental smell to identify why he is in distress (Example: <i>"You seem very anxious to me. I noticed it smells like bleach in here and I remember you really did not like the bleach when you smelled it during the smell test. Is the smell bothering you?"</i>)</p>
<p><b>Notes</b></p>	<p>If a student reacts poorly to the exercise, stop and discuss. He may need more foundation work with the senses and language before participating.</p>

Section 6.0 AWARENESS DEVELOPMENT AND EXECUTIVE  
FUNCTIONS (ADEF) MODULE

<b>Source</b>	Created by Elana Himmelfarb, 2012

### 6.15 Activity 2: Playing with My Cognitive Skills: Visualizing and Verbalizing

<p><b>Applies to:</b></p>	<p><b>6.07.3 The Mind, Playing with My Cognitive Skills: Visualizing and Verbalizing (Building Blocks of Concept Formation)</b></p>
<p><b>Areas Targeted for Development and/or Objectives</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Anchoring the 12 foundational structure words that are the building blocks to concept formation.</li> <li>• Visualizing using the structure words as a guide.</li> <li>• Verbalizing what one sees in the mind’s eye so another can see the image through the use of words</li> <li>• Following directions and guidelines</li> <li>• Visualizing skills (constructing an image in the mind’s eye)</li> <li>• Verbalizing skills (communicating the image constructed by using structure words and description)</li> <li>• Critical thinking and categorization (understanding the meaning of each structure word and being able to categorize according to each structure word)</li> <li>• Parts-to-whole thinking (identifying both the details and the big picture of the visualized image)</li> <li>• Managing stress and anxiety related to visualizing and verbalizing</li> </ul>
<p><b>Student Functional Capacities Engaged by Exercise</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Receptive language (understanding directions, understanding structure words)</li> <li>• Active working memory and sequential memory (holding the directions and order of operations for the process of visualizing and verbalizing)</li> <li>• Concept formation/visualization</li> <li>• Expressive oral language (verbalizing the image and finding words to describe it)</li> <li>• Descriptive language (generating descriptive words for the image)</li> <li>• Emotion regulation (managing anxiety and overall emotion regulation in the face of anticipation, the unknown, and the unexpected)</li> </ul>

<p><b>Time Required</b></p>	<p>Approximately 1 hour: approximately 10 minutes to review structure words, 15 minutes for facilitator to visualize and verbalize and have student construct an image based on their words; 5 minutes to “share pictures” and see if matching; 15 minute to switch and have student visualize and facilitator has to construct image; 5 minutes to “share pictures” and see if matching.</p>
<p><b>Number of Participants</b></p>	<p>1:1 exercise until the student is stable with the meaning of the 12 structure words and an understanding of what it means to visualize. Can be adjusted to a small group exercise if all students are stable with structure words and have had practice with visualization exercises.</p>
<p><b>Space Needed</b></p>	<p>Distraction free room with no interfering sensory stimuli (noises, competing smells, etc.)</p>
<p><b>Materials Needed</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 12 index cards with a structure word written on each card</li> <li>• Sample pictures or images from a magazine in case the student is not yet able to generate visualization on their own</li> <li>• A list of descriptive words associated with each structure word that can be referenced if the individual is having difficulty generating language on their own.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Pre-activity Preparation and/or Discussion Topics</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Introduce and anchor concept of visualizing (seeing an image in the mind’s eye). Can practice with an image shown and then taken away or by using an image the student knows well such as a family member, favorite cartoon character, or a known image such as a policeman or fireman. Once student is able to “see” images, begin practice visualizing objects not in the room and wean him off of the dependence of having to look at a picture to create one in his mind.</li> <li>2. Introduce the 12 structure words in the following manner: Anchor the most concrete first and make sure the student is stable before moving on. Have him use gestures, movement, and other non-verbal actions when applicable. Use visualization cues such as “what do you see for...”, “How should I picture this cat sitting on a wall?” “Can you use your words and movement to show me what you see so I can make the same picture in my mind?” etc. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>What</b> – (Examples: cat, umbrella, clown, a candy bar, etc.)</li> <li>• <b>Size</b> – (Examples: big, small) Encourage gesturing by asking them to show you how tall, small, etc. with their hands.</li> <li>• <b>Shape</b> – (Examples: square, round, bumpy, etc.) Encourage gesturing and also encourage comparisons (example: “Should I picture something round like a ball or more oval like an egg?”)</li> <li>• <b>Number</b> – (Examples: a few, a lot, 5, some)</li> <li>• <b>Color</b> – (Examples: blue, red, etc.) Student should not simply list the color but describe the color of the object he sees (example: a light brown cat)</li> <li>• <b>Where</b> – Have student describe what he sees around the image that tells</li> </ul> </li> </ol>

where it is “located”. (Example: “The cat is on a wall outside so I see green plants and a red brick wall.”) If the student is seeing the image in isolation (floating in space with no context) use this as an opportunity to ask him to “put” the image somewhere: “Instead of having your policeman floating in space, can you put him at work and tell me where you see him.” (Example: *directing traffic, in a mall, guarding a bank, etc.*)

- **When** – (Example: “It is light out and I see a sun so it is daytime.”)
- **Movement** – (Example: “The cars are moving fast so everything around them is blurry.”) This structure word lends itself well to having students use nonverbal communication to reflect meaning (have them show you how the man walks, get on the floor and move like a cat sneaking up on a squirrel, etc.)
- **Sound** – (Example: Image is a traffic jam - “I hear honking and brakes squealing.”) Student can use words and make sounds to highlight any sound associated with their image.
- **Mood** – (Examples: “The cat is arching his back and his hair is standing up so I see him as scared”, “The policeman has a serious face so he is mad.”) Identifying the mood associated with an image can be a challenge for some individuals. If they assign a mood word without explanation, ask what they see in their picture that tells them what the mood is.
  - The last two structure words are the most abstract and for some it may be wise to stop and solidify skills with the first ten.
  - Students with visual-spatial ordering difficulty may not be able to image in 3D. If the student is able to do abstract reasoning and create complex, 3D images try to introduce and anchor:
- **Background** – Describe what is behind the image. (Examples: “Behind the boat I see a horizon with the sun setting” and “A group of children surrounds the clown.”) May be able to use discussion of **Where** to help if student was able to generate what he saw around his image.
- **Perspective** – Most abstract of the structure words as it not only requires 3D conceptualization but nuances and angles. (Example: “I am looking at the circus ring from above/from the stands, from on top of an elephant”) May need to get student to move around and practice seeing a real 3D object from many angles to anchor the concept of perspective (Example: Lie on ground and look at an action figure, stand on a chair and look down on it, put it up high on a shelf, etc.)

Take as much time as needed to establish and practice visualizing and identifying the structure words with pictures and cut-out images. Lay the structure word index cards out so they can be easily referenced. Once the student is able to do the process with visual aids with some success, this activity can be done repeatedly in sessions spread out over time to build and reinforce visualization and verbalization skills.

<p><b>Activity Steps</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Review rules and procedures for visualizing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create an image in the mind’s eye (if unable, use pictures from magazines, etc.)</li> <li>• Using the structure words as a guide, incorporate words, gestures, sounds, and movement to describe your picture to the teacher</li> <li>• The teacher will then repeat back what the student’s words made them see and any mistakes are corrected</li> <li>• Switch places and now it is the teacher’s turn to create an image and use words, gestures, sounds and movement to describe the picture to the student.</li> </ul> </li> <li>2. Answer questions and clarify any confusion</li> <li>3. Review structure words student will be using (depends on skill level)</li> <li>4. Student visualizes and verbalizes with support</li> <li>5. Teacher repeats back image student made and student corrects any differences</li> <li>6. Take a break if needed</li> <li>7. Teacher visualizes and student is in charge of making sure he uses all the structure words (may need to have index cards available for reference or have them written on a board)</li> <li>8. Student repeats back and teacher corrects</li> </ol>
<p><b>Situations and Remedies</b></p>	<p>If a student has significant regulatory issues, a lack of engagement, or a weak sense of reciprocity this exercise should be delayed until such time as he is able to be regulated, engaged, and reciprocal enough to benefit from the activity.</p> <p>If a student has cognitive difficulty understanding the concept of visualization, work should be done to anchor the structure words with 1D, 2D images, and 3D objects.</p> <p>If a student has expressive language difficulty and/or difficulty with categorization:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with 3D objects he can hold and use his senses to examine instead of creating visualization he will have to verbalize.</li> <li>• Generate a list of familiar descriptive words and allow student to circle, point to, or otherwise indicate which one he feels goes with each structure word.</li> </ul>

<p><b>Follow-up / Post-activity Discussions or Other Steps</b></p>	<p>Since structure words and visualization are the building blocks to writing and reading comprehension, they can be applied in a wide range of teaching scenarios and teachable moments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If a student is having trouble describing an event, an object, or a scene from a movie the structure words can help prompt thinking, ability to describe orally, and recall from memory with increased detail.</li> <li>• When making comparisons, exposure to work with the structure words can be very helpful (examples: Great Danes can be as big as a small horse, the locker room smells like it does when you go to the health club)</li> <li>• Providing guidance, inspiration, and language in writing – structure words can be used to guide the content that needs to be included in a paragraph written describing something.</li> <li>• Visualization techniques have tremendous value in education and learning:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– helps anchor auditory information given in explanations or lectures</li> <li>– increases one’s ability to follow directions</li> <li>– assists students in comprehension of vocabulary words, understanding new concepts, making connections</li> <li>– Provides inspiration in art, improvisation, role playing, presentations, discussions, writing, brainstorming, problem solving, etc.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p><b>Notes</b></p>	<p><u>Lindamood-Bell</u> offers an entire structured program for remediating and building Visualizing and Verbalizing skills, starting with single images and building up to visualizing whole paragraphs.</p>
<p><b>Sources</b></p>	<p>Bell, N. (1991). Gestalt imagery: A critical factor in language comprehension. <i>Annals of Dyslexia</i>, 41(1), 246-260. doi: 10.1007/BF02648089</p> <p>Hayes, C.B., ed. (2006, May 2). <i>Dyslexia in children: New research</i>. New York: Nova Science Pub Inc.</p> <p>Johnson-Glenberg, M. C. (2000, December). Training reading comprehension in adequate decoders/poor comprehends: Verbal versus visual strategies. <i>Journal of Educational Psychology</i>, 92(4), 772-782). doi: 10.1037/0022-0663.92.4.772</p> <p>Mendelson. (2004). For whom is a picture worth a thousand words? Effects of a visualizing cognitive style. <i>Journal of Visual Literacy</i>, 24(1), 1-22A.</p> <p>Stimley, R. E. (2006). Reading to learn: The role of metacognition in reading comprehension and academic achievement of students with learning disabilities. Retrieved November 28, 2012 from <a href="http://cardinalsolar.bsu.edu/handle/handle/192730">http://cardinalsolar.bsu.edu/handle/handle/192730</a></p> <p>Snowling, M. J., &amp; Hulme, C. (2011, January 12). Evidence-based interventions for reading and language difficulties: Creating a virtuous cycle. <i>British Journal of Educational Psychology</i>, 81(1), 1-23. Doi: 10.1111/j.2044-8279.2010.02014.x</p>



### 6.16 Activity 3: Playing with Cognitive Skills: Creativity and Brainstorming

<b>Applies to:</b>	<b>6.07.3 The Mind: Playing with My Cognitive Skills</b>
<b>Areas Targeted for Development and/or Objectives</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Following directions and guidelines</li> <li>• Verbalizing</li> <li>• Creativity</li> <li>• Brainstorming</li> <li>• Managing stress and anxiety related to generating ideas on the spot in the absence of clues or an explicit, “right” answer</li> <li>• Using humor and visualization in the creative process</li> </ul>
<b>Student Functional Capacities Engaged by Exercise</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Receptive language (understanding directions, sifting through known vocabulary to find those that sound similar to the nonsense word )</li> <li>• Expressive oral language (verbalizing ideas)</li> <li>• Emotional regulation (managing anxiety and overall emotion regulation in the face of an open-ended exercise with no correct answer)</li> <li>• Critical reasoning (generating fake meaning for nonsense words)</li> <li>• Inhibition/facilitation (taking turn, waiting for others to take their turn)</li> <li>• Focal maintenance (sustaining attention needed during task to focus on answers peers give and respond)</li> <li>• Phonological processing/encoding (Ability to spell name then reverse the letters to spell it backward)</li> </ul>
<b>Time Required</b>	Approximately 45 minutes: approximately 10 minute to anchor rules of the game, 25 minutes to play, 10 minutes to process experience
<b>Number of Participants</b>	Small to medium sized group (3-8). For individuals with slow processing, expressive language difficulty, high anxiety when put on the spot, or verbal impulsivity when others are speaking, the activity might need additional staff to float and facilitate. Each participant should have a chance to make his own guesses during each group member’s turn.

<b>Space Needed</b>	Distraction-free room with no significant interfering sensory stimuli (noises, competing smells, etc.). Can sit in circle on floor or in chairs.
<b>Materials Needed</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chalkboard or white board to write down names</li> <li>• Dry erase markers or chalk</li> <li>• Sample already prepared using teacher's first name</li> <li>• Chairs if students do not want to sit on floor</li> </ul>
<b>Preparation</b>	None needed
<b>Activity Steps</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Discuss rules of the game: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Each student in the group will take a turn at the board writing his first name backwards.</li> <li>• Students are to pretend it is a word in a strange foreign language (or an alien language if students prefer fantasy). Group decides upon the pronunciation of the backward name.</li> <li>• Including the person who's name is on the board, each student makes up a definition for the word</li> <li>• Go around so everyone has a chance to have their name done</li> </ul> </li> <li>2. Answer questions and clarify any confusion</li> <li>3. Begin by using the teacher's first name (example: yllas for Sally)</li> <li>4. Students brainstorm how to pronounce (example: ee-las, yeelas, ill-as, etc.). Then make up a definition (example: a house for eels to live in, a dish people make in Greece, etc.)</li> <li>5. Once the trial run is done and the students have a sense of how to play, the game begins.</li> <li>6. Game over when each student has had his name done</li> <li>7. When finished: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discuss tricks students used to brainstorm (find another word that looks like or sounds like a word they know, imagination, sources of inspiration such as Anime or Pokémon names, etc.)</li> <li>• Identify definitions students made up that stood out as particularly funny or creative</li> <li>• Discuss ease/difficulty in making up definitions and being put on the spot to be creative</li> <li>• Discuss if students were able to have fun or if they were reactive to other people's definitions of their name they did not like, etc.</li> <li>• Discuss times in real life when students felt put on the spot to be creative to generate ideas (examples: classroom, social situations, ordering food, asked a question and was caught off guard); discuss strategies for coping in such situations</li> </ul> </li> </ol>
<b>Situations</b>	If a student has difficulty writing on the board or spelling his name backward,

<p><b>and Remedies</b></p>	<p>facilitator should write for the individual so his spelling does not interfere with his ability to play the game.</p> <p>If a student has cognitive or conceptual difficulty understanding what a definition is and is unable to generate definitions for objects he knows well, he should not participate in this exercise until he has gained the ability to work with and understand the concept of a definition.</p> <p>If a student has expressive language difficulty or slow processing, he can either get help from a facilitator or not engage in the game until he is able to process what is said and respond when it is his turn at a speed that enables him to benefit from the experience.</p> <p>If an individual has high emotional reactivity/defensiveness to peers, the game may prove very challenging when it is his turn and others guess definitions for their name they may not like. Additional coaching and facilitation may be required to help keep reactivity manageable so the individual and his peers can enjoy the game.</p>
<p><b>Follow-up / Post-activity Discussions or Other Steps</b></p>	<p>Continue to provide exercises that center on creativity and idea generation/brainstorming in a group setting to strengthen cognitive skills and self-regulation in group settings.</p>
<p><b>Notes</b></p>	<p>If a student reacts poorly to the exercise, stop and discuss. He may need more foundation work with language, brainstorming, creativity, and understanding the group process before participating.</p>
<p><b>Source</b></p>	<p>Morris, K., &amp; Cinnamon, K. (1974). <i>A handbook of verbal group exercises</i>. Hoboken, NJ: Pfeiffer &amp; Co. Expanded by Elana Himmelfarb, 2012</p>

6.17 Activity 4: Emotions and Thinking (The Loneliness Game”)

<b>Applies to:</b>	<b>6.08.4 Developing Awareness of the Mind: Emotional Experiences and Thought Reactions</b>
<b>Areas Targeted for Development and/or Objectives</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exploring and identifying thought patterns that surface in reaction to an emotional experience</li> <li>• Understanding that emotions cause thought reactions, and that those thoughts can further intensify one’s emotions</li> <li>• Verbalizing emotional experiences</li> <li>• Abstract thinking (understanding the game is a metaphor for the experience of social rejection and loneliness)</li> <li>• Critical reasoning (analyzing emotions and the thoughts it elicited)</li> <li>• Managing stress and anxiety related to emotional input (rejection)</li> <li>• Evaluative thinking (connecting the experience of the activity to real life examples and identifying emotion/thought patterns)</li> <li>• Emotional thinking (reflecting upon one’s feelings and emotional thoughts surrounding loneliness, feeling left out, social rejection)</li> </ul>
<b>Student Functional Capacities Engaged by Exercise</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Receptive language (understanding directions)</li> <li>• Expressive oral language (verbalizing the experience, feelings, thoughts)</li> <li>• Descriptive language (generating descriptive words for emotional experiences)</li> <li>• Emotion regulation (managing anxiety and overall emotion regulation in the face of anticipation and few guidelines)</li> <li>• Critical reasoning (making connections between the game and real life social interactions)</li> </ul>
<b>Time Required</b>	Approximately 1 hour: no set-up time needed. Game should be cued and ready but student should not see screen until game begins.
<b>Number of Participants</b>	This activity is best done 1:1, but it can be modified to a small group configuration by having each student take a turn alone in the room while he plays the game, then have small group convene to share their experiences.
<b>Space Needed</b>	Distraction-free room with no interfering sensory stimuli (noises, competing smells, etc.)
<b>Materials Needed</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Computer screen, internet access, mouse</li> <li>• A list of descriptive words handy during discussion so student can draw from the word bank if having difficulty generating language on his own to describe the experience. (Example: lonely, frustrating, easy, hard, confusing, realistic, unrealistic, etc.)</li> <li>• Pad of paper or a white board to write down what student says and does as he plays the game so feedback can be given and observations referenced during discussion. (Student may be so absorbed in game he is not aware of what he said and did.)</li> </ul>

<p><b>Pre-activity Preparation and/or Discussion Topics</b></p>	<p>Discussion preceding exercise to anchor context and set the climate for the experiment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How video games can simulate real life (generate examples from experience and also bring in other examples such as the military and medical school trainings using video simulation)</li> <li>• Have student identify overall reactions to video game obstacles and frustrations</li> <li>• Have student reflect on preference and possible reaction regarding doing something “blind” (no rules or hints) vs. knowing what to expect</li> </ul>
<p><b>Activity Steps</b></p>	<p>No prompting or explanation; simply tell the student to play the game. Observe student’s emotional reactions and write down verbalizations as he plays. After finished (approximately 5 minutes of play time) have discussion.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Ask student to describe how he is feeling in the moment</li> <li>2. Cue up “The Loneliness Game” so it is ready for the student to play <a href="http://www.necessarygames.com/my-games/loneliness">http://www.necessarygames.com/my-games/loneliness</a></li> <li>3. Make sure the student reads or is told the only instructions: use the arrow keys to move your man. There are no other instructions.</li> <li>4. Do not answer any questions or clarify any confusion, simply reassure the student to keep playing and discussion will follow afterwards.</li> <li>5. Take notes on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Whether student notices the name “The Loneliness Game” right as it starts</li> <li>• All physical and behavioral reactions</li> <li>• All verbalizations, sighs, groans, etc. and level to which they are repetitive</li> <li>• Any spontaneous insights or realizations during or at completion of game</li> </ul> </li> <li>6. Before launching into discussion, ask student again how he is feeling</li> <li>7. Discuss: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emotional experience of playing the game (feelings, sensations, emotional reactions)</li> <li>• Thoughts student had while playing</li> <li>• Connection between his feelings and thoughts</li> <li>• Difference between how student felt before and after game</li> <li>• Have student explain in his own words why it is called “The Loneliness Game” and have student try to identify with the game and understand what it is saying about social rejection and loneliness.</li> <li>• Reflect on whether his reaction to being rejected by the dots brought up feelings and thoughts similar to when people reject him. Did he make the dots behave like they would when they are in groups of peers? What feelings does it bring up when people move away, and what thoughts surface about him and others when he feels this way? Did he identify with his dot, feel bad for it (empathy)?</li> </ul> </li> </ol>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Imagine the dots as people, provide a simple scenario and have student reflect on what he would do (keep trying, not try at all, give up, etc.). Reflect on how well his strategies work and generate alternate strategies.</li> <li>● Evaluate whether it accomplished the goal of eliciting feelings of loneliness in the player.</li> <li>● What was learned about his emotions and thought reactions and to what extent he enjoyed or disliked the experience and why</li> <li>● Draw conclusions about student’s overall sensitivity/reactivity to social rejection and loneliness</li> <li>● Reflect on how this information is helpful in the real world</li> </ul>
<p><b>Situations and Remedies</b></p>	<p>If a student has</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Significant emotional regulation issues in general,</li> <li>● Tremendous anxiety doing something without step-by-step instructions, or</li> <li>● Significant social isolation or loneliness issues</li> </ul> <p>Care will need to be taken to decide the timing, appropriateness, and level of support needed. The activity can either be delayed until the student shows readiness or the facilitator can “play” the game with him to increase the level of emotional support.</p> <p>If a student has cognitive or conceptual difficulty understanding what a simulation is or has weak abstract reasoning in general, the activity can either be delayed until the student shows readiness or the facilitator can “play” the game with him to increase the level of cognitive support by verbalizing insights during the game.</p> <p>If a student has expressive language difficulty but strong receptive language:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Generate a list of descriptive words (feelings and thoughts) and allow him to circle, point, or otherwise indicate which ones surfaced during his experience</li> <li>● Have the student write, keyboard, or use Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) devices to express his feelings and thoughts</li> </ul>
<p><b>Follow-up / Post-activity Discussions or Other Steps</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Simulate the dot game with a live group of peers. Do not allow anyone to talk and the only gesturing allowed is to look away or turn your back to the “outsider”. Discuss and reflect on feelings and resulting thoughts.</li> <li>2. Provide feedback to the individual when they behave among peers like their dot did.</li> <li>3. 1:1 and group discussions (all students should have had first-hand experience playing the game) generating social scenarios that highlight issues surrounding the emotional experience of social rejection and how it changes thinking about oneself and others. Generate alternative solutions and healthy coping strategies</li> <li>4. Role play/improvisation a human version of the dot game using scenarios. Make sure each student has a chance to be both isolated as the rejected one and part of the group that rejects the outsider.</li> </ol>

<b>Notes</b>	If a student reacts poorly to the exercise, stop and discuss. He may need more foundation work with social rejection and managing emotions before being in a position to benefit from the experience, draw meaning, and self-reflect.
<b>Source</b>	Exercise created by Elana Himmelfarb, 2012 using “The Loneliness Game,” created by David Lerin <a href="http://www.necessarygames.com">www.necessarygames.com</a>

### 6.18 Activity 5: Perspective Taking I: Guessing the Viewpoint of Others on Video

<b>Applies To:</b>	<b>6.09.2 Me and You, Perspective Taking, #2</b>
<b>Purpose:</b>	Exploring and identifying the perspective of other people
<b>Areas Targeted for Development and/or Objectives:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Following directions and guidelines</li> <li>• Verbalizing skills (putting ideas into words)</li> <li>• Contextual thinking (incorporating the context of a situation into one’s analysis)</li> <li>• Perspective taking (projecting what others might think based on the information available)</li> <li>• Critical thinking (analyzing a scenario and another’s behavior to find clues to conclusions about their perspectives)</li> </ul>
<b>Student Functional Capacities Engaged by Exercise</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Receptive language (understanding directions)</li> <li>• Expressive oral language (verbalizing ideas, generating descriptive words for context clues)</li> <li>• Emotion regulation (managing anxiety and reactivity that may surface in the scenarios)</li> <li>• Critical reasoning (identifying and analyzing context clues and incorporating them into conclusions)</li> <li>• Social cognition (perspective taking, reading non-verbal cues such as behavior)</li> </ul>
<b>Time Required</b>	Approximately 30 minutes to 1 hour: approximately 5 minutes to introduce and anchor the activity guidelines. Can extend or shorten the activity depending on attention, mental stamina, etc.
<b>Number of Participants</b>	Can be done with one individual or a small group (3-5). For individuals with slow processing or expressive language difficulty the activity is best done 1:1 so the process can unfold at his pace and time can be used as needed with each scenario. If done in a small group, students need to take turns guessing and listening to each other’s ideas
<b>Space Needed</b>	Distraction-free room with no significant interfering sensory stimuli (noises, competing smells, etc.)



<p><b>Materials Needed</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● TV or computer</li> <li>● Pre-selected recorded or cued up soap opera, sitcom, or movie clips</li> <li>● If group activity, can sit on ground or use chairs. All students need to be able to view the screen</li> <li>● White board to write down ideas as students generate them</li> <li>● Dry erase markers with several colors so each character analyzed is coded in distinct color</li> </ul>
<p><b>Pre-activity Preparation and/or Discussion Topics</b></p>	<p>Discussion preceding exercise to anchor concept of perspective taking (ADEF). Enough examples should be generated until the individual understands the concept and is able to participate in the activity.</p>
<p><b>Activity Steps</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Discuss rules and procedures for the activity:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Watching short scene clips with the sound muted</li> <li>● Facilitator will stop/pause the scene</li> <li>● Students will:                 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– recall what they saw happen</li> <li>– Identify each character and guess their role in the scene (example: bad guy, mother, store clerk, etc.)</li> <li>– discuss how each character behaved, identify the emotions expressed (body language and facial expressions)</li> <li>– draw conclusions about the perspective of each character (example: the male student wanted to get his teacher mad and did a lot of things behind her back and then made faces to his friends and seemed really proud of being obnoxious; the teacher was confused and angry because she was being disrespected, she did not know how to control the student so she stormed out of the classroom to get the principal)</li> </ul> </li> </ul> </li> </ol>

	<p>2. Watch scene clips, each followed by discussion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● If activity is done in a small group, facilitator should write down each student’s contributions and encourage debate if there are differences of opinion, guiding them back to the scene. Can re-watch if there is variance in what students recall.</li> <li>● If done 1:1 can also re-watch the scene as needed to reference</li> <li>● If students add information that was not present in the scene or make assumptions that are not logical watch the scene again and point out the discrepancies</li> </ul> <p>3. When finished</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Decide which scenes where it was easiest to figure out the characters’ perspectives. Identify what made it easy (large gestures, big actions, strong emotions)</li> <li>● Decide which scenes where it was difficult to figure out the characters’ perspectives</li> </ul>
<p><b>Situations and Remedies</b></p>	<p>If student has significant regulatory issues that impair his ability to be engaged fully in this activity and draw meaning, scale the exercise back to 1:1 and/or watch fewer scenes in each session and spread out over multiple sessions</p> <p>If a student has cognitive or conceptual difficulty understanding the complexity of non-verbal cues or perspective-taking the activity should be delayed until the student has the skills to benefit from the experience and draw meaning.</p> <p>If a student has expressive language difficulty he can act out the various behaviors and facial expressions he found significant.</p> <p>If a student has difficulty tracking multiple pieces of information or has slow processing, break down steps into smaller pieces:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Watch scene and let student know that he will be asked to describe what happened</li> <li>● Watch scene again and prompt student to identify each character and guess their role in the scene (examples: bad guy, mother, store clerk, etc.). Can pause as much as needed to stop and reflect, discuss context clues and put pieces together</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Watch scene again and prompt student to pay attention to how each character behaved, identify the emotions expressed (body language and facial expressions). Can break it down character by character if needed to decelerate pace and complexity further.</li> <li>• Watch scene one last time to see if student can generate a big picture conclusion about the perspective of each character (example: “The male student wanted to get his teacher mad and did a lot of things behind her back and then made faces to his friends and seemed really proud of being obnoxious”; “The teacher was confused and angry because she was being disrespected, she did not know how to control the student so she stormed out of the classroom and got the principal”.)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Follow-up / Post-activity Discussions or Other Steps</b></p>	<p>This activity can be done repeatedly with different video clips. Once a student is able to identify key perspectives through non-verbal behavior on a video, can progress to Perspective Taking II: Guessing The Viewpoint of Others Through Role Play, and Perspective Taking III: Guessing The Viewpoint of Others Through Real Life Observation</p>
<p><b>Notes</b></p>	<p>If a student reacts poorly to the exercise, stop and discuss. He may need more foundation work with social cognition and language before participating.</p>
<p><b>Source</b></p>	<p>Created by Elana Himmelfarb, 2012</p>

### 6.19 Activity 6: Perspective Taking II: Guessing the Viewpoint of Others in Role Play

<b>Applies to:</b>	<b>6.09.2 Me and You, Perspective Taking, #2</b>
<b>Purpose:</b>	Exploring and identifying the perspective of other people
<b>Areas Targeted for Development and/or Objectives:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Following directions and guidelines</li> <li>• Verbalizing skills (putting ideas into words)</li> <li>• Contextual thinking skills (incorporating the context of a situation into one’s analysis)</li> <li>• Perspective taking skills (projecting what others might think based on information available)</li> <li>• Critical thinking skills (analyzing a scenario and another’s behavior to find clues to conclusions about perspectives)</li> </ul>
<b>Student Functional Capacities Engaged by Exercise</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Receptive language (understanding directions)</li> <li>• Expressive oral language (verbalizing ideas, generating descriptive words for context clues.)</li> <li>• Emotion regulation (managing anxiety and reactivity that may surface in the scenarios )</li> <li>• Critical reasoning (identifying and analyzing context clues and incorporating them into conclusions)</li> <li>• Social cognition (perspective taking, reading non-verbal cues such as behavior)</li> </ul>
<b>Time Required</b>	Approximately 30 minutes to 1 hour: approximately 5 minutes to introduce and anchor the activity guidelines. Can extend or shorten the activity depending on attention, mental stamina, etc.
<b>Number of Participants</b>	<p>Can be done with one individual, small or medium sized group (3-8).</p> <p>For students with slow processing or expressive language difficulty, the activity is best done 1:1 so the process can unfold at their pace and time can be used as needed with each scenario.</p> <p>If done in a small group, students need to be able to take turns guessing and listening to each other’s ideas</p> <p>Two facilitators are needed for this exercise, as there are times when the actors have to step out of the room and discuss</p>

Section 6.0 AWARENESS DEVELOPMENT AND EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONS (ADEF) MODULE

<p><b>Space Needed</b></p>	<p>Distraction-free room with no significant interfering sensory stimuli (noises, competing smells, etc.)</p>
<p><b>Materials Needed</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Room to move around during role-play</li> <li>• Index cards with simple, real-life scenarios</li> <li>• Props for role-play that would be useful to the scenarios given to the students</li> <li>• If a group activity, can sit on ground or use chairs. All students need to be able to view the screen.</li> <li>• White board to write down ideas as students generate them</li> <li>• Dry erase markers with several colors so each character analyzed is coded in distinctive color</li> </ul>
<p><b>Pre-activity Preparation and/or Discussion Topics</b></p>	<p>Discussion preceding exercise to anchor concept of perspective taking. Enough examples should be generated until the student understands the concept and is able to participate in the activity.</p> <p>Experience engaging in Perspective Taking I: Guessing the Viewpoints of Others in Video</p>
<p><b>Activity Steps</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Discuss rules and procedures for the activity</li> <li>2. Students pick up an index card (1-2 players per scene)</li> <li>3. Students who drew scene card step out of the room with a facilitator and partner if it is a 2-person scene.</li> <li>4. Students reads the scenario</li> <li>5. Facilitator makes sure students understand and can articulate the “scene”. If students have a partner, discuss strategy and roles. Facilitator helps as needed</li> <li>6. Students return to the room and act out a short scene</li> <li>7. Peers discuss and reflect on the following (students who acted out the scene do not speak):             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recall what they saw happen</li> <li>• Identify each character and guess their role in the scene (example: bus driver and passenger, mother and child, babysitter and child, etc.)</li> <li>• Discuss how each character behaved, identify emotions expressed (body language and facial expressions)</li> </ul> </li> </ol>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Draw conclusions about perspective of each character (example: “The babysitter thinks the child is a brat and the child is doing everything he can to get her upset because he doesn’t like her/is mad at his parents for leaving him home, etc.” )</li> </ul> <p>8. Acting students tell peers whether their observations or conclusions matched their scene</p> <p>9. After scene has been discussed and evaluated the next student or pair of students get to pick a scene card until each person in the group has had a turn</p> <p>10. When finished</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Decide which scenes where it was the easiest to figure out the characters’ perspectives. Identify what made it easy (large gestures, big actions, strong emotions, have been in a similar experience)</li> <li>• Decide which scenes where it was difficult to figure out the characters’ perspectives (didn’t understand or know how to interpret certain behaviors or expressions, had no prior context for scene)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Situations and Remedies</b></p>	<p>If a student has significant regulatory issues that impairs his ability to be engaged fully in this activity and draw meaning, scale the exercise back to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1:1</li> <li>• Do simplified scenes and facilitator should exaggerate behaviors, gestures, and emotions to help prompt</li> </ul> <p>If a student was not able to do the pre-activity Perspective-Taking I, participation in Perspective-Taking II should be delayed until he has skills to benefit from the experience and draw meaning.</p> <p>If a student has expressive language difficulty the scenes can be done non-verbally</p> <p>If a student has difficulty tracking multiple pieces of information or slow processing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Simplify scenes</li> <li>• Exaggerate context clues with high affect and grand gestures</li> <li>• Call “freeze” intermittently in the scene so the actors will freeze and the group can discuss the scene in smaller parts</li> </ul>

<b>Follow-up / Post-activity Discussions or Other Steps</b>	Once a student is able to identify key perspectives and draw accurate conclusions from the role playing scenarios in Perspective Taking II: Guessing The Viewpoint of Others Through role-play, introduce Perspective Taking III: Guessing The Viewpoint of Others Through Real Life Observation
<b>Notes</b>	If a student reacts poorly to the exercise, stop and discuss. He may need more foundation work with social cognition and language before participating.
<b>Source</b>	Created by Elana Himmelfarb, 2012

### 6.20 Activity 7: Perspective Taking III: Guessing the Viewpoint of Others through Real Life Observation

<b>Applies to:</b>	<b>6.09.2 Me and You, Perspective Taking, #2</b>
<b>Purpose:</b>	Deepening the ability to identify the perspective of other people by watching their interactions
<b>Areas Targeted for Development and/or Objectives:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Following directions and guidelines</li> <li>• Verbalizing skills (putting ideas into words)</li> <li>• Maintaining focus on a task in the midst of environmental distractors</li> <li>• Contextual thinking skills (incorporating the context of a situation into one’s analysis)</li> <li>• Perspective taking skills (projecting what others might think based on the information available)</li> <li>• Critical thinking skills (analyzing a scenario and another’s behavior to find clues to conclusions about their perspectives)</li> </ul>
<b>Student Functional Capacities Engaged by Exercise</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Receptive language (understanding directions)</li> <li>• Expressive oral language (verbalizing ideas, generating descriptive words for context clues.)</li> <li>• Emotion regulation (managing anxiety and reactivity being around people)</li> <li>• Critical reasoning (identifying and analyzing context clues and incorporating them into conclusions)</li> <li>• Social cognition (perspective taking, reading non-verbal cues such as behavior)</li> <li>• Attention regulation (ignoring non-salient information and stimuli, maintaining focus despite distractors)</li> </ul>
<b>Time Required</b>	<p>Approximately 45 minutes: 10 minutes to discuss activity and review what student will be looking for, 20 minutes of observation, 15 minutes for post-observation discussion and reflection.</p> <p>If activity is done on program grounds, time can be more controlled. If activity is done in a public milieu, staff will need to factor in time for logistics (driving to the mall, parking, walking to the food court, etc.).</p>



<p><b>Number of Participants</b></p>	<p>Can be done with one individual or a small group (1-3).</p> <p>For students with slow processing or expressive language difficulty the activity is best done 1:1 so the process can unfold at their pace.</p> <p>If done in a small group, students need to be able to take turns guessing and listening to each other's ideas.</p> <p>2 Facilitators may be needed for this exercise if done in small groups to help with logistics and to pull a student who might become dysregulated and need to leave the place of observation.</p>
<p><b>Space Needed</b></p>	<p>On-site at program or school location, observation opportunities are best where there is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● An increase in chance to see a variety of behaviors</li> <li>● The actions of the observed group are obvious and not too subtle and nuanced</li> <li>● The presence of the observers will not cause a disruption or change the way the observed students behave</li> <li>● Possible viable locations: playground/recess, PE, lunchroom, classroom where there is an involved activity and the students are preoccupied</li> </ul> <p>In the community, observation opportunities are best when:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Students can be observed without knowing they are being watched</li> <li>● There can be a respectful distance between the observers and the students they are watching</li> <li>● The observation does not cause a disruption or change the behavior of the students being observed</li> <li>● The students observed are engaged in an activity (not sitting and reading, etc.)</li> <li>● The location is not too chaotic or sensorily dysregulating (loud noises, etc.)</li> <li>● Possible viable locations are areas in the community including public parks, airports, food court in a mall, train or bus station, etc.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Materials Needed</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Access to transportation to community or permission from school if on-site</li> <li>● Pad of paper and pens/pencils to write down observations (students write or teacher can scribe)</li> </ul>

<p><b>Pre-activity Preparation and/or Discussion Topics</b></p>	<p>Discussion preceding exercise to anchor concept of perspective taking. Enough examples should be generated until students understand the concept and are able to participate in the activity.</p> <p>Experience engaging in Perspective Taking I: Guessing the Viewpoints of Others in Video and Perspective Taking II: Guessing the Viewpoints of Others Through Role-Play</p> <p>How to manage self in public/during school observation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Keeping voice down</li> <li>● Not pointing</li> <li>● Looking away occasionally so observed person does not feel stared at or become self-conscious</li> <li>● Role is as observer – do not approach the students you have been watching</li> </ul>
<p><b>Activity Steps</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Discuss rules and procedures for the activity.</li> <li>2. Students settle into observation location</li> <li>3. Teacher will select, point out, and “assign” what students should be looking for. Students can also generate ideas for observation (<i>Example: mother shopping with child who is behaving badly and she is trying to manage her frustration. Students should be assigned to watch the mother and child over someone simply walking by</i>)</li> <li>4. Students quietly verbalize observations and teacher writes them down. If any students are good writers they can have their own notepad.</li> <li>5. When the observed party moves on, select another observation focus or move locations to get a different viewpoint. If at a mall or somewhere with open levels, it may be interesting to do an observation from an upper level looking down to provide the experience of variance in physical perspective.</li> <li>6. When students get restless or fatigued, end the exercise and regroup in a quiet location to discuss (classroom, van, outside parking lot)</li> <li>7. Peers discuss and reflect on the following:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Recall what they saw happen (<i>Example: watched playground; two children fought over a toy</i>)</li> <li>●</li> </ul> </li> </ol>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify each character and guess their role in the scene (<i>Example: one child owned the toy and the other wanted it</i>)</li> <li>• Discuss how each character behaved, identify emotions expressed through body language and facial expressions as they may be too far away to hear words (<i>Example: The owner of the toy was tearful, the other child had a mean expression and was physically aggressive</i>)</li> <li>• Draw conclusions about perspective of each character (<i>Example: The child who owns the toy likes to share and tried to share toy but the other child was greedy and grabbed it away. The child who owns the toy got frustrated and grabbed it back, refusing to let the other child see it again because he did not trust the other child anymore. If the second child had not been so grabby and aggressive they probably could have played with the toy together.</i>)</li> </ul> <p>8. When finished</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Decide which scenes where it was the easiest to figure out the characters' perspectives. Identify what made it easy (large gestures, big actions, strong emotions, have been in a similar experience)</li> <li>• Decide which scenes where it was difficult to figure out the characters' perspectives (didn't understand or know how to interpret certain behaviors or expressions, had no prior context for scene)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Follow-up / Post-activity Discussions or Other Steps</b></p>	<p>Continue to reinforce perspective taking in the following contexts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understanding characters and their motivation in movies, shows, and books</li> <li>• Discussions about peer relationships and peer conflicts</li> <li>• Bring things to their awareness when out and about in the community (example: notice how the man at the next table is speaking to the waiter. How would you describe it (demanding, rude, mean, polite, friendly, etc.)? Why would someone treat his or her waiter rudely?)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Notes</b></p>	<p>If a student reacts poorly to the exercise, stop and discuss. He may need more foundation work with social cognition, regulation, and language before participating.</p>
<p><b>Source</b></p>	<p>Created by Elana Himmelfarb, 2012</p>

### 6.21 Activity 8: My Hierarchy of Needs

<b>Applies to:</b>	<b>6.13 ADEF Module Completion Activities</b>
<b>Purpose:</b>	Provide a big picture summary in a graphic model of individual student needs based on work done in the ADEF
<b>Areas Targeted for Development and/or Objectives</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Big picture summary in a graphic model of individual student needs based on work done in the ADEF</li> <li>● Reflecting on what was learned about self through the ADEF</li> <li>● Verbalizing needs</li> <li>● Categorizing needs</li> <li>● Evaluating information in terms of importance.</li> <li>● Reinforcing new self-knowledge from ADEF</li> <li>● Producing a graphic representation of needs for future reference</li> </ul>
<b>Student Functional Capacities Engaged by Exercise</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Receptive language (understanding directions of exercise)</li> <li>2. Active working memory and long-term access (recalling with salient details and insights that arose during ADEF work)</li> <li>3. Expressive oral language (verbalizing thoughts)</li> <li>4. Higher order thinking (evaluating/categorizing needs, conceptualizing “hierarchy” and applying the concept to their own needs, and understanding that the symbol of a triangle represents a hierarchy, summarization)</li> <li>5. Saliency determination (ability to identify what is the important information from a large amount of information)</li> <li>6. Prioritization (ability to arrange information according to importance or value)</li> <li>7. Gestalt/big picture thinking (ability to reflect on an experience and see how the parts of the ADEF together create a big picture of the many parts of oneself)</li> </ol>

<p><b>Time Required</b></p>	<p>The amount of time needed to perform this activity depends heavily on the individual's:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Language systems</li> <li>• Processing speed</li> <li>• Efficiency of recall</li> <li>• Critical reasoning skills</li> <li>• Attention controls</li> </ul> <p>An individual who struggles with any of the above will need the activity spread over several sessions. An individual who is not struggling with the above list might be able to accomplish the activity in one to two 50-minute sessions.</p>
<p><b>Number of Participants</b></p>	<p>The process of constructing the hierarchy should be done 1:1 as the information is so individualized and time needed to complete task will vary greatly.</p> <p>Once students have done their own personal hierarchy, they can be matched with developmentally appropriate peers for group sharing, discussion, and reflection on each student's hierarchy and a comparison of needs.</p>
<p><b>Space Needed</b></p>	<p>Distraction-free room with no significant interfering sensory stimuli (noises, competing smells, etc.)</p>
<p><b>Materials Needed</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ADEF journal with student's responses for reference and guidance</li> <li>• A large piece of blank white paper</li> <li>• Several different colors of thin tipped markers</li> </ul>
<p><b>Pre-activity Preparation and/or Discussion Topics</b></p>	<p>Completion of the ADEF</p>

**Activity  
Steps**

1. Set climate and expectations by explaining that the activity is designed to:
  - Give students a chance to take all the information they gathered through the ADEF and choose the most important needs and realizations about themselves
  - Create a visual that will summarize a lot of the ADEF information in an easy to reference chart
  - Create a chart that will be useful in other activities, discussions, and group experiences throughout the program
2. Anchor the definition of hierarchy
  - Define hierarchy
  - Provide simple real life examples that are understandable and have context in the student's life (examples: In a courtroom—bailiff, lawyers, judge; in the hospital—nurse assistant, nurse, doctor)
3. If student has higher-level skills, introduce Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and review. If student struggles with more profound processing, language, or cognitive challenges skip #3 and go to #4
4. Introduce a blank triangle chart with the abridged categories written in and large areas left blank to write in (bottom to top):
  - My Basic Sensory and Physical Needs (what I need to feel comfortable and regulated with my senses and in my body)
  - My Basic Cognitive Needs (what I need to understand what is going on around me, what I need to learn best, what I need to express myself best)
  - My Basic Emotional and Social Needs (what I need to feel emotionally calm and happy, what I need to get my social needs met)
  - My Basic Self-Esteem Needs (what I need to do, where I need to be, and who I need to be around to feel good about myself)
  - My Unique Qualities (my morals, my creativity, my gifts and talents)
5. Take the time needed with the student to start at the bottom and fill in each part of the chart. The student should select a color theme for each level. This exercise will require access to the ADEF information for reference. If the student has a lot of cognitive, language, and processing challenges the language load should be adjusted to use vocabulary on his level of comprehension. The student is freed up to reflect as the facilitator guides him through the process and writes down what the student decides should go in each category. To save space, use key words and phrases rather than whole sentences.
6. When the process is finished, however long it takes, time should be set aside to review when complete.
7. Discuss how this is not a fixed chart and needs to change over time. If the student is cognitively able, the facilitator can ask him to predict ways his chart might change as he gets older and more independent.

<b>Situations and Remedies</b>	As noted in activity step #3 above.
<b>Follow-up / Post-activity Discussions or Other Steps</b>	<p>The finished individualized My Hierarchy of Needs chart can be used in a multitude of ways:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Group reflection and sharing</li> <li>• Referenced in therapeutic sessions</li> <li>• Revised on occasion throughout the program experience</li> <li>• Used as inspiration for journal entries, papers, group discussions</li> <li>• Used as a reference when a student is upset or in distress but does not know why – a quick visual review of his needs might prompt insight and understanding</li> <li>• The concept of a hierarchy and the graphic model can be abridged and used for other self-reflection exercises or to help explain/breakdown an abstract concept</li> <li>• The chart should become part of the student’s SIP file</li> </ul>
<b>Notes</b>	None
<b>Source</b>	Created by Elana Himmelfarb, 2012 inspired by Dr. Abraham Maslow’s <i>Hierarchy of Needs</i> chart and concept.

### 6.22 Activity 9: Identifying Personal Goals Based on What I Know About Myself

<b>Applies to:</b>	<b>6.13 ADEF Module Completion Activities</b>
<b>Purpose:</b>	Identifying and formulating personal goals
<b>Areas Targeted for Development and/or Objectives:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Capacity to reflect on what was learned about self through the ADEF</li> <li>• Identifying and verbalizing needs</li> <li>• Evaluative thinking (identifying information about self – needed to formulate goals)</li> <li>• Reinforcing new self-knowledge that arose from ADEF</li> <li>• Creating attainable and realistic short- and long-term personal goals</li> <li>• Critical reasoning (big picture thinking, strategic thinking, prioritization)</li> <li>• Temporal-sequential ordering (identifying whether goal is short- or long-term based on what is needed to accomplish it)</li> <li>• Visualization skills (envisioning a future self, envisioning what changes would look like if goals were accomplished)</li> </ul>
<b>Student Functional Capacities Engaged by Exercise</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Receptive language (understanding directions and vocabulary from ADEF)</li> <li>• Active working memory (recalling with salient detail the insights that arose during ADEF work)</li> <li>• Expressive oral language (verbalizing thoughts)</li> <li>• Higher order thinking (evaluating and prioritizing needs, conceptualizing goals and steps needed to achieve them, designing meaningful and attainable goals)</li> <li>• Saliency determination (ability to identify which goals would be most important or have the most meaningful positive impact)</li> <li>• Visualization/conceptualization (projecting into the future, predicting)</li> </ul>



<p><b>Time Required</b></p>	<p>The amount of time needed to perform this activity depends heavily on the individual's:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Language systems</li> <li>• Processing speed</li> <li>• Efficiency of recall</li> <li>• Critical reasoning skills</li> <li>• Attention controls</li> </ul> <p>An individual who struggles with any of the above will need the activity spread over several sessions. An individual who is not struggling with the above list might be able to accomplish the activity in one to two 50 minute sessions.</p>
<p><b>Number of Participants</b></p>	<p>The process of identifying and designing personal goals should be done 1:1, as the information is so individualized and personal.</p>
<p><b>Space Needed</b></p>	<p>Distraction-free room with no significant interfering sensory stimuli (noises, competing smells, etc.)</p>
<p><b>Materials Needed</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ADEF journal with student's responses for reference and guidance</li> <li>• Paper or a computer to log goals</li> </ul>
<p><b>Pre-activity Preparation and/or Discussion Topics</b></p>	<p>Completion of the ADEF</p> <p>An understanding of what a goal is, what it means to set a goal, that it typically requires steps, and changes in behavior and time to make changes. Use examples from the individual's life to anchor understanding.</p>
<p><b>Activity Steps</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Set climate and expectations by explaining that the activity is designed to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Give students a chance to take all the information they gathered through the ADEF and decide what they feel are most important needs and realizations about themselves</li> <li>• Create personal goals they will receive support in attaining</li> </ul> </li> <li>2. Go through each section of the Parts of Self section in the ADEF and help students identify and reflect upon possible goals. Goals should be written clearly in full sentences. There should be a minimum of 1 goal per section, no more than 2. Assure students this is just the beginning of the goal-making process – that the steps and plans for how to meet goals will be discussed at a different time once</li> </ol>

the goals are chosen. Also indicate there are many other categories of goals that will be discussed at a later time (examples: career, relationship, etc.) and they do not have to try to do all now.

- Sensory goals (example: being able to tolerate being touched)
- Physical goals (examples: taking my medication without reminders, running a 5K, eating foods that won't make my celiac disease act up as much, etc.)
- Cognitive goals (examples: learning how to do research on the computer, learn Russian, read a chapter book)
- Emotional goals (example: staying calm and more emotionally regulated when I lose a game)
- Social goals (example: starting a conversation with a stranger)
- Recreational goals: (example: try bowling)
- Creative goals: (examples: take up photography, learn to play the drums)
- Mindset goals (example: I would like to be comfortable with things not being perfect all the time, I would like to not jump to conclusions so fast)

3. Take the time needed with students to construct goals. This exercise will require access to the ADEF information for reference. If a student has a lot of cognitive, language, and processing challenges the language load should be adjusted to use vocabulary on his level of comprehension. The student is freed up to reflect as the facilitator guides him through the process and writes down what the student has decided goes in each category.

4. When the process is finished, however long it takes; time should be set aside to review once complete.

5. Engage the student in a process of deciding:

- Whether goals should be posted somewhere they can see them
- Who to share goals with (parents, other teachers, peers)

6. Discuss how this is not a fixed or complete list, and goals change over time. If students are cognitively able, the facilitator can ask them to predict ways their goals might change, as they get older and more independent.

**Situations  
and**

Depending on the students' cognitive capabilities, the facilitator may need to pre-identify goals and spend time reviewing them and their importance rather than having

<b>Remedies</b>	them struggle through the more complex task of vetting through the ADEF to find them.
<b>Follow-up / Post-activity Discussions or Other Steps</b>	<p>Once goals have been itemized and reviewed students will be ready for subsequent sessions designing the steps and sequence for accomplishing them (see activity Designing My Personal Goals: Steps to Success and Change)</p> <p>Once students have completed their personal goals, they can be matched with developmentally appropriate peers for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Group sharing</li> <li>• Discussion and reflection on each student’s goals</li> <li>• A comparison of needs</li> <li>• Identifying commonalities among peers</li> <li>• Group brainstorming of suggestions for meeting goals</li> <li>• Enlisting others in achieving goals</li> <li>• Referenced in therapeutic sessions</li> <li>• Revised on occasion throughout the program experience</li> <li>• Used as inspiration for journal entries, papers, group discussions</li> <li>• Used as a reference when an individual has lost sight of his goal and lapses into behavior that interferes with achieving it.</li> </ul> <p>Goals lists should be added to the student’s SIP.</p>
<b>Notes</b>	None
<b>Source</b>	Created by Elana Himmelfarb, 2012

### 6.23 Activity 10: Designing My Personal Goals: Steps to Success and Change

<b>Applies To:</b>	<b>6.13 ADEF Module Completion Activities</b>
<b>Purpose:</b>	Understanding and formulating the steps needed to meet personal goals
<b>Areas Targeted for Development and/or Objectives:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Capacity to reflect on what has been learned about self through the ADEF</li> <li>• Identifying and verbalizing needs</li> <li>• Evaluative thinking (identifying information about self – needed to formulate goals)</li> <li>• Reinforcing new self-knowledge that arose from ADEF</li> <li>• Creating the steps and sequence for meeting attainable and realistic short- and long-term personal goals</li> <li>• Critical reasoning (big picture thinking, strategic thinking, brainstorming, creativity)</li> <li>• Thinking in terms of step wisdom, time, and sequence</li> <li>• Visualization skills (envisioning a future self, envisioning what changes would look like if goals were accomplished)</li> <li>• Enlisting others in attaining goals and meeting needs</li> </ul>
<b>Student Functional Capacities Engaged by Exercise</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Receptive language (understanding directions and vocabulary from ADEF)</li> <li>• Expressive oral language (verbalizing thoughts)</li> <li>• Higher order thinking (evaluating and prioritizing needs, conceptualizing goals and steps needed to achieve them, designing meaningful and attainable goals, big picture thinking)</li> <li>• Saliency determination (ability to identify which steps would most likely lead to the most meaningful positive impact)</li> <li>• Visualization/conceptualization (projecting into the future, predicting level of difficulty with steps to meeting goal)</li> </ul>

<p><b>Time Required</b></p>	<p>The amount of time needed to perform this activity depends heavily on the individual's:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Language systems</li> <li>• Processing speed</li> <li>• Efficiency of recall</li> <li>• Critical reasoning skills</li> <li>• Attention controls</li> </ul> <p>An individual who struggles with any of the above will need the activity spread over several sessions. An individual who is not struggling with the above list might be able to accomplish the activity in two to four 50-minute sessions.</p>
<p><b>Number of Participants</b></p>	<p>The process of identifying and designing the steps to meeting personal goals should be done 1:1, as the information is so individualized and personal.</p>
<p><b>Space Needed</b></p>	<p>Distraction-free room with no significant interfering sensory stimuli (noises, competing smells, etc.)</p>
<p><b>Materials Needed</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ADEF journal with student's responses for reference and guidance</li> <li>• Paper or a computer to log steps</li> </ul>
<p><b>Pre-activity Preparation and/or Discussion Topics</b></p>	<p>Completion of the ADEF</p> <p>An understanding of what a goal is, what it means to set a goal, that it typically requires steps, changes in behavior and time to make changes. Use examples from the individual's life to anchor understanding.</p> <p>An understanding of steps and sequence</p> <p>An understanding that change occurs over time and the process will have its own ups and downs (times when it is easier to make changes and the goals feel attainable, and other times when it is harder to accomplish or the end result feels far away).</p>
<p><b>Activity Steps</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Set climate and expectations by explaining that the activity is designed to give them a chance to take the personal goals they identified through the ADEF and generate paths to get there</li> </ol>

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2. Go through each goal one at a time. Break down goals so students understand the parts where change is needed and co-generate ways to work towards meeting the goals in a step-wise manner. This process should not be rushed, as much emphasis needs to be placed on process so students do not focus solely on the end result:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Sensory goals</li> <li>● Physical goals</li> <li>● Cognitive goals</li> <li>● Emotional goals</li> <li>● Social goals</li> <li>● Recreational goals</li> <li>● Creative goals</li> <li>● Mindset goals</li> </ul> </li> <li>3. This exercise will require access to ADEF information for reference. If a student has a lot of cognitive, language, and processing challenges the language load should be adjusted to use vocabulary on his level of comprehension. The student is freed up to reflect as the facilitator guides him through the process and writes down the steps in the proper sequence.</li> <li>4. When the process is finished, however long it takes; time should be set aside to review once complete.</li> <li>5. Engage students in a process of deciding:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Whether goals should be posted somewhere that they can see them</li> <li>● Who to enlist in helping meet goals (parents, other teachers, peers)</li> <li>● Any materials, resources, or experiences that are needed in the steps to meeting goals</li> </ul> </li> <li>6. Predict what may be easy/hard to do of the steps created and brainstorm strategies.</li> </ol>
<p><b>Situations and Remedies</b></p>	<p>Depending on the student’s cognitive capabilities, the facilitator may need to pre-identify the steps and sequence for each goal and spend time reviewing them and their importance, rather than having the student struggle through the more complex task of vetting through the ADEF to find them.</p> <p>If a student has a lot of goals and becomes overwhelmed, prioritize for him which goals to approach first and which to address later.</p>

<b>Follow-up / Post-activity Discussions or Other Steps</b>	<p>The plan of action should be put in place, enlisting teachers, peers, and family as needed. Frequent assurance, support, and coaching should be provided as students work towards goals.</p> <p>Once students have completed their personal goals, they can be matched with developmentally appropriate peers for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Group sharing</li><li>• Discussion and reflection on each student’s progress towards his goals</li><li>• A comparison of needs</li><li>• Identifying commonalities among peers</li><li>• Group brainstorming of suggestions for meeting goals</li><li>• Enlisting others in achieving goals</li><li>• Referenced in therapeutic sessions</li><li>• Revised on occasion throughout the program experience</li><li>• Used as inspiration for journal entries, papers, group discussions</li><li>• Used as a reference when a student has lost sight of his goal and lapses into behavior that interferes with achieving it.</li></ul> <p>Goals lists should be added to the student’s SIP.</p>
<b>Notes</b>	None
<b>Source</b>	Created by Elana Himmelfarb, 2012

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## Section 7.0

### CREATIVE EXPRESSION

#### Igniting that spark within each individual

**Halloween changed Noah's life.** That, and an opportunity to find and follow his passion. Struggling with autism and a complicated medical history, language came slowly to Noah. His parents were told he would not likely advance beyond fourth grade level.

When he was five, Noah discovered Halloween and costumes. For the first time, something sparked his interest. He began arranging costumes in sets across floors and furniture. His parents, working in the movie business, watched with great fascination. They introduced Noah to puppetry, then ventriloquism. He began to draw, and shortly after, discovered animation.

Noah's parents enrolled him in a media program for neurotypical kids, and instantly he became one of their best animators. He started producing animated films in middle school, which he entered into and won international competitions.

Now 18, and in high school, it is unclear whether Noah will get his diploma. His career path, however, is quite certain. Noah plans to be an animator.

*(Robinson, 2009)*

#### 7.01 Creative Expression as a Vital Programmatic Element

The pursuit of creative expression is synonymous with the pursuit of joy and the celebration of diversity. But for individuals with autism and other developmental disabilities, it is far more than that. An individual's creativity can pave the path toward a life with meaning and purpose. It can lay the groundwork for lifelong learning, hobbies, and for fulfilling work experiences. It can make the difference between connection and isolation. For this reason, creative expression is an essential element of every module and a central characteristic of this transition curriculum.

**When we talk about “creative expression” here, we are talking about a:**

- Form of communication, an avenue of self-expression
- Pathway to social participation
- Means to develop relationships with others
- Representation of one's emotional experience

- Way to uncover new interests, passions, and hobbies
- Guide to short- and long-term educational planning
- A rich source for awakening, developing, and pursuing meaningful work and career opportunities

Whether expressed through movement, drama, visual arts, music, cooking, or technology, creativity is a way for individuals to connect to one another. It is a way for each individual to find his or her own voice despite personal barriers, language difficulties, or social challenges.

An operating theory of this Transition Curriculum is that when an individual is able to find his voice and express and own his interests, he also unlocks the drive to learn, enabling significant change in his life and the prospects for his future. Like Noah, in the story above, and Christopher, who you will hear about below, even young adults with significant challenges can go on to study, work and live a life full of purpose and meaning.

## 7.02 How to implement programmatically

### Program-wide

It takes a team approach to ensure creative expression is woven continuously into each student's program experience. This can be accomplished with group activities, outings, evening and weekend events, course offerings, guest visits, community collaborations, projects with fellow students, and celebrations of holidays and significant events. Whenever possible, students should be part of the creative planning process. Topics might include choosing a theme for a party, decorating a student lounge, designing fair rules of engagement while playing games, etc.

Working 1:1 or in small groups can help to awaken and expand creative expression for each student. Some students may have well-developed creative skills, personal interests, and preferences, while others have few or none. Those with strong creative interests will need continued guidance to deepen and possibly expand their personal interests and preferences. Students with limited creative experience or direction will need well-supported approaches that begin with exploration and discovery. Facilitated brainstorming can ignite creative ideas and provide a forum for exploring how to share them with others.

**! Individual differences should be embraced by all staff members no matter the approach a student may take for creative work.**

**Creative expression can be woven into the fabric of a program by:**

- Fostering a culture that values and celebrates individual forms of creative expression
- Supporting a culture that celebrates the excitement, joy, and collaboration that arises from creative endeavors
- Tapping into the creative forces of each individual student, following their lead on an interest or passion, or exposing students to new areas of creative interest
- Staff modeling creative ways to approach ideas, activities, and experiences
- Designing ways to expand and stretch each student's creative capacity in a wide variety of contexts
- Identifying ways to apply a student's creativity in educational planning and career exploration

**Students should have daily opportunities to practice and stretch their creativity in their expressions, interactions, thoughts, creations, and actions.**

For some students, it may take time and trial and error to identify creative avenues for them to pursue. Students who are already pursuing creative activities or have expressed creative interests will be able to take a more active role in the exploration and discovery process. For students at all levels of creative capability, continuing goal setting, planning, and reflection improves the outcome.

**It is important for staff to keep in mind that:**

- The rate and extent to which a student progresses is highly individual
- There is no "right" or "wrong" way to be creative
- For some individuals, being creative elicits self-doubt, frustration, low confidence, and anxiety. Challenging emotions can affect the creative process, and should be monitored and addressed as they arise.
- Creativity feeds off momentum. Intermittent or inconsistent work on creative projects may interfere with the process.
- Environment and timing can affect one's creative flow. Work with individuals to identify optimal times in the day and best places to work.

## Program-Wide Scheduling and Individualized Programs

Once an individual identifies creative avenues to pursue, the team can evaluate ways to incorporate these activities into the student's schedule through group explorations, field trips, and individualized or small group instruction. For example, one student may have a photography class in his schedule, another might have a cooking class, and another may intern at a local theater to learn about set design and scenery.

### From isolation to productivity...

**Christopher spent most of his childhood and adolescence hiding** under the blankets of his bed and under the hood of his sweatshirt. He was non-verbal and over-sensitive to all sorts of environmental stimuli, and unable to attend school or public events. His family struggled to find ways to make his life more comfortable and meaningful. "Find out what he cares about," one of his providers suggested.

Paying close attention, his mom noticed Christopher seemed to watch her when she was working in the kitchen preparing meals, and encouraged him to help. At first, he could not even measure ingredients. But he learned to stir, do other small tasks, and soon he became a huge help in the kitchen.

One day, his mother noticed he was looking at a recipe in her cookbook. Using supported typing, she and his team discovered he had learned to read on his own. With time and help, he was able to communicate using the keyboard, first just a word or two, then more. Through this technology, Christopher communicated his hopes and dreams about the future.

Today, Christopher is an entrepreneur, preparing and delivering gourmet lunches to local businesses. The business bears his name, Christopher's Cuisine (<http://christopherscuisine.com>). He designs menu selections, writes shopping lists, buys the food, and delivers the meals. He has assistants who help him with things he cannot do, like using knives or talking on the phone. Christopher is very much a part of the community and his deliveries bring far more than just food to his customers.

*Robinson, 2009*

### The Advisor's Role

As described in section 5.0 Teaching Approaches, Methods, Processes, Assessments, and Tools, students entering into the transition program are assigned an advisor to provide ongoing individualized mentoring and support. The advisor plays a critical role in student creative expression activities.

### Primary duties of the advisor are to

- Identify areas of interests and strengths based on the student's SIP, preferences, and current functional levels
- Brainstorm with advisee for creative project ideas
- Design strategies, accommodations, and modifications needed to support a particular creative endeavor
- Coordinate with instructors on executive function support for ongoing creative projects
- Monitor progress and assist with reflection and feedback sessions
- Help to obtain resources for a given project or endeavor
- Ensure that creative endeavors and approaches are woven consistently into student daily program experiences
- Assess ways the individual's creative interests could inspire or guide employment options, community involvement, continuing education, and career development opportunities

### Staff Roles

Staff play a vital role in a student's creative expression experiences. Specifically, they can

- Look for ways to capitalize on opportunities and avenues for creativity within the program
- Act as mentors and instructors for skills they have that interest students (*Examples: African drumming, painting, photography, video editing*)
- Coordinate with advisors to report concerns, share ideas to pursue, make suggestions for goal setting, coordinate resources, and provide feedback
- Use outside resources and connections to help students increase community involvement
- Participate in creative endeavors and projects as collaborators, mediators, facilitators, or mentors
- Generate and develop ideas about individual, program-wide, and community-based creative projects

### Community Contribution

Creative expression provides a means for students to form lasting relationships within their communities through shared interests and experiences. Students engaged in collaborative community-based creative experiences, relationships, and projects can

- Deepen their capacity for forming and maintaining connections and relationships with others
- Create valuable resources, contacts, mentors, advocates, and friends in their communities
- Open avenues for increased social interactions through attendance and participation in community-wide events
- Foster potential internships, volunteer positions, apprenticeships, jobs, and lifelong hobbies
-

- Increase student comfort levels and confidence being out in the community and interacting with others

### Examples of creativity-based community collaboration

- Guest speakers, performances, demonstrations
- Program classes taught by local artists and artisans
- Site visits and tours of theaters, dance studios, art galleries, and craft manufacturers
- Shadowing an artist for a day
- Local collaborative exhibits, plays, and performances
- Internships, apprenticeships, volunteer experiences, jobs with local artists and performers
- Creative community projects (painting murals, beautifying or landscaping a local park, art installations in public places, public performances, community gardening)

### Student Life and School Culture

Creative expression is also a *process* that can enliven our imaginations and inspire us to learn. Staff members are encouraged to *value* creative approaches to problem solving, collaboration, brainstorming, conflict resolution, and planning.

### Desired Outcomes

Creative expression in collaborative work can improve

- Buy-in or ownership
- Personal accountability in group projects
- Executive function
- Pride, collaboration, and accomplishment
- Group problem-solving, feedback from peers, and identity-building
- Practice with emotion regulation in 1:1 and group contexts



### 7.03 Structuring an Approach to Small Group and Individual Creative Expression

This section provides general guidance on how to use group and individualized approaches to ignite and expand student creative expression. The approaches listed can be tailored to fit the needs of an individual. Group approaches capitalize on dynamic interactions emerging among peers.

#### Small group work achieves multiple goals simultaneously

- Strengthens social thinking – particularly in terms of peer interaction, communication, negotiation, and collaboration
- Expands self-awareness – identifying affinities and interests that can be used in other areas of the individual’s program and life; understanding strengths and challenges
- Provides practice with executive functions
- Builds independence
- Activates higher order thinking skills through dialogue, research, debate, and discussion
- Strengthens and deepens relationships through shared interests
- Strengthens capacity for meaningful self-reflection
- Identifies potential careers, hobbies, and interests that can become lifelong pursuits
- Increases exposure to a healthy process of decision-making through experience
- Identifies potentially valuable small group or program-wide projects

#### Group Approaches

Groups of 3-4 students with complementary developmental profiles can be configured successfully into small working groups for creative expression. Ideally, group members will have a variety of preferences, goals, hobbies, and interests. Small group work also provides a great springboard for

- Comparing and contrasting respective preferences, goals, and hobbies so all group members are exposed to potential new interests
- Designing classes based on common interests (*Example: three participants decide to learn how to draw anime*)
- Inspiring ideas and activities to explore together as a group
- Selecting goals, making plans, taking exploratory trips, and identifying potential guest speakers

#### Group Design

Once a group is established, we suggest laying the groundwork and moving forward by the steps below.

### Laying the groundwork

1. Establish fundamental structure
  - Agree upon group and social ground rules
  - Rules should include ways to respect and respond supportively to others' creative ideas/interests
2. Create safe atmosphere in which to be creative
  - Use formal and informal group-building exercises to build rapport and trust among students. Encourage sharing of thoughts and feelings, collaborative creative activities, and variety of verbal and non-verbal group bonding activities.
3. Establish basic processes group will use and agree upon
  - Group routines (opening/closing)
  - Social behaviors and goals that support collaborative and individual creative expression
4. Establish common nomenclature
  - Introduce key terms used in work including *creativity, brainstorming, creative process, trial and error, creative risk taking*. Ensure everyone has shared working definitions and good basic understanding of elements required for creativity.
5. Finding inspiration and focus
  - Discuss, define, and generate examples of creative expression
  - Use samples and visuals (written and pictorial) to note all group members' ideas

### Moving forward

1. Strengthen collaboration
  - Foster connections among group members through social relationships
  - Use idea demonstrations, show and tell, video clips, activities, etc.
2. Generate and explore creative ideas
  - Gather information about project topics
  - Use supported research on ideas generated
  - Search online, ask a professional, or use other reference materials
3. Implement creative tools and approaches – use appendices D, E, and F to
  - Generate ideas about possible creative expression activities
  - Identify discussion topics (*Example: introducing Multiple Intelligence Theory and applying it in their own lives*)

### Individual Approaches

Some individuals are shy, anxious, or self-critical about taking creative risks. They may benefit from individualized support initially. Working creatively 1:1 fosters confidence, reduces anxiety, and encourages creative risk-taking. Some students are more creative facing fewer distractions. Others struggle to work

collaboratively in creative endeavors. Still other individuals need specialized accommodations and strategies that are easier to implement 1:1.

Individual approaches to exploring creative expression are advised when

- Student has significant emotional or sensory regulation or sensitivity issues and needs a quiet environment more easily modulated by staff
- Anxiety, attentional difficulty, and perseverative thoughts interfere with cognitive processing and the individual needs 1:1 coaching to manage anxiety and stay on topic
- Student feels it is a personal process and requests doing some or all the work 1:1
- Student interests and pursuits are a mismatch for the group either in complexity or by topic
- Student has already begun a project and needs 1:1 time with staff to execute it

### 7.04 Tracking Progress in Creative Development

Staff can track the progress of each participant's creative work in a variety of ways, including:

#### Staff Meetings

Group leaders report regularly on group process and member progress so staff can

- Be informed and have the option to contribute or participate
- Assess needs for additional or different strategies or accommodations
- Identify progress towards long-term goals
- Identify others (staff and community members) who can provide assistance or support students' creative pursuits

#### Advisor

- Keeps notes on discussions with advisees regarding creativity
- Designs a creative way – in collaboration with students – to track progress visually (chart, portfolio, etc.). Collaboratively reviews and updates progress chart.
- Advisor Guide Sheets for Student Creativity Development (see Appendix G in the Appendices) may be helpful in discussions with advisees. Data collected should be added to the student SIPs for future use.
- Coordinates with career development staff on creative activities that could potentially develop into a career path or job

## 7.05 Staff Resources for Developing Creative Expression Activities

The following resources are selected to help staff in developing creative expression discussion topics and activities for small group and individuals. The language, complexity, rate, and prioritization of what content to include will depend on the cognitive and developmental levels of the individuals.

As much as possible:

- Draw from each student’s personal experiences by using stories, examples, metaphors, analogies, or comparisons
- Anchor all concepts with a student’s personal experience or self-reflection

### Multiple Intelligence and Types of Creativity

- Howard Gardner’s Multiple Intelligence Theory  
Lane, Carla. (undated). The Distance Learning Technology Resource Guide. Retrieved from <http://www.tecweb.org/styles/gardner.html> Nov 2013
- Links to information on classroom strategies, real life examples, and lesson plans for teaching the concept of Multiple Intelligences:  
Hanna, Nydia R. (undated). Multiple Abilities/Intelligences. Retrieved from <http://www2.gsu.edu/~mstnrhx/457/mi.htm> Nov 2013  
PBS. (undated). Educational Resources, Howard Gardner’s Multiple Intelligence Theory. Retrieved from [http://www.pbs.org/wnet/gperf/education/ed\\_mi\\_overview.html](http://www.pbs.org/wnet/gperf/education/ed_mi_overview.html) Nov 2013  
Thirteen.org. (undated). Tapping into Multiple Intelligences. Retrieved from <http://www.thirteen.org/edonline/concept2class/mi/> Nov 2013
- Explore Dr. Robyn McMaster’s work on the brain and creativity and her 8 Types of Creativity (builds off of Gardner’s work)  
McMaster, Robyn. (2011). The 8 Types of Creative Intelligence. Retrieved from <http://lateralaction.com/articles/multiple-intelligences/> Nov 2013
- Explore Robert Epstein’s “4 Core Competencies of Creative Expression”
  - capturing
  - surrounding
  - challenging
  - broadening
 Epstein, Robert. (undated). Developing your creative competencies. Retrieved from <http://www.booki.cc/principles-of-creativity-in-the-workplace/develop-creativity/> Nov 2013
- Free Spirit Publishing. (2009). Story Starters In a Jar. Free Spirit Publishing.

## Creativity and the Brain

- The Brain and Creativity Institute  
USC Dornsife College. (undated). Brain and Creativity Institute. <http://dornsife.usc.edu/bci/>
- Epstein Creativity Competencies Inventory for Individuals online student quiz.  
MyCreativeSkills.com. (2012). Do You Have the Skills You Need to Express Your Creativity?  
Retrieved from <http://mycreativitieskills.com/> Nov 2013
- Understanding Right vs. Left Brain Theories  
Cherry, Kendra. (undated). Left Brain vs Right Brain. Retrieved from  
<http://psychology.about.com/od/cognitivepsychology/a/left-brain-right-brain.htm> Nov 2013
- Interactive Online Brain Games  
Luminosity.com. (undated). Improve your brain health and performance. Retrieved from  
[http://www.lumosity.com/landing\\_pages/188?gclid=COiqlpfe47YCFUYaOgodqmEAEQ](http://www.lumosity.com/landing_pages/188?gclid=COiqlpfe47YCFUYaOgodqmEAEQ) Nov 2013
- Online Creativity Games, Creative Thinking Exercises, and Creative Projects Creative Games.net.  
CreativityGames.net. (2013). Creativity Brain Training Games. Retrieved from  
<http://creativitygames.net/> Nov 2013
- Teacher resource site for games that stimulate creativity and increase self-knowledge and brainstorming activities  
McGraw-Hill Education, Glencoe Online. (undated). Creative Thinking Activities and Games.  
Retrieved from <http://www.glencoe.com/sec/busadmin/entre/teacher/creative/> Nov 2013
- Creative thinking games and exercises, creative things to do when students are bored, creativity in the classroom  
Shukla, Ishani Chatterjee. (2012). Creative Thinking Games. Retrieved from  
<http://www.buzzle.com/articles/creative-thinking-games.html> Nov 2013
- Creativity defined, links to other creativity websites  
Wilson, Dr. Leslie Owen. (2007). On Defining Creativity. Retrieved from  
<http://www4.uwsp.edu/education/lwilson/creativ/define.htm> Nov 2013
- Creativity Post Online Magazine  
CreativityPost.com. (2011). Twelve Things You Were Not Taught in School About Creative Thinking.  
Retrieved from  
[http://www.creativitypost.com/create/twelve\\_things\\_you\\_were\\_not\\_taught\\_in\\_school\\_about\\_creative\\_thinking](http://www.creativitypost.com/create/twelve_things_you_were_not_taught_in_school_about_creative_thinking) Nov 2013

## 7.06 Student Worksheet for Developing Ideas for Creative Projects

The following material is designed to help students develop ideas for creative projects. It can be reformatted and expanded by staff for students to use either individually or in small groups.

### Personal Creative Preferences

Check or circle the creative activities you are interested in, like, and/or currently do. Add examples and other ideas as needed. If writing is difficult, a staff member can help.

- Art (*Examples: drawing, painting, cartooning, animation, etc.*)
- Music (*Examples: playing it, listening to it, how I respond to it*)
- Food and cooking (*Examples: making up or altering recipes and food combinations, decorating*)
- Dance and movement
- Ideas (*Examples: inventions, theories, explanations*)
- Fashion (*Examples: how I dress, style my hair, accessorize, color, etc.*)
- Inventing things (*Examples: using a model, finding random parts*)
- Words (*Examples: stories, poems, writing, jokes, puns, etc.*)
- Ways to approach a task (*Example: I like to find my own way to do things*)
- Making up games
- Planning events, parties, celebrations
- Making movies
- Photography
- Decorating a room

### Reflecting on Personal Creativity

1. What are the best parts of my day for being creative? Generate daily examples (*Examples: picking what to wear based on weather or mood, selecting morning wake up music to energize me*)
2. Are there times in my day when I am more naturally creative than other times? Why do I think that is? (*Example: In art class, I feel tired / rushed / have to follow specific rules*)
3. Are there times in my day where I would like be more creative to make my day more interesting or less boring? (*Example: walk a different route than usual to get somewhere*)
4. What gets in the way of my being creative? (*Examples: low confidence, I am worried what others might think, I cannot come up with ideas on my own, I get stuck because I want it to be perfect, I don't want to be judged by others, I am okay once I get going but I have trouble getting started*)

5. What helps me feel creative? (*Examples: creating with other people, music, movement, alone time, quiet, a lot of space, getting support and encouragement from others, having a list to follow, being relaxed, having a snack, exercising*)
6. How do I use my creativity on special occasions? (*Examples: gift buying, decorating for holidays, planning a birthday meal, baking a cake, making my own Halloween costumes*)
7. What creative activities would I like to try? What things and people do I need to help it go well or to begin the brainstorming and planning process?
8. What famous people do I think are creative? How are they creative?
9. Who in my life is creative? How do they show their creativity? Could I learn some tips from them?
10. If you could interview three famous creative people, who would they be? What would you ask them?
11. If you could invent something to make your life easier, what would it be?



## 7.07 Forms and Benefits of Creative Expression

The following list is designed to assist staff in identifying creative activities that may be good matches for individual students considering their personal strengths, challenges, needs, and developmental levels (physical, social, emotional, cognitive).

### Movement

#### Dance: Formal

##### Benefits:

- Increases body awareness (Example: body positioning, avoid bumping into other dancing couples)
- Increases tolerance for touching and being in close proximity with dance partner
- Strengthens sequential motor movements (following a specific sequence of prescribed steps and movements)
- Strengthens cross-body and overall coordination, balance, and movement flexibility
- Reinforces motor memory (moving from being over-dependent on watching others or following steps laid in floor to integrating the movements into memory)
- Exposes individual to potential hobby or activity (Examples: dance lessons, dance competitions)
- Increases exposure to a variety of musical styles (Example: tango vs. waltz, etc.) and identifying preferences in musical tastes
- Increases ability to manage positive interactions with an instructor (Examples: how to receive correction, feedback, compliments)
- Provides practice with anxiety management (Examples: when things go wrong, when I can't master a particular movement or step)
- Provides practice keeping attention on task and reducing negative interference from self-consciousness or comparing self to others
- Improves ability to develop creative strategies and accommodations for accomplishing movement tasks
- Improves self-evaluation: what emotions arise, do I like the activity, how does it benefit me, what is my stamina/endurance for this activity, how often do I want to do it?

#### Dance: Informal

##### Benefits:

- Increases body awareness (*Example: body positioning, avoid bumping into other dancing couples*)
- Strengthens cross-body and overall coordination, balance, and flexibility in movement
- Exposes individual to potential hobby or activity (*Examples: collecting music, free-form dancing at home or at concerts where dancing is allowed*)

- Explores ways free-form dancing can be a stress-reducer, a way to energize the body if feeling lethargic, a way to work through difficult emotions
- Increases exposure to a variety of musical styles and identifying preferences in musical tastes
- Reduces self-consciousness
- Works with the concept that there is no “right” or “wrong” way to do something creative
- Increases opportunities to activate creativity and find ideas within oneself (rather requiring someone to tell them what to do or how to do it).
- Increases range of body movement
- Improves self-evaluation: what emotions arise, do I like the activity, how does it benefit me, what is my stamina/endurance for this activity, how often do I want to do it?

### **Mime: Simple and concrete scenarios and situations**

*Examples: Wind blowing, rainstorm, cleaning room*

Benefits:

- Provides practice with visualizing and conceptualizing a scenario
- Strengthens skills in non-verbal communication
- Activates parts to whole thinking – what is the overall impression/scene I want to create and what elements do I have to include so my audience can understand?
- Provides opportunities to work on sequence (have to play actions out in a specific sequence so they can be understood)
- Activates creativity and brainstorming
- Increases self-control and experience following guidelines of an exercise (*Examples: no talking, can't touch the “audience”, etc.*)
- Improves emotional regulation (managing frustration, excitement, etc. inherent in the exercise)
- Exercises creative brainstorming of individualized strategies and accommodations for how to navigate with increased success
- Improves self-evaluation: what emotions arise, do I like the activity, how does it benefit me, what is my stamina/endurance for this activity, how often do I want to do it?

### **Mime: Complex and nuanced scenarios and situations**

*Examples: Social interactions such as attending a party, expressions of emotion, more details and dimensions added to the scenario*

Benefits:

- Strengthens complex and abstract visualization and conceptualization
- Strengthens social cognition
- Strengthen skills in non-verbal communication
- Strengthens body awareness and motor planning

- Activates parts to whole thinking – what is the overall impression/scene I want to create and what elements do I have to include so my audience can understand?
- Provides opportunities to work on sequence (have to play actions out in a specific sequence so they can be understood)
- Activates creativity and brainstorming
- Increases self-control and experience following guidelines of an exercise (*Examples: no talking, can't touch the "audience"*)
- Improves emotional regulation (managing frustration, excitement, etc. inherent in exercise)
- Provides executive function practice (organizing and planning scenarios, self-monitoring)
- Provides creative problem solving practice (if audience is not understanding it, what else can you do to display meaning without words?)
- Improves ability to develop creative strategies and accommodations to minimize interference from challenges
- Improves self-evaluation: what emotions arise, do I like this activity, how does it benefit me, what is my stamina/endurance for this activity, how often do I want to do it?

### Mime: Solo

#### Benefits:

- Improves self-management (reduces anxiety, etc.)
- Builds independence
- Strengthens ability to rely on one's own ideas and creativity

### Mime: With peers

#### Benefits:

- Provides practice with peer collaboration
- Provides opportunities to strengthen executive function skills (pre-discussion, coordination of roles and planning prior to starting mime, adjusting skit as needed, etc.)
- Provides practice with managing emotions (frustration, trying to control, managing anxiety over skit difficulties)
- Increases opportunities to collaborate creatively

### Role Play and Improvisation

#### Benefits:

- Strengthens critical thinking
- Practices expressive and receptive language
- Practices body language (reading and displaying)
- Improves rhythm and timing in social interactions
- Strengthens motor planning

- Raises awareness and skills in perspective-taking and seeing the experience of others as different than one's own
- Increases awareness of how one's actions are perceived and interpreted by another
- Practices social problem solving
- Practices parts to whole thinking (big picture meaning and which details to include)
- Strengthens capacity to manage unexpected changes or responses
- Activates creativity and brainstorming
- Strengthens ability to conceptualize (visualize a scenario) and understand what the associated actions and feelings are
- Improves collaboration and negotiation skills
- Provides practice preparing for situations and reduces anxiety about them
- Provides a method for processing the emotions and confusion surrounding an event that has already occurred
- Provides practice for multiple ways to handle a situation
- Reinforces understanding of causal relationships and contingency thinking
- Improves ability to develop creative strategies and accommodations to minimize interference from challenges
- Improves self-evaluation: what emotions arise, do I like this activity, how does it benefit me, does it tie to a potential career or internship interest such as theater or acting? What is my stamina/endurance for this activity, how often do I want to do it?

### Group movement games

#### Benefits:

- Improves ability to follow verbal directions
- Strengthens rule use, step-wisdom, and sequencing
- Provides social cognition practice (negotiating, social problem solving, collaborating, coordinating, teamwork, turn taking, competition, playing fair, etc.)
- Provides practice in managing emotions (frustrations, anxiety, anger, impatience waiting turn)
- Increases opportunity to engage the body, raise body awareness, and add movement to the day
- Increases tolerance for group activities
- Improves ability to develop creative strategies and accommodations to minimize interference from challenges
- Improves self-evaluation: what emotions arise, do I like this activity, how does it benefit me, what is my stamina/endurance for this activity, how often do I want to do it?

### Board games involving movement

#### Benefits:

- Improves ability to follow verbal and written directions
- Strengthens rule use, step-wisdom, and sequencing

- Provides social cognition practice (negotiating, social problem solving, collaborating, coordinating, teamwork, turn taking, competition, playing fair)
- Provides practice in managing emotions (frustrations, anxiety, anger, impatience waiting turn, managing losing and winning)
- Provides opportunity to engage the body, raise body awareness, and add movement to the day
- Increases tolerance for group activities
- Improves ability to develop creative strategies and accommodations to minimize interference from challenges
- Improves self-evaluation: what emotions arise, do I like the activity, how does it benefit me, what is my stamina/endurance for this activity, how often do I want to do it?

### Yoga, Tai Chi, Martial Arts, etc.

#### Benefits:

- Improves following steps and sequences
- Improves understanding ways in which one's own creativity can be incorporated into an activity that has a specific protocol (although the sequence may be predetermined, an individual can have her own style or flair for how she navigates the steps, and in some cases, such as yoga, can modify some of the movements or body positioning creatively)
- Increases endurance
- Reinforces understanding of skill building – takes a lot of practice and incremental progress to reach mastery
- Provides a context for personal goal setting (*Example: want to get to purple belt*)
- Increases body awareness (*Example: body positioning, avoid bumping into others*)
- Increases tolerance for instructional touching and being in close proximity with another
- Strengthens sequential motor movements (following a specific sequence of prescribed steps and movements)
- Strengthens cross-body and overall coordination, balance, and movement flexibility
- Reinforces motor memory (moving from being overly dependent on watching others or following steps laid out on the floor to integrating the movements into memory)
- Exposes individual to potential ongoing hobby or activity (*Examples: lessons, competitions, learning about subject*)
- Increases ability to manage potentially challenging interactions with an instructor (*Examples: how to receive correction, feedback, compliments*)
- Practices anxiety management (*Examples: getting confused in a movement sequence, things going wrong, can't master a particular movement or step*)
- Practices keeping attention on task and reducing negative interference from feeling self-conscious or comparing self to others
- Practices delayed gratification (takes practice and time to get good)

- Improves ability to develop creative strategies and accommodations to minimize interference from challenges
- Improves self-evaluation: what emotions arise, do I like the activity, how does it benefit me, what is my stamina/endurance for this activity, how often do I want to do it?

## Physical Education

### Benefits:

- Improves following verbal directions
- Strengthens rule use, step-wisdom, and sequencing
- Provides social cognition practice (*Examples: negotiating, social problem solving, collaborating, coordinating, teamwork, turn-taking, competition, playing fair, etc.*)
- Provides practice in managing emotions (frustrations, anxiety, anger, failure, impatience waiting turn, etc.)
- Provides opportunity to engage the body, raise body awareness, and add movement to the day
- Increases tolerance for group activities
- Increases ability to manage potentially challenging interactions with an instructor (*Examples: how to receive correction, feedback, compliments, etc.*)
- Improves ability to develop creative strategies and accommodations to minimize interference from challenges
- Explores ways to creatively approach or modify game/exercise
- Improves self-evaluation: what emotions arise, do I like the activity, how does it benefit me, what is my stamina/endurance for this activity, how often do I want to do it?

## Technology and Technological Arts

### Computer art and animation

### Benefits:

- Increases skills in technology use (*Examples: how to install a program, use tutorials, etc.*)
- Teaches how to use technology for creative purposes (*Example: student-generated designs*)
- Improves creative brainstorming and idea generation (*Examples: topics, themes, landscapes, color, story line*)
- Gives experience looking for inspiration and ideas by inspecting what other people have done
- Provides opportunities to develop mentor relationships
- Improves ability to develop creative strategies and accommodations to minimize interference from challenges
- Improves self-evaluation: what emotions arise, do I like this activity, how does it benefit me, does it tie to a potential career or internship interest, what is my stamina/endurance for this activity, how often do I want to do it?

### Still photography

Benefits:

- Improves attention, selection, and creative use of perspective, angles, proximity to object
- Increases attention to detail
- Provides context for creative brainstorming to develop ideas for photographic themes and compositions
- Provides context for trouble shooting problems – creative problem solving
- Provides opportunity to develop mentor relationship
- Improves ability to develop creative strategies and accommodations to minimize interference from challenges
- Improves self-evaluation: what emotions arise, do I like it, how does it benefit me, does this tie to a potential career/internship interest, what is my stamina/endurance for this activity, how often do I want to do it?

### Photographic film development

Benefits:

- Improves ability to following directions
- Provides opportunities to develop mentor relationships
- Improves ability to develop creative strategies and accommodations to minimize interference from challenges
- Improves self-evaluation: what emotions arise, do I like the activity, how does it benefit me, does it tie to a potential career/internship interest, what is my stamina/endurance for this activity, how often do I want to do it?

### Digital photo editing

Benefits:

- Improves ability to following directions
- Provides context for creativity (playing with format, color, presentation, cropping, lighting)
- Provides opportunities to develop mentor relationships
- Improves ability to develop creative strategies and accommodations to minimize interference from challenges
- Improves self-evaluation: what emotions arise, do I like the activity, how does it benefit me, does it tie to a potential career/internship interest, what is my stamina/endurance for this activity, how often do I want to do it?

## Video filming

### Benefits:

- Builds creativity through process of brainstorming, research, and subject selection
- Builds skills operating equipment
- Learns to express creativity (filming angles, lighting, background, close-ups)
- Strengthens ability, flexibility, and willingness to edit/revise own work
- Provides opportunities to develop mentor relationships
- Improves ability to develop creative strategies and accommodations to minimize interference from challenges
- Improves self-evaluation: what emotions arise, do I like the activity, how does it benefit me, does it tie to a potential career/internship interest, what is my stamina/endurance for this activity, how often do I want to do it?

## Audio recording

### Benefits:

- Learns creativity through process of brainstorming project idea, research, and subject selection
- Builds skills operating equipment
- Learns to express creativity (sound levels, adding background music, flow of recording)
- Learns editing skills and strengthens ability, flexibility, and willingness to edit/revise own work
- Improves ability to develop creative strategies and accommodations to minimize interference from challenges
- Improves self-evaluation: what emotions arise, do I like the activity, how does it benefit me, does it tie to a potential career/internship interest, what is my stamina/endurance for this activity, how often do I want to do it?

## Video game design

### Benefits:

- Builds creativity through process of brainstorming project idea, research and subject selection
- Builds skills operating equipment
- Learns to express creativity (selecting game elements, characters, background, themes)
- Learns editing skills and strengthen ability, flexibility, and willingness to edit/revise own work
- Improves ability to develop creative strategies and accommodations to minimize interference from challenges
- Improves self-evaluation: what emotions arise, do I like the activity, how does it benefit me, does it tie to a potential career/internship interest, what is my stamina/endurance for this activity, how often do I want to do it?



### Simulation game playing

(Sim City and other self-guided computer games)

Benefits:

- Builds creativity through process of working through the challenges of the game
- Reinforces step-wisdom and preparedness (need to first read instructions or watch tutorials)
- Learns skills involving rules and guidelines for operating program
- Learns skills involving physical manipulation of the controls (getting the hardware and software to do what you want it to do)
- Learns to express creativity (selecting elements, characters, background, themes, templates)
- Provides opportunities for creative problem solving
- Reinforces collaboration, turn-taking, compromise, social problem solving and negotiation if is a group activity
- Improves ability to develop creative strategies and accommodations to minimize interference from challenges
- Improves self-evaluation: what emotions arise, do I like the activity, how does it benefit me, what is my stamina/endurance for this activity, how often do I want to do it?

### Art with various physical materials

(Drawing, cartooning, painting, self-portraits, mixed media, clay, collage, nature-based art, beadwork, leatherwork)

Benefits:

- Improves fine motor skills
- Improves ability to follow verbal and written instructions and demonstrations
- Provides opportunities for brainstorming and creativity surrounding selection of materials and development of concept
- Learns how to gain inspiration from other people's art (*Examples: looking at magazines, visiting art museums, using internet*)
- Provides opportunities for creative brainstorming and idea generation (topics, themes, style, color)
- Provides opportunities to develop mentor relationships
- Provides practice managing task-specific emotions such as frustration or failure
- Provides practice managing negative thoughts (*Examples: I can't do art, I am bad at this, free floating anxiety triggered by art, bad past experiences in art classes*)
- Improves ability to develop creative strategies and accommodations to minimize interference from challenges

- Improves self-evaluation: what emotions arise, do I like this activity, how does it benefit me, does it tie to a potential career or internship interest, what is my stamina/endurance for this activity, how often do I want to do it?

### Project-based art (individual and group)

Board game design; building models; sewing; making clothing, costumes, pillows, or other items; woodworking; murals; outdoor art projects: benches, gardens, garden art, labyrinths, animal- or plant-based art; functional art, building design/architecture; scrapbooking; making a comic book; collecting something and displaying it.

#### Benefits:

- Practices fine motor skills
- Practices following verbal and written instructions and demonstrations
- Provides context for brainstorming and creativity involving selection of materials and development of concept
- Provides opportunities to gain inspiration from other people's art projects
- Provides opportunities for creative brainstorming and idea generation (topics, themes, style, color)
- Provides opportunities for mentor relationships
- Provides practice managing task-specific emotions such as frustration or failure
- Provides practice managing negative thoughts (*Examples: I can't do this, I am bad at this, free floating anxiety triggered by art projects, bad past outcomes from projects*)
- Improves ability to develop creative strategies and accommodations to minimize interference from challenges
- Improves self-evaluation: what emotions arise, do I like this activity, how does it benefit me, does it tie to a potential career or internship interest, what is my stamina/endurance for this activity, how often do I want to do it?

### Music

Instrument playing (formal and improvised), listening, composing, instrument making, mash-ups, creating a compilation of favorite music to reflect a certain mood.

#### Benefits:

- Practices fine motor skills
- Practices following verbal and written instructions and demonstrations; learning through modeling and observation (in person, videos)
- Provides opportunities for brainstorming and creativity involving selection of instrument or activity
- Provides opportunities to gain inspiration from other people's musical achievements (*Examples: listening to works, researching on line, watching videos*)

- Provides opportunities for creative brainstorming and idea generation
- Provides opportunities to develop mentor relationships
- Provides practice managing task-specific emotions such as frustration or failure
- Provides practice managing negative thoughts (*Examples: I am not musical, I am bad at this, free floating anxiety triggered by art, bad past experiences in art classes*)
- Improves ability to develop creative strategies and accommodations to minimize interference from challenges
- Improves self-evaluation: what emotions arise, do I like this activity, how does it benefit me, does it tie to a potential career or internship interest, what is my stamina/endurance for this activity, how often do I want to do it?

### Language Arts

Poetry, oral storytelling, short story writing, memoirs, non-fiction writing, play writing, script writing, journaling, acting, making up riddles and jokes, debate, writing blogs, alternative history writing (*Example: what would the world be like if dinosaurs did not die out?*).

#### Benefits:

- Provides practice with expressive language (oral and written)
- Provides practice with executive function skills (*Examples: designing plan, organizing, plan implementation and follow through, evaluation of progress and end results, keeping track of details of project, time-management*)
- Provides practice with following verbal and written instructions, demonstrations, and examples
- Provides opportunities for brainstorming and creativity surrounding selection and development of concept
- Increases inspiration from other people's work in the given area (*Examples: looking at pictures in magazines, visit theater, internet, video clips, articles*)
- Provides opportunities for creative brainstorming and idea generation (topics, themes, style)
- Provides opportunities to develop mentor relationships
- Provides practice managing task specific emotions such as frustration, failure, delaying gratification, managing impatience
- Provides practice managing negative thoughts (*Examples: I'm not smart enough to do this, this is too hard, I am bad at this, anxiety triggered by past bad experiences in given area*)
- Improves ability to develop creative strategies and accommodations to minimize interference from challenges
- Improves self-evaluation: what emotions arise, do I like this activity, how does it benefit me, does it tie to a potential career or internship interest, what is my stamina/endurance for this activity, how often do I want to do it?

### Social/relational activities

Interviewing, poll taking, planning a social event, planning a fund raising event, representing school at a community event, planning and throwing a party, making up a group game, team building and group problem solving activities.

#### Benefits:

- Provides opportunities for social cognition and skills work
- Provides opportunities for receptive and expressive language skill building
- Practice with executive functions (*Examples: designing plan, organizing, plan implementation and follow through, evaluation of progress and end result, keeping track of details of project, time-management, predicting outcomes*)
- Provide practice establishing project guidelines
- Provides opportunities for brainstorming and creativity surrounding selection of materials and development of concept
- Increases inspiration from other people's work (*Examples: look at pictures in magazines, finding examples, watching videos, internet research*)
- Provides opportunities for creative brainstorming and idea generation (topics, themes)
- Provides opportunities to develop mentor relationships
- Provides practice managing task specific emotions such as frustration, failure, overwhelm
- Provides practice managing responsibilities and personal accountability
- Provides practice managing negative thoughts (*Examples: I can't do this, I am bad at this, anxiety from past bad experiences*)
- Improves ability to develop creative strategies and accommodations to minimize interference from challenges Improves self-evaluation: what emotions arise, do I like this activity, how does it benefit me, does it tie to a potential career or internship interest, what is my stamina/endurance for this activity, how often do I want to do it?

### Other areas for creative expression

- Visualization
- Meditation
- Math-based art
- Logic and problem solving puzzles
- Entering a contest
- Talent show
- Visual puzzles
- Imagining a product and creating an advertising campaign or slogan
- Creating an imaginary world/city and its inhabitants

### 7.08 Advisor Guide Sheets for Student Creativity Development

The following guide sheets are intended to

- Help advisors track overall student progress and exposure to creativity
- Identify difficulties, obstacles, or other impediments to their advisee’s creative exploration
- Generate needed adjustments, accommodations, and strategies
- Track efficacy of interventions (adjustments, strategies, accommodations)
- Ensure student’s program experience incorporates creative expression
- Create a growing list of creative ideas, projects, and activities student has an expressed interest in for current and future scheduling purposes
- Organize needs, materials, personnel, and other aspects of a given project
- Help advisors track progress and outcome of current or ongoing advisee’s creative projects

These guide sheets are used at the discretion of the team or program director. This material should be reformatted by users based on need.

#### Tracking Form

Tracks overall student progress with creative expression and exposure to creativity

Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

List all creative elements currently present in student’s schedule (classes, groups, activities, lessons, projects)

Daily:

Weekly:

Ongoing projects:

For each, describe:

- **Current** difficulties
- **Goals** (are there stated goals, and if so what are the goals of participants in this creative endeavor?)
- **Level of participation** (highly engaged, resistant, low, intermittent involvement, erratic bursts of engagement, needs ongoing encouragement, when student needs help and with what? generating own creative ideas vs. following lead of others, adding ideas to supplement ideas of others, no contributions)
- **Emotional reactivity** (emotions that interfere or impede participation, such as anxiety, excitement, etc.)
- **Social interactions** (positive, difficulties arising when collaborating with peers?)
- **Environmental sensitivities** (need for adjustments)
- **Regulation** (able to remain regulated, need for regulation support)
- **Staff** (which staff are involved and what roles do they take with the student)
- **Current adjustments, accommodations, and strategies** that have been put in place to address obstacles and challenges
- **Revised goals** based on progress

### Creating and Reflecting on Ideas, Projects, and Activities for Creative Expression

For each student, create a list of potential creative endeavors. Revisit the list and revise with student throughout the year. As the student adds each item to the list, try to stretch their critical thinking by asking them to evaluate the following:

- How did I come up with my idea? (*Examples: on my own, inspired by a peer, movie, news*)
- What do I hope to get from this experience? (*Examples: fun, learning, career exploration, peer bonding, build a specific skill,*)
- Does this idea or project involve just me or do I have to think about other people?
- What am I expecting will be the outcome if I do it?
- Is this the right time to try out this idea? If not, is there a better time and why?
- Ask any additional thought-provoking questions as needed.

Once many ideas are discussed and examined at least one idea will likely rise to the top as something the individual will commit to doing. Use the *Making Things Happen* guidelines on the next page to help students get started.

### Making Things Happen

This list provides guiding questions to help students filter their ideas further for creative projects. Matters of *feasibility* and *how to proceed* are examined more closely. Use this list for the refinement process, and to engage students in critical thinking and executive functions.

<b>Idea</b>	Does this idea need to be stated more clearly and in more detail? Do I need to spend some time organizing my thoughts about it? Do I need help with this?
<b>People</b>	Who can I involve so the idea becomes a success? How might I do this?
<b>Needs</b>	What materials or supplies do I need for this idea, activity, or project to go well?
<b>Logistics</b>	How will I get the materials, supplies, and people the project will require? How long might it take to arrange all this? ( <i>Examples: buying materials, renting space</i> )
<b>Cost</b>	Considering all the above, what might be the final cost of the project?
<b>Other details</b>	Considering all the above, when might be the best time to try this idea? How much organization is needed? From whom do I need to get permission? etc.

## 7.09 Teacher Resources

### Steps to Maximize Imagination

Carson, Shelley. *Your creative brain: seven steps to maximize imagination, productivity, and innovation in your life*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010. Print.

### Creativity In the Classroom

Starko, Alane Jordan. *Creativity in the Classroom: Schools of Curious Delight*. New York, NY: Routledge, 2010. Print.

### Handbook of Creativity

Kaufman, James C., and Robert J. Sternberg. *The Cambridge Handbook of Creativity*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2010. Print.

### Fostering Creativity in the Classroom

Cropley, Arthur J. *More Ways Than One: Fostering Creativity in the Classroo*. N.p.: Praeger, 1992. Print

### Creative Therapy

Tubbs, Janet. *Creative Therapy for Children with Autism, ADD, and Asperger's: [using Artistic Creativity to Reach, Teach, and Touch Our Children]*. Garden City Park, NY: Square One, 2008. Print.

### Experiential Learning

Beard, Colin, John P. Wilson, and Colin Beard. *Experiential Learning: A Best Practice Handbook for Educators and Trainers*. London: Kogan Page, 2006. Print



### 7.10 In Summary

Establishing creative expression as a program-wide principle gives students the widest range of opportunities to create their own unique way of stepping into independence and adulthood. With creativity as a central focus, teachers are free to deliver content in exciting and inspiring ways, and take advantage of their own creativity by modeling its use and value in thinking, doing, and being.

## 7.11 References

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### Handbook of Creativity

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### Creative Therapy

Tubbs, Janet. *Creative Therapy for Children with Autism, ADD, and Asperger's: [using Artistic Creativity to Reach, Teach, and Touch Our Children]*. Garden City Park, NY: Square One, 2008. Print.

### Experiential Learning

Beard, Colin, John P. Wilson, and Colin Beard. *Experiential Learning: A Best Practice Handbook for Educators and Trainers*. London: Kogan Page, 2006. Print

**Case Histories**

Robinson, Ricki. Personal communication to D. Flaschen, February 2013

## Section 8.0

### CRITICAL THINKING:

### Definitions and Teacher Guidance

*“Biology gives you a brain. Life turns it into a mind.” Jeffrey Eugenides*

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## 8.01 Introduction

**Critical thinking** skills are the tools we use to think clearly and rationally. They permit us to go beyond simple memorization of facts into the world of analyzing and understanding the connections between ideas. They give us the ability to distinguish between degrees of importance, solve problems systematically, detect errors in reasoning, and reflect on beliefs and values.

**Executive functions** are closely related to critical thinking skills. Where critical thinking tools are concerned with *thought*, executive functions are concerned with *doing*. Executive functions have to do with planning, organization, and execution of planning.

Critical thinking contributes to executive function by providing clear, logical reasoning abilities. Without clear reasoning, efforts to accomplish most non-automatic tasks could be seriously hindered. When the student is skilled in both executive function and critical thinking, he can become an independent, collaborative decision maker and a real-world problem solver.

This module is designed to strengthen critical thinking skills (also referred to as higher order thinking) within the context of executive functions. Using this material, young adults in transition can become effective thinkers and agents of positive change in their own lives. This dual approach is vital for all individuals with autism and other developmental disabilities, regardless of their individual diagnosis or level of functioning.

Since critical thinking and executive function are essential skill sets for participants to navigate meaningfully through all modules in the transition curriculum, this material is intended for use: (1) whenever the need arises, (2) when opportunities to teach these skills emerge during any activity, and (3) when a participant exhibits critical thinking or executive function challenge in need of explicit intervention.

The overlapping relationship of critical thinking and executive function is illustrated in the graphic on the following page. The skills listed in the SHARED column combine the thought processes of critical thinking and the active processes of executive function.



### Application of Critical Thinking in the Transition Curriculum

At a program-wide level, development of critical thinking and executive function skills is embedded into all activities, classes, projects, events, relationship-building work, formal and informal conversations and interactions, groups, decision-making processes, advisory meetings, and internship experiences. This ensures participants have ongoing coaching, support, and skill building. Brain teasers, riddles, and short critical thinking exercises can be included as warm-ups for classes, used as team building activities, and to get the brain activated before starting challenging tasks.

*“Logic will get you from A to B. Imagination will take you everywhere.”*

**-- Albert Einstein**

Additional program-wide opportunities to embed critical thinking and executive function practice, coaching, and exposure include:

- Event planning
- Collaborative projects
- Conflict resolution
- Debates and discussions
- Group problem solving
- Community outings
- Short classes (first aid and fire drill protocol)
- Competitions and contests
- Voting
- Brain games
- Local scavenger hunts
- Improvisation and role play
- Learning how to research a question (who to ask, trusted sources, internet, what key search words to use, etc.)

For participants who need more intensive critical thinking or executive function skills work, support or remediation should be built into their program schedules. For example, an individual who cannot conceptualize time will need work to build the foundation. The student can then go on to develop skills in estimating, managing, and planning time-related activities and projects. Remediation or compensatory techniques can be provided by staff or by outside resources and professionals, such as OT, SLP, or learning specialists.

Specialized program-based interventions to build concepts such as sequence, frequency, and duration can be integrated into the student's daily schedule using interactive software (see 8.07 Sources and References for other suggestions.)

In the sections that follow are definitions and other teacher guidance for each of the major critical thinking and executive function skill areas.

## 8.02 Concept Formation

includes...

- Visualizing the Concept
- Parts-to-Whole / Whole-to-Parts Thinking
- Processing Meaning

When we are able to visualize and comprehend both concrete and abstract ideas, we are able to be stronger communicators, thinkers, and problem solvers.

**Concept formation** is the result of grasping the properties of objects, events, or qualities using the processes of **abstraction** and **generalization**.

**Abstraction** involves identifying and extracting a non-tangible notion or essential characteristic from a concept or its properties.

**Generalization** has to do with drawing a unifying principle, rule, or notion from a wider body of data or experience.

*For example, apples can be characterized by their physical qualities (shape, feel, size, taste), their context (hanging on a tree in an orchard, in a pile in the produce department of a grocery store), or their uses (dipped in caramel and put on a stick to eat, given to teachers by students).*

### Individuals challenged by concept formation tend to demonstrate difficulty in

- Object identification (*Example: Student has trouble identifying what a hat is. He may have difficulty identifying by verbal, visual, tactile or other means*)
- Object usage (*Example: Student has trouble understanding a hat is used to keep one's head warm, block out glaring sun, prevent sunburn, for protective purposes, or as a fashion statement. He may have difficulty grasping the main use and alternative usages.*)
- Applying the object to a context (*Example: Student has difficulty drawing a picture of someone wearing a hat that holds clues as to why he is wearing it; has trouble including a hat in a verbal description of a whole concept such as a policeman or someone he knows, like his mom; has trouble incorporating hat into a story in a way that reflects understanding of its purpose or use*)

### How to approach concept formation when working with students

The basic guiding question is: *What is it?* The focus should be on building and using descriptive language. Begin with broad terms and comparisons. Help the student build his base of detailed descriptive terms he can understand and use in conversations and stories, and can apply in speaking and writing. Increase



his descriptive ability to enhance the richness of his concept formation (big vs. little, enormous vs. tiny). Through concept formation, we are able to deepen our understanding of the world around us.

**Concrete Concepts** are physical objects such as chair, rain, ice cream, and bedroom. They have physical dimensions that can be identified through the main five senses (sight, taste, touch, hearing, smell).

**Abstract concepts** are ideas, thoughts, or theories that extend beyond concrete realities, specific objects, or actual instances. Justice and poverty are examples of abstract concepts. (Dictionary.com)

Individuals who struggle with concept formation tend to display three predictable learning profiles:

1. Challenges with concept formation across the board, and in need of support that builds the skill from the foundation upwards (concrete to abstract)
2. Intermittent challenges – sometimes they are able to form and manipulate concepts and other times they are not, making it difficult to identify what needs support and remediation
3. Solid understanding of concrete concepts but great difficulty with abstract concepts.

Students with profile #1 will benefit by working with concrete concepts until they demonstrate they are stable with concrete concept imagery, detail/big picture thinking, and processing meaning. Once stable, they can be supported in applying those skills to abstract concepts.

Students with profile #2 will benefit from beginning in the concrete realm so teachers can identify areas of strength and areas in need of strengthening (*Example: Student is strong with visualization and meaning but struggles with parts-to-whole/whole-to-parts thinking*). Once the areas of challenge are identified, they can be concentrated on as the teacher moves between work in both the concrete and abstract realms, shoring up areas in need of support and practice.

Students with profile #3 will likely need guidance to understand how to visualize an abstract concept. Practicing simply visualizing abstract concepts is the recommended starting point until the student demonstrates an ability to think abstractly. Once this skill is established, deeper work in abstract concepts is likely to be more effective because the individual has a stronger foundation upon which to build new skills.

### **Individuals challenged in the area of concrete concepts tend to**

- Struggle to identify objects (on paper, in 3D, through words)
- Tend to get quickly confused in discussions and when receiving instructions or explanations
- Mix objects up when speaking or when asked to retrieve or identify something
- Have low reading comprehension
- Get frustrated or emotionally dysregulated by games involving object identification, matching, and other concept word play.
- Have difficulty guessing an object based on clues and cues

### How to approach concrete concepts when working with students

If a student struggles with basic concrete concepts it is important to rule out challenges in other domains before assuming the difficulty is rooted in concrete conceptualization. Students with slow processing speeds, language processing challenges, and auditory processing challenges will struggle with concept formation. In these cases, it is recommended that the approach to concept formation work be formed based upon the appropriate learning strategies and accommodations.

Individuals with a low fund of knowledge or exposure to concepts will appear to be weak in concept formation when in fact they need to work on expanding their vocabulary and being exposed to a wider variety of concepts. In such cases, work on vocabulary building and experiential learning should come before explicit concept building work begins.

### Individuals challenged in the area of abstract concepts tend to

- Gravitate to concrete stories, movies, games, entertainment, and conversations and may avoid or resist situations, stories, or experiences they perceive as “too hard” or “too confusing”
- Get lost in a lecture or conversation if the topic moves into abstraction
- If confidence, self-awareness, and/or self-advocacy is low will not likely ask for clarification or identify when they are not understanding something
- May ask a lot of questions that interfere with the flow of conversation or activity
- Use overgeneralized vocabulary rather than descriptive language containing more detail

### How to approach abstract concepts when working with students

Understanding each individual’s language capability, vocabulary base (receptive and expressive), and visualization skills provide clues to how teachers should engage students on this topic. *For example, a student with challenges in language processing and expression may need approaches that incorporate visuals and movement. A student with vocabulary difficulties may need approaches that incorporate visuals, three-dimensional manipulatives, and movement. A student who struggles with visualization will need visualizing and verbalizing techniques.*

#### 8.02.1 Visualizing the Concept

**Visualization** is the ability to construct an image or represent an idea in the mind’s eye. However, the notion of “visualization” can go beyond imagining just physical characteristics. Visualization of an object or abstract principle can include meaning, function, and qualities that help create a deeply meaningful, multi-dimensional representation. These representations allow us to think critically, preview what is to come, and form our own unique view of the world.

**Concrete example:** When asked to picture a circus, the student conjures up a scene of a parade with elephants, people in costumes, imagines the smell of peanuts and hay, hears the man yelling “ladies and gentlemen,” hears lions roar, can describe the big tent and clown’s make-up, etc.

**Abstract example:** When asked to picture democracy, the student imagines a town meeting with people in lively discussions, people waiting in line at a polling center, ballot boxes, etc.

### Individuals challenged in the area of visualization tend to

- Have difficulty constructing a picture in the mind's eye based on someone else's words
- Be overly dependent on images made for them in order to understand. They may need to see a picture of a shoe, or have someone point to a shoe in addition to hearing the word to be able to imagine one
- Have weak reading comprehension, especially if there are few or no illustrations to match what the words say
- Have weak recall of plots, stories, and characters from books read. By contrast, they may have excellent recall of visual information – movies, TV shows, things they saw happen
- Omit, sporadically use, or misuse descriptive language
- Show little interest and demonstrate weak skills in making up stories
- Have difficulty and/or lack independence with activities that include brainstorming
- Omit key details in artwork
- Have difficulty conceptualizing what the end result of a project, activity, or event would look like
- Not use gesturing to supplement meaning (Examples: The fish was this long – show with hands; The old man walked this way – imitate hobbling slowly)
- Have difficulty with visual memory. Visual memory is the ability to hold images in the mind's eye for a sustained period of time and conjuring them up again as needed.
- Be delayed in forming object permanence. Object permanence is the ability to know something exists when it is hidden from view.
- Have difficulty making a map or constructing a bird's eye view of an area

### How to approach visualizing concepts with students:

Guiding questions include:

- Identifying and breaking down concepts into their observable parts: *What is it? How big is it? What colors should I see? How many? What shape does it look like? What sound would it make? etc.*
- *What should I picture/imagine/see in my mind based on your description of a (frog, chair, circus, angry policeman directing traffic, etc.)?*
- *How can you use your words, gestures, and movements to help me see the picture you have in your mind/are holding in front of you?*

Visualization can be supported in many ways throughout the day: capitalize on teachable moments in conversations, emphasize in classes and group work, engage in visualization-based games and activities, make use of materials from visualization-based programs, and utilize visualization board games and interactive

online games. Very effective, engaging approaches to visualization enlist the body and the senses as well as thinking and language.

### 8.02.2 Parts-to-Whole / Whole-to-Parts Thinking

**Parts-to-whole thinking** is the ability to experience internally the parts that make up an object or idea and then how those parts combine or integrate to create that object or idea.

**Whole-to-parts thinking** involves grasping an overall concept first and then moving on to grasp the details or parts that make up the idea.

If parts of an object or circumstance are examined in isolation from one another, the resulting understanding is limited. If the whole is examined without recognizing that each of the parts is distinct and has its own role, understanding is again limited. A wider understanding becomes possible if both deconstruction (whole-to-parts) and synthesis (parts-to-whole) are used

When we are able to deconstruct ideas and concepts into their parts to examine and synthesize those parts back together to find greater meaning, we become big picture thinkers. The better we are as big picture thinkers, the more we can contribute to group collaborations in a positive and meaningful way.

**Cognitive-based example:** When examining paintings using parts-to-whole thinking we can break those works of art into styles, uses of colors, uses of perspectives, and moods to understand how the various genres are defined. Alternatively, we can use whole-to-parts thinking to examine each genre in detail by studying its components.

When we have the capacity to break things into parts, we can discover aspects of an idea or experience in which we feel particularly drawn. We may want to expand on or explore them as potential new interests or passions. We can also understand what elements may be dysregulating or undesirable.

**Being able to grasp details and the whole picture enables us to explore our personal preferences and opinions in creative ways. We can become more flexible, comprehensive thinkers and learners.**

**Social-emotional based example:** A student reacts poorly to going to a circus. When the experience is broken down into parts the individual discovers it was not the whole circus experience that was upsetting but a particular sensory experience that made it for him (smells, noises, sounds). However, the elephants were very compelling and he wants to learn more about them (where they come from, facts about them, how they are trained).

#### Individuals challenged in the area of parts-to-whole thinking tend to

- Have difficulty drawing conclusions based on a series of facts
- Focus too much on details and are unable to conceptualize the main ideas
- Leave out key parts of a multi-step or multi-component project or approach to a task

### Guiding questions to use with students

- *If I break an idea or object down into its parts and lay them out side by side, what would I include? When we put them together, what does it make?*
- *What role does each part have in making the whole object or idea work?*
- *When all parts are together, what is the resulting object or idea?*
- *If any parts were missing, how would it change the whole?*
- *How can we use our creativity to represent visually or act out through movement the relationship among all the parts and the whole?*
- *Are there parts to which I am particularly interested or drawn?*

### Individuals challenged in the area of whole-to-parts thinking tend to

- Have difficulty breaking down a concept, idea, or object into its parts and identifying the role and value each one plays
- See the main idea but have difficulty identifying and understanding key components that make up the main idea
- Struggle to see how changing one part of a concept, idea, or object makes changes to the whole outcome (*Examples: if I remove a part, the object will work differently or not work; if I change the time of day we schedule the picnic, how does that change what we pack to eat or bring?*)
- Have trouble seeing how the parts of a concept, idea, or object work together when in isolation (Example: how just the pedal and gears work together on a bike) and altogether (*Example: all individual bike parts make up a whole bicycle*)
- Have difficulty because they focus on one aspect of an object, idea, or concept (*Examples: just talking about clowns at the circus, looking at many styles of seats a bike can have, examining the role a dispatcher has in an emergency response*)
- Find making revisions, omissions, substitutions, and other changes difficult because it is challenging to isolate the change and conceptualize how it may improve the result. This may include things the student has created as well as other objects, ideas, concepts. (*Examples: changing an element in a story to alter the outcome and improve the overall piece, changing one of the ingredients in a recipe, modifying a piece of art*)

### Guiding questions to use with students

- *When we break this object, idea, or concept into parts what is the significance of each part? (What role does each part play and why is it important?)*
- *If we take out one part of something, how does it change the result? If we add something, how would it change the result?*
- *If we want to make a change or improve on an object, idea, or concept, what should we focus on? Where would we start? How would it affect the whole?*

- *If we examine your favorite gadget, object, idea, story, or concept and break it down into parts can you tell me why each is there/what each does? (Literally take it apart, do it as a visualization exercise, draw out on a whiteboard or poster)  
Is there one part of this object, idea, or concept you like best; you think makes the whole thing work well?*

There is a natural repetition in wording and activities when working on strengthening big picture thinking. As students become familiar with the questioning process and a predictable approach to constructing and deconstructing concepts is established, the process becomes easier. As skills increase, students can be pushed further with more challenging questions that stretch their ability to analyze, solve problems, and think creatively.

Using student interests (favorite objects, stories, concepts, etc.) as starting points for this work can increase likelihood of engagement, enthusiasm, and receptiveness. Once the student is more adept at parts-to-whole and whole-to-parts thinking with familiar concepts that have positive associations, staff can begin expanding to less familiar and more complex material. This helps students stretch their thinking.

### 8.02.3 Processing Meaning

Meaning is processed by sorting through a collection of related data (memories, facts, emotions, etc.), identifying how the pieces connect, and how they are relevant to the individual. This process can result in greater understanding and may lead to improved critical thinking.

When we are able to process efficiently and have the capacity to analyze, make connections, and draw conclusions, we become meaning-makers. As those skills solidify, we internalize the process and become more cognitively active, alert, and observant. As a result, we become motivated to seek even greater understanding.

**Example:** The individual looking at a painting is able to identify parts, how each part relates to and affects the meaning of the painting. If he steps back mentally, he can take in the painting as a whole, integrated image. The next step towards sophisticated thinking is to explore more abstract concepts such as symbolism, political messages, historical significance, how the piece compares to other works from the same artist, etc.

#### Individuals challenged in the area of processing meaning tend to

- Get lost, confused, or otherwise have difficulty participating in, following, and understanding conversations (1:1 or group)
- Need instructions, explanations, and other verbal information repeated several times
- Have difficulty generating inferences, opinions, or arriving at sound conclusions based on facts
- Deliver convoluted explanations
- Confuse meanings of words, especially those that sound or are spelled similarly
- Have difficulty writing creatively, creating story summaries, generating alternative endings, etc.
- Have difficulty telling stories cohesively or recalling an event verbally

- Miss or misinterpret significance, metaphor, analogies, underlying meaning, and other more subtle and abstract aspects of comprehension
- Misinterpret the meaning of social situations

### Guiding questions to use with students

- *What is the purpose of this object or idea?*
- *What does it do?*
- *Where would I likely see or use this object or idea?*
- *In what situations would this object or idea be helpful?*
- *Who would likely use this object or idea and in what situations?*
- *How does the presence of this object or idea affect other things around it?*
- *If this object or idea were missing, how would it affect a given situation?*
- *Need non-object related examples*

### 8.03 Analysis

includes...

- Reasoning
- Main Idea and Supporting Details (Big Picture Thinking)
- Categorizing
- Making comparisons
- Drawing conclusions
- Logic and Reasoning
- Interpretation and Inference
- Creativity and Brainstorming
- Generating Multiple Possible Outcomes
- Rule Use

**Critical thinking** is a series of steps one can take to reason clearly and arrive at useful conclusions about what to do or what to believe. The steps consist of gathering knowledge or information about a topic or issue; comprehending the information; analyzing it to determine its completeness, validity, etc.; evaluating it to draw conclusions; and drawing conclusions. The process is not always linear, as critical thinking often requires us to revisit known information, add new knowledge to it, and re-evaluate any new meaning that may arise.

**Analysis** consists of breaking something down into its basic elements to make a detailed examination of them.

When we possess and systematically practice critical thinking skills, we are able to go beyond the basic recognition of meaning. We can engage in more sophisticated processes, such as: questioning meaning, applying meaning, generating new meaning, and so much more.

#### **Individuals challenged in the area of critical thinking and analysis skills tend to**

- Have difficulty knowing where to start or how to approach a critical thinking-based discussion
- Have difficulty knowing what facts, ideas, examples, and concepts to include to express an idea clearly and comprehensively, support a suggestion, or offer an explanation
- Give elaborate explanations or analyses lacking sequence or marked by other gaps in logic
- Have difficulty explaining, backing up, or defending their thoughts, beliefs, or opinions (in general or on a specific topic)
- Struggle to arrive at either concrete and/or abstract conclusions
- Often miss meaning in a story, anecdote, event, or discussion
- Struggle with writing, problem solving, decision making, and other activities that require critical thinking or analysis
- Generate ideas that lack creativity and insight
- Have difficulty understanding social situations



### How to approach critical thinking and analysis with students

Simply providing specific guiding questions in the Critical Thinking and Analysis section will not be particularly helpful as analysis and critical thinking are so contextual. When working with an individual in these two domains, questions need to be tailored to find gaps in understanding, interpretation, and logic. Helpful approaches often include:

- Following a student's chain of logic to its conclusion (can be done verbally, with pictures, drawing, or concept mapping)
- Eliciting opinions, asking the student to defend his conclusions or options (through debate or questions)
- Having the student draw a concept map; represent ideas through images and drawings; orally explain, write, act out, or otherwise represent his understanding of the topic at hand. **Concept mapping** (also called mind mapping) is a means of visually representing information using words and pictures related by lines drawn among them in a similar way to how sentences are diagrammed in English grammar textbooks.
- Answering inferential or interpretive questions generated by the teacher
- Brainstorming, then evaluating ideas generated
- Modeling creative ways to look at and evaluate an idea

#### 8.03.1 Reasoning

**Reasoning** allows us to make meaning of objects, ideas, contexts, and experiences. When we are able to **compare, contrast, describe, analyze, categorize, and integrate** new information with prior knowledge we build our ability to be active and effective learners. As this skill is strengthened, our confidence and motivation to learn increases.

When working with students on strengthening reasoning it is important to reinforce both **verbal** and **non-verbal reasoning skills**. **Verbal reasoning** enlists receptive language (understanding) and expressive language (oral communication) as the main tools for approaching understanding and communicating a concept. **Non-verbal reasoning** enlists symbols, patterns, gestures, pictures, etc. as the main tool for approaching, understanding and communicating a concept.

It is important to strengthen language-based, verbal reasoning with individuals on the autism spectrum to the extent they are able given their language and language processing capabilities. It is essential to strengthen **non-verbal reasoning** skills alongside work on verbal reasoning skills, especially with individuals vulnerable to language-based challenges.

**Non-verbal reasoning skills open doors to communication, understanding and creative expression that would otherwise remain closed for those who possess inherent language challenges.**

When we can detect patterns, understand sequencing, see things spatially (in relation to each other), and conceptualize time concretely and abstractly, we have strong non-verbal reasoning skills. These non-verbal skills expand our career options and we feel more prepared to participate in groups and collaborative hands-on projects.

Reasoning can be divided into two categories: **concrete reasoning** and **abstract reasoning**:

**Concrete reasoning** means thinking with information derived from the physical senses and tangible experiences. This form of reasoning is often associated with the literal use of words.

*For example, if we look outside at midday and the sky is dark, wind is blowing, and everything is wet, our concrete reasoning skills tell us it is raining outside. If we want to be sure, we may walk outside and put our hands out to feel the raindrops. This concrete reasoning leads us to a related concrete realization that an umbrella or raincoat is needed if we wanted to be outside and not get wet.*

Difficulty with concrete reasoning can extend to one- and two-dimensional visual and auditory information as well. *(Examples: Illustrations in a story that represent the words; instructions given in picture form; visual charts using pictures to explain a sequence, process, or rule; symbolic representations such as signs intended to guide behavior such as poolside symbols, signs near electrical or construction work, and road signs; some graphic novels, cartoons, movies, and TV.)*

#### **Individuals challenged in the area of concrete reasoning tend to**

- Miss obvious, observable clues
- Do not connect concrete facts together to arrive at a logical conclusion
- Are dependent on others to help them understand and draw conclusions based on observable information

**Abstract reasoning** is the ability to extract generalized principles or ideas from concrete experiences and use those ideas to develop additional understandings or meanings.

A person who can only reason concretely might be able to speak of the chair, table, and stools in a room. Another person with the ability to reason abstractly might see all the same objects but refer to them as “the furniture in the room.”

Once the foundational ability to reason abstractly is active, the student’s reasoning can be stretched beyond the boundaries of the initial topic. The student can be coached to apply meaning in related ways that deepen and expand understanding. This opens doors for opportunities to make the process more active and complex. For example, when the student can see the various objects in the room as “the furniture”, the next skill level would be drawing conclusions and evaluating opinions about the furniture.

### Individuals challenged in the area of abstract reasoning tend to

- Struggle with concepts related to time (see below)
- Struggle with concepts related to spatial ordering (see below)
- Struggle with contingency/conditional thinking (see below)

### How to approach improving concrete and abstract reasoning

These activities develop mental flexibility and adaptability, especially in the presence of limiting circumstances or group dynamics. If a student has trouble making basic observations, he needs more practice visualizing and verbalizing. If a student struggles to form opinions or draw conclusions, he needs more practice in those specific areas. In such cases, it is wise to delay abstract reasoning work until their foundational skills are stronger and they have the tools to be more successful abstract thinkers.

Example of how both concrete and abstract reasoning can be approached in different ways, illuminating how individual learning profiles affect the way one approaches the reasoning process:

**Scenario A:** *“I like the furniture because it has a modern look and makes the room look cool.”*

This student’s comment reveals he is familiar with contemporary style of furniture, is having a positive reaction to what he sees, and uses emotions to process experience. Discussions about happiness with the current furniture situation can lead to larger discussions about preferences regarding room arrangements, picking favorite chairs, and brainstorming what uses the room could have in the program (great place to be quiet and study, consider making this the student lounge, etc.).

**Scenario B:** *“I hate the colors. Some of the pieces are old or slightly damaged. They don’t match each other.”*

This student also infuses emotions into his thinking, is having a negative reaction to what he sees, allocates his attention to small details, and prefers things to be in order or look a certain way.

In a group context, compare and contrast opinions. Discuss how different rooms “should” look depending on desired usage. Discuss if any pieces could be repaired or cleaned up. Discuss if there is a budget for the furniture and, if so, engage students in brainstorming and voting how to use it (buy or sew slip covers, what to keep, going to thrift stores or yard sales to look for replacements, do some online comparative shopping). If there is no budget, discuss potential options and encourage creative solutions.

**Scenario C:** *“I like the separate furniture pieces but they are in awkward places in the room.”*

This student demonstrates parts-to-whole thinking strength, an inclination to have things in order according to preferences. He demonstrates some visualization skills (has a vision in his mind the room does not fit and is “awkward”), but he may not be as emotionally driven to form opinions.

Decide what does not work well, what the room will be used for, then draw alternative floor plans, vote on changes, move objects around, and experiment, etc.

Key components needed for effective abstract reasoning are **Time, Spatial Reasoning,** and **Contingency/Conditional Thinking**. These three aspects of abstract reasoning are fundamental. They us understand and organize abstract elements that play major roles in understanding, thought organization and logic.

### Time

In its simplest application, the notion of **time** has concrete aspects – such as when used as a position on a continuum (the calendar date March 12, 1895) or when speaking of duration (the vacation lasted two weeks). It can refer to the position of the hands on an analog clock, the series of numbers on a digital clock, or the starting and ending points of events.

However, time also has a more abstract nature that tends to be more difficult for many students with disabilities. It can be used to approximate the passage of time – an “era”, a “phase”, or a distinct period of one’s life (*Example: “my time in the military”*). It can be used colloquially (*Examples: “Time’s up!”*, *“It’s about time!”*) or metaphorically or descriptively (*Example: “Watching this movie is like watching corn grow”*).

To further complicate matters, time can be fixed (*Example: “You have 20 minutes to complete this quiz”*) but it can also be conditional or fluid (*Examples: “Take all the time you need”, “We don’t have enough time to ride the rollercoaster and the Ferris wheel”*). Time can be contingent on other factors and sometimes adjusted according to external logistics and limitations. In these cases, it requires an even higher level of understanding and cognitive flexibility.

### Individuals challenged in the area of time concepts tend to

- Be poor estimators of time (*Examples: how long it takes to complete a task*)
- Be unaware of the passage of time (both in general and specifically)
- Be dependent on others to manage their schedules and make plans
- Be surprised when told something is ending or transitioning into a different activity, and possibly overwhelmed emotionally when told to stop, clean up, or finish
- Be frustrated, impatient, or dysregulated by waiting (feels endless)
- Have difficulty projecting into the future or estimating how long ago something happened  
Struggle with time-related academic subjects, such as history
- Avoid or react negatively to activities with time parameters (*Examples: races, timed tests, etc.*)

### How to approach time when working with students

Since time is such a difficult concept for many, activities should be tailored to individual need, have experiential components, and be spread throughout the day.

- Raise awareness of time throughout the day (*Example: physical education lasts 50 minutes*)
- Draw attention to passage of time and track it (*Example: use a stop watch to time something*)
- Consider time as a factor in decision-making (*Example: we don't have time to bake cookies from scratch but we could use pre-made dough and bake them before the party*)
- Build time management practice into the day (teachable moments and responsibilities managing one's schedule)

If an individual struggles with telling time and reading clocks, the student will need a lot of experiential work supplemented with reflection and discussion. If an individual can read a clock but struggles with conceptualizing the passage of time, the work should be a combination of

- Using visual aids, cards, games, and storyboarding to illustrate passage of time through visual cues
- Reading stories with illustrations to support story elements related to time
- Activities and discussions to expand and practice the skill of marking time
- Frequent and ongoing practice estimating time (*Examples: How long will a task take? How long will it take to get somewhere?*)
- Frequent and ongoing practice evaluating the passage of time (*Example: Before an activity or experience giving the marker of time, "It is now 2 o'clock; we will do xyz for 15 minutes." After the activity, discuss the experience in relation to time: "Did that 15 minutes go by fast, slow, or about what you expected 15 minutes to feel like?"*)
- Frequent and ongoing practice identifying factors that affect time to increase awareness of contingencies and flexible thinking (*Example: "We have a lot planned today so we need to pay attention to our time; If you decide to take a longer break now, you may be rushed later"*). Note that oral information is best understood and retained when accompanied by visual information (*Example: having a poster up reminding students of a change in schedule*).

The last three are particularly helpful since they focus on estimation, prediction, and reflection. Have the student perform actions and estimate how long they took. Have him repeat the same action with someone else timing it. Do comparison and reflection on the difference between the student's internal sense of the passage of time and an external standard such as a clock. This activity supports self-monitoring and time management simultaneously – both vital executive functions.

**Note to the reader:** Some individuals are stable in their basic understanding of time when there are visual or other supportive cues but still struggle with the passage of time in the absence of obvious time cues. *For example, as long as a clock is visible in the classroom, the student knows how long an activity is taking. However, without that clock, he may imagine he has only been on the computer for a few minutes when in fact it has been several hours.*

## Spatial reasoning

In general, **spatial reasoning** involves the ability to judge three-dimensional relationships and visualize them in the mind's eye. (refer to 8.02.1 for more information on visualization).

Dr. Gerald Grow describes spatial intelligence:

*“The spatial intelligence manifests in a variety of ways. Transforming mental images is a spatial skill that engineers and designers depend on. When a hiker pauses with map and compass, it is the spatial intelligence that conceptualizes the path. Through the spatial sense, a painter ‘feels’ the tension, balance and composition of a painting. Spatial ability is also the more abstract intelligence of a chess master, a battle commander, or a theoretical physicist, as well as the familiar ability to recognize objects, faces, and details.”*  
(Sarno 166)

### Spatial reasoning is needed to

- Identify shapes
- Perceive objects and their position/location in space
- Recognize scenes or faces
- Notice fine differences and details
- Draw objects or scenes that make sense from a spatial standpoint
- Conceptualize math problems
- Move objects in a room in the mind's eye
- Navigate large spaces
- Imagine a cohesive and spatially accurate scene or object in the mind's eye
- Create art
- Understand and judge personal space
- Read body language

Like time, **spatial reasoning** is challenging to define because it combines both concrete and abstract elements. The concept was expanded into the broader notion of spatial intelligence by Dr. Howard Gardner. (Gardner 6-7, 14, 215-216)

### Individuals challenged in the area of spatial reasoning might exhibit

- Generalized difficulty in visual processing
- Difficulty finding objects in one-, two-, and three-dimensional space
- Difficulty judging distance between objects, between themselves and objects or other people, and judging distance in general
- Difficulty understanding direction (in two-dimensional space, what direction is the line on the page pointing; in three-dimensional space, which direction is someone facing)
- Difficulty understanding, reading, and using maps
- Difficulty reading body language

- Lack of recognition of familiar places
- Needing physical help to orient oneself in space (touch the wall when walking down a hall)
- Difficulty visualizing something in action

### How to approach spatial reasoning when working with students

The approach, language level, and complexity of how to engage students with spatial reasoning issues will depend on the specific areas of challenge.

### Activities and resources to use with students

- Following directions: Activities that start as one-dimensional on paper, then move to two-dimensional on a whiteboard, then three-dimensional space in a room
  - start with 2-3 directions that are concrete and slowly increase complexity and number of steps as the student experiences mastery
  - first say directions, have the student repeat them back, and then have the student follow the steps to reinforce memory and step-wisdom
  - activate visualization as much as possible to bolster memory (*Example: "First, I see you draw a yellow circle in the middle of the paper. Second, I see you fold the paper in half. Tell me what you see yourself doing..."*)
- Scavenger hunts
- Treasure map games
- Art projects (on paper, models, etc.)
- Brain teasers, visual puzzles, and board games based on recognizing spatial clues
- Specific exercises (Wieder & Wachs, 2012)

### Conditional or contingency thinking

In **conditional or contingency thinking**, a conclusion is based on a provisional, or "if...then" proposition. Also known as *deductive reasoning*. This ability to reason from cause to effect or general to specific enables one to compare options, connect related aspects of a concept or situation together, and use logic to navigate experiences.

Deductive reasoning skills allow us to be more independent and strategic thinkers because we can assess the facts of a situation and draw accurate conclusions.

Deductive reasoning gives us the tools to manage the past, present, and future: why an event played out as it did, what is going on in a current situation, and what may happen in an upcoming experience.

Deductive reasoning plays an important role in decision-making, problem solving, and executive function (refer to section 8.04 for more information).

A great benefit to thinking conditionally and being able to identify contingencies is that individuals become more flexible and adaptable to change. This ability provides them with a method for approaching



unexpected changes as they arise. In this way, deductive reasoning skills help to maintain emotional regulation because they prepare individuals for impending changes. They provide a means of understanding change when it arises.

### Individuals challenged in the area of conditional thinking tend to

- Have difficulty drawing conclusions if contingencies are involved
- Struggle with generating multiple possible outcomes
- Struggle in situations requiring a change of direction from what was expected
- Have challenges making plans that require anticipating and preparing for possible obstacles
- Lack preparedness or become dysregulated if details of a situation change
- Have difficulty understanding how changing something may impact the outcome

### How to approach conditional thinking when working with students

Use "if...then" formatted questions whether it is a visual representation or posed with words. Use role-play scenarios and other creative, humorous, and interactive exercises since much of contingency thinking leads to changes in behavior or actions. By seeing contingencies in action, students can better understand the abstraction and make connections. The emphasis on creativity and humor keep students engaged and enlivened, which bolsters learning.

#### 8.03.2 Main Idea and Supporting Details (Big Picture Thinking)

**Main ideas** surface in cartoons, stories, books, conversations, jokes, literature, videos, commercials...they are everywhere. Our ability to detect them, whether obvious or subtle, simple or complex, directly affects the meaning we draw from them.

The main idea in a Disney vacation commercial is "Pick Disney for your next family vacation". The main idea in Dr. Seuss' The Lorax is, "We must care about and care for nature because without it we all suffer." The main idea in a story or article is the point the author wants you to remember most. Sometimes the central theme is stated directly, sometimes it must be inferred

**Supporting details** are "... facts, statements, examples, specifics which guide us to a full understanding of the main idea. They clarify, illuminate, explain, describe, expand and illustrate the main idea..." Our ability to identify and examine supporting details is what helps us understand how we got to the main point or central meaning. It provides us with a road map to how the author, cartoonist, video game designer, etc. made their creation. (Langan, 14-37)

#### Understanding supporting details

- Permits us to break an idea down into its important parts
- Helps us identify an aspect of a work that we want or need to understand better
- Provides us with points of discussion, analysis, or questioning  
(Langan)



### Individuals challenged in the area of main ideas and/or supporting details tend to

- Exhibit gaps in understanding
- Avoid longer stories, movies, and conversations
- Hesitate to participate in discussions or attend lectures
- Have difficulty following visual, oral, and written information
- May appear to have difficulty maintaining attention while being read to, watching a movie, hearing a lecture, or reading a book
- Have weak memory recall
- Get confused or overwhelmed if they get lost conceptually
- Have difficulty generating reasons for choices or defending ideas

### How to approach main ideas when working with students

The traditional educational approach for identifying the main idea and supporting details is verbally-based using worksheets, quizzes/tests, or class discussions. Heighten student engagement by incorporating visual images, emotional content, physical manipulatives, humor, role play, graphic organizers, concept maps, games, etc.

#### 8.03.3 Categorizing

**Categorizing** involves examining ideas, objects, feelings, places, experiences, etc. and classifying them in groupings of similar qualities. Categories can be broad or specific and subtle. They can be based on concrete criteria (*Example: make a list of mammals*) or abstract (*Example: list countries with democratic governments*). They can be based upon a single criterion (*Example: list things that are red*) or multiple criteria (*Example: list expensive watches made in Switzerland*).

When we can categorize information, we are able to begin bringing order to confusing situations.

### Individuals challenged in the area of categorization tend to

- Be more comfortable with broad, concrete categorization such as “point to all the big items”
- Lack the ability to generate strategies for how to approach and navigate categorizing
- Classify things, ideas, people together that do not have similar qualities
- Select illogical basis for categorizing
- Avoid activities where categorizing is required (sorting objects, debating, compare/contrast games, and exercises, etc.)

### How to approach categorization when working with students

As with main ideas, the traditional educational approach for working on categorization tends to be verbally-based, often in a worksheet format. Widen the approach using visual images, physical manipulatives, role play, graphic organizers, games, etc. If possible, avoid activities where categorizing is a core element of success (sorting objects, debating, compare/contrast games and exercises, etc.)

The first step is to identify a basis or strategy for categorization. Students can be engaged in deciding which category an item fits because it supports strategic thinking (*Example: “Let’s organize these jobs in two categories – dangerous and not dangerous. Be ready to point out why you think a job is dangerous if someone in the group disagrees with you.”*)

#### 8.03.4 Making comparisons

A **comparison** is an examination made between two or more objects, people, places, ideas, etc. Making comparisons require quite a bit of cognitive activation and flexibility in thinking. When we are skilled in making comparisons, we:

- Understand the concept of sameness and difference
- Understand the concept of categorization
- Can identify sameness and difference according to specific criteria (*Example: those individuals in the room who have glasses, those who do not*)
- Can identify similarities and differences in the concrete realm
- Become flexible in applying the skill.

More advanced comparison skills include:

- Identifying similarities and differences in the abstract (ideas, opinions; possible, projected, or imagined scenarios)
- Understanding similarities and differences can be both general and broad (*Example: string instruments vs. wind instruments*) or specific and small (*Example: guitar can make low sounds that are soothing and a ukulele only makes higher pitched sounds that can be over-stimulating*)
- Comparing not only by category but within a category (*Example: chemistry and philosophy are both school subjects, but learning chemistry requires memorization of facts and formulas whereas learning philosophy requires understanding ideas and concepts*)
- Making comparisons about one concept that may vary because of a change in mood, situation, need, etc. (*Example: When my cat is hungry she is affectionate and wants my attention. She often crawls in my lap and purrs. When my cat feels playful or restless she knocks things over to get my attention and wants me to throw her toys and play fetch.*)

#### Individuals challenged in the area of making comparisons tend to

- Shy away from debates and discussions involving comparisons
- Struggle with decision-making, as comparisons play a crucial role in the process
- Have difficulty making choices
- Have difficulty explaining preferences (Joe may know he feels more comfortable around Sara than Jack but he may not be able to explain why because that involves comparing two people)
- Have difficulty constructing an argument. Because of this, they often have difficulty persuading others to agree with their choices.

### How to approach making comparisons when working with students

Add in visual images, physical manipulatives, role-play, graphic organizers, games, etc. It is also important to incorporate comparison-based observations throughout the day in different contexts. This gives students a wider range of opportunities in which to apply this way of thinking and raises their general awareness.

Students usually need practice making comparisons and judgments regarding their thoughts and feelings. One might start with what they like, how they might rate something on scale of 1-10, ordering preferences or emotional experiences, etc.

### 8.03.5 Drawing Conclusions

**Drawing conclusions** means coming to a logical judgment, interpretation, explanation, or inference based upon reasoning and evidence. It is a complex process of evaluating all the major factors or forces relevant to a situation. It requires one to gather various types of information, sort the information into categories, make comparisons, determine the relevance and relative value of the data found, and draw on earlier experiences.

Without the ability to draw conclusions, we are left to float in a sea of facts. This ability strongly influences the success of our:

- Academics
- Social choices
- Decision making
- Opinion formation
- Beliefs about ourselves and the world
- Career choices

### Individuals challenged in the area of drawing conclusions tend to

- Struggle with analysis, writing, and reading comprehension
- Experience anxiety when making even small decisions
- Be overly dependent on or influenced by others when making decisions
- Be hesitant to join a conversation, offer an opinion, or state a preference
- Develop a passive style of relating to peers in group decision-making situations
- Be led into problematic behaviors by others because cannot anticipate the consequences of various actions/scenarios

### How to approach drawing conclusions when working with students

For students who struggle to draw even the most basic of conclusions, give them practice drawing simple conclusions using a limited amount of concrete details. Once basic skills are established, gradually increase the complexity of activities by adding more facts. When the timing feels appropriate, begin to

incorporate a written component and increase the writing expectation according to the student's individual writing capability. For example, first expect fragmented sentences, then complete sentences, then short paragraphs, then longer paragraphs, and so forth.

Incorporate visual images, physical manipulatives, role-play, graphic organizers, games, etc. Concept mapping is a wonderful strategy for illustrating visually the process of arriving at conclusions. Role-play by taking another person's role can also be beneficial.

For those individuals who are adept at writing but struggle with oral language, begin with writing. Later, when ready, get them to begin verbalizing.

A staff member can act as a scribe for a student who struggles with graphomotor difficulty (an accommodation) or one who thinks more effectively if the written component is removed so he can focus on generating the ideas (a strategy). Assistive technology tools provide students with support in generating language and wording.

#### 8.03.6 Logic and Reasoning

**Logical reasoning** is a thinking process using a systematized series of steps to arrive at a conclusion. Logical reasoning is useful for deepening understanding, drawing conclusions, and making inferences.

It is important to note some individuals are stronger in non-verbal logic and reasoning whereas others excel in the verbal realm. Both are important skills to master and can be worked on through individual or group exercises and activities. Note each student's abilities with verbal or non-verbal logic and reasoning. Find ways to capitalize on strengths when planning program schedules, internship options, projects, extracurricular activities, and hobbies. Strengths also inform educational strategies, accommodations, and career development.

Keep in mind there is no one "right" way to think through something. If a student uses an unusual logical pathway to arrive at conclusions, remember the quality and usefulness of the outcome is more important than how the individual arrived at it. Non-traditional systems of thinking should be respected. In cases where a student has difficulty arriving at useful conclusions, the teacher can query the student about his process and explore it with concept mapping and other tools. The teacher helps the student uncover where his logic has failed him and find other ways of approaching the task. The student can then practice the new approach through specifically tailored activities and discussions.

Logical reasoning affects how we think, feel, act, learn, and interact with others. It applies not only to critical thinking but also to other critical neurodevelopmental domains: expressive and receptive language, social cognition, executive function, emotional regulation, mindset, resiliency, attention, motor planning, and sequential/temporal/spatial ordering.

### Individuals challenged in the area of logic and reasoning tend to

- Ask questions, make assumptions, and arrive at conclusions that are illogical or do not consider all the relevant factors (*Example: overlooking the obvious – what can be detected in the moment with senses, facts, or what is generally known to be true*)
- Have difficulty seeing and making connections both on concrete and abstract levels (*Examples: struggle with cause-and-effect relationships, have difficulty bridging from one idea to a related idea, etc.*)
- Experience challenges with problem-solving and decision-making processes
- Initiate behavior, say things, or react to stimuli, ideas, or requests in ways that do not logically match what was asked of them, presented to them, or expected of them in a given situation
- Struggle to understand or completely miss the meaning behind abstract representations and ideas (analogies, metaphors, jokes, puns, etc.)
- Lack the ability to sequence logically and prioritize objects, ideas, actions, or plans
- Have difficulty accomplishing tasks even if they are following directions
- Tend to avoid or get dysregulated by logic-based games, puzzles, brainteasers, etc.
- Experience difficulty brainstorming and being creative – tend to gravitate to very concrete or well-known activities that have very obvious and predictable guidelines and sequences
- Hit impasses and show inflexibility when attempting to debate, defend actions, negotiate, compromise, or socially solve problems
- Be dependent heavily on others to organize, plan, prioritize, etc. (weak executive function)
- Not be able to interpret intentions behind a gesture, decision, or expression of emotion
- Have difficulty knowing how to allocate their attention during an activity, task, or experience
- Produce illogical visualizations that impact comprehension negatively (reading, discussions)
- misunderstand cues and clues that typically would help lead one to arrive at a logical guess (*Examples: academic work, social interactions, games*)
- Become rigid and inflexible, insisting that something has to occur that cannot

### How to approach logic and reasoning when working with students

Teaching logic and reasoning has well-established conventional methods, many of them involving written language. However, there are many ways to enliven this traditionally linear process using non-verbal and verbal puzzles, jokes and riddles, board games, role-play and improvisation, art projects, group exercises, watching video scenes, creative writing, and other inventive methods.

#### 8.03.7 Interpretation and Inference

**Interpretation** is the act of drawing meaning or a conclusion based on what is known or can be observed. A **premise** is something offered for consideration; a point being discussed. **Inference** is the process of deriving conclusions from premises known or assumed true.

Inference and Interpretation are needed in all contexts and interactions, especially in social situations. They allow us to detect subtleties, clues and cues that help us understand the complexity and underlying messages in what is being said or what is happening around us. They help us detect the emotional states of others, especially in situations where someone has not overtly stated how she feels.

When we are able to see beyond the literal or obvious and recognize hidden meanings within what someone has said or done:

- We draw greater understanding from the things people say and do
- We are less likely to miss information that could impact us
- We are less confused about interactions and situations where there is a difference between literal statements and what was intended
- We are able to understand the importance of non-verbal cueing such as tone of voice, gestures, facial expressions, body language
- We are able to catch underlying emotional messages and detect words or actions that reveal or hint at another's motivation or intention in a given situation

All this strengthens emotional intelligence.

#### **Individuals challenged in the area of interpretation and inference tend to**

- Be unable to elaborate on their thoughts, ideas, and opinions
- Avoid philosophical and abstract discussions
- Gravitate to movies and stories that have concrete or finite endings
- Avoid brain teasers, mental games, and academic activities that have more than one correct answer
- Have difficulty "reading between the lines" both in written language and social situations
- Have difficulty interpreting humor (especially wit or dry humor), plays on words, double entendres, etc.

#### **How to approach interpretation and inference when working with students**

Interpretation and inference skills can be challenging for individuals on the autism spectrum because of their abstract nature. For that reason, techniques that use visuals to illustrate the flow of thought processes are very useful (*Examples: concept mapping, graphic organizers, etc.*) as are physical exercises that enlist movement and body positioning to represent the flow of ideas.

### **8.03.8 Creativity and Brainstorming**

**Creativity** is defined as the tendency to generate or recognize ideas, alternatives, or possibilities that may be useful in solving problems, communicating with others, or entertaining ourselves and others. (Franken 396)

Franken claims there are three basic reasons why people are motivated to be creative:

1. The need for novel, varied, and complex stimulation
2. The need to communicate ideas and values
3. The need to solve problems (Franken 396)

Creativity involves being “able to view things in new ways or from a different perspective” to generate new possibilities or new alternatives. Tests of creativity measure not only the number of alternatives people can generate but the uniqueness of those alternatives. The ability to generate alternatives or see things uniquely does not occur by chance; it is linked to other, more fundamental qualities of thinking, such as flexibility, tolerance of ambiguity or unpredictability, and the enjoyment of things heretofore unknown. (Franken, 394)

**Brainstorming** is the creative process of generating multiple ideas, additions, changes, modifications, or solutions based on a given topic, activity, guideline, or item. An individual can brainstorm or as part of a group process.

When we are able to use brainstorming, creativity, flexible thinking, and humor we increase our ability to be innovative and enjoy creative processes, expanding career options, opening avenues for recreational activities, and infusing social interactions with more playfulness.

#### **Individuals challenged in the area of creativity and brainstorming tend to**

- Become overly attached to the first idea presented to them or to ideas they generate, and may become agitated if engaged in a process of “what else”
- Show inflexibility in all areas of their life: learning, play, interactions with peers
- Insist on doing things the same way they were done the last time
- Engage in and gravitate toward predictable experiences, routines, games, topics of conversation, etc.
- Prefer models, puzzles, and other activities that have a prearranged procedure and explicit end result
- Avoid activities and discussions that inherently have varied outcomes
- Reject ideas and possibilities they might actually enjoy, therefore limiting their experiences and options
- Become confused and or dependent on others during creative activities that require making choices or generating ideas

#### **How to approach brainstorming when working with students**

Experience with creativity and brainstorming can enrich and enliven an experience. As much as possible, staff would follow the lead of student-generated creative expression and provide support they can pursue and expand upon their creative ideas.



- For students who have difficulty embarking on creative activities, staff should be on the lookout for glimmers of interest or curiosity whether expressed verbally or nonverbally in any context (Examples: during a class, in a conversation, during an activity, while watching a movie, while cooking dinner, etc.). Something a student finds compelling or interesting, even momentarily, can often be expanded upon to awaken a new or underdeveloped passion or interest.
- A staff member may notice an emerging interest in the process of working or engaging with the student one-on-one. These observations should be shared in staff meetings so the whole team can collaborate on creative ways to nurture and expand on it.
- Remember that each individual expresses creativity in his own way and develops his passions and interests in his own time. Some interests and passions will be fleeting, while others may take hold and become lifelong activities or career options. All hold value in the student's evolution of self.
- Students may find aspects of creative exploration to be anxiety-producing. For some individuals on the autism spectrum, novelty can be fun and compelling. For them, trying new things or doing a familiar activity in a different way feels fun and exciting. Others are fearful in the face of novelty. For them, a gentle approach can make them more open to trying new things. Fostering and strengthening creativity and brainstorming in all activities, group work, and courses can help individuals on the autism spectrum to:
  - collaborate with others
  - increase their capacity to be flexible in thought and action
  - strengthen their ability to see more possibilities and options both in their daily lives and in planning for the future

### 8.03.9 Generating Multiple Possible Outcomes

The skill of generating multiple possible outcomes contributes greatly to our ability to be flexible and adaptable mentally and emotionally. If we understand *an outcome is not fixed but instead depends upon events that came before it*, we are less likely to become stuck, frustrated, anxious, or emotionally overwhelmed by the unexpected.

A **contingency** is an event that may happen but cannot be predicted with certainty. An outcome is uncertain if it depends upon an event that may or may not happen. Being able to think contingently means one is able to see connections among items, scenarios, and ideas and use that understanding to predict possible outcomes based upon each possibility. This is what is meant by "thinking with multiple possible outcomes".

Contingent thinking requires an ability to understand the concept of causal relationships – that is, if one factor changes, what effect might it have on related parts or on the whole? It also requires the ability to think sequentially – to follow logically a trail of thought to an identifiable conclusion. It requires conditional thinking – “if...then” scenarios – and the ability to hold several pieces of information in memory while they are manipulated.



When we can predict multiple outcomes based on the information we have available, and if we can understand and apply the concept of cause and effect, we have access to logical thinking. We can then mentally run “what-if” scenarios to identify potential obstacles. In this way, we become skilled problem solvers and decision makers. Effective problem solvers are more independent, flexible, and adaptable in managing difficulties.

It is important to recognize the role creativity plays in generating possible outcomes. Creative thinkers can navigate decision-making – especially decisions that involve many contingencies – more adeptly and with less anxiety.

### Individuals challenged in the area of generating multiple possible outcomes tend to

- Become overly attached to one outcome and may become angry, anxious, or upset at even the thought it may not happen the way they imagined
- Be weak in brainstorming skills
- Be rigid thinkers in general
- Be sensitive to or dysregulated by change and unpredictability
- Seek excessive reassurance from others about how “it’s going to be” or seek a guarantee it will play out as expected
- Become argumentative or resistant when others try to engage them in a discussion about what else might happen
- Have a pattern of being surprised in the face of change in an outcome even if they are warned sufficiently or witnessed the element that changed the outcome
- Repetitively watch and/or read a beloved story, movie, or TV show. They may get very excited as it nears its predictable conclusion. They may over-focus on the story and want to talk about it a lot.

### How to approach generating multiple possible outcomes when working with students

- Watch video clips (one-on-one or in small groups). Pause them at meaningful points to highlight and discuss: What do you think will happen next? Why? What problems are the characters facing? How did they choose to resolve them? Is there something else they could have done? How would that have changed the outcome?
- Create a concept map of the situation as it evolves so students have visuals to refer to. This deepens their understanding of connections and results that spring from choices, actions, and thoughts.
- Role-play, do improvisations, and have discussions based upon scenarios (in groups). Give students practice generating and managing multiple possible outcomes in lively, creative, and fun ways.
- Use books and other educational resources that give students a starting scenario and then introduce influencing factors. Have students select from a pool of possible outcomes.

- There are also several popular fiction books that work well, especially young adult mystery series such as Encyclopedia Brown, or multiple ending books such as Choose Your own Adventure and Goosebumps
- Work on emotional regulation and coping skills in the face of change or the unexpected

### 8.03.10 Rule Use

**Rule use** is the ability follow and apply an external set of rules, whether they be stand-alone (*Example: look both ways before crossing a street*) or in a specific sequence (*Example: steps to bake bread*). Rule use applies to:

- Procedures (such as science experiments)
- Principles for navigating predictable processes more adeptly (such as grammar rules)
- Guidelines for behavior (poolside do's and don'ts)
- Safety parameters (when operating equipment)
- Guidelines of a project to reach a prescribed result (*Example: steps to write a paper*)

When we understand the rules of processes, groups, and the society around us, we are usually safer, less likely to be caught by surprise, and better able to predict outcomes. We understand more about what others expect of us.

#### Individuals challenged in the area of rule use tend to

- Have trouble with rule-based academic subjects (math, science, grammar, spelling, etc.)
- Experience difficulty planning, organizing, and executing projects because they lack guidelines or don't attend to guidelines that are given
- Get lost or stuck in the midst of an activity
- Struggle with procedures and sequentially-based activities
- Be overly dependent on others to tell them when and where a rule applies
- Get lost or confused in social situations where social rules apply
- Have difficulty understanding why something went awry where a vital rule was skipped
- Struggle with rule-based games that lead to emotional distress, avoidance, frustration, etc.
- Avoid solo and group activities and recreational experiences that have a lot of rules
- Staunchly insist on doing things their way because following rules makes their experience "not fun" (*Example: want to do abstract art instead of lesson plan-based art because it has too many steps and rules, and the outcome has to look a certain way*)
- Have difficulty playing a game or doing an activity a different way

Other areas of ambiguity in rule use relate to situations where rules are negotiable. In those cases, students need support in understanding the rule and clarification on which specific aspects of the rule are up for negotiation. *For example, one may be able to negotiate with the waiter to have him change the ingredients in a menu item but the price listed may not be up for negotiation.* Explicit rules need to be established for the negotiation process itself, which includes the verbal and non-verbal social aspects involved.

For many individuals on the autism spectrum, unspoken rules present the most difficulties, especially unspoken social rules. These rules tend to make what is already confusing (especially social interactions) even more confusing, frustrating, and anxiety producing.

Individuals who are overly concrete in use of rules may run into difficulties as they attempt to control peers' or staff behavior.

### How to approach rule use when working with students

- Rules that apply to a specific activity or environment should be explicitly discussed and posted for visual reference
- In residential programs, rules grow exponentially to address evenings, weekends, house rules, safety rules, etc. Engage students as much as possible in making of rules (where appropriate)
- Students will need to have rules explained to them at a level of language and complexity that meets their cognitive and processing capabilities
- Social rules can be addressed in a multitude of ways ranging from social peer group work, 1:1 work, conflict resolution situations, role play, improvisation, etc.
- Some young adults are overly attached to rules. Work towards transforming automatic compliance, dependency, and rigidity into thoughtfulness, flexibility, and appropriately independence.

It is important to note that making decisions and solving problems are often anxiety producing for individuals on the autism spectrum. For some the entire experience is rife with anxiety, whereas others may not experience emotional difficulty until the consequences of their choices present themselves. These processes enlist all of the critical thinking components listed in section 8.02 and 8.03, and thus can create stress and overwhelming feelings in individuals who possess challenges in these areas. When emotional reactivity surfaces it further complicates the process of arriving at a decision or resolving a problem. Therefore, successful approaches to teaching these higher order thinking skills incorporates emotional regulation support alongside critical thinking and executive function support.

Individuals with low self-confidence or a history of making poor choices might find the entire decision-making/problem solving process emotionally challenging. Because they do not trust themselves to make good choices, they will need confidence building support throughout the process so they can begin to feel more comfortable exerting their preferences and their will.

### Summary List of Executive Functions

#### Planning

Being able to come up with approach to solve a problem

#### Strategic thinking

Being able to think in a manner that best uses existing or emerging resources or possibilities

#### Step wisdom

Ability to visualize what one is trying to accomplish and the steps needed to arrive at that objective

#### Organization

To arrange resources and events in such a way as to obtain a desired result efficiently

#### Time management

Ability to use time in a way that makes work more efficient, easier to complete

#### Self-monitoring

Being able to watch, analyze, and evaluate oneself while completing a task

#### Plan implementation/execution

Carrying out a plan

#### Pacing

Ability to adjust the speed of work to make it appropriate for the circumstance

#### Causal relationships

Ability to understand events in terms of cause and effect

#### Evaluative thinking

Ability to reflect upon or judge the value (positive or negative) of some event or experience

#### Reinforcibility

Ability to use previous experience to guide or correct behavior; learning from experience

### 8.04 Higher Order Thinking: Decision Making and Problem Solving

includes...

- Identifying Decisions to be Made/Problems to Address
- Motivations and Intentions
- Applied Logic and Reasoning
- Applied Interpretation and Inference
- Generating Possible Decisions/Solutions
- Anticipating Likely Outcomes: Visualizing Results
- Managing and Evaluating Results

**Decision-making** is a process that leads one to reach an answer or conclusion that may then lead to an action. Although much of the process is linear, some decisions require revisiting certain facts that may shift thinking and ultimately change the final decision.

Whether deciding on a menu item, choosing which shirt to buy, considering whether to join a club – all decisions require a process. For many people, the process is impeded by cognitive challenges, language difficulties, low self-confidence, anxiety, and dysregulation. Therefore, incorporate into all teaching any supports, strategies, or accommodations needed for these issues.

Remember to establish *reflection* as a distinct step in all decision-making work. Since the act of reflection is an abstract concept, many students require explicit instructions on how to do it. Many people reflect internally and in silence. Students who are new to the act of reflecting will need the process externalized. With teacher support and modeling, students learn to articulate their thoughts and work through the process of examining their own decision-making. Reflection is indispensable for self-evaluation, managing emotional reactions and unwanted results, and setting goals for future decision-making.

**Problem solving** involves identifying the varying components of a situation that are not working well and require action to change course, make adjustments or resolve. Prior to any action taken, effective problem solving requires applying advanced critical thinking skills and executive function. Without them, it becomes very difficult to visualize the desired end result, identify what changes need to be made, generate possible solutions, and assess which solution is the best fit for a given situation.

In order to be an effective decision-maker and problem solver an individual must

1. Understand the decision/problem at hand
2. Understand what factors need to be included in order to make an informed decision/resolve a problem (*Examples: facts, needs, goals, intentions of self and others, desired outcomes, opinions or guidance from others, past experiences*)
3. Assess whether he has all current information required
4. Decide what additional information is needed
5. Figure out where or from whom he can get the needed information
6. Be able to find the information and fill in the gaps

7. Revisit the facts once he has what is needed to arrive at a decision/solve a problem
8. Enlist others if needed for feedback, suggestions, etc.
9. Make a decision/decide on a solution
10. Act on the decision/solution
11. Manage and evaluate its results
12. Manage his emotions and acknowledge his expectations both during the process and in reaction to the end result

Not only do decision making and problem solving engage one's critical thinking systems, they also draws upon executive functions. The ultimate goal of making a decision is an action or choice. It is our executive function system that determines the sequencing, quality and effectiveness of that action. Therefore, be prepared with strategies and activities that support the executive functions as students master the decision-making/problem solving process.

### Individuals challenged in the area of decision-making and problem solving tend to

- Get confused, emotional, reactive, overwhelmed, or dysregulated when facing a decision/problem
- Impulsively gravitate to the first suggestion made by others or first idea that pops into their minds regardless of its merit or applicability to the issue at hand
- Approach a current decision or problem in a manner they have used before without paying attention to the change in context. They may not factor in other relevant aspects either not present in earlier contexts or that were different in the previous situation (overgeneralizing)
- Be overly dependent on others to navigate decisions and address problems
- Avoid situations where decisions have to be made or problems are likely to arise
- Select experiences that will present familiar and comfortable decisions (go to same restaurant because they understand the menu and can find the same meal they always order)
- Adopt a high stakes mentality surrounding the impact the decision or solution will have on their lives, increasing anxiety levels and becoming overwhelmed
- Become paralyzed both in making and acting upon decisions and solutions
- Become upset when results are not what they wanted, even if they chose the course of action

### How to approach the decision-making and problem-solving process with students

- Executive function support (how to navigate, how to change course/adjust, how to repair or "fix")
- Emotional regulation support (how to receive emotional help from others as well as self-regulate)
- Strengthening ability to manage unexpected decisions and problems through role play, improve, social stories etc.
- Brainstorming and creative thinking support

- Trial runs – picking clearly contrasting decision/problem possibilities and run them through the critical thinking and executive processes to predict the end results (a great way to infuse humor by adding some silly or obviously poor decisions)
- Visual maps, flow charts, and other ways to represent the decisions/problems and possibilities visually in terms of choice and outcome to increase comprehension and organize thoughts
- Role-play scenarios that illustrate and break down the various aspects of making a decision/solving a problem
- Facilitate post-analysis of decisions/solutions and outcomes (discussion, storyboard, etc.). This creates opportunities to reflect on how to do things differently next time
- Keep a decision log to track decisions and outcomes that can be reviewed later for deeper learning and identifying patterns in decision making
- Preview and predict possible decisions that will need to be made and problems that may arise across many scenarios and contexts, in particular prior to an upcoming event, outing or situation
- Reassurance and perspective shaping (most decisions are not permanent, and many solutions to problems can be shaped once the initial problem has been addressed)
- Infuse the process with excitement, humor, creativity, play, and fun (many students who find decision-making/problem-solving hard can get very serious and it can color their entire experience)
- Help them get more information. Often people are stuck when making a decision or solving a problem because they don't have all the information they need.
- Provide necessary accommodations and strategies for any cognitive or language weaknesses that might be interfering with the decision-making/problem-solving process (*Example: Instead of starting with an open-ended process, narrow down viable choices and present to student.*)

#### 8.04.1 Identifying Decision to be Made/Problem to be Solved

For decision-making/problem-solving to be organized, efficient, and relevant, one must first clearly identify what needs to be decided or solved.

Deciding which factors to consider during the process involves narrowing down one's focus to the most relevant elements. This helps the individual concentrate on what is most important.

**Examples:** Should I get chocolate or vanilla ice cream for dessert? Would Target or Home Depot be more likely to sell the object I am looking to buy? If I need to be home by 5 pm, what time do I need to catch the #3 bus? What should I do if it rains on the day I have scheduled my birthday picnic party?

The experience of having a problem, making a decision or facing an obstacle typically includes experiencing intense emotions (frustration, anxiety, embarrassment, etc.). These can negatively affect one's critical thinking and decision-making skills significantly. Defining a problem or obstacle and clearly identifying the associated factors:

- Supports the individual's executive function by helping him approach the problem in an organized fashion
- Increases the individual's ability to access his critical reasoning skills
- Helps the individual become aware of and manage interference from disturbing emotions

Executive functions needed in this step of the process are typically previewing (using visualization to bolster understanding), organization (of thought and details), and strategic thinking.

### **Individuals challenged in the area of Identifying decisions/problems tend to**

- Be disorganized in their thinking
- Struggle to keep their attention on the details of a situation (often it is the details that help a person arrive at a decision or solution)
- Experience overwhelm or anxiety when asked their opinion or thoughts about a decision or problem
- Seek predictable situations where decisions are either easy or repeatable
- Hesitant or avoidant of situations where a decision will need to be made or problems arise
- Prefer being given a limited choice (do you want this or that?) rather than open-ended scenarios (what do you want?)
- Avoid situations involving a lot of choice (big menus, buffets, arcades with lots of games and prizes to choose from, etc.)
- Defer to others

### **How to approach identifying a decision/problem with students:**

- Preview situations and expectations surrounding decisions/potential problems beforehand, discuss what to look for and what to expect
- Enter into decision making and problem solving scenarios with a written list/symbols that a student can refer to if they get confused or anxious
- Rehearse and role play identifying a decision/problem across many scenarios
- Make decisions ahead of time and generate a list of possible solutions to predicted problems
- Use concept maps or other visuals and charts to support critical thinking and visualization
- Watch video clips and read stories surrounding decisions and problems so the student can identify key factors while not under pressure
- Review decisions the student has made previously and problems the student has solved successfully before
- Non-verbal and verbal games, puzzles and scenarios focused on identification of a problem (Example: "What's wrong" visual puzzles and scenarios, etc.)



### 8.04.2 Motivations and Intentions

Often a decision-making or problem-solving process requires awareness and understanding of personal motivations, intentions, and desires that might influence a direction or outcome. In this step, students reveal short- and long-term desires and goals specific to a decision/problem at hand. All goals should be discussed and written down so they can be expanded upon or revisited later, and to support comprehension through visualization. Some students may need guiding questions to identify underlying, unspoken, or unconscious motivations, intentions, and goals.

**Decision making example:** Do I eat an apple or chocolate ice cream? I want chocolate ice cream but I am trying to lose 10 pounds...how does that affect my decision? If I eat chocolate ice cream instead of an apple how does that affect my goal of losing weight so I can fit into my clothes better?

**Problem Solving example:** The kids at my birthday party do not want to play the game I wanted to play. Do I come up with a game everyone wants to play because I want everyone to have fun? Do I persuade/insist we play my game because it's my party and my day to be in charge?

Motivations and intentions typically have an emotional component. Exploring the underlying or associated emotions is critical. Executive functions begin to play a larger role now because the concept of goals and goal setting begins to emerge. Using example above, the immediate motivation is to have self-control with sweets, the overarching intention is to lose weight, and the underlying goal emerging is the student wants to fit into his clothes.

#### Individuals challenged in the area of understanding the role motivation and intention play in making a decision or solving a problem tend to

- Have difficulty self-reflecting on their own motivations and intentions
- Find it challenging to identify the desires and motivations of others
- Struggle with identifying emotions (theirs and others) and connecting emotions to events and contexts
- Have lower levels of self-awareness
- Have difficulty generating reasons why they said something or acted in a particular way
- Often do not see patterns and predictability in their choices
- Miss context clues such as tone of voice, gestures, body language, hints, etc. that reveal underlying motivation/intention

#### How to approach understanding the role motivation and intention play in making decisions and solving problems with students

- Watch video clips and identify character motivation/intention based on actions, gestures, facial expressions, tone of voice, and words
- Role play and improvisation scenarios that give students practice in both identifying and displaying motivation/intention through words, body language, and actions

- Creating storyboarding and reading cartoons, both of which make use of thought bubbles that symbolize hidden or subtle motivations and intentions
- Guessing games aimed at providing hints and clues to underlying motivation/intention
- Creating lists, collages, and art with words or symbols that illuminate a student's desires and wishes
- Watching video clips and attending to how the soundtrack gives clues to a character's motivation/intention
- Selecting music, colors and other creative ways to represent motivation or intentions and apply them in role play contexts or the making of a short film clip
- Look at decisions made and problems solved by famous people or fictional characters and guess what their motivation/intention was given what we know about them and their situation

### 8.04.3 Applied Logic and Reasoning

A process of logic and reasoning is required to evaluate relevant information and ideas related to the decision/problem at hand. The individual has to be able to assess how the various factors may affect the final outcome (*Example: Deciding which ice cream flavor to buy may have to include considering how one is going to get to the store that has that particular flavor*).

In order for individuals to arrive at decisions or solutions effectively, they must depend upon their logic and reasoning skills to weigh, compare, and contrast. These functions are used to identify factors contributing to problems, to assess what roles those factors play, and to determine what changes need to be made to bypass, reduce, or remedy problems.

Executive functions engaged in applying logic and reasoning to evaluating each option include maintaining attention and concentration, previewing, strategic thinking, step-wisdom, planning, organization, time management, and pacing.

#### **Individuals challenged in the area of applying logic and reasoning to the decision-making or problem-solving process tend to**

- Be impulsive, inconsistent, or random in arriving at a decision or solution
- Tend to rush the process and go for a singular approach rather than weighing, reflecting, and generating multiple options
- Overgeneralize strategies, even when they do not fit the context in which the decision or solution needs to be made
- Show disorganized thinking
- Jump over important steps or not connect related aspects of the situation
- Struggle to prioritize in the situation (what to attend to, what to ignore, what to weigh heavily, what is a small or inconsequential factor)
- Not draw from previous similar experiences to help inform thinking about the current situation

### How to approach applied logic and reasoning related to making decisions and solving problems with students

- Use concept maps, flow charts and other visual aids that represent a chain of logic and connect salient points together
- Slow down the decision-making/problem-solving process to better examine its parts (with scenarios or past events)
- Present small decisions and problems to be addressed that have limited components to build skills, increasing complexity as their ability strengthens
- Watch video clips, pausing to break down each step in logic. Write down or visually map the scenario to bolster comprehension.
- Practice through discussion (scenarios and stories), role play and improvisation
- Have student instruct teacher or fellow students on how to navigate a decision or problem – communicating through words, gestures and actions
- Anticipate upcoming decisions and problems (start small) and generate plans for how to navigate them
- Provide students with a list of things to think about that they can carry with them and refer to as needed when out and about

#### 8.04.4 Applied Interpretation and Inference

Interpretation and inference come into play in subtle ways during the decision-making process. If the student has difficulty with these skills, outcomes can be troublesome. Interpretation and inference can be used to reflect on solutions, how they played out, how effectively they solved problems they were applied to, etc. Interpretation and inference help by generating thoughts, opinions, and ideas about what went wrong, how it could have gone differently, and what could be done the next time to prevent difficulty from reoccurring.

#### Interpretation

When a decision lies before us, we are often required to conceive the meaning of abstract, emotionally charged, or unfamiliar words. *For example, "rich" chocolate cake does not refer to money but to taste. "Delicious" strawberry crunch ice cream is only delicious if one likes strawberries and enjoys crunchy objects in smooth ice cream (a possible texture issue).*

#### Inference

Inference is drawing a conclusion using evidence and reasoning. It engages an equally subtle cognitive process that involves memory recall, self-reflection, and drawing conclusions to arrive at a decision.

When a decision is before us, we usually draw from our experiences in similar contexts as well as consider our preferences. Then we compare these factors to our current options.

Individuals on the autism spectrum often become stuck when making inferences because they are required to juggle several factors, evaluate them separately and together, incorporate knowledge of self, and then synthesize all that understanding to arrive at a decision.

*For example, Johnny is invited to a party. His first response, which is impulsive, is to refuse to go. If he receives help addressing the anxiety and is supported to reflect on similar parties he has attended (and enjoyed), he may recall that two of his favorite people will probably be attending. He reads the invitation more carefully and discovers there will be bowling – an activity he loves. He may then infer he would like to go to the party after all.*

By helping students, such as Johnny, break down, identify, and visually represent all components involved in the decision-making process and how they connect, we provide them with the tools they need to begin making decisions more independently.

The executive functions engaged during the interpretation and inference phase of a decision-making process typically include previewing, planning, strategic thinking, causal relationships, and evaluative thinking.

#### **Individuals challenged in the area of applying logic and reasoning to the decision-making or problem solving process tend to**

- Miss key signals/information that could inform thinking surrounding a decision or problem at hand
- Jump to conclusions that often do not factor in subtle yet important information
- Display linear thinking that is more concrete in nature
- Struggle to extract meaning or draw conclusions
- Miss abstract or complex meaning in a situation (verbally and non-verbally)

#### **How to approach applied interpretation and inference related to making decisions and solving problems with students**

- Many of the strategies in 8.04.2 Motivations and Intentions will apply in working with students on inferences and interpretation to help ferret out unspoken, subtle, or underlying meaning
- Practice drawing interpretations and inference based on a few clues and cues, slowly expanding in complexity as the student strengthens their skills
- Visual puzzles and games designed to help students infer and interpret
- Role play and improvisation activities that give students practice in real time
- Reverse the process, starting with a given interpretation or inference and then building a story or scenario that could reflect it (*Example: Someone is displeased...what are all the ways they can show it with words, gestures and actions without outright stating “I am displeased”?*)

### 8.04.5 Generating Possible Decisions/Solutions and Anticipating Likely Outcomes

As outlined in 8.03.10 *Generating multiple possible outcomes*, the ability to generate multiple outcomes is a vital critical thinking skill and plays a specific role in navigating the complex, and often stressful, process of making a decision and solving a problem.

Staff can be very helpful in guiding students to generate possible decisions and solutions that apply to their specific situations. This reduces stress by limiting the possibilities to a manageable number so the process is not bogged down by too many options. Making concept maps, decision flow charts, or other visual representations of the process can be very calming (emotional regulation), organizing (executive function), and help individuals allocate their focus towards fleshing out the most viable choices.

Creativity, brainstorming, and research took place earlier in the decision-making process to expand ideas and open up options. At this point, they are valuable in narrowing down and becoming more specific as final decisions are approached.

Anticipating outcomes involves using a combination of visualization and the ability to understand situations. Strategic and evaluative thinking are executive functions often used while visualizing results. These executive functions involve:

- Comparing and contrasting images
- Visualizing concepts to help increase meaning and assessment
- Using visualization to activate creative thinking
- Using visualization to help generate multiple possible outcomes, and visual problem solving.

**Individuals challenged in the area of generating possible decisions/solutions and anticipating outcomes tend to**

- Become anxious, impatient, or overwhelmed when asked to come up with more than one idea
- Display inflexibility when decisions and problems arise
- Tend to overgeneralize approaches from past experiences even when they do not fit the current context
- Over-rely on others to generate ideas, suggestions and solutions
- Rush to the decision or solution that is easiest, most accessible in the moment even when other options are better and available
- Become frustrated with or resistant to engaging in discussions initiated by others that slow down the decision making or problem solving process to reflect on possibilities and weigh options
- Become anxious when faced with multiple decisions or problems
- Have difficulty visualizing potential scenarios

**How to approach generating possible decisions/solutions and anticipating outcomes with students:**

- Use visual aids to map out decisions/problems and their corresponding outcomes and solutions
- Practice visualizing and verbalizing decision making and problem solving scenarios
- Begin small with a simple decision/problem – with peers or a teacher, brainstorm as many solutions and outcomes as possible. Slowly expand in complexity as skills strengthen
- Incorporate movement as a way of helping students see the difference between options (*Example: designate decision/problem spots in the room and then move towards the solution/outcome spots in the room as ideas are generated*)
- Watch video clips and pause tape after decision/problem is revealed. Generate possible solutions and outcomes, then watch how the character chooses to resolve their situation. Discuss.
- Preview upcoming situations ahead of time where the student could benefit from mapping out strategies and choices ahead of time
- Working on emotion regulation and self-soothing techniques for staying calm in situations where decisions have to be made and problems may arise. Role play and practice what to do.

**8.04.7 Managing and Evaluating Results**

Managing and evaluating results is a process of:

- Being able to identify both direct and indirect results of actions, choices, or situations
- Identifying all direct and indirect consequences of actions, choices, situations, etc. (making connections and understanding what happened in a sequential or relational manner)
- Drawing conclusions about the roles positive, negative, or neutral factors had on the result
- Identifying whether any action is necessary in the present to fix or make changes to the outcome
- Identifying what can be learned from an experience – my role, the role of others, outside factors, timing, etc. (*What would I do differently if I did it again to increase my chances of having the desired outcome?*)
- Identifying and managing feelings elicited from the experience
- Evaluating what was learned

The executive functions that come into play while managing results are evaluative thinking (How did that go? How did I do?) and reinforcibility (What can I learn from this situation that will change my thinking and actions in a similar situation in the future?)

### Individuals challenged in the area of managing and evaluating results tend to

- Be overcome with challenging emotions once results are apparent
- Habitually blame others or factors in the situation or outside themselves for undesired results
- Have difficulty learning from their choices and mistakes in the moment and carrying this understanding forward into future similar situations
- Be limited in their ability to self-reflect
- Resist taking ownership or seeing their personal responsibility in how a situation played out
- Get stuck in the concept of external fairness rather than reflecting on the role their choices played
- Feel powerless when outcomes are not as they wished - not realize that a change in choices in the future can change the results (it doesn't always have to turn out this way)
- Be hesitant to enter into future situations where a similar outcome may occur

### How to approach managing results when working with students

Work on managing results should be varied and include 1:1 reflection discussions, small group peer feedback sessions, group discussions, stress management exercises, visualization exercises, etc. It is important that work in this area not be solely cognitive and verbal.

There is a strong emotional component to managing and evaluating results. Managing results in situations where the outcome is not desired means facing disappointment, frustration, anger, blame, and other difficult emotions. Evaluating results that were undesirable often means looking at oneself and reflecting on what one wishes they had not done or done differently. Both experiences expose vulnerability that can be hard for individuals on the autism spectrum to manage. Therefore, it is recommended that an equal amount of time be allocated to the emotional aftermath of a decision or problem as is spent on the facts of the situation. By doing so, teachers can model healthy ways to manage difficult emotions and how self-reflect and still be kind and understanding of one's own mistakes and challenges.

### 8.05 Conclusion: Applying Critical Thinking in Project Situations

The skills presented in this module will require much real-world practice. One of the best ways to engage individuals in practical applications of critical thinking is through *projects*. Here are some tips on selecting projects and how to best engage students in the critical thinking:

#### Staff Guidelines

- Draw upon areas of strength and interest
- Select/adjust projects to the appropriate level of difficulty in light of challenges
- Incorporate flexibility needed to modify and accommodate according to individual needs
- Select project options that capitalize on available support (advising, mentoring, coaching)
- Select projects that draw upon available physical resources and fit budget constraints
- Assess need for coaching/mentorship to support regulation, organization, and constructive problem solving

#### Staff/Student Coordination Guidelines

- Engage and increase buy-in and motivation through collaboration in all phases (brainstorming, planning, and implementation)
- Research similar projects online to generate ideas and activate visualization
- Preview project to identify and anticipate challenges and generate a list of strategies and needs. Include having the student predict aspects of the project that might:
  - prove the most challenging
  - be the easiest
  - be likely to cause frustration
  - trigger dysregulation
  - trigger overwhelming feelings
- Anticipate time-related issues (length of project, level of commitment, competition with other current activities, and commitments)
- Generate list of potential collaborators/mentors, materials needed, and other resources
- Visualize desired result, possible outcomes, potential roadblocks, contingency plans
- Assign project responsibilities: student, staff, community partners, etc.
- Identify fixed and flexible/negotiable aspects of project
- Establish strategies for navigating social/relational aspects of project (delegation, collaboration, negotiation, communication, conflict-resolution, etc.)
- Infuse process with enthusiasm, humor, creativity, and stress-management techniques
- Discuss managing expectations (distortions, misunderstandings, unrealistic ideas)
- Develop organization, prioritization, motivation, and self-assessment tools and tricks for successful completion (especially key in longer-range projects). Examples include:
  - time management schedule
  - feedback (formal and informal)
  - progress check-ins
- Condense work into a user-friendly visual format that can be posted where the student has ongoing access to promote independence and organization



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## Section 9.0

# SELF-AWARENESS

*“The person I was yesterday, introduced me to the person I am today; which makes me very excited about meeting the person I will become tomorrow. ”*

— abridged from poem written by Poetic Evolution

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#### 9.03 Developing the Self

## 9.01 Introduction

This module continues what began with the Awareness Development and Executive Function module. The ADEF establishes a common ground and a common language with students. It addresses very concrete topics – such as understanding the conditions of their bodies and how this affects them. These concrete subjects are good places to begin with most students on the autism spectrum because they help teachers build rapport very quickly.

By the time students begin work on this module, they should have enough self-awareness to embark on the next two steps of their personal growth:

1. Developing more sophisticated use of newly learned skills
2. Integrating new abilities

Developing a more sophisticated use of acquired skills begins with a searching examination of their inner worlds. Part One of this module, *Understanding of the Self*, contains a process designed to facilitate this.

Education reformist David Perkins defines *understanding* as “... being able to use what you know flexibly in unfamiliar situations or to address new problems.” (Perkins 1998).

Meaningful self-understanding informs our choices and helps us gravitate to people, activities, relationships, professions, passions and environments that we find life-affirming and meaningful.

**Part One does not** need to be completed before beginning Part Two, *Development of the Self*. Once results from Understanding of the Self (i.e., self-understanding) have appeared, Part Two can be started.

**Part Two** encourages students to dream about their lives and the kinds of people they would like to be. At this point, many students are able to start making decisions and to set goals that are in harmony with their needs, desires, strengths and challenges. With this context, goals are more fulfilling and successful.

By working on self-understanding through active exploration, students become empowered as they approach adulthood. They become agents of positive change within themselves and for others in many life situations.

The goals of this module are to:

- Deepen self-awareness
- Achieve an understanding that personal growth is an ongoing, dynamic process of trial and error, learning, reflection and self-evaluation.
- Provide tools and coping-mechanisms to manage factors that interfere with positive, meaningful self-awareness – such as self-criticism, self-doubt and low self-esteem
- Provide creative methods for helping individuals maintain self-awareness
- Link self-awareness to interactions and experiences with others.

## Section 9. SELF-AWARENESS

- Increase understanding of oneself in a wide variety of contexts: activities, tasks, different environments, situations, choices, decision-making, problem-solving, etc.
- Learn to create goals aligned with one's own needs; how to enhance one's experiences; how to open avenues for change and opportunity (personal, interpersonal, creative, recreational, educational, work and career, independence)
- Learn to use new self-awareness to increase self-advocacy and self-care

**As you move through this exploration, you will find a series of personal inventories presented as checklists.**

You might wish to print them out and have them handy as you go. You will want to customize this, working at the student's own pace. In Part 2, **Developing the Self**, you should work on the material that feels most attractive and accessible to your student at any given time. It is likely no two students will complete Part 2 in the same order!



## 9.02 Understanding of Self

Endless opportunities for both facilitated and spontaneous self-reflection appear as students progress through other modules and participate in day and residential activities. The combination of explicit instruction, feedback, reflection, and organic experiences allows students to receive information in the ways most suited to their learning styles. They can experiment with this new self-knowledge in a wide range of contexts, each at his own pace.

The Understanding of Self section is designed to scoop up all the rich insights gained by students through their participation in the program thus far. It then explicitly guides them to:

- Make connections and see patterns in their reactions, relationships, preferences, strengths, challenges through all they have learned about themselves. This is done with compassion and non-judgment
- Fill in gaps, explore, question, reflect, and deepen self-understanding
- Increase body awareness and understanding of how they move through space, how they hold their bodies, and how they interact physically with others, and how all this affects their experiences and our emotions
- Show how self-understanding enables them to draw conclusions, evaluate themselves and their needs, and advocate on their own behalves
- Increase the sense of personal accountability and responsibility in interactions, relationships, choices, and other contexts
- Establish the ways self-understanding is a valuable tool for making choices that fit personal needs, preferences, strengths, and sensitivities
- Explore creative uses for self-understanding to increase success, joy and positive outcomes
- Consider new creative endeavors, relationships, educational pursuits, personal challenges, and career options

All the information and activities in this section can be adapted to fit individual instruction, small group, and large group settings. All elements can be accommodated to match individual learning styles.

### 9.02.01 Preferences and Affinities

**Preferences** are the things, environments, foods, people, activities, and situations we gravitate to because they make us feel good. Individuals who are aware of their preferences are empowered to make choices that are well-informed by their own needs. Informed choices increase our level of engagement and ownership in the decision-making process. They increase the likelihood of outcomes containing enjoyment, satisfaction and success.

Informed choices also improve one's ability to negotiate, self-advocate and compromise in shared decision-making situations. This section supports students in clarifying their preferences and understanding the role they can play in making healthy and positive choices.

### How to know when preference is actually avoidance

Some individuals on the autism spectrum form preferences as a function of or in reaction to avoiding something unpleasant. A clue to detecting avoidance is an individual describing something in terms of it NOT being something else and he is also not able to generate other reasons why he likes it. For example, a student shows a preference for quiet spaces where he can be alone. When asked why he prefers being alone or what feels good about being alone, he says "It's not loud and confusing," and admits, "I get lonely." In this case, his preference reveals a struggle: He does not know how to manage himself and stay regulated in a room full of activity, yet he desires to be around people. Having discovered this, the teacher can now work on improving regulation in social milieus and also help him explore working with other people (in small group work with limited ambient noises) so his real needs can be better met.

**Affinities** are activities, ideas, people and things that we find innately interesting, exciting or otherwise compelling. They are attraction-based, thus the draw has an emotional charge that fuels the interest. This emotional charge strongly affects how we each express our affinities. Every person's relationship to their affinities is unique, and individuals on the autism spectrum are no different. Some people are private, some share their affinities only with those they are comfortable with and trust, some are very open, some can become obsessed or take their focus on an affinity to an extreme level – to the exclusion of pursuing other interests.

One can have an affinity that is similar to a preference. For example, within the sensory experience an individual might have an affinity for soft objects, everything from clothing to petting a kitten or a blanket. Another person might have an affinity for highly charismatic people and naturally gravitate to expressive folks. Yet another person might have an affinity for activities that involve movement over sedentary activities.

Affinities play a role in influencing what we wish to learn and experience, who we wish to interact with socially, how we express ourselves creatively, what brings us joy, and what work and career paths seem attractive to us. This section supports students in expanding upon their affinities and exploring creative ways to apply them intellectually, socially, recreationally, and vocationally.

The outline below provides teachers with categories to explore with students. Whether done 1:1, small group, large group or a combination of configurations, the approach is intended to be lively, fun, and interactive. Each session should be well supported with visuals and other representations to anchor understanding and assist students to make connections. This section is filled with opportunities for student show-and-tell; a wonderful way for students to work on communication, sharing, and organizing a presentation.

The initial reactions of students to the content below are likely to be emotionally driven, because our emotions guide much of our preferences and affinities. Students may need to work through their emotional reactions and feelings first before they can settle down and apply their cognitive processes to reflect, make connections, and draw meaning.

Additional guidance for this section in particular:

- Discussing preferences and affinities lends itself to personal storytelling, which bolsters learning and creates lively teaching environments. When we have students generate personal examples to highlight their preferences and affinities, we enlist their affect, language, and higher order thinking.
- Small and large group work in this section enables students to exercise their abilities to compare and contrast, while exposing them to new possible interests and encouraging peer bonding over shared preferences and affinities.
- Throughout this module, there are two excellent ways to help students become receptive to new ideas, to become more tolerant of individual differences, and to be more respectful during peer interactions:
  - Create a climate of non-judgment regarding individual variation.
  - Establish an explicit set of group rules about ways to respect others' likes and dislikes.
- Exploration should be as interactive as possible to keep students engaged and learning experientially. Media clips, magazines, demonstrations, taste tests, role-playing and improv, art, music clips and activities all support students in conceptualizing and forming opinions because they not only have discussion to draw upon but actual experience.

### The value of self-disclosure

In this section, teacher self-disclosure is a very valuable tool. By self-disclosure, we mean appropriately and purposefully discussing one's own thoughts, feelings, aspirations, goals, failures, successes, fears, dreams as well as one's likes, dislikes, and favorites. This sort of sharing demonstrates to students that having one's own individuality (likes, dislikes, aspirations, fears, etc.) is perfectly normal. It also increases staff-student bonding over shared interests and opening up opportunities for staff to explore shared interests in specially tailored classes, program activities and projects.

### 9.02.02 Preferences and Affinities: Personal Inventory Checklist

#### *People*

- When I like someone, what is it about them that I like? (personality, smells, movements, size, voice quality, etc.)
- When I am around people I like how do I feel? (physically, emotionally, sensorily)
- What kinds of thoughts do I have when I like a person?

#### *Environments & Environmental Factors*

- When I am in a place that I like, what are the qualities that are there? (sounds, smells, amount of people, open spaces, indoor/outdoor, bright, etc.)
- When I am in a place that I like being in, how do I feel? (physically, emotionally, sensorily)
- What kinds of thoughts do I have when I am in a place I like?

#### *Activities (recreational, collecting)*

- When I do (xyz) activity, what is it that I like? (sensory, physical, , etc.)
- When I am doing (xyz), how do I feel? (physically, emotionally, sensorily)
- What kinds of thoughts do I have when I am doing (xyz)?

#### *Music*

- What do I like about xyz type of music? (sensory, physical, etc.)
- When listen to xyz how do I feel? (physically, emotionally, sensorily)
- What kinds of thoughts do I have when I listen to xyz?

#### *Learning*

- What topics do I like to learn about?
- When I am learning about something I like how do I feel? (physically, emotionally, sensorily)
- What kinds of thoughts do I have when I am learning about something I like?

#### *Aesthetics*

- What is visually pleasing/beautiful to me?
- When I am surrounding by or looking at something that I like the looks of, how do I feel? (physically, emotionally, sensorily)
- What kinds of thoughts do I have when I look at or am surrounded by something I find pleasing or beautiful?

### *Clothing/Style*

- What style/type of clothes do I like? (on oneself, on others)
- When I am dressed in a way that pleases me, how do I feel? If I see someone dressed in a way I think is cool, how do I feel? (physically, emotionally, sensorily)
- What kinds of thoughts do I have when I dress the way I like/see someone dressed in a way I like?

### *Food*

- What foods do I like? Is there something specific I like about these foods? (senses)
- When I eat food I like how do I feel? (physically, emotionally, sensorily)
- What kinds of thoughts do I have when I eat foods I like?

### *Sensory-based experiences*

The sensory sub-section offers great opportunities to incorporate body awareness as it relates to others. Since body awareness is traditionally a challenge many individuals on the spectrum face, it is helpful to weave it into related discussions.

Examples:

- What are my preferences for
  - Being touched by others?
  - Standing close to others?
  - Getting hugs?
  - How does my body feel when it comes into contact with others and objects?
  - How do I prefer to enter a room?
  - How do I prefer to move through a crowd?
- What sensory feelings do I like/enjoy?
- When I am exposed to a sensory experience I like how do I feel? (physically, emotionally)
- What kinds of thoughts do I have when my senses are pleased?

### *Other topics the student generates*

### 9.02.03 Interests

We define “interest” as a state of curiosity or concern about or attention to something. Personal interests can surround an idea, an activity or an object. While the theme of the previous section, Affinities and Preferences, is best illustrated as *sharing* and *comparing*, the theme of the Interests exploration is best illustrated as *being curious* and *exploring*.

While affinities and interests can and often are related, it is not always the case. For example, an individual may have an affinity for trains. He finds them visually compelling to watch, likes the sounds of the clickety-clack and the whistle. However, if you try to expose him to information about trains he may not lean forward, and in fact, he may even resist - almost as if the information dulls or weighs down his experience of it. He may talk about trains a lot, cycling his information but resistant to other people talking about it. His parents may be befuddled because they do not understand how their child can love trains so much, but when they try to get traction and build on it, the effort goes nowhere.

An example of an interest and an affinity coming together would be an individual who has an affinity for trains but also wants to study train schedules and maps, learn how trains run, talk to a conductor, etc. So, we look for natural affinities and expose students to things we hope they might find an affinity with, and then within that we stretch to see where there is a toehold for interest - the layering on of new information and new experiences to build upon and perhaps leverage it into projects, career exploration, etc.

While affinities can be solo, internal experiences or more external, relational experiences, interests require interaction with the subject in some way, perhaps through a book, or computer research, or a related object. Interests lend themselves to relational dynamics – such as learning, sharing, debating, discussing, co-creating, and meeting experts in a field.

All the approaches and teacher guidance from section **9.02.02 Preferences and Affinities** apply to this section as well.

Additional Guidance:

- Compared to affinities, interests tend to have a stronger language, cognitive and executive function component. Thus when organizing student groups for the activities in this section, group them by developmental level and language capability. This does not mean there should not be cross-group sharing of interests. Rather, grouping in this way allows the initial discussions, presentations, and development to proceed in ways that match the members’ similar learning styles.
- An effective and fun way to share interests program-wide is through holding an Interest Fair. Students and staff create little booths, models or other creative representations of their interests. Have both staff and students leave a ticket in the basket at booths that interest them. This and other sharing activities will help in the formation of clubs, student projects, and staff-student creative collaborations.

## Section 9. SELF-AWARENESS

- Exploration of interests is a great vehicle for inviting community collaboration. Members of the community who have skills, expertise or knowledge in an interest can become involved and some may become mentors. Interests are also excellent lead-ins to volunteer, community involvement, and internship possibilities.

**! An interest is that sweet spot where natural affinities deepen and expand, and great learning and relational experience can occur.**

**9.02.04 Interests: Personal Inventory Checklist**

- Topics (favorite topics to discuss)***
  - What about this topic interests me?
  - Do I know anyone who shares the same interest?

***Learning (things I know a lot about and/or want to learn more about)***

- What subjects am I interested in learning?
- Do I know anyone who shares the same interest?

***Career Related (careers & jobs that interest me)***

- What about this career interests me?
- Do I know anyone who shares the same interest?

***Activities (activities that interest me and/or I would like to try)***

- What about this activity interests me?
- Do I know anyone who shares the same interest?

***Pop Culture (movies, TV shows, books, art, celebrities, trends, other media)***

- What in pop culture interests me?
- Do I know anyone who shares the same interest?

***Community-based***

- What about my community interests me?
- Do I know anyone who shares the same interest?

***Current events/news***

- What about the news interests me?
- Do I know anyone who shares the same interest?

***Hobbies***

- What about this hobby interests me?
- Do I know anyone who shares the same interest?

***Other topics the student generates***

- What about this topic interests me?
- Do I know anyone who shares the same interest?



### 9.02.05 Strengths

A strength is something we are good at, either innately or through practice. It may draw upon any of our systems – sensory, emotional, social, cognitive, or physical. Strengths can be singular in nature, such as an excellent sense of smell, strong attention to detail, an affectionate personality, or capability at spelling. Or, they can arise from a combination of skills, such as a martial art (motor coordination, anticipation, memory of moves and their sequences, body awareness), art (color selection, visual-spatial ordering, hand dexterity, visualization, etc.), empathy (compassion, perspective-taking, social awareness) or reading comprehension (decoding, analysis working memory, vocabulary, attention, etc.). Each Student Individual Profile will contain information about strengths, and staff can incorporate it into discussions and activities.

Many of the teaching approaches suggested in sections **9.02.01 Preferences and Affinities**, and **9.02.03 Interests** apply in this section. In particular, we emphasize the importance of experiential learning and establishing a climate of supportiveness and non-judgment among peers.

An examination of strengths can lend itself to feelings of competition and negative comparison. Thus, teachers are encouraged to set the climate for this work so students approach this topic in a collegial and celebratory manner.

Students will benefit from critical thinking games and discussions that highlight the connections between their strengths and:

- Self-esteem
- Activities they already engage in (why they are drawn to them or do them recreational activities that may align with their strengths)
- Ways their strength can be used to increase learning
- Ways their strengths can be of benefit to others (fellow students, school program, local community, etc.)
- Creative ways to apply their strengths in the community through projects and collaborations with local community members.

### About Body Awareness

A strong sense of body awareness can be capitalized on in many contexts. Body awareness ties physical, spatial and sensory processing skills together and enables an individual to:

- Know where he is in physical space
- Be aware of his body positioning (in isolation and in relation to others)
- Be aware of his body movements and be able to manage/adjust them either independently or when attention is drawn to them (posture, gait, reaching for objects, using objects, etc.)
- Be aware of the effect his body on himself, on others, and on the physical space he occupies
- Navigate physical spaces with ease.

Signs that a student struggles with body awareness (addressed below in Section **9.02.07 Challenges**) include but are not limited to:

- Difficulty navigating spaces (with or without surrounding objects or people)
- Awkward posturing (sitting or standing) and movements (gait, reaching for things, tool use)
- Low awareness to how body is positioned and the effect it has on themselves, others, and their environment
- Anxiety navigating spaces

In addition to creating an opportunity to raise the student's body awareness, work in this area allows teachers to address the associated emotional reactions that can accompany body awareness difficulties (Example: anxiety, panic, overwhelm, disorientation, irritability)

In addition to consulting with an Occupational Therapist, many rich and engaging OT resources are available and helpful when working with students to address low body awareness challenges.

### 9.02.06 Strengths: Personal Inventory Checklist

#### *Physical skills*

- What are my physical strengths?
- What are the ways they benefit:
  - me
  - my interactions with others
  - my learning
  - my fun
- What emotions, thoughts and body sensations arise when I am doing something physical that I am good at?
- Other observations related to my physical strengths

This area opens the door not just for additional insight but creative thinking, self-esteem building and fun. For example, ask students: “If your strength were a super power, what could you do with it?”

You can also ask students to represent their strength non-verbally and/or through an artistic representation.

#### *Sensory capabilities*

- What are my sensory strengths?
- What are the ways they benefit:
  - me in general
  - my interactions with others
  - my learning
  - my fun
- What emotions, thoughts and body sensations arise when my senses help me out
- Other observations about my sensory strengths

(Same suggestions as a. Physical skills, Other observations, above)

#### *Body Awareness*

Students will need both verbal explanations and experiential activities to anchor the meaning of body awareness.

- In what ways is my body aware?
- How does this awareness benefit:
  - me in general
  - my interactions with others
  - my learning
  - my fun

- What emotions, thoughts and body sensations arise when I am benefitting from having good body awareness?
- Other observations related to my body awareness skills

(Same suggestions as a. Physical skills, Other observations, above)

### *Emotional skills (empathy, kindness, cooperation, etc.)*

What are my emotional strengths?

What are the ways they benefit:

- me in general
- my interactions with others
- my learning
- my fun

What thoughts and body sensations arise when I am using my emotional strengths?

Other observations related to my emotional strengths

(Same suggestions as a. Physical skills, Other observations, above)

### *Cognitive skills*

What are my cognitive skills?

What are the ways they affect:

- me in general
- my interactions with others
- my learning
- my fun

What emotions, thoughts and body sensations arise when I am using my strong thinking skills?

Other observations related to my cognitive strengths

(Same suggestions as a. Physical skills, Other observations, above)

### *Relationship skills*

What are my relationship strengths?

What are the ways they benefit:

- me in general
- my interactions with others
- my learning
- my fun

What emotions, thoughts and body sensations arise when I am relating well with others?

Other observations related to my relationship strengths

(Same suggestions as a. Physical skills, Other observations, above)

### *Creative Expression*

What are my creative strengths?

What are the ways they benefit:

- me in general
- my interactions with others
- my learning
- my fun

What emotions, thoughts and sensations arise when I am in my creative zone/being creative?

Other observations related to my creative strengths

(Same suggestions as a. Physical skills, Other observations, above)

### *Self-Care, Self-advocacy and Self-regulation*

What are my strengths in taking care of my needs, speaking up and asking for help, and staying regulated?

What are the ways they benefit:

- me in general
- my interactions with others
- my learning
- my fun

What emotions, thoughts and sensations arise when I am

- taking care of my needs
- asking for what I need from others
- staying regulated

Other observations related to my self-care, self-advocacy and self-regulation strengths

(Same suggestions as a. Physical skills, Other observations, above).

### *Managing my responsibilities*

What are my strengths in managing my responsibilities?

What are the ways they benefit:

- me in general
- my interactions with others
- my learning

- my fun

What emotions, thoughts and sensations arise when I am taking care of my responsibilities well?

Other observations related to my responsibility strengths

(Same suggestions as a. Physical skills, Other observations, above)

***Other student generated strengths***

Teachers can apply steps a through d from the sections above if students come up with additional strengths.

### 9.02.07 Challenges

Personal challenges are difficult to address. They often bring up strong feelings and a sense of vulnerability, especially when we share them with others. Individuals on the autism spectrum can experience lifelong stress regarding their personal challenges, felt especially keenly during school years.

Often, an individual's challenges become the focus as parents, teachers and professionals work in earnest to facilitate education and help make goals for the future. If equal time is not spent expanding strengths and experiencing joy, young adults on the spectrum may emerge from their school years overly focused on personal difficulties. They may end up underestimating themselves and remain quite unaware of their strengths. This makes it critical to address this constructively in the context of transition learning.

The goal of this section is to support individuals in recognizing their challenges in a non-judgmental manner. Instead of being daunted by the recognition of personal difficulties, they can come to understand how understanding their challenges will enable them to make good decisions for themselves.

Staff should model for students how to approach personal challenges with humor, flexibility and compassion. This will provide great help to students in developing healthier, more functional and more positive relationships with the more difficult aspects of themselves.

Neutralizing the emotional reactivity surrounding challenges opens opportunities for students to understand themselves better. It becomes easier for them to establish personal goals and become creative in working with personal obstacles.

*Much of the teaching methodology suggested in Preferences and Affinities, Interests, Strengths, above, also applies in this section.*

#### **Guidance on self-disclosure and modeling as teaching tools**

Self-disclosure is a particularly effective teaching tool when discussing challenges with students.

**Example:** Teacher admits she cannot spell well. She shares the frustration it caused in school and sometimes when texting or sending emails. Students and teacher then share anecdotes of funny outcomes to misspellings. Teacher continues that although being a poor speller is frustrating, it did not stop her from pursuing the dream of being a teacher.

She can go on to show the strategies she has adopted to manage the problem – having someone else check her work before submitting it, using spell checker, using code words like LOL in texts to cut down on spelling out full words, etc.

By modeling positive ways to frame and manage challenges in an open, compassionate manner, staff can show that we all have challenges and that they can be addressed in positive, productive ways.

### **Guidance on the emotional component to challenges**

Students facing long lists of personal challenges can become discouraged. To prevent a student from feeling overwhelmed by this exploration, the **Challenges** section can be addressed over time. Pacing is very important here.

In this module, each challenge is addressed with a series of reflection steps. They are designed to move the student from identifying and understanding a challenge to brainstorming and generating solutions. In this way, a road map to improvement begins to emerge. This flow also helps students realize some challenges have dynamic and mutable aspects, which offers the hope of improvement.

When we address challenges that are more fixed in nature, we guide the students to have compassion for themselves and help create bypass strategies and generate positive coping mechanisms.

Some students will prefer to discuss their challenges privately. This desire should be respected by allowing the student to start the work in 1:1 sessions. Then, when possible, slowly phase into small group discussions with peers who have similar struggles. The power of group work in discussing challenges lies in:

- Helping students break their sense of isolation regarding what is hard
- Normalizing their experience by seeing that others have similar difficulties
- Seeing and learning positive coping mechanisms peers use to accommodate for or bypass challenges



### 9.02.07 Challenges: Personal Inventory Checklist

- **Physical limitations**
  - a. What are my physical challenges?
  - b. What are the ways they affect:
    - me in general
    - my interactions with others
    - my learning
    - my fun
  - c. What emotions, thoughts and sensations arise?
  - d. Ways I cope:
    - to bypass/work around it
    - to get support from others and self-advocate
    - to stay regulated and engaged with others

#### 1.4.2 Sensory interferences (include environmental sensitivities)

- a. What are my sensory sensitivities?
- b. What are the ways they affect:
  - me in general
  - my interaction with others
  - my learning
  - my fun
- c. What emotions, thoughts and body reactions arise?
- d. Ways I cope
  - to bypass/work around it
  - to get support from others and self-advocate
  - to stay regulated and engaged with others

#### 1.4.3 Body awareness issues

- a. How low body awareness show up in my body and the ways I move?
- b. What are the ways they affect:
  - me in general
  - my interactions with others
  - my learning

- my fun
- c. What emotions and thoughts arise?
- d. Ways I cope
  - bypass/work around it
  - get support from others and self-advocate
  - stay regulated and engaged with others

1.4.4 Emotional issues

- a. What are my emotional issues?
- b. What are the ways they affect:
  - me in general
  - my interactions with others
  - my learning
  - my fun
- c. What thoughts arise when I am struggling with an emotional issue? How do my body and sensory system react?
- d. Ways I cope
  - bypass/work around it
  - get support from others and self-advocate
  - stay regulated and engaged with others

1.4.5 Cognitive difficulties

- a. What are my cognitive difficulties/thinking challenges?
- b. What are the ways they affect:
  - me in general
  - my interaction with others
  - my learning
  - my fun
- c. What emotions, thoughts and body sensations arise?
- d. Ways I can cope
  - bypass/work around it
  - get support from others and self-advocate
  - stay regulated and engaged with others

1.4.6 Relationship issues

- a. What are my relationship issues?
- b. What are the ways they affect:
  - me in general
  - my interactions with others
  - my learning
  - my fun
- c. What emotions, thoughts and body sensations arise when I am struggling with a relationship issue?
- d. Ways I can cope
  - bypass/work around it
  - get support from others and self-advocate
  - stay regulated and engaged with others

1.4.7 Creative expression challenges

- a. What are my creative blocks
- b. What are the ways they affect:
  - me in general
  - my interactions with others
  - my learning
  - my fun
- c. What emotions, thoughts and body sensations arise?
- d. Ways I can cope
  - bypass/work around it
  - get support from others and self-advocate
  - stay regulated and engaged with others

1.4.8 Self-care, self-advocacy, and self-regulation interferences

- a. What gets in the way of taking care of my needs, speaking up for my needs and staying regulated?
- b. What are the ways they affect:
  - me in general
  - my interactions with others

- my learning
- my fun
- c. What emotions, thoughts and body sensations arise?
- d. Ways I can cope
  - bypass/work around it
  - get support from others and self-advocate
  - stay regulated and engaged with others

1.4.9 Roadblocks to managing my responsibilities

- a. What gets in the way of me managing my responsibilities independently?
- b. What are the ways this affects:
  - me in general
  - my interactions with others
  - my learning
  - my fun
- c. What emotions, thoughts and body sensations arise?
- d. Ways I can cope
  - bypass/work around it
  - get support from others and self-advocate
  - stay regulated and engaged with others

1.4.10 Other student generated challenges

Teachers can apply steps a through d from the sections above if students come up with additional strengths.

### 9.02.09 Hopes, Dreams and Goals

This section invites students to dream big and frame their futures in positive ways. As with challenges, a vulnerability accompanies sharing one's hopes and dreams. Thus, some students may wish to start the discussion 1:1 and then open up to group work with like-minded peers. Establishing respectful ground rules for the group will help students to feel safe sharing.

General guidance for this section:

- Hopes, dreams and goals are future-oriented concepts. It is vital that discussion is supplemented with visuals, activities, media clips and other interactive methods. Moving beyond just words helps individuals who struggle to conceptualize the future (or have difficulty with language) understand and express themselves effectively and creatively. Interactive activities can include:
  - making dream boards or collages
  - role play and improv
  - brainstorming activities that incorporate movement
  - story writing and acting
- It takes one set of skills to hope, dream and generate goals for oneself but it takes a whole other set of skills to work towards making them happen. Executive function and critical thinking are heavily enlisted in the art of fleshing out a vision, generating a plan and implementing it.
- Once students have generated their ideas, teachers can help them shift into developing them further by:
  - looking at logistics and figuring out how feasible they are
  - doing research to fill in the gaps and learn more
  - shaping ideas according to new information
  - activating creativity and brainstorming

Once students' ideas have been developed, they need to be evaluated and prioritized. This involves guiding students to think critically while still staying in a creative mindset – adjusting ideas as new insights evolve. The use of timelines, dream boards and other visuals are very useful in strengthening comprehension and engagement in this process. At this juncture, staff will need to assess when students are ready – and what steps and support are needed – to fold these goals into the student's program experience.

9.02.10 Hopes, Dreams and Goals: Personal Inventory Checklist

- **Physical**
  - What do I hope/want/dream my body can do?
    - by myself
    - with others

**Emotional**

- How do I hope/want/dream of feeling and reacting emotionally?
  - when I am alone
  - with others
  - in relationships

**Cognitive**

- What would I hope/dream/want my brain to be able to think/do?
  - by myself
  - with others

**Personal**

- What do I hope/dream/want to do or have in my personal life that I am not doing or don't have now?

**Relationships**

- What do I hope/dream/want in my relationships with others? (could be a quality such as less fighting, or a category such as wanting a best friend or girlfriend)

**Social Life**

- What do I hope/dream/want to do in my social life that I am not doing now?

**Creative Expression**

- What do I hope/dream/want to create? (remember creativity can be applied in many contexts beyond the traditional association with artistic endeavors)

**Self-Care**

- What do I hope/dream/want to do to take better care of my needs?

**Responsibilities**

- What do I hope/dream/want to be responsible for that I am not responsible for now?

**Recreational**

- What fun activities do I hope/dream/want to do that I have not yet tried?

**Academic**

- What do I hope/dream/want to learn?

- for pleasure/personal interest
- for work/career

*Career*

- What do I hope/dream/want to do for a job or career?

*Independence*

- What do I hope/dream/want to be able to do on my own that I am not doing now?

*Bucket List*

This is a great subtopic for fun and creative sharing, brainstorming, critical thinking and letting imagination play.

- What do I hope/dream/want to be able to do in my lifetime? (cost, logistics, and other potential obstacles should not be a factor)

*Student-generated ideas*

### 9.03 Developing the Self

*“You have brains in your head. You have feet in your shoes. You can steer yourself in any direction you choose.” -- Dr. Seuss*

By this point in the module, students will be well-immersed in their own journeys of self-awareness and self-understanding. Much rich information will have been uncovered that helps students expand their view of themselves in a validating, illuminating and positive manner. This next section supports staff and students to turning this new student self-knowledge to action, success and joy.

In the first section of this module, students have focused on generating goals. Students were encouraged to imagine and creatively brainstorm without focusing on implementation details, or logistics, or any interfering factors. As students now move into **Developing Self**, staff can begin to weave executive function into the process through evaluative thinking, step-wisdom, and big picture analysis. Students begin to examine their ideas in terms of feasibility, timing, priority, and other practical concerns.

#### Welcoming change

Understanding and developing oneself is a life-long and non-linear process. We may set a goal and then not act on it right away. We change our minds and our preferences over time. Past goals fade away to be replaced by new ones. As our relationships with others deepen, our goals may again change. Many ASD individuals find change to be distressing. It is very important therefore to explicitly address how change is a natural part of life; that it is quite OK to continue changing and developing oneself throughout a lifetime. This perspective is a vital life tool that reduces anxiety and leads to managing and even positively capitalizing on change.

To help individuals on the autism spectrum better understand the complex notion of *developing throughout our lives*, teachers should emphasize this thinking and model it throughout the work.

#### General guidance for this section

- Plan development and implementation require executive function and critical thinking skills. Successful goal development and implementation require motivation, engagement, flexibility, optimism, adaptability, collaboration, and negotiation. Thus when working on this part of the module, recognize the multiple demands this process makes on students. Realize it might create stress and overwhelm some. For this reason, it is important to monitor and work with any emotional dysregulation that might arise.



- An effective way to individualize approaches to student goals is through adjusting the rate, volume and complexity to fit their individual cognitive, emotional and regulatory needs and style.
- Students are encouraged to refer to any and all information (art projects, written work, charts, concept maps, lists, etc.) generated earlier to help prompt their memory and support their thinking.

### 9.03.01 Using my preferences, affinities and interests to expand my life

This section employs brainstorming and creative thinking skills and goal setting (executive function). Using a high-affect, engaging approach helps students get excited about possibilities and activates thinking. Staff can take the roll of scribes, recording student ideas and visually representing them on paper or white board. Drawing lines to connect one thought to another supports critical thinking. Drawing arrows from ideas to their respective goals supports executive functioning.

While change excites some students, others find it daunting and anxiety producing. Still others feel a mix of both positive and negative emotions. Students with anxiety may hesitate to engage in the process because they fear they will be forced to make changes before they are ready. Students should be assured that any changes made from work in this section will occur at their own pace and timing.

Like the previous section, this part of the module is organized into printable worksheets. Some students may need or want to spend quite a bit of time on Sections A and B, current and new activities, before they are cognitively ready to make decisions and incorporate those decisions into C, which projects future goals, and any other following sections. Conduct the module at whatever pace works best for each student. Working on the Goals sections might need to be delayed until they are emotionally receptive and ready for it.

This section is filled with opportunities to incorporate engaging teaching tools and methods such as internet research, site visits, interviews, media clips, in-program and in-community experiments, etc. These experiential methods and tools will help students build upon, draw meaning, and contribute to 1:1 and group discussions.

Information and activities in this section should be revisited throughout each individual's program experience as needed. Doing so encourages students to see their personal development and goal setting as a dynamic, ongoing and flexible process.

CHECKLIST: USING MY PREFERENCES, AFFINITIES AND INTERESTS TO EXPAND MY LIFE

9.03.02 Hobbies and Recreation

□ **A. Expand on current hobbies & recreational activities**

Some students may insist they are happy with their current hobbies and recreational activities, and resist making any changes. In these cases, it is important for teachers to remember the overarching goal is for students to self-reflect and be self-determining. If a student has moved through an active reflection and evaluation process and arrived at the conclusion not to change anything, that is perfectly fine. The teacher can move on to B. If the student has not been reflective, teachers can support them through their thinking so that they arrive at a meaningful conclusion. Even if they still end up deciding not to make any current changes, they have still benefitted greatly from the exercise and practice.

□ **B. Trying new hobbies & recreational activities**

Students who carry anxiety surrounding trying new things may find this section challenging. Teachers can tailor their approaches to move at gentle speeds. Incorporate anxiety management principles and develop coping strategies to manage fears associated with trying new things and risk-taking.

Examples of low-anxiety exploration approaches:

- Watch others perform the task or activity
- Have the individual participate in the activity even if he is not ready to try it. Assign him a task that keeps him engaged and gives him exposure with minimal risk of anxiety (shopping for, gathering, and handling the materials; timing or observing people doing the activity, helping set up/break down, videoing the scene.)
- Watch media clips related to the activity or task
- Listen to anecdotes of people who also struggled when they first tried and how they coped with the change
- Research the topic
- Search for related photos in magazines, and make a collage
- Do improv and role play
- Do emotional work on identifying and coping with the anxiety and fears that arise
- Do the task in tandem with a trusted peer or staff member

□ *C. Goals*

Goal-setting requires step-wisdom, strategic thinking, time management and many other executive functions. Teachers are encouraged to use plenty of organizational tools and visual representations. Staff should share the goals discovered with other staff and the student's advisor and record progress in the Student Individual Profile. Together, come to an agreement on the best timing for developing each according to the individual readiness.

When a student is ready to set a plan into motion, the following teaching methods will support his progress:

- Create a visual means of tracking progress the student can use as a reference. This helps engage him actively in the process.
- Develop with the student an list of milestones or sub-goals that can be crossed off as they are achieved (jog around the parking lot, jog around the building, jog around the block, etc.) this incremental approach helps reinforce step-wisdom, underscore the value of the process it takes to reach a goal, and validates student efforts along the way.
- For students who respond well to rewards and markers of accomplishment and/or have difficulty waiting for a long-term reward, establish points of accomplishment. At these points, a prize or other acknowledgement of progress should be given (extra trip to the library, ice cream, lunch with a favorite staff member).
- Use other creative tools to help students with both detail and big picture thinking such as color coding, breaking goals down week by week, charts, goal journal, etc.

Some students may lapse into comparing themselves with others, breeding a sense of competition for achieving goals. Since all individuals will be working at their own pace and with their own unique set of strengths and challenges, this type of peer comparisons and competition is normally counterproductive.

Staff are encouraged to be vigilant to this dynamic and emphasize the importance of celebrating each other's accomplishments and affording fellow peers the respect and privacy they need to work on their goals. Reinforcing a climate of non-judgment and support regarding goal achievement provides the modeling students need to build skills in collegiality and mutual respect. Additional suggestions to reduce comparisons and competition include:

- Posting the goal progress charts in the student's advisor's office instead of in a general area so they have access to them in a more private manner
- Have small peer group meetings where students get facilitated guidance in how to share personal progress and frustrations and support each other's goals in a pro-social manner
- Have designated goal-in-progress celebrations intermittently where all students participate and receive kudos for their work. The focus is on a general celebration of their effort, commitment and creativity and helps infuse enthusiasm into the process. Instead of a focus on achievement, this type of

celebration highlights the importance of participation and the bravery it takes to take risks. This type of celebration also models for students that the journey to our goals is just as important as the end result.

### 9.03.03 Increasing My Knowledge/Education

This section helps students widen their view of learning beyond the linear concepts we are supposed to learn for specific end results – to get a diploma or a job. Teachers help students to increase their excitement and receptivity to learning as a dynamic and pleasurable activity that does not have to have any other end goals than personal enjoyment and sharing with others.

Teacher approaches for reframing learning with students include:

- Lively brainstorming discussions of why and how learning benefits us throughout our lifetime.
- Generating examples of learning in everyday life (how to fill out a lottery ticket, discovering a new short cut to get somewhere, making a new recipe, etc.)
- Technology is an affinity with many students (iPods, tablets, computers, game consoles, cell phones, automated checkout lines, web TV, etc.). Because they also have frequent exposure to technology's constant changing and upgrading, it provides an excellent concrete example of having to learn in everyday life. Video gamers also have a lot to contribute about learning for fun, as each new game requires learning in a multitude of ways.

This section lends itself well to a small group approach with peers who have similar interests. A group configuration introduces valuable elements of sharing, giving and receiving feedback, collaborating, group brainstorming to name a few. It allows students to examine possibilities about themselves in a group context where peers can mirror back and respond to each other's ideas, feelings, beliefs and reactions. Nonverbal and verbal games and activities, movement, role play and improv, art and other creative experiences enliven and anchor discussions.

Some students may desire or need to do this work in a 1:1 context. They may have strong emotional reactions to learning, planning for the future, employment and/or change in general. In such cases their emotional experience needs to be incorporated into the work, particularly because these students need additional time to strengthen their emotional regulation on scary or intimidating topics. Teachers are encouraged to start with what feels safe and grounding to the student, introducing more complexity and social dynamics when the individual is ready.

- **A. Expanding my knowledge on the things I am already interested in**
  - How can I learn more? (Internet, books, movies, articles, enlisting others, places to go such as museums)
  - Why do I want to learn more (for pleasure, to meet a personal goal, etc.)
- **B. Topics of interest I would like to start pursuing**
  - What I am interested in
  - Why I am interested in it (for pleasure, to meet a personal goal, etc.)
- **C. Goals**

Although many students are likely to generate goals that focus on themselves (to be smarter, to know more, to get a job, etc.) staff are encouraged to weave the social aspects into goals (how can this pursuit include others both for fun and for practical reasons)

  - Short Term
  - Long Term

#### 9.03.04 Career exploration, jobs, and internship possibilities

Internet research, outings, site visits, guest speakers, articles, media clips and group discussions are all great methods for approaching this section. In the next two sections, students will be evaluating their potential work and career options in light of their strengths and weaknesses. In this section, the goal is simply to brainstorm, think creatively and dream big. The list each student generates will shape and revise as they work their way through the remainder of the module, and will be revised throughout their program experience as they change and grow.

- **A. Expanding my understanding of careers & jobs I am already interested in**

Prediction & self-reflection prompts:

  - What parts of this job/career seem easy?
  - What parts of this job seem hard?
  - What aspects do I think I would enjoy the most?
  - Considering my preferences, interests and affinities, in what ways does this job seem like a good fit for me?
  - Considering my personal challenges, in what ways might this job not be a good fit for me?
  - How would this job benefit me in my life?
  - How does this line of work benefit and contribute to others, my community/society?

□ ***B. Exploring careers & jobs that might interest me***

The predicting and self-reflection questions above can be applied to new ideas generated.

□ ***C. Goals***

- Short term: Short term goals will largely be exploratory in nature – getting more information, visiting places, talking to people, etc.
- Long Term: Long term goals will be revised continuously based upon what is learned in the information-gathering stage above and due to individual shifts in interests.

**9.03.05 Increasing social interaction/Building and maintaining social relationships**

This section helps student to bridge their personal interests with social interaction. Students may be able to generate examples from past experiences where they shared in an activity, endeavor or interest with a peer, family member or friend of the family. Media clips and examples of famous interest-based collaborations are also engaging ways to reinforce these concepts with students.

Section 8.0, the Relationships module, includes raising awareness to the idea of interest-based relationships. This module helps students take that concept and practice putting it into action with current interests, affinities and preferences.

- ***A. How can I use my current affinities, preferences & interests to create and improve relationships***
- ***B. How can I identify activities, people, groups and organizations that potentially match my interests, affinities and preferences***
- ***C. What I need find out more about and how do I do it? (talk to people, send emails, research on web, etc.)***
- ***D. Goals***
  - Short term
  - Long term

**9.03.06 Getting more involved in the community**

To help students generate ideas, it is recommended that staff have a list of community organizations on hand. This list gives students a starting point for matching themselves with groups that are align with their interests and affinities. The list does not have to be definitive, for students and staff can co-research additional ideas through the web and walk-about in the community.

An additional benefit to this section is that the process will naturally expand student views on community-based options. Ideas generated in the Understanding and Participating in Community module can provide a wealth of ideas, as will local community papers and websites. A visit to the local business and/or tourism bureau combines fact-finding and social interaction with additional experience navigating the local community.

Staff are encouraged to keep a running list of the places and ideas generated in this section, as they can inspire future field trips, guest speakers and more.

- *A: What groups and activities in the community tie into my current affinities, preferences and interests?*
- *B: How can I use my current affinities, preferences and interests to find new groups and activities in the community?*
- *C: Goals*
  - Short term
  - Long term

### 9.03.07 Capitalizing on my strengths

The concept of capitalizing on a strength is an abstract one. A good starting point for this section is using examples familiar to the student. Looking at famous people (history and now) and drawing the connection between their strengths and their successes is helpful.

Once the concept is anchored, staff can move onto closer, less grand examples drawn from daily living. Use known people such as themselves, family members, and students. Run through as many varied examples as needed until the connection between a strength and the successful accomplishment of a task is clear.

At this point students will be more ready and more flexible in their thinking. This will enable them to apply this concept to their own lives. Teachers can line up experiences and activities that show how their strengths, when applied to doing something, shine through.

To do this, identify a specific strength and an activity that will best highlight it. Example: A student is artistic and writes well. She can do an activity making signs. The signs can then be evaluated in terms of their strengths (artistic qualities, use of color, lettering is even, well-spaced and readable; spelling/words spelled correctly)

The teacher may have the same strength and make a lovely sign as well, or not be skilled in this area and make a shoddy sign.

The activity is followed by reflection:

- What strengths do I have that helped make this task easy?
- Did I enjoy myself more because this was easy to do?

- What other things do I do that are easy for me because of my strengths

Once students have practiced identifying strengths in others and in themselves, they can shift to applying the concept in various contexts below. Use the master lists of strengths developed for each student earlier in this module (Strengths, section 9.02.06). Staff may have to help students recall previously identified and discussed strengths.



CHECKLIST: USING MY STRENGTHS TO EXPAND MY LIFE

9.03.08 Ways I can use and expand on physical strengths and skills

- A. To increase learning*
- B. To interact more meaningfully with others*
- C. To find a good match for internships, jobs or careers*
- D. For fun (recreational activities, hobbies, creative expression etc.)*
- E. Goals*
  - short term*
  - long term*

9.03.09 Ways I can use and expand on my emotional strengths and skills

- A. To increase learning*
- B. To interact more meaningfully with others*
- C. To find a good match for internships, jobs or careers*
- D. For fun (recreational activities, hobbies, creative expression etc.)*
- E. Goals*
  - short term*
  - long term*

9.03.10 Ways I can use and expand on my cognitive strengths and skills

- A. To increase learning*
- B. To interact more meaningfully with others*
- C. To find a good match for internships, jobs or careers*
- D. For fun (recreational activities, hobbies, creative expression etc.)*
- E. Goals*
  - short term*
  - long term*

9.03.11 Ways I can use and expand on my relationship strengths and skills

- A. To increase learning*
- B. To interact more meaningfully with others*
- C. To find a good match for internships, jobs or careers*
- D. For fun (recreational activities, hobbies, creative expression etc.)*
- E. Goals*
  - short term*
  - long term*

9.03.12 Ways I can use and expand on my creative strengths and skills

- A. To increase learning*
- B. To interact more meaningfully with others*
- C. To find a good match for internships, jobs or careers*
- D. For fun (recreational activities, hobbies, creative expression etc.)*
- E. Goals*
  - short term*
  - long term*

9.03.13 Ways I can use and expand on my strengths and skills in self-care, self-advocacy and self-regulation

- A. To increase learning*
- B. To interact more meaningfully with others*
- C. To find a good match for internships, jobs or careers*
- D. For fun (recreational activities, hobbies, creative expression etc.)*
- E. Goals*
  - short term*
  - long term*

9.03.14 Ways I can use and expand on my strengths and skills in managing my responsibilities

- A. To increase learning*
- B. To interact more meaningfully with others*
- C. To find a good match for internships, jobs or careers*
- D. For fun (recreational activities, hobbies, creative expression etc.)*
- E. Goals*
  - short term*
  - long term*

9.03.15 New and other ways I can use this skill

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- A. Personal enjoyment*
- B. Learning*
- C. Relating to others*
- D: For fun*
- E: To help others*
- F: Employment*
- G: Be more creative*

CHECKLIST: WORKING WITH MY CHALLENGES TO EXPAND MY LIFE

9.03.16 Physical challenges

- A: Review the ways my physical challenges affect my life and my ability to do the things I want or need to do*
- B: How others can help me (physically, emotionally, cognitively)*
- C: What I can do (physically, emotionally, cognitively)*
- D: Goals*
  - short term*
  - long term*

9.03.17 Emotional Challenges

- A. Review the ways my emotional challenges affect my life and my ability to do the things I want or need to do*
- B. How others can help me (physically, emotionally, cognitively)*
- C. What I can do (physically, emotionally, cognitively)*
- D. Goals*
  - short term*
  - long term*

9.03.18 Cognitive Challenges

- A. Review the ways my cognitive challenges affect my life and my ability to do the things I want or need to do*
- B. How others can help me (physically, emotionally, cognitively)*
- C. What I can do (physically, emotionally, cognitively)*
- D. Goals*
  - short term*
  - long term*

9.03.19 Relationship skills

- A Review the ways my relationship challenges affect my life and my ability to do the things I want or need to do*
- B How others can help me (physically, emotionally, cognitively)*
- C What I can do (physically, emotionally, cognitively)*
- D Goals*
  - short term*
  - long term*

9.03.20 Creative Expression

- A** *Ways my creative challenges affect my life and my ability to do the things I want or need to do*
- B** *How others can help me (physically, emotionally, cognitively)*
- C** *What I can do (physically, emotionally, cognitively)*
- D** **Goals**
  - short term*
  - long term*

9.03.21 Self-Care & Self-Regulation

- A** *Ways my self-care & self-regulation challenges affect my life and my ability to do the things I want or need to do*
- B** *How others can help me (physically, emotionally, cognitively)*
- C** *What I can do (physically, emotionally, cognitively)*
- D** **Goals**
  - short term*
  - long term*

9.03.22 Managing my responsibilities

- A** *Ways my challenges managing my responsibilities affect my life and my ability to do the things I want or need to do*
- B** *How others can help me (physically, emotionally, cognitively)*
- C** *What I can do (physically, emotionally, cognitively)*
- D** **Goals**
  - short term*
  - long term*

9.03.23 Self-advocacy

- A** *Ways my challenges in speaking up for myself and my needs affect my life and my ability to do the things I want or need to do*
- B** *How others can help me (physically, emotionally, cognitively)*
- C** *What I can do (physically, emotionally, cognitively)*
- D** **Goals**
  - short term*
  - long term*

9.03.24 Summary

The Understanding and Development of Self module thoroughly navigates the exploration of self, an exploration that marks the beginning of a lifelong process. As our strengths, challenges, affinities, interests, passions change, we change. Thus, the material presented here can be revised and revisited at various junctures throughout a student's program experience to help him better see the changes that he has undergone.

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## Section 11.0

# RELATIONSHIPS

*“Nothing is more exciting and bonding in relationships than creating together.”*  
**Stephen Covey**

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## 11.01 Introduction

Relationships are the connective tissues that bind us to our world. We learn everything we know as human beings through relationship to our physical world and social world. In this module we will focus on relationships in our social world. Through our relationships with people we are able to engage with the world, widen our possibilities, practice setting healthy boundaries, and stretch our perspectives.

Relationships can challenge us to develop our own personal communication styles, understand more deeply the differences and similarities between others and ourselves, and provide us with a bridge to independence and areas of personal development. They can be sources of comfort, safety, validation, insight, creativity, and learning. They can also push our buttons, try our patience, force us to compromise, and cause us to question ourselves in uncomfortable ways.

Relationships can be complicated and challenging for anyone. For individuals with regulation, communication, and social engagement challenges, forming and maintaining relationships may be much more complicated. For this reason, it is essential that individuals with ASD and other developmental disabilities have sufficient experience, facilitation, and reflection when working on these skills. Differences in an individual's sensitivity to touch come into sharper focus when decisions about intimacy arise. Challenges in interpreting social cues can pose real barriers understanding the nuances that can accompany dating.

The following material outlines what to cover when helping transition students grasp the essentials of relationships. And happily, we are able to point to a number of other exceptional resources developed for use in this area.

### General guidance for this module

Thinking about relationships is hard for any student, and students with social relationship challenges may find this work particularly difficult. In this module, we will suggest a process whereby first we examine the type of relationship and then reflect upon its significance to the student. We hope this breaks the subject into manageable parts. For students who can process and absorb a large volume of information, staff choose to tackle a whole section in its entirety or at a relatively steady pace. Other students will benefit by addressing each section in a piecemeal fashion, so that they can make meaning from and achieve insight into each piece. Throughout this section, it is important to acknowledge that:

- Discussing relationships may elicit a wide range of emotions. Some individuals may become emotionally dysregulated during the process. Please remember that the emotional experiences that arise while the student navigates this module are as valuable as the cognitive process of understanding its content. Undoubtedly, the emotional experiences may play a role in how quickly an individual can progress through the content.
- Many people define relationships by the context in which they exist. Therefore, students are encouraged to share anecdotes related to their relationships. Here, storytelling can greatly enrich the process.

Some specific tips:

1. Module content can be covered in either 1:1 or small group contexts depending on the individual's preference, learning style, and regulatory profile. Much of this material can be covered in discussion groups.
2. Students will benefit from working one-on-one with staff if they:
  - prefer to discuss certain relationship issues privately;
  - need more emotional support; or
  - need individualized accommodations to support their learning and communication style.
3. Students may benefit from working in small groups if they:
  - stay more engaged in group settings;
  - and/or generate more language and ideas when they are in the presence of others
4. To make the information come alive use:
  - Brainstorming techniques,
  - Incorporate visual maps, create lists and concept maps on white boards and large poster pads. Visuals help students stay focused, make connections, elicit insights, organize thinking, and process meaning. They capture the main points of discussions, help students and staff revisit discussions, and build upon what has already been covered.
  - Incorporate videos, TV shows, and YouTube clips. Our recommendation is for staff to find clips from favorite films or films with which the student is otherwise quite familiar.
  - Creativity plays a key role in this module. Both staff and students are encouraged to find creative ways to represent various relationships through art, movement, role play, costuming, and other creative methods. Interactive approaches energize this section, activate thinking, encourage brainstorming and creativity, and establish meaning.
    - Improvisation and role-playing are particularly helpful activities. By their nature they incorporate the unexpected through actions, words, and expressions. Using these activities students generate real world scenarios in a safe and supportive practice environment.
  - There are many ways to define something without using words. Staff are encouraged to find multiple creative non-verbal ways to have students play with concepts and understand them.
5. All the material below can be adjusted to fit each individual's cognitive, regulatory, and language capabilities. The rate, volume, complexity and overall approach to discussing relationships should be modified based upon the individual's processing speed, verbal or informational overwhelm thresholds, cognitive stamina, and language capability

## 11.02 Establishing the Importance of Relationships

Relationships provide three general domains of benefit: personal, interpersonal, and practical. Below, we provide a structure for students to discuss each of these benefits with their peers and transition staff.

For many students, it is easiest to begin discussing relationships in small peer groupings. Individuals with significant attention, social cognition, or regulation issues can start 1:1 with a staff member and move into group settings when they are developmentally prepared.

A small group configuration is beneficial because it invites key elements of relating to play out in real time: reciprocity, listening, giving and receiving feedback, expressing multiple perspectives, self-regulation, group brainstorming, and social awareness.

For each area below, have students generate multiple examples. Incorporate role-play to help establish concepts, elicit emotions, and create engagement. Ideas generated by the group can be represented visually in creative ways for later discussions. *There are many relationship-based and relationship building games available for staff to access through education, psychology, and team building sources that can be modified and used in this module; we have listed a few of them below in the References section at the end of this module.*

Remember to lead relationship discussions with humor, curiosity, and compassion for others. This allows staff to model positive ways to relate to others. Once each domain is discussed, the group should focus on drawing personal conclusions about each topic. This will foster self-evaluation, big-picture thinking, summarization, and reflection. Having students express their preferences and priorities about which benefits are most meaningful to them allows insights to develop that will carry forward through the rest of the module.

### 11.02.01 Personal Benefits

Explore general personal benefits of relationships in terms of increasing opportunities for:

- Self-reflection and personal development
- Learning through observation and modeling by others
- Widening perspective
- Building social problem-solving skills
- Setting appropriate personal boundaries with others
- Learning how to receive (help, compliments, gifts, etc.)
- Better health and wellness
- Support in managing stress
- Sense of belonging and purpose
- Self-compassion
- Happiness
- Student-generated benefits

### 11.02.02 Interpersonal Benefits

Explore the interpersonal benefits:

- Learning compassion for others
- Compromising and negotiating
- Sharing positive experiences, objects, feelings, ideas
- Increased tolerance, appreciation, and/or enjoyment of differences among people
- Collaborating and co-creating
- Group problem-solving
- Opportunities to work on patience, flexibility, taking turns, and other key interpersonal skills
- Learning how to forgive and repair
- Student-generated benefits

### 11.02.03 Practical Benefits

Practical benefits form the third domain. Explore these in terms of:

- Reducing isolation and loneliness
- Increasing work and career options
- Navigating one's communities more effectively
- Widening options for activities, recreational endeavors, and other pursuits that require more than one person or require skills one does not have (whether it be task-oriented, like setting up a tent, or process-oriented, like completing a project)
- Student-generated benefits

### 11.03 Types of Relationships

The sequencing of the steps outlined on the following pages can be individualized according to each student's learning style. For example, students who struggle with comprehension, language (receptive or expressive), or idea generation might benefit from watching examples of relationships in video clips first, as suggested above. This will get their visual thinking activated and establish the meaning and type of relationship to be discussed before they are asked to draw from their own personal experiences. Other students might begin by discussing personal experiences, then watch the videos, and then return to add more to their personal information based on insights or thoughts that the video clips elicit.

Often the differences among relationships are due to subtle characteristics such as intensity or comfort level. The distinctions between strangers versus acquaintances and friends versus close friends are much more subtle than the differences between an apple and a cucumber. Many individuals on the autism spectrum find the concept of gradations challenging because differences among concepts are less clear to them. For this reason, they often find *making comparisons* and *identifying similarities* conceptually challenging.

#### Visualizing shadings of difference

Visually representing relationships on a graduated scale can be helpful for deepening understanding. After discussing each type of relationship, the student places it on his own personal relationship scale. This can be revisited and revised over time as relationship skills strengthen. The scale can vary depending on the individual.

**Begin devising such a scale by drawing a line.** Write an opposing key word at each end of the line (easy/hard, comfortable/uncomfortable, calming/agitating, etc.) Any number of degrees of gradation can be added between these polar opposites – as many as the student finds useful.

#### 11.03.01 Family

Relationships with family members are core experiences that follow us through our lifetimes. The connective forces that hold family relationships together can include need, tradition, culture, religion, affection, and shared interests – to name just a few. The continuum of variation in family relationships is vast – some are underscored by nurturance and expressions of love, others are colored by tension and conflict, most fall somewhere in between.

This section is designed to support students in:

- Exploring relationships they have with each member of their family
- Understanding roles and patterns of relating
- Generating goals for increasing positive family interactions, and reducing conflicts and unhealthy patterns of relating

Family dynamic activities used in counseling and psychology to help clients visualize, understand and articulate family relationships can be abridged and used in this section. Some examples are provided below.

### Close and not- close family relationships

Examine close family relationships with the following steps:

1. Define what is meant by “close family relationships”
2. List close family members
3. List favorite/desired qualities in each close family member
4. Examine what can be challenging about relationships with close family members
5. Benefits – how does being close with some family members contribute positively to life
6. Watch video clip examples, note observations of qualities that define a close family relationship. Have the student note each of these communication qualities:
  1. Verbal
  2. Nonverbal
  3. Emotional tone
  4. Behavior
  5. Word choice
  6. Personal goals regarding close family relationships

***Repeat the process with not-close family relationships, observing the differences.***

#### 11.03.02 Strangers

Strangers are a big part of social relating, especially when navigating public places. It is important that everyone have tools for how to approach and interact with someone unfamiliar to them. Strangers can be helpful when one is lost, entertaining while waiting in line, or potential new friends, and so much more. Because interactions with strangers can be positive, negative, or not of consequence, it is critical that transitioning young adults develop the life skills to address a range of possible experiences with strangers.

Most of us interact with strangers in a wide variety of ways. Some people meet strangers with confidence and curiosity, while others are more subdued or hesitant. For individuals on the autism spectrum, encounters with strangers may be intensified. Individuals with high reactivity to the unexpected or unfamiliar are prone to anxiety, hesitation, shyness, or withdrawal. Other individuals may seek novelty and newness. They may embrace meeting new people with enjoyment – sometimes charmingly, other times overstepping personal boundaries or breaking unspoken etiquette. Another common reaction to strangers may be giddiness, leading to agitation and interfering with the ability to be present and engage meaningfully. It is

important to take the time to understand how each student defines the concept of *stranger* and what reactions (emotional, cognitive, sensory, etc.) may be elicited when thinking about interacting with one. Personality and temperament as well as past experiences influence interactions with strangers as well.

This section addresses the practical, social, and emotional issues that arise when interacting with strangers. The goal is for students to develop a balance of flexibility, skills, and awareness that enable them to relate with new people while also staying safe.

Examine relationships with strangers using the following steps:

1. Define “stranger”
2. Examine interactions with strangers
  - In passing
  - Approached by a stranger
    - Asking you for information
    - Striking up a casual conversation
    - Making a request
  - Approach a stranger
    - When to do it
    - Practice doing it
3. Things to remember when interacting with strangers
  - Etiquette
  - Knowns (what I can observe when meeting someone for the first time)
    - Body language
    - What they say
    - Context (what can I assume to be true based on the context in which I meet a stranger)
  - Unknowns
  - Personal Safety
4. How to disengage from an interaction with a stranger
  - Signs they want to end the interaction
  - When you want to end the interaction
  - When circumstances end the interaction
5. Goals regarding interactions with strangers



**Resource materials on relationships with strangers include:**

- <http://www.researchautism.org/resources/newsletters/archives/documents/TeachingChildrenwithAutismHowtoRespondtothertheLuresofStrangers.pdf>
- Social story activity guidelines  
[http://www.cheri.com.au/PDF\\_Files/professionals/Whatisasocialstory.pdf](http://www.cheri.com.au/PDF_Files/professionals/Whatisasocialstory.pdf)
- Stranger safety <http://www.thesafeside.com/>
- Children's books on strangers such as The Berenstain Bears learn About Strangers, Stan & Jan Berenstain, Random House, 1985
- [https://www.kidsuncomplicated.com/resources/page/reference\\_materials](https://www.kidsuncomplicated.com/resources/page/reference_materials)
- Cartoon episodes with emotional characters such as Anime, or relationship-themed such as My Little Pony, etc., that focus on themes surrounding strangers
- Sitcom episodes (especially with exaggerated acting, slapstick and high affect) that have a stranger theme – select simple plots so focus can stay on the stranger dynamic rather than comprehension and following a complex story

### 11.03.03 Acquaintances

For the sake of this section, an acquaintance is a person with whom one has some slight friendship or association; someone who is known and encountered regularly, but not known well.

Follow the step-by-step process outlined above in the close family relationships section 11.03.1, modifying as needed. Add the following step:

- Compare acquaintances to strangers (similarities and differences)

### 11.03.04 Friends

Examine friendships with the following steps:

1. Define "friend"
2. Whom does the student consider his friends? (list names)
3. Benefits to having friends
  - Ways he benefits from the friendship
  - Ways his friends benefit from the friendship
4. Challenges in friendships
  - Typical friendship issues

- Problems the student is currently having
5. What kinds of etiquette apply?
  6. What expectations are there about friends?
  7. Activities: Include watching video clip examples, note observations of qualities that define the relationship as a friendship; role-play scenarios to practice and highlight the dynamics of interacting with friends; small group discussions on presented scenarios. Aspects of interactions to examine:
    - Verbal
    - Nonverbal
    - Emotional tone
    - Behavior
    - Word choice
  8. What goals are there regarding friendships?

### 11.03.05 Close Friends

Close friends, often called best friends, are key support systems in life. They offer us chances to relax, be playful, and be our true selves. Within this dynamic, we experience personal growth and insight as well as gain important emotional and social skills.

Some students may have not yet experienced close friendships. In those cases, help them understand the notion of close friendship by drawing from movies, TV shows, books, or from observing the lives of peers or siblings.

Examine close friendships with the following steps:

1. Define “close friend”
2. List favorite/desired qualities in a close friend
3. Examine longtime friendships, using process outlined in the Friends section; modify as needed
4. Examine new close friendships, using process outlined in the Friends section; modify as needed
5. Compare acquaintances vs. close friends, close friends vs. longtime friends

### 11.03.06 Love Relationships

Love relationships are complicated as a concept and experience. Dissecting and discussing them can prove even more complex. In young adults with ASD and other developmental disabilities, social, emotional, cognitive, and communication challenges may influence how to tackle issues such as dating, romantic love, and physical desire. Let student interest in the topic guide the timing and approach to this section:

- Has the individual expressed curiosity (verbally or non-verbally)?
- Has the individual had prior experience (been on a date or had a boyfriend or girlfriend)?

Some students will be interested and ready to tackle dating and romantic love as explicit subjects. While other students will be better served through a less personal, broader context (movies, stories, famous real and mythical romantic relationships) approach. The transition team can further develop the concepts and work with students to apply them personally when ready.

#### Dating

Some students in the program may have been on a date or had someone in their life who they considered a boyfriend or girlfriend. Depending on the depth and meaning of those experiences, they may be able to draw from them. Other individuals may not have any dating experience but express curiosity due to their own desires or seeing such situations on TV or in movies. Staff are encouraged to connect with students at their emotional and developmental levels – that is to say, as much as possible, build upon what is already familiar to them.

**NOTE:** *This is an area where staff knowledge of individual students and relationships with them is extremely important, and staff will need to be creative in developing activities best suited to each individual. Some students may need to delay this topic until they show interest. Other students may be ready but would do best with 1:1 work until they gain the skills to stay regulated and engaged in group discussions.*

Unrealistic and overly stylized dating shows on TV in the last decade misrepresent the dating process to young adults. These shows will likely come up and can be good fodder for discussion. Consider them invitations to add realism by comparing them with real world experience.

Insofar as possible, staff are encouraged to find realistic portrayals when using media (video clips or movies.) It can be an effective teaching tool to show the sharp contrast between an unrealistic and a realistic clip if the student is able to understand the contrast and meaning behind the comparison.

When approaching topics of dating and sex with groups of students, it is important the group members are compatible in terms of developmental levels, and with regard to sensory and regulatory issues.

Examine dating relationships with the following steps:

1. Define “dating”
  - What is dating?
  - What is a date?
  - Why date?
2. Qualities desired in a prospective date
3. List individuals student has dated or is interested in dating
4. Benefits – how can a dating relationship contribute positively to life
  - Ways individual could benefit from dating
  - Ways other person might benefit
5. Challenges – what can go wrong in a dating relationship?
  - Typical new close friend issues
  - Problems student is currently having in the area
  - Identify regulation issues that might arise while on a date and problem-solve for positive responses
6. Etiquette issues
7. Expectations
8. Personal dating goals
9. Watch video clip examples, note observations of qualities that define it as a positive dating relationship and friendship
  - Verbal
  - Nonverbal
  - Emotional tone
  - Behavior
  - Word choice

10. Watch video clip examples, note observations of qualities that define it as an unhealthy dating relationship. Follow process outlined immediately above.

## Sex

One aspect of dating that requires a thoughtful and careful approach is sex. This module offers teachers the opportunity to address sex as it relates to dating: sexual attraction, flirting, sexual exploration and the act of sex itself. Typically, these issues are all elements of the dating process to varying degrees and are connected to one's readiness and maturity. For individuals on the spectrum, navigating the ambiguity of sex and dating is often complicated by developmental delays, sensory processing challenges and regulatory difficulties.

From a developmental standpoint, there will be great variation among students in terms of their readiness and maturity. Some will be curious and able to discuss sex and dating in a serious manner, where others may become giddy, silly and disruptive. Some may already have had sexual desires or experiences whereas others have not begun to incorporate it into their thinking, much less their experience.

From a sensory standpoint, some students may have sensory sensitivities to touch that affect their willingness and desire to relate to others in a sexual way.

Lastly, students with challenges in regulation may not be ready to approach discussions on sex and dating without becoming hijacked by their emotions. All of these elements must be weighed when designing the timing and approach to sex and dating with young adults on the spectrum.

Thus pacing, presentation; timing; attention and mindfulness surrounding language and word choice; selection of age and stage-appropriate supplemental course material; establishment and reinforcement of clear boundaries, group rules and norms; and flexibility to create breakout smaller groupings are all important factors for teachers to consider in planning and implementation of discussions surrounding sexuality.

A comprehensive, detailed and highly practical treatment of the subject can be found in [Intimate Relationships and Sexual Health: A Curriculum for Teaching Adolescents/Adults with High Functioning Autism Spectrum Disorders and Other Social Challenges](#), by Catherine Davies and Melissa Dubie. The authors include suggested lessons and teachers' notes as well as worksheets for use by students. Warnings about the explicitness of some material are included as appropriate. Topic areas range from anatomy and reproductive health to discussion of the science of sexual response, attitudes, dating and maintaining relationships and avoiding sexual victimization. While the Davies/Dubie curriculum is aimed at high-functioning individuals, the level of detail and structure of the curriculum makes it easily adaptable to a wider disability population.

## Marriage

Marriage will be a goal for some students, whereas for others it will not. Students and staff should work together to determine how students might benefit from discussing marriage. It can be tackled as a broad concept and/or presented specifically in relation to their parents and other married couples known to them. Students who are interested and developmentally / emotionally ready can also examine marriage as a life choice they may wish to make. This is a highly individual area of exploration and one that can result in a great deal of anxiety for some students.

Issues surrounding having children and divorce are life choices/situations that may or may not be relevant to students. These two topics can be emotionally laden for some, while others may have little context or interest. Asking students directly if they have interest in becoming parents can open doors to rich discussions that some students will find compelling. Questions along this line give staff insight about issues to be addressed further or at a different time.

Those who are not interested or ready to discuss being a parent will likely provide a “Yes” or “No” answer and wish to move on. Those who have experienced divorce in their families are likely to incorporate that experience into their views on marriage. Thus, there will be natural opportunities to discuss these topics during this section.

If students wish to talk more about their personal experiences with divorce in their families, staff are encouraged to create a separate discussion group to meet their needs. This will ensure discussions of marriage do not get sidetracked by a few participants who need to delve into it deeper than others.

Examine marriage relationships using the following steps:

1. Define “marriage”
  - Based on what they know first-hand (watching married couples interact, especially parents)
  - Based on movies, TV, etc.
2. Interested in marriage?
  - Why
  - Why not
3. Interested in having children?
  - Why
  - Why not
4. List favorite/desired qualities in someone you might want to marry
5. Benefits – how can a marriage relationship contribute positively to one’s life?
  - Ways it could benefit student’s life
  - Ways it could benefit his or her partner
6. Benefits – how can having children contribute positively to one’s life?
  - Ways having children could benefit student’s life
  - Ways having children could benefit his or her partner

7. Challenges – what can go wrong in marriage relationships?
  - Typical marriage issues
  - Problems one might have while married
  - Identify regulation issues that might arise in an ongoing cohabitating relationship and problem-solve for positive responses
8. Expectations
9. Watch video clip examples, observe qualities that define a healthy marriage
  - Verbal
  - Nonverbal
  - Emotional tone
  - Behavior
  - Word choice
10. Watch video clip examples, note observations of qualities that define it as an unhealthy marriage. Use same process as in 9 above.

### 11.03.07 Functional Relationships

Life is full of people who contribute to our experiences in functional ways that often we take for granted or do not reflect on. Since one of the overarching goals of the transition curriculum is to build and strengthen independent living skills for individuals with developmental disabilities, this section is quite important.

A vital step toward becoming independent involves raising awareness of community members and the roles they play. How should one interact and collaborate with them? This section also opens the door to addressing two central program goals: strengthening social problem-solving and building self-advocacy skills.

The functional relationships section is also quite beneficial from an emotional standpoint. For many individuals on the spectrum, being out and about in the community can feel like tiptoeing through a mine field of unexpected interactions and demands. This section helps students become more familiar with the types of community interactions they might experience, reducing anxiety and fear of the unfamiliar. If a student has had traumatic experiences in the community or carries a lot of generalized anxiety in this domain, it may be advisable to approach the subject broadly and neutrally at first, working towards a more personal approach as the student becomes ready.

This section is designed to be very interactive and creative. Functional relationships can be visually represented through charts and pictures, acted out through role-play and improvisation, represented in a puppet show, highlighted with action figures, etc. (you tube video clips, movies, tv shows)

Below is a list of key functional relationships and a process for examining them. The rate, volume, complexity, and sequence can all be adjusted to meet the needs of individual students. Staff can add to the list as needed and skip categories not relevant to the individual's life.

Consider functional relationships with:

- Waitresses
- Other people commonly seen in the community through an exchange (great opportunity for brainstorming)
- Bus driver
- Pharmacist
- People depended upon for specific reasons (great opportunity for brainstorming)
- Ticket takers (amusement parks, theaters)
- Front desk people and greeters (first points of contact)
- Store and mall personnel (cashiers, salespeople)
- Bank tellers
- Postal and other delivery people
- Add more with student (opportunity for brainstorming)

The general process to examine functional relationships is:

1. Define “functional relationship”
2. List functional relationships student can identify
3. Benefits – how does each relationship contribute positively to student’s life?
  - Ways student benefits from cultivating a relationship with each
  - Ways the other person can better help student if relationship is developed
4. Challenges – what can go wrong; typical issues that can arise
5. Examine issues student has with one or more functional relationships
6. List favorite/desired qualities
7. Etiquette issues
8. Expectations
9. Watch video clip examples. Note qualities in the interactions that reflect the relationship (positive and negative examples)
  - Verbal
  - Nonverbal
  - Emotional tone
  - Behavior
  - Word choice
10. Personal goals for functional relationships

### 11.03.08 Safety and Authority Figure Relationships

Because safety and authority figures are related to issues that can have significant emotional charge or are connected to trauma, this section may need to be modified or delayed until the timing is appropriate.

- Police
- Firemen



- Ambulance drivers and paramedics
- Security guards (mall, loss prevention in stores)
- School personnel/administrators
- Other (great opportunity for brainstorming)

Use the Functional Relationships process given earlier.

#### 11.03.09 Care Provider Relationships

Students who have had traumatic experiences associate with health care providers may struggle in this section. If so, this section may need to be modified or delayed until the timing is appropriate.

Examine relationships with care providers using the following steps:

- Therapists
- Doctors
- Nurses (take blood, take your information)
- Alternative healers (acupuncture, yoga, massage, chiropractor, etc.)
- Other (great opportunity for brainstorming)

Use the Functional Relationships process given earlier.

#### 11.03.10 Learning Relationships

Students who have a checkered or painful history with schools and learning might struggle when asked to discuss learning relationships. If so, modified this section or delay until the timing is appropriate.

Examine learning relationships using the following steps:

- Teachers
- Facilitators, aides, tutors
- Instructors and coaches (art, martial arts, sports, music, etc.)
- other (great opportunity for brainstorming)

Use the Functional Relationships process given earlier.

#### 11.03.11 Supportive Relationships (Not Family Members)

Examine supportive relationships using the following steps:

- Mentors – unpaid relationships where someone has elected to take on supporting the individual to accomplish a goal or to provide additional support and interaction. Often a former teacher, babysitter, best buddy, etc.
- Family friends
- Neighbors
- other (great opportunity for brainstorming)

Use the Functional Relationships process given earlier.

### 11.03.12 Work Relationships

Individuals in the transition program may not yet have work experience by the time they reach this module. If a student has work experience – even small paid chores, an allowance with expectations of household work, or a casual or isolated job – draw as much as possible from their firsthand experience.

Whether a student has had work experience or not, this section should be considered a warm-up or introduction to the Work and Career Development module. Though some may not have worked yet, it is likely they have had exposure to ideas about work through movies, TV, and experiences their parents may have shared. They may have also held responsibilities or chores at home that can be framed as “jobs” and used as examples during discussion.

Examine relationships with bosses, supervisors, and co-workers using the following steps:

1. Define “work relationship”
2. List ideal qualities in a boss
3. Benefits – how can an employee-boss relationship contribute positively?
  - How the student can benefit
  - How the employer or boss can benefit
4. Challenges – what can go wrong in an employee-boss relationship?
  - Typical issues that arise
  - Predicting potential issues student may have
5. Activities list: Watch video clip examples, observe qualities in the interaction that reflect an employee-boss/supervisor relationship
  - Verbal
  - Nonverbal
  - Emotional tone
  - Behavior
  - Word choice
6. Personal goals

Repeat the above steps with regard to co-workers.

### 11.03.13 Fellow Program Members/Students

This section can be modified and revisited as needed throughout the program as the individual experiences changes in relationships, preferences, and needs.

The general process to examine relationships with fellow program members (fellow students) is:

1. Identify
  - Friends
  - Fellow students he would like to know better
  - Fellow students he has difficulty relating to
2. Benefits
  - How a student relationship can contribute positively
  - How the student can benefit from relationships with other program members
  - How other program members can benefit
3. Challenges – what can go wrong in a student relationship?
  - Typical issues that arise
  - The student's personal issues
4. List favorite/desired qualities in a fellow student
5. Etiquette, including effects on others in the program
6. Expectations
7. Personal goals
8. Making comparisons amongst student relationships

## 11.04 Assessing and Reflecting on Current Relationships and Personal Relationship Skills

### 11.04.01 Categorizing and Making Meaning

Using a visual organizer such as a chart, graph, color code, or white board, have the individual make some big picture assessments about their relationships. This picture assessment can be a familiar one such as a graphic family tree, or teachers and students can use their creativity to find other ways to represent connections and relationships.

Staff can use knowledge of the individual's learning style to pick a visual format to begin, or engage him or her in the selection of something appealing. The key is to find a format that is clear and streamlined. Concept maps with too many offshoots and subcategories can be confusing visually and cognitively. Concept maps can be applied to pre-writing, planning, group brainstorming, parts-to-whole analysis, information reminders, and so forth, and are useful in many different learning contexts.

Visual representation of relationships help students to both visualize and conceptualize relational connections. These tools enable teachers to engage the student through art, color and symbols to indicate important qualities that define the relationship such as:

- level of intimacy/closeness
- duration
- comfort level
- type of relationship
- proximity
- frequency of interaction

Once visual representations of a student's relationships are done they can be used as tools for group discussions, writing stories or plays, role play and improv scenarios, comparison and contrast (among a student's relationships and between students) discussions and games, relationship goal setting activities and more.

### 11.04.02 Drawing Conclusions

1. Have the individual identify key relationships and circle them (no more than 5-8)
2. List one to three things the student likes and one to three things he doesn't like about each key relationship. Focus on the **relationship** and **interactions with** the individual under discussion, not on the person himself.
  - My role
  - The other person's role
  - Mutual roles
3. What conclusions can be drawn now that the student sees his relationships laid out before him? Encourage student to make spontaneous observations using these guiding questions:
  - Do you have many relationship of the same type? Thoughts on why?

- Are you lacking some types of relationships? Would you like that to be different? What types of friendships would you add? (*Example: friends who share the same interests*)
- Would you like to make any changes to your relationships? (be specific)
- Make relationship goals – be specific
  - by need (*Example: I need more supportive friends*)
  - by desire (*Example: I want some friends who will be goofy with me/who will go fishing with me*)
  - staff/teacher suggestions

#### 11.04.03 Big Picture Reflection on Relationship Skills

Consider the size of the discussion group when beginning this section. For some students it may make sense to begin this discussion in a 1:1 setting due to the personal nature of reflection. If the student has good, stable friendships with peers, discussions with them providing feedback could be very effective. Discussions in this section will benefit by using a student’s concept maps and other graphic depictions of relationships from the previous section. Proceed with the following steps:

1. Relationship strengths
  - In which relationships does the student excel?
  - How is he a “good friend” because of this strength and how do others respond to him?
2. Brainstorm ways student can capitalize on these strengths in current relationships and in forming new ones
3. Relationship challenges
  - In which relationships does he struggle?
  - In what ways would he consider himself a “difficult or demanding” friend and how do others respond to him?
  - Brainstorm ways to lessen challenges in current relationships and in forming new ones. Focus on what student can do, not others.
4. Ways and means for improving relationship skills

This section is meant to be experiential: involving role-play, group work, improvisation, discussion, etc. Draw from concrete examples and scenarios from existing relationships. If student has trouble choosing, use concept maps and help student come up with an incident gone wrong that he wants to do differently – or make up a scenario. Staff should be taking notes so they can fold their observations into the Personal Reflection section that follows.

The following are types of relationship scenarios listed in order of increasing difficulty. Staff and students can add to the list as needed or apply it to a current conflict or social problem that has arisen in the program environment. Note that “asking” or “communicating” doesn’t necessarily have to involve words.

- Asking for something to use, have, borrow (close, not close)
- Asking someone to do/not do something (close, not close)
- Communicating my feelings (close & not close)
- Asking a friend to change his responses, behaviors

Create role-play scenarios for each of the above. Examine each scenario using the following steps:

- A. What was positive about the interaction? Be specific:
  - In terms of words: To which words and phrases did people react positively? Are there other situations where those same words can be used to get a positive result?
  - In terms of feelings and how they were expressed: What feelings were expressed in an effective way? In what ways did people respond positively? Are there other situations where expressing feelings this way could be used to get positive results?
  - With gestures, body language: What movements, gestures, and body language were expressed in an effective way? In what ways did people respond positively? Are there other situations where holding one's body, gesturing, or moving this way could be used to get a positive result?
- B. What was difficult about the interaction?
  - In terms of words: Which words used in this scenario led to difficulty? In what way were words used ineffectively (be specific)? What reactions did they cause in other people? What other ways could words be used that might change the interaction and result positively?
  - In terms of feelings and how they were expressed: What feelings were expressed that caused the interaction to go awry? How were they expressed? What reactions did they cause in other people? What other ways could feelings be expressed in these situations to cause a more positive outcome? (This would be a good opportunity to discuss gradations of intensity in how one expresses feeling. Experiment with adjusting the control buttons - intensity, body language, word choice, etc.)
  - In terms of gestures and body language: What body language and movements played a part in this interaction going awry? What reactions did they cause in other people? What are some different ways the student could move or hold his body so he creates a more positive outcome?
  - In terms of actions: What actions contributed to this situation going awry? How did people respond to those actions? What are different ways one could act in this situation that would more likely lead to a positive outcome?

C. Expectations (realistic vs. unrealistic demands on others)

- Did the student start this interaction or come to this situation with an expectation or desire for how he wanted it to go? Did this expectation affect his thoughts, feelings, body language, and actions? Did it have a positive or negative effect on his experience? Was the expectation realistic or unrealistic? In what situations is it good and okay to express his expectations out loud?

D. Involving others (who to enlist, especially in situations involving problem solving and conflict resolution)

- What are the signs in an interaction that it is not going well? Would another person getting involved be helpful? How would she help? Who would be a good person to ask?

E. Reflection

Once students have reflected on the dimensions above and have generated alternate ideas, run the role-play scenario again but this time using the new ideas. See if the outcome is different and more positive.

5. Negotiating, compromising, and resolving conflicts

Conflict resolution and negotiation require thinking, communication, relationships, and general awareness skills. These include: being aware of one's own nonverbal communication; reading non-verbal cues (body language, tone of voice, etc.) ; managing internal and external emotional responses; taking other people's perspectives; social problem-solving; thinking creatively; collaborating; word choice; listening skills; reciprocity.

The following process is designed to help individuals on the autism spectrum or with other developmental disabilities grasp the foundation and nuances of interacting with others when negotiation and compromise are called for. The concepts exercises below should be incorporate the usual wide variety of learning methods.

A. Define "negotiation." Use activities and media clips to establish an understanding.

View/demonstrate examples of successful negotiation vs. broken down negotiation and compare (role play, improvisation, media clips)

- When do I negotiate in my relationships? (parents and permission, asking for something, social situations, peer interactions)
- Assessing my negotiation skills
  - good at
  - struggle with
- Ideas for improvement and negotiation goals

B. Define "compromise." Use activities and media clips to establish an understanding.

- When do I compromise in my relationships? (parents, peers, social events, etc.)
- Compare examples of successful vs. unsuccessful compromises (role-play, improvisation, media clips)

- Assessing my skills in compromising
  - Good at
  - Struggle with
- Ideas for improvement and goals for improving compromise

### Regulation first

Successful negotiation, compromise, and conflict-resolution require students to be regulated. In addition to facilitating student interactions, staff members need to be aware of the regulation issues of each student involved and provide any support needed.

These skills take time to establish and refine. Reinforce them continually in many contexts, activities, projects, games, and decision-making sessions. Look for opportunities in any situation where disagreement might arise and compromise will be crucial: group work, free time, in residence (issues that arise after program hours at the

6. Things I need/want to change in myself to improve my relationships
 

Use a visual chart to record brainstormed ideas, reference back as needed to prior discussions and relationship maps. Sometimes the answer might be non-relational, such as stepping out of the room to calm down in order to be less reactive. Be as creative as possible in brainstorming ideas.

  - A. Thoughts – how can I express my thoughts so my relationships go smoother? (What should I consider about the other person, the context, timing, etc.)
    - Productive thoughts
    - Unproductive thoughts
  - B. Feelings – how can I express my feelings (good, bad, ugly, giddy, etc.) so relationships go smoother? (What should I consider about the other person, the context, timing, etc.)
    - Productive feelings
    - Unproductive feelings
  - C. Behaviors – how can I act in pro-social ways that help my relationships go smoother? (What should I consider about the other person, the context, timing, etc.)
    - Productive behaviors
    - Unproductive behaviors
  - D. Expectations - how can I manage my friendship expectations so my relationships go smoother? (What should I consider about the other person, the context, timing, etc.)
    - Realistic and productive expectations
    - Unrealistic and unproductive expectations



### 11.05 Starting New Relationships

Once an individual has a stronger perception of relationships and ability to reflect on them, he is ready to examine how to apply this new awareness to forming new relationships.

Relationships often begin under the following circumstances:

- Forming friendships
- Attraction and flirting (can be delayed if individual is not developmentally ready)
- Out and about in the community
- New teacher or instructor
- New doctor or therapist
- Other (great opportunity for brainstorming)

Use these steps to examine each context:

1. Define and describe
2. Tips
3. Turn offs
4. Etiquette (include setting personal boundaries)
5. Managing expectations

### 11.06 Transitioning from Acquaintance to Friendship

For many people, across many relationship types, this next phase happens organically. Individuals on the autism spectrum, who struggle with transitions in general and/or possess challenges in social cognition, may find relationship transitions difficult and confusing. For this reason, we enumerate steps to help individuals recognize shifts in relationships and build the skills needed to navigate them more successfully.

The steps to use are:

1. Identify who to pursue a deeper relationship with and why
2. Identify clues other people give signifying they have opened the door for/desire a deeper connection (verbal and nonverbal)
3. Obstacles to avoid
4. How expectations and personal responsibility changes in a deepening friendship
5. Other aspects of transitioning (attraction, uneven desire – one person wants to be closer than other)
6. Practicing (role play and discussions)
7. Goals (identifying a current casual relationship and strategizing how to deepen it)

To help the student with transitioning relationships, we suggest the following tools: use examples from people discussed in previous sections in this module; use examples from student's past experiences; create scenarios for discussion; role-play and improvisation; use social stories from books and other resources.

### 11.07 Maintaining Relationships

Maintaining relationships is like tending garden. Both require awareness, effort, cultivation, “weeding,” addressing issues that pop up, and much more. Without this attention, relationships become choked with weeds and unhealthy. This section is designed to help individuals with developmental disabilities keep their relationships healthy. As in all previous sections, staff can use visual aids, creative activities, movement, and other experiential approaches in all discussions.

The following is a list of types of relationships that often require maintenance, management or action to keep the connection engaged and growing:

- Friendships
- Dating (when student is interested)
- Teachers, fellow students, co-workers, and other people the student has ongoing exposure to and with whom there exists the potential for relationship growth

Students learn relationship maintenance by examining each of the following:

1. What are the benefits to having ongoing friendships
  - Social
  - Emotional
  - Health and general wellness
  - Support in difficult times
  - Fulfills a specific personal need or purpose
2. Tips: Useful suggestions for maintaining friendships
3. Turn offs: Things to avoid
4. Etiquette (social conventions)
5. Managing expectations (on both sides of the relationship)
6. Taking personal responsibility for changes in an ongoing friendship
7. Addressing conflicts that arise within friendships
  - Identifying signs of issues, conflicts between people
    - verbal
    - nonverbal
    - how to approach resolving conflicts – ways to disarm, lessen tension, and communicate concerns and issues)
    - signs the conflict is being resolved
8. Recognizing warning signs a conflict is unresolved
9. Learning to let go of bad feelings created by a conflict: How to move on, how to avoid grudges, resentment, tension, awkwardness)

10. Other issues surrounding conflicts between friends (other people taking sides, gossip, peer influence/interference, etc.)

### Low-maintenance relationships

Not all relationships require active maintenance. Casual relationships out in the community sometimes are best left casual. Some friendships are not destined to become close or personal and work fine on a superficial level. Students learn best about “low maintenance” relationships by means of examples. Students should learn to distinguish them from other relationships on a track to grow – due to individual desire, mutual desire, need, or utility.

### 11.08 Deepening Friendships

**Note:** You can also use the following process while working on romantic relationships to augment the curriculum of the **Dating** section.

Deepening friendships arise when people in a relationship desire to become closer. This sort of dynamic introduces many complex and nuanced interpersonal dimensions such as:

- Bringing someone into confidence (telling secrets)
- Shifting personal boundaries
- Maintaining reciprocity, collaboration, compromise, and negotiation
- Repair and resiliency (when things have gone awry)
- Identifying and addressing miscommunications
- Increasing personal responsibility within the relationship
- Loyalty and trust
- Timing and pacing

Listed below are topics to explore with each student about deepening friendships. It is particularly helpful for the student when he can draw on personal experiences based on current friendships. It can be helpful to watch media clips, engage in discussions supported by a wide variety of activities, creative expression, and experimentation through role-play, improvisation, social stories, scenarios, and case studies.

1. Why deepen friendships?
  - Benefits
  - Challenges
2. Clues people give indicating they have opened the door for/desire a deeper friendship (verbal and nonverbal)
3. How expectations and personal responsibility change in a deepening friendship
4. Other issues of deepening friendships (inequality in effort/desire, crushes, other social dynamics such as their friends don't like you)
5. Challenges to deepening friendships
6. Practicing (role play and discussions)
7. Goals (identifying a current casual relationship and strategizing how to deepen it)

### 11.09 Ending Relationships

Ending a relationship is often a difficult process. It can happen slowly over time or abruptly; it can be a conscious decision or a drifting apart; emotionally exhausting or a relief; self-initiated or initiated by another; end dramatically or go out with a whisper....and these are just a few of the possible ending scenarios.

Approach students working on this section with compassion. Ending a relationship – or having one ended by another -- can be painful, but the aftermath can be worse. Support discussions with a wide variety of activities, creative expression, and experimentation through role-play, improvisation, social stories, scenarios, and case studies. The group or individual might want to begin by generating a list of scenarios or reasons to end relationships. Use visual maps to illustrate brainstorming. Explore:

Why and when to end friendships

- What are the signs (subtle and obvious) a friendship has run its course or is no longer a good or healthy friendship? How does this unhealthy friendship make me feel and/or do me harm?

How to End a Friendship

- What to do, what to say, and how to say it

#### Aftercare

An ending friendship carries with it feelings of grief for the loss, with residual issues that can cause disturbing feelings extending well after the split. Students with developmental disabilities may have a greater difficulty processing these feelings. Preparing students in advance can help ease the stress and pain of transitioning friendships.

Splits can be particularly painful when they are uneven, when one person wants to end the relationship and the other does not. These scenarios can raise feelings of rejection and internal questions about self-worth. There are many dimensions to this, some internal and person-specific and some external and relational. In uneven splits, practitioners can help by identifying aspects that can be anticipated as a component or dynamic. Next, try to identify which of those are more universal in nature (even if the manifestation varies by individual) and then use these universal aspects as categories that students can personalize.

It can be useful to pick a clear metaphor to enlist visual thinking for compare and contrast and to anchor comprehension. For example, one might use the concept whitewater rafting to mirror the sequencing and development of friendships. Getting used to wearing the life preserver, listening to instructions, getting used to the paddle and boat, figuring out who is doing what – these are the sometimes-awkward beginning stage of friendships. Lazily cruising down the river on smooth-as-glass water is the honeymoon, fun easy part. Hitting the rapids after drifting lazily down the stream can represent hitting a rocky phase with a friendship.

We may not be able to see the rapids around the bend and if we drift lazily and don't pay attention, they can catch us off-guard and we might have to scramble. Someone might fall out of the boat. But if we pay attention, keep a hold of our paddles, look for signs (hearing rushing water, seeing the water bubbling or increasing in speed, etc.), and communicate/collaborate with the other people on our boats and boats ahead of us, we are better prepared. When we hit a bumpy part of the river, we can handle it and even come out the other side of the rapids in better shape, bonded with the people in our boat because we weathered it together.

Once that metaphor is established, students can take a closer look at each phase of the rafting trip: In the rocky part, when relationships are beginning to sputter and show signs of failing what would we see/experience? There is typically a pull-back or retreat dynamic of sorts whether it be reduction in invitations to do things, less correspondence in general, lessening warmth, the "brush-off", etc.

If metaphors are not useful in a particular case, staff can present the phases of friendships and then drill down into the aspects of each phase with a basic concept map.

### 11.10 Qualities of Relationships

Qualities of relationships provide additional lenses for examining the topic of relationships. The list of relationship qualities below is sourced from work done at Sonoma University. The information is useful in generating additional discussion, inspiring ideas for activities, and going deeper into detail with students. It also provides a wealth of descriptive language that may be useful in discussions with students. (Lynch & Daniels, 2000). The qualities of relationships they identified include:

- Comforting and assuring
- Passionate, active, and exciting
- Conflictual or otherwise emotional (jealousy, frustration, etc.)
- Scripted relationships
- Similarity-based relationships (attracted to being with person because of similar in personality, perspective, need or temperament)
- Healing relationships
- Past-time relationships
- Differences-based relationships (attracted by qualities they have that you do not)
- Individuation-assertion relationships
- Experimental relationships
- Transitional relationships
- Idealized relationships
- Need-based (need them for survival)
- Utility-based (want something from them)
- Affinity-based (love the same things)
- Proximity-based (became friends because of an activity, class or other experience that brought you together)
- Convenience-based (easy, available, habit)
- Historical (long time friendships carried over)
- Attraction based
  - physical attraction
  - personality attraction
- Other
  - student generated idea
  - staff generated ideas
  - ideas gathered from research

Examine each quality by using the process below:

1. Define what each quality is
2. What are the challenges of relationship with these qualities  
(*Examples of challenges for idealized relationships: They do not last long, tend to be uneven in terms of reciprocity; they often end with an event that disappoints or disillusion.*)



3. Watch video clip example, note observations of qualities in the interaction that reflect that quality in the relationship (+/- example)
  - Verbal
  - Nonverbal
  - Emotional tone
  - Behavior
  - Word choice
4. What is predictable about this quality of relationship?
5. Do I have a preference for or difficulty with this quality in a relationship?
6. Who on my list do I have relationships like this with?

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## Section 12.0

# SOCIAL AWARENESS

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### 12.01 Introduction

Social awareness increases our ability to successfully navigate the world of social communication. We need social communication skills when we are seeking information, requesting assistance, desiring emotional connection, wanting to be playful or creative with another, expressing an idea or insight, sharing an experience or needing comfort.

Effective social communication asks us to draw upon several critical processes:

- Language to process, understand and generate on a verbal and nonverbal level
- Regulation to manage one's attention, emotions, sensory sensations, and thoughts
- Facilitation to know when and how to start, contribute, respond; and Inhibition to know when and how to stop or rein-in reactivity and impulses
- Several forms of Intelligence:
  - Experiential - informs us based on prior social experiences
  - Reflective - enables us to pause and reflect both on what we wish to say and what the other person has said/responded
  - Interpersonal - understands the desires, intentions and motivations of others
  - Intrapersonal - understands our own feelings, motivations, thoughts and fears

The Social Awareness module places a strong emphasis on skill building through self-exploration, personal insight and self-discovery. The active process of going inwards creates the opportunities for personal growth that are necessary for making meaning surrounding who we are. But this process only takes students halfway on the road to finding and establishing their personal empowerment. To truly step into their own, we must guide students to turn their newly developed power of awareness and attention outwards. Personal insight becomes far more meaningful when it can be applied in social contexts and in relationships.

This module acknowledges that relating with others creates situations where simultaneous social and emotional demands converge, which can be overwhelming, anxiety-producing and confusing for individuals on the autism spectrum. These social dynamic require skills in perspective-taking, collaborating, negotiating and empathy if the interactions are to be successful and fulfilling.

### 12.01.01 Teacher guidance

The key to working on the cycle of social communication and its components with student is the use of experiential based approaches combined with verbal discussions and media clips.

Small group and 1:1 discussions are very helpful for brainstorming and generating ideas. Social stories that are read to the group and discussed can elicit both ideas and emotions that are very instrumental. Media clips enable students to see social dynamics play out without personal involvement, making it easier to identify and analyze them. For full understanding to take root and new skills become part of one's repertoire, however, teachers need to translate what arises in discussion and passive viewing into active experiences. Engaging emotions, creativity and movement through real time trial and error practice strengthens the learning process and provides students with the practice they need to become more socially engaged and responsive.

Experiential teaching methods that enable students to practice and flex their social communication skills include:

- role play scenarios
- improv scenes (both fixed scenarios and those where the teacher changes elements mid-stream and students have to accommodate to the changes)
- movement-based social scenario games
- small group hot potato or pass the baton games where students have to respond on the spot
- non-verbal socially based exercises and games (gestures & body language, miming)
- acting out scenes from a movie, play, TV show
- writing a play and acting it out
- marionette game – one student controls what another student does and says in a scene
- making short movies or filming scenes
- using art to represent social interactions literally or symbolically
- puppet scenes

Follow experiential activities with discussion and/or written reflection so staff can assess what each student drew from the experience and to help inform what aspects of social communication need to be worked on further.

Tips on media clip selection:

- select a wide variety of examples that show the good, bad and neutral examples
- choose clips that do not have a lot of other complicating factors so students can focus on the social piece (isolated scenes with not a lot of ambient noise or distraction are best)
- humorous clips capture students attention
- cartoons can be helpful as well as live acting
- use student generated clip ideas when salient

Tips for using media clips:

- Teachers should be sure to thoroughly set up media clips so students are clear on the characters, their role and what specifically they should be observing. *Example: “In this clip of the husband talking to his wife, pay close attention to their tone of voice with each other. Don’t worry about what they are saying, we will watch it again later and pay attention to their words.”*
- Clips can be watched in several rounds, each time isolating a different element. *Example: “Last time we paid attention to their tone of voice. This time I want you to focus on their body language or facial expressions.”*
- Muted scenes are great for helping students focus solely on body language
- Media clips can be paused as needed to discuss or point out a subtle or specific dynamic.
- Storyboarding the video clip reinforces what characters said, and thought bubbles allow students to reflect on what the characters were thinking. This enables teachers to highlight the difference between what is said and what people meant when there is a discrepancy between the two. *Example: “Notice that the husband said ‘I forgive you,’ but does his face and body language look like someone who has forgave his wife for hurting his feelings? Can you guess what he is really thinking? Why do you think he said ‘I forgive you’ if he really didn’t?”*
- Concept mapping the flow of the scene, who said what, and other elements that were highlighted supports a more in-depth post-viewing discussion.

## 12.02 Social Emotional Awareness

### 12.02.01 Introduction to social emotional awareness

**Social emotional awareness** involves having awareness of the dynamics of social interaction while at the same time having awareness and understanding of the emotions that arise within oneself in that type of social interaction.

For example, an individual who is aware of the dynamics of social interactions will likely have a degree of skill to listen to conversations, understand that reciprocity is necessary and wait for her turn. We can say that she has a degree of social emotional awareness if she also realizes that having to wait for her turn to speak might provoke in some anxiety within her. This awareness would then allow her to develop strategies to mitigate that anxiety so she could listen and respond appropriately when in dialogue with another person.

**Social navigation** is the art of successfully making one's way through the complex and nuanced world of social interaction and social choices.

The multi-dimensional nature of social navigation requires us to master a long list of quite sophisticated awareness and skills. To name a few, we need to be able to

- comprehend what is being said
- understand one's own personal sensitivities and biases
- possess a measure of self-control over one's reactions
- understand which topics are appropriate to discuss in a given social context
- take different perspectives
- understand social expectations
- have a sense of social timing
- have empathy to build rapport and understanding of another
- communicate thoughts and feelings in pro-social ways
- use humor in a situation-appropriate manner (humor regulation)
- engage with people in a reciprocal manner
- detect subtle verbal or non-verbal social clues
- understand the expressed and unexpressed rules guiding social situations
- respond using language appropriate to circumstance
- recognize when one might have crossed a social boundary
- receive feedback and self-correct or repair a social situation gone awry

Social navigation skills are directly tied to one's ability to build and maintain relationships, self-advocate, gain independence within a community, engage in recreational activities, participate in group activities and develop job skills.



Although there are emotional aspects of social navigation that make *most* people uncomfortable (embarrassment from stumbling or misspeaking, momentary shyness introducing oneself to a group, etc.), everyone has their own *personal* list of social challenges which cause them anxiety, create difficult emotions or otherwise bring about some degree of dysregulation. Regardless of what the personal challenges may be, the antidote is usually quite a straightforward process:

- **Reflect on one’s individual sensitivities, patterns of reacting, biases, and inherent challenges that arise in social situations which tend to “ruin” the experience or lead to negative outcomes.** *Example: Feeling self-conscious when speaking to a group of people*
- **Identify the potential scenarios that are of concern.** *Example: Discomfort arises at work in meetings and socially at parties*
- **Understand one’s patterns of reacting within those scenarios.** *Example: Stammering, forgetting what one was going to say, fidgeting, difficulty making eye contact, stiff style of speaking*
- **Connect how one’s reactions affect the experience and end result.** *Example: Tend to either avoid situations where one might be put on the spot to speak within a group. At work it means one is passed up for promotions and projects. Socially it means avoiding attending parties and other group community events. The results can be career disappointment, lowered income potential, social isolation, and loneliness.*
- **Process the emotions, thoughts, concerns and issues as they arise.** *Example: Join a support group; engage in one-on-one therapy; join a public speaking group that offers support, skill acquisition and practice; identify non-threatening groups of people where one might feel safer trying to practice skills.*
- **Brainstorm and problem-solve alternative ways of responding that will increase the likelihood of a more positive outcome and increased resilience in managing the situation.** *Example: In addition to the interventions listed above, carry a worry stone or other tactile comfort object for soothing; have an ally or friend in the group who can provide support and encouragement; try to build skills in baby steps and have realistic expectations; work on positive and encouraging self-talk; ask for feedback and advice from trusted people who are skilled in public speaking; identify other ways to build confidence in social situations.*

**Social intelligence**, in the words of psychologist Daniel Goleman, who has written extensively on the subject, is “the ability to generate an understanding of and demonstrate skills in navigating the complexities of social interactions and social environments.”

For those individuals who possess natural social intelligence and efficient executive function skills, this is a fairly automatic and adaptive learning process. If we want to become more comfortable meeting new people, we might take baby steps to push through the discomfort, or rely on assistance and coaching from a friend, therapist or other confidante.

### 12.02.02 Challenges in building social emotional awareness

For individuals on the autism spectrum there are additional dynamics that make the process of self-reflection and building social-emotional awareness a more difficult and often far less independent venture. The most common are:

- **Sensory integration** challenges increase the likelihood of dysregulation occurring with an intensity and frequency that can leave individuals vulnerable and unable to manage situations independently. *Example: Alex tours the UPS distribution center as part of career exploration. The ambient noises and smells are so dysregulating he is unable to focus on what the tour guide is saying or be available to consider whether he would like to work there.*
- **Emotional regulation** difficulties increase the likelihood of extreme emotional reactivity to even small difficulties. *Example: Cyndi loves birds and is working with staff on several projects to learn about them. On an exploratory trip to a pet store to look at parrots, Cyndi has a severe panic reaction to some caged ferrets near the entrance. She becomes so reactive she is unable to access her excitement at seeing the birds or even attempt strategies such as closing her eyes so she get past the ferrets to the bird department. Staff has to take her out of the store to calm her.*
- **Executive function** challenges and deficits increase the likelihood that critical thinking, creativity and problem-solving will not support the individual in moving from reaction to resolution. An impaired ability to preview and predict difficult social situations increases the likelihood of dysregulation when the unexpected occurs. Weak goal-setting skills cause an inability to initiate and work towards positive social change. *Example: George goes with a group to the car show but the show advertised the wrong time on their website. Consequently the group arrives an hour early and is refused early admittance. George is so upset at the unexpected chain of events that he is unable to participate in a group discussion with peers and staff about whether to find something to do nearby until the show opened or cast his vote for a change in plans (go eat lunch, go to a museum, etc.) Later in a discussion with staff about the incident, George comes to the conclusion that he will never see another car show again and instead of being available to engage in goal setting and planning for the next car show. He sinks into disappointment and despair.*
- **Low self-awareness** prevents most individuals on the spectrum from achieving the level of personal understanding necessary for proper self-care, self-advocacy and good decision-making on self-care topics. *Example: George has a tremendously sensitive sensory system. He refuses to eat out claiming "I hate restaurants" The few restaurant experiences he has had resulted in significant dysregulation that leads to tantrums, which lead to quickly exiting before finishing a meal. George's lack of understanding to his sensory sensitivity and environmental preferences and needs prevent him from realizing that it is not restaurants he dislikes but rather noisy, chaotic, crowded places. By working to understand his sensory sensitivities and needs, a door is opened for George to begin exploring and experimenting going to quiet, small restaurants with a pleasing ambiance or eating*

at popular places at off peak times. He is also able to walk into a restaurant and advocate for himself by saying, "it's too loud in here, can we go somewhere else or get the food to go?"

- **Challenges in motivation, confidence, and resilience** can result in a lack of persistence to push forward and make personal changes in the face of obstacles and challenges. This decreases the likelihood that individuals on the spectrum will be able to maintain the energy needed to face social challenges, change their reactions, and experience positive outcomes from their efforts. *Example: Sam goes to the doctor, who informs him that the root of many of his health problems is his weight. Immediately afterwards, Sam expresses an interest in weight loss. As he engages with staff on discussions about options to lose weight, Sam quickly loses steam as he realizes that every option requires him to make changes in his habits and have more self-control with junk food. Despite staff breaking down the options into small steps, providing the scaffolding, support and encouragement needed to help ensure success, Sam sabotages the process by lapsing into his old eating habits and refusing to make changes. Underlying the resistance is a lack of confidence. Staff ends up having to work on confidence building and motivation in general with him so that he will have more internal strength for taking on a weight loss program.*
- The inability to conceptualize abstract concepts, identify problems and their causes, and generate ways to make changes poses challenges due to the abstract nature of social problems. For this reason, it is very helpful to use techniques and strategies that organize, sequence, and concretize social scenarios and their resulting emotional experiences. *Example: Jeffrey is able to say that attending sporting events causes anxiety but he is very restricted in his ability to dissect what about the sporting event triggers the anxiety. Breaking down the dimensions of and sequence inherent in attending a sporting event helps him identify where the anxiety triggers are.*

### Show me!

When working with persons on the spectrum, we recommend that discussions of detailed situations be accompanied by visual charts or concept maps. This releases individuals from having to try to hold the information in memory while grappling with concepts that they might find abstract and challenging.

12.02.03 Understanding social emotional comfort zones

The starting points for raising social emotional awareness consist of:

- Having a good sense of the individual's level of language and comprehension, as well as their preferred means of processing information. In this way, the delivery, rate and complexity of the following content will match the individual's learning and communication style.
- Creating a strong rapport and compassionate connection with the student creates an element of emotional safety. This encourages him to risk sharing difficult thoughts so they can be examined and discussed.
- Not assuming the individual understands that social situations elicit emotional reactions. It is essential to make it completely real that the two are related. The most basic way to activate social-emotional awareness is by linking social situations and environments with corresponding feelings. *Example: "Large crowds make me feel panicky." Once a connection is established, expand the context to create a deeper understanding. Determine if all the social situations that involve crowds elicit the same panic response. Do crowds sometimes elicit other responses? If so, what are these responses? How are the circumstances with crowds different in these cases? In this way, identify recurring patterns of emotional responses.*
- If the individual is able to quickly understand and generate examples of the connection between social experiences and emotional reactions, he is indicating his readiness to tackle the material. If the individual is conceptually unclear about the relationship between social and emotional experiences, more time should be spent establishing the concept through discussion, reflection, watching video clips, etc.
- When the individual displays conceptual readiness to begin social-emotional awareness building, start with familiar constructs such as categorizing what feels good vs. what feels bad. Simply generating a list of social situations and how good or bad the student feels while engaging in them provides a starting point for dissecting each social scenario to look for clues about what might be eliciting emotions.
- If the individual has the capability to think abstractly, the discussion and approaches can gradually become more nuanced and complex. *(Example: being able to see that multiple factors can come together and accumulate, causing distress (I can sometimes tolerate loud noises and I can sometimes tolerate crowds of people but when noisy and crowded are together I get really anxious); understanding motivation/intent in others in context (there is a difference between someone bumping into me accidentally and someone touching me for a specific reason. When someone accidentally bumps into me, I need to try to manage my own response rather than lashing out but if someone I am interacting with wants to touch me it is ok to self-advocate and express your dislike).*
- For others, the discussions about emotions might need to stay concrete and visually organized to support comprehension. *(Example: Doing storyboarding, concept maps or charts to make subtle or*

*abstract aspects of social relating more concrete: making thought bubbles and filling them in to highlight that people have inside thoughts that motivate the actions we see; Keeping the complexity of the language at an appropriate developmental level (sad as opposed to a more nuanced emotional terms such as wistful, angry vs resentful, etc.).*

- Individuals with challenges in expressive language will need strategies and accommodations that modify the approach to the module in a manner that fits their constraints. Suggestions include using more visual manipulatives, adding tactile components, establishing gestures to communicate preference, etc. For example, if an individual is nonverbal and uses a speaking device such as a board, take advantage of their device to advance the student's learning. Individuals who struggle with receptive language and comprehension will require more simple language to match their ability to take in information.

#### 12.02.04 Successful and unsuccessful personal social emotional patterns

The goals for this section are for the student to be able to:

- Understand that social situations elicit emotional responses
- Begin identifying personal patterns of reacting (when I do social activity "x", I tend to feel "y".)
- Gain a clearer understanding of social preferences and dislikes
- Identify what qualities in a social situation are in the individual's comfort zone and what tends to be dysregulating

The steps, teacher guidance, and activities in this section are designed to elicit the reflection and understanding needed for social-emotional awareness development. Begin generating ideas on how to capitalize on these insights to increase social comfort zones.

- **Establish the connection between social events and the emotions that might arise while participating in them.**

Ensure the student has a clear understanding of what this discussion will be about. Ensure there is a clear sense of the relationship between social events and emotions. Do not proceed until this is well-understood.

##### **Activities:**

- Concept maps and charts
  - Storyboarding
  - Watching video clips
  - Role-playing
  - Discussion and reflection
- **List social situations where the individual feels good.**

Elicit as many scenarios and as much specificity as possible, using clarifying words to qualify what “good” means to her. *Example: Excited can be a good feeling or a bad/overwhelming feeling depending on the individual; “I love the part when I get to eat birthday cake” vs. the general “birthday parties are fun.” or “I love birthday parties.”*

**Activities:**

- Making lists on whiteboard
- Making collages with magazine pictures
- Making a short storybook and illustrating it
- Role playing scenarios
- Recalling recent experiences
- Discussion & reflection

□ **Connect feeling good with personal choices.**

Help the individual make the causal connection between very specific events and how she feels.

*Example: Because birthday parties are exciting in a good way, I am happy when I am there, and it is fun to see the presents opened. When I get invited to a birthday party I usually want to go.*

**Activities:**

- Concept mapping to show connections
- Flow charts that highlight sequence and cause & effect
- Discussion & reflection
- Role play scenarios

□ **Make a list of evaluative statements to support big picture thinking and promote self-awareness of positive preferences**

A possible example: Charlie loves to go to birthday parties. Charlie’s favorite part of the party is eating the cake.

Charlie gets very excited when he is invited to a birthday party (this raises awareness to emotional patterns and responses to specific social situations).

When Charlie thinks about the party his thoughts sometimes get stuck on being excited about eating the cake (raises awareness to habit of sticky thoughts and where he gets stuck)

Charlie needs reminders to think about other important things about the party such as buying a present and how to get along with the other kids (reinforces the need for help from others and raises awareness to what kind of help he needs)

Charlie’s anxiety about what to expect goes down when he has information. It helps Charlie a lot when he knows what the activities are, who will be there and how long he is expected to stay (important strategies and coping mechanisms to increase the positive experience).

If Charlie gets too impatient and anxious about eating the cake and is having trouble waiting, it helps if he can keep busy playing a game, take a break, or help get the candles and the cake ready. (strategies and coping skills, what to do if problems arise).

After the cake eating Charlie is usually ready to go home and get some quiet time away from all the excitement (raise awareness to needs and how to address them).

**Activities:**

- Make a book with “pearls of wisdom about me” for later reference, illustrate with magazine pictures or drawing to support the words
- Test some of the evaluative statements through role-play scenarios
- Use the statements to plan strategy for an upcoming event (i.e. friend’s birthday party next Tuesday)
- Group peer discussions sharing evaluative statements and seeing similarities and differences among peers
- Role-playing scenarios to “test” theories

□ **Think outside the box to capitalize on a good thing – brainstorm and be creative**

Examine together other social situations similar to those on the individual’s “good list” they may like to try. *Example: Other parties are similar to birthday parties. Would it feel good to go to a Christmas party or a family reunion? How are these places/social activities similar or different to a birthday party? Since I like the festivity and excitement of parties, what other parties could I go to? Should I think about throwing/hosting/planning my own party since I love them so much?*

**Activities:**

- Making a list in 1:1 session with staff
- Generating list in a peer group
- Write ideas on a white board or chart for visual reinforcement
- Improv
- Watch video clips and get ideas from the characters about ways they handle situations

□ **Identify social situations where the individual feels bad.**

Ask for as many scenarios and as much specificity as possible, using other words to qualify what “bad” means to the individual. *Examples: What makes me feel bad at sporting events is I don’t know when people are going to cheer or scream and it startles me so I can never relax; I get so anxious that my*



*team will lose and I cannot chat with anyone because I just want to stare at the scoreboard and not talk.*

**Activities:**

- Making lists on whiteboard
- Making collages with magazine pictures
- Making a short storybook and illustrating it
- Role playing scenarios
- Recalling recent experiences
- Discussion & reflection

□ **Connect feeling bad with the individual's choices.**

Help him make the connection between personal choices and feeling bad. *Example: Because it matters so much to me that my team wins, if they lose I get devastated. I have really mixed feelings when my dad takes me to a game. I am both excited and anxious to go, and I get all mixed up inside. I start getting restless and irritable.*

**Activities:**

- Concept mapping to show connections
- Flow charts that highlight sequence and cause & effect
- Discussion and reflection
- Role play scenarios

□ **Make a list of evaluative statements to support big picture thinking and promote self-awareness of positive preferences**

A possible example:

I love my team so much that if it is losing I get very upset (raising awareness to emotional reactions and the related level of intensity)'

I want my dad to understand how much going to games stresses me out so he can be a better support to me (raising awareness to relational issues, self-advocacy and receiving support)

If my team loses it can ruin my whole day and I need help from others to managing my disappointment (raising awareness to low resiliency, goal setting, coping mechanisms).

**Activities:**

- Make a book with all the "pearls of wisdom about me" for later reference, illustrate with magazine pics or drawing to support the words
- Test some of the evaluative statements through role play scenarios
- Use the statements to plan strategy for an upcoming event (ie friend's birthday party next Tues)



- Group peer discussions sharing evaluative statements and seeing similarities and differences among peers
- Role playing scenarios to “test” theories

□ **Think outside the box to problem-solve. Brainstorm and be creative.**

Examine together solutions to stressful or emotionally unpleasant social situations. *Examples: If I watch the game at home in my pajamas and have my favorite snacks, I can focus on the game rather than trying to make it a social event. If I take my favorite action figure with me to the game, it will help me stay calmer. If I tell my dad I am stressed out by the game, maybe he would give me more support when we go together. If I wear earplugs, perhaps the cheering and screaming would bother me less.*

Examine what other social situations are similar to those on the individual’s “bad list” that they avoid, dread, or otherwise struggle with. *Example: I feel the same way when I go to a music event that I do at a sporting event. I hate the screaming fans. What other social events might have screaming fans?*

**Activities:**

- Making a list in 1:1 session with staff
- Generating list in a peer group
- Write ideas on a white board or chart for visual reinforcement
- Improv
- Watch video clips and get ideas from the characters about ways they handle situations

□ **Draw conclusions and make goals**

Summarize verbally and with graphic organizers (charts, concept maps, white board drawings) what has been learned through this process. See if there are any additional ideas, reflections, preferences or goals the student might want to add.

**12.02.05 Understanding emotions in social circumstances**

Once a student has grasped that a connection exists between social environments and the emotions they feel, the next natural progression is to examine these contexts more closely. By bringing social contexts into sharper focus, the individual can begin to usher more specificity into their awareness. This specificity moves them closer to being able to make good decisions and be pro-active rather than react and overgeneralize.

For example, for years Alice has avoided all group social activities and refused to attend community events because it was hit or miss whether the experience would be good. If it turned bad, it tended to do so very quickly and take a huge emotional toll on her and her caregivers. This overgeneralized avoidance caused her to miss countless opportunities to stretch and grow. After

working through the first section of this module, Alice now has an understanding that social situations with a certain amount of excitement and activity cause her to feel giddy in a good way, but if the environment is too loud and chaotic the giddiness quickly turns to dysregulation and she feels awful. This section of the module now allows Alice to look at this dynamic more closely and:

- Understand that “good” giddy means happy and excited whereas “bad” giddy means confused and anxious, and she gets practice telling the difference. This enables her to not only become aware of the difference but add new emotional language words that she can use to let someone know how she is feeling with more specificity so they can be of better support to her in times of social difficulty
- Understand that she has a personal threshold past which social situations tend to go awry, and she gets practice identifying what is the right amount of excitement and what is too much.
- Understand that the giddiness can actually start before she is in the environment and that there are things she can do to calm and soothe, self-talk, get assurance from others and otherwise control the giddiness from “brewing” and causing her to feel amped-up and vulnerable when she enters a social environment.
- Reframe any cognitive distortions and mindsets that may be fueling her distress
- Get information and do research to fill in gaps or address misunderstandings that might be causing distress
- Make a list of what she can control and where she can make decisions and self-advocate before, during and after a social experience to increase success
- Get supported, supervised practice with peers and staff to learn how to self-manage and self-advocate through group discussions, improv and role-playing.

## 12.03 Social Thinking

### 12.03.01 Introduction to social thinking

Social thinking refers to how we cognitively conceptualize and frame our experiences. The concrete aspect of social thinking centers upon how we describe our experiences to ourselves (what is going on and what does it mean). The more abstract dimensions of social thinking relate to factors that shape the quality of what we perceive: biases, mindset, values and morals, motivations, expectations, etc. This section capitalizes on all the informal work on social thinking students have been doing with each other and staff in the program milieu and shines a light on it as its own discriminate topic.

The implementation of social thinking work comes in many forms: teachable moments, coaching and facilitation, small group work, conflict resolution and other social problem-solving meetings, specifically designed activities and explicit instruction. Teachers are encouraged to highlight social thinking elements when they arise, in particular because they are an internal process that could remain otherwise “invisible” and therefore overlooked by students.

Temple Grandin writes, “Perspective-taking, being able to look beyond oneself and into the mind of another person, is the **single most important aspect of functioning that determines the level of social success** to be achieved by a child or adult with ASD. Through it, we learn that what we do affects others – in positive and negative ways. It’s the link that allows us to feel connected to others. It gives us the ability to consider our own thoughts in relation to information we process about a social situation, and then develop a response that contributes to, rather than detracts from, the social experience.”

There are aspects of social thinking that work really well through direct instruction - activities, worksheets lecture and discussion. All of these modalities should have a visual and experiential component to support comprehension. Much of the social thinking work, however, will need to have an experiential component to highlight the connection and causal effects between what one thinks and what one feels and does. Role-play and improv, social stories that are acted out, storyboarding, interactive interpersonal games and experiments and other activities hold great value because they engage emotions, creativity and movement with real life application.

Teaching strategies that help make the invisible world of social thinking visible will be highly instrumental for enhancing student learning in this section. Examples include:

- Storyboarding an interaction with thought bubbles to show what individuals are thinking
- Concept maps that illustrate the flow of thoughts and how they lead to emotions and actions
- “Ladder of Inference” work in which students analyze an exchange by identifying biases, beliefs, values and mindsets

- Freeze-framing or pausing during role-play, improv and real time student interactions to decelerate emotional and behavioral reactions and tease out the social thinking behind them.
- Doing skits with signs that are held up to represent underlying emotions or meaning different than what is being expressed
- Picking social thoughts out of a hat and working them into improv skits for other students to guess

### Potential pitfalls

Several issues can impede students in tackling the topic of social thinking. They include:

- very fixed and rigid mindsets
- significant regulatory challenges
- cognitive difficulties or limitations
- social phobia and social anxiety

These learners may need more scaffolded support to break down social thinking into meaningful chunks. Adjust the rate, volume and complexity of the presentation and the anchoring activities accordingly. Some students may benefit from 1:1 work with a staff member (with other staff members joining in or puppets, stuffed animals or drawn characters to play roles in role-play scenarios) if peer group work is too overwhelming.

### 12.03.02 Building social language comprehension

In order to meaningfully analyze social thoughts, students must first have a bank of social thinking vocabulary and a pool of body language postures from which to draw. In small groups and 1:1 work, staff can assist students in brainstorming a master list of social language words and phrases, facial expressions and non-verbal social cues. Each idea needs to be discussed, acted out, and improvised on to reflect the natural variation in people.

Verbal and non-verbal skits, social stories, role-plays and improv can help students practice generating, detecting and interpreting social language. Place attention on all kinds of social language contexts:

- concrete and direct (displeasure in words, facial expressions and gestures)
- nuanced and subtle (being more passive about expressing displeasure)
- expected (person communicates/reacts the way you expected them to)
- unexpected (person communicates/reacts in an unexpected way )
- shifts (started out pleased and then began to exhibit displeasure)
- benign (social language that remains calm and positive)
- confrontational or conflictual (social language that indicates a disconnect, friction or other problem)

Many social thinking activities contain activities, lesson plans and materials for building and understanding social thinking language. In particular, Michelle Garcia Winner books and resources (including Social Thinking Worksheets for Tweens and Teens: Learning to Read In-Between the Social Lines) are rich with activities and discussion topics for students.

### 12.03.03 Understanding “mindset” and changing fixed beliefs

Our mindsets are the personal palate from which we color the world and shape our experiences. Mindsets can be positive, compassionate, optimistic and creative. They can cause distress if they are based in anxiety, fear, obsessiveness or pessimism. Some individuals carry one or a few mindsets that they generalize and through which they filter the bulk of their experiences. Other people have a wide variety of mindsets they apply depending on context (for example, a negative mindset about learning but a positive one about people).

Individuals with autism spectrum disorders can benefit greatly from understanding mindsets because they are important but invisible forces that can be easily missed. Mindsets dictate our thoughts, feelings and behaviors as well as influence our creativity, motivation and values. They have tremendous impact on our past (interpretation of memories), our present (what is happening now and the meaning I make of it), and our future (the potential for change, ability to hope and dream, goal-setting, what we perceive as our options and choices). Even a basic recognition of mindset is instrumental in enabling a person to see how their thoughts influence their lives and to increase their capacity for change.

The “Ladder of Inference” is helpful in visually illustrating social thinking dynamics and concretely displaying how mindset affects an interaction. The ladder design shows how people move between social thinking components, often getting stuck on a particular rung because of a bias or belief. It can be applied to both quick interactions and more involved social interactions. The metaphor breaks down the social experience so that students can see and compare their internal process with what is happening around them.

Below are the rungs on the ladder using the mindset example “People don’t want to be my friend” to highlight its application:

- **What is happening:** the **general and basic facts about the interaction with no meaning applied** (*Susie walks by someone she knows and says “hello”*). This step is typically affected by one’s attention regulation and basic scope of observation.
- **Select data that we feel is of importance.** This is where we allocate our attention in a social interaction. (*Sam did not say hello back, gesture or make eye contact*). This step reveals

#### Teacher tip

In addition to using a visual representation of a ladder, teachers can illustrate the process through movement by having circles on the floor representing each position and have students move back and forth as they role-play social interactions.

what the individual sees as the focus, often over-focusing on or missing details that affect or distort our understanding.

- **Interpret** what happened in the exchange. At this juncture we draw upon our biases, fears and insecurities (*Susie thinks: They ignored me!*) Emotions and reactions often begin to bubble to the surface. This is the place where we assign meaning to what we experienced, whether it is accurate or not.
- **Evaluate** our interpretation. In doing so we deepen our bias and solidify it into a fact (*Susie thinks: They ignored me because they don't like me and don't want to be my friend*). In this stage, we embed ourselves in the interpretation that works best for us given our pre-held mindset about how people and the world works.
- **Theorize** based upon our biases. This step creates the story we tell ourselves. (*Susie thinks: I bet the other students told her not to be nice to me because she doesn't like me either.*) This step rationalizes our experience and inserts explanations for why others behaved as they did.
- **Draw big picture conclusions** about what happened. In doing so, we get further ensconced in our “noble certainties” of how people are and the way the world works that align with our mindset (*Susie concludes: I should just stop trying to be friends with people – it never works out well for me*) At this point we have generalized our beliefs about the initial situation, ourselves and others to apply to all social interactions.

Another teaching method for anchoring mindsets is through role-play and characters. Well-known fictional characters who represent a specific mindset can be helpful in anchoring meaning. Good examples include characters in Winnie the Pooh, Spongebob Squarepants and other children’s literature and TV shows. Media clips can also an engaging way to examine mindset, with the advantage of being able to easily pause as needed to stop and discuss.

#### Additional resources on mindset and the Ladder of Inference

- <http://ed.ted.com/lessons/rethinking-thinking-trevor-maber>
- <http://artsfwd.org/how-do-teams-work-effectively/>
- <https://www.det.nsw.edu.au/proflearn/der/htmods/thinking/ladder.html>
- <http://mindsetonline.com/>

#### 12.03.04 Understanding the perspectives of others

Stepping into the shoes of another opens up opportunities to see the world differently that we habitually perceive it. Seeing the world differently opens up opportunities to gain new perspectives, shift one's thinking and empathize with another. When we are able to take another's perspective, especially when it differs from our own, we are given chances to flex our thinking and connect meaningfully.

Reading fiction allows us to step outside of ourselves and use our higher order thinking and visualization to see the world through the narrator's eyes. Watching movies enhances this process by adding sound (voiceovers and soundtracks) and visuals (images, flashbacks, scenes) to bolster our shift in perspective. Role-play games and acting out scenes in plays and improv engages our bodies and voices in the process. Activities where we have to switch places with another and act/think/feel as we imagine they would engages and enlists our creativity and movement in the process. We recommend using all of these modalities to flex students' ability to shift perspective and become more mentally flexible.

#### 12.03.05 Learning to identify problems in social interactions

Once students have moved through the activities outlined above, they will have developed vocabulary, awareness and understanding over the ways we apply our thoughts in social interactions. This section asks students to draw upon their newly emerging knowledge and understanding and apply it to envision "what can go wrong" scenarios. In doing so they become more prepared to adapt, socially problem-solve and navigate challenging emotions that arise when social interactions go awry.

This work is best done in group settings so that students can benefit from alternate perspectives and ideas, as well as engage in collaborative brainstorming and problem-solving.

Begin by having a bank of social scenarios ready for students to reflect upon, discuss and act out. Start with more concrete, straight-forward situations and increase elements of nuance and complication as they become more adept.

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## Section 13.0

# UNDERSTANDING AND PARTICIPATING IN COMMUNITY

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### 13.01 Introduction

*“The world is so empty if one thinks only of mountains, rivers and cities; but to know someone who thinks and feels with us, and who ... is close to us in spirit, this makes the earth for us an inhabited garden.” Goethe*

Community-based learning opportunities give students opportunities to use their emerging personal and interpersonal skills in real-world situations. New awareness ignited on campus continues to evolve and expand. Knowledge about how communities and society work becomes more meaningful as it is experienced first-hand. Social engagement skills have the chance to become more sophisticated as they are applied daily in a variety of situations.

Most people learn best through experience, and this is especially true for individuals on the autism spectrum. Traditional teaching methods such as instruction, discussion, reading, media, and research are important and necessary teaching tools for knowledge acquisition. For the transition student, however, these methods always should be paired with meaningful and applicable experiences useful in daily living, supported by coaching and modeling.

It is within the context of the day-to-day community life that transition students learn to translate knowledge into action, sharpen adaptive and independence skills, and become active, contributing members.

Although most students will have experienced community on a small scale (friends, family, school, therapeutic support team, etc.), many may have yet to explore the wider environment. This module provides a bridge for transition students to expand into their communities, at their own paces, and in their unique styles, and leverages that learning to promote understanding of their place in the large society.

In support of these goals, the Community module has the following objectives:

#### Understanding Community

- Understand what a community is, and what it means to be a member of a community (in some cases several communities)
- Understand what roles, rules, and infrastructure keep one’s community alive and growing
- Learn the richness of resources and people that exist in one’s community

#### Participating in Community

- Learn to socially navigate a community and interact positively with its members. This includes practicing verbal and behavioral skills needed to navigate spontaneous social interactions
- Learn to physically navigate one’s community effectively and become more independent
- Apply content learned in the program into real-life situations
- Strengthen executive function, creative problem-solving, decision-making, adaptability, and resiliency skills in a wider range of social scenarios

- Gain skills in using local resources and become more self-advocating and self-determined in seeking information, locating resources, and meeting one's needs
- Reframe distortions or biases about places and people through new positive experiences, in doing so strengthening meaningful self-reflection and the ability to reflect on others
- Reduce anxiety and dysregulation regarding unexpected factors, crowds and open spaces, strangers and unfamiliar places, unknown outcomes, inability to control one's environment
- Increase ability to establish and improve relationships with community members
- Identify and establish community mentors, partnerships, and allies
- Strengthen and widen affinities, interests, and passions, and discover new ways to leverage them into increased community involvement and social relationships
- Set educational, career, recreational, social, executive function, self-regulation, and other personal goals that can be worked on within the community and with community members
- Create community-based, collaborative endeavors to use as vehicles for interacting with community members, skill-building, and expressing creativity and passions

### Understanding and Participating in Society

- Strengthen current passions and interests (research, field trips, activities, discussions, projects)
- Use curiosity to awaken new interests and passions (watching a documentary, following the news, interviewing people)
- Build independence (self-advocacy, making life decisions, voting, citizenship)
- Increase community participation (attending a rally, lecture, or cultural performance, visiting the state capitol)
- Bolster executive function skills (writing a letter to the President, planning a project to raise money for a societal cause, planning a trip)
- Raise awareness of how our actions affect others (recycling, volunteerism)
- Develop and expand work and career options
- Create a bank of topics for conversation with others
- Support critical thinking (comparing, contrasting, formulating opinions, appreciating diversity, debating)

### Before beginning



This section guides the teacher and learner in experiential learning activities in the community. **Section 13.17, General Guidance for Being Out and About in the Community with Students**, will help with initial planning, contingency planning, organization, plan implementation, and post-experience management, and should be read and considered before

## 13.02 Part 1: What is a Community?

### Establish the meaning of the word “community.”

The literal definition according to Merriam-Webster is, “a unified body of individuals.” Although this definition is short and dry, the word “unified” hints at a deeper, more profound meaning of the word: *Community is a group of individuals who come together in the shared human need to have a sense of belonging.* This sense of belonging creates emotional connectedness and opens doors to building functional and interpersonal skills. The communication and collaboration found in active communities provide each member with opportunities to build and strengthen relationships, understand the needs and perspectives of others, learn, and self-advocate.

Ultimately we want to establish a deep, internal, felt sense of community. To get there, however, we must first lay a foundation of cognitive understanding and then gradually lead them to the more complex layers as they are ready.

Establish the concept of community through 1:1 or group discussion:

- Define the word and brainstorm associated words that help strengthen their conceptual understanding – *together, sharing, cooperating, friendly*, etc. If possible include both action and emotion words to show the multi-dimensional nature of communities
- Generate examples of communities – encourage them to draw from their experiences and knowledge about the world
- Look at pictures of communities and people doing community-based activities – voting, parades, flea market, etc.
- Apply other creative methods for representing community – movement, art, etc.

Once students can visualize and conceptualize community, they are cognitively prepared to layer on information about the structure, organization, and uses of a community.

### Understanding the parts of a community

Here we deepen the foundation on which to layer more information, raise awareness, pique interest, think creatively, and build skills. It is usually best to begin with the physical neighborhood in which the institution hosting this program resides.

This step involves

- Identifying the physical aspects of community – the places, people, and physical map of area
- Breaking down the broad, abstract concept of community into its vital parts
- Clarifying how the parts work individually
- Illuminating how they all work together

Before jumping into *what to teach*, the following general guidance may be helpful to teachers:



### General Guidelines Point #1

There will be a wide range of variation among students in terms of their awareness, knowledge, and experience concerning *community*. Many students will be somewhere in the middle, possessing some knowledge but with gaps of understanding and awareness that need filling in. *The wider the variation in awareness, knowledge, and experience, the more challenging it can be for teachers to choose strategies and approaches for group settings.*

### Solution

Before launching into the module and layering on new information, elicit from students what they already know. “What do you know?” sessions will help teachers identify:

- Each student’s level of knowledge
- Natural small groupings of students who might work well together
- Students who need more intensive 1:1 support to navigate the information and make it meaningful
- Students who can be mentors for other students or considered “experts” because of their knowledge and skills

This exploration can be done in a group discussion where the teacher writes down contributions, draws pictures and concept maps using a whiteboard for all to see and respond to.

### General Guidelines Point #2

Some students will claim to have no community experience from which to draw.

### Solution

Even a student with very little experience out and about in the local community still lives in one. Help her see that she does have some knowledge through her *micro-community* (family, friends, teachers, therapeutic support systems). This will help her connect with the module content.

### General Guidelines Point #3

Some individuals experience life in a variety of communities: Perhaps an old neighborhood where he or she used to live, the community where family home is now, a second home community they see only in the summer, grandparent’s neighborhood, etc. Divorce and split custodial arrangements can further confuse the issue. This may confuse teachers and peers at times while trying to determine to which community the student is referring.

### Solution

It may also prove helpful for each student to have a “My Communities” book they create that contains separate sections for each community as they move through the module. Students can have fun naming each one to reduce confusion and give them reference points in discussions. Within each community section,

pictures can be drawn, representational images from magazines can be pasted, and words written to help with comprehension, retention, and thought organization.

This helps individuals cognitively separate the different communities and make comparisons among them more easily.

Students with connections to several communities can be regarded as “experts” in certain areas. Teachers can look to them for contributions, to generate ideas, and to be helpful to fellow students.

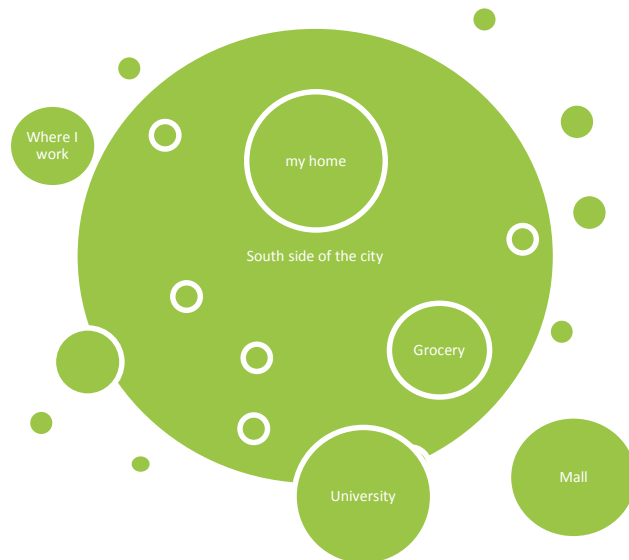
### General Guidelines Point #4

The transition program resides within a physical neighborhood with specific zoning and cultural or ethnic identity. This neighborhood resides within and alongside other such neighborhoods, which together comprise a larger community or region of the city, and so on.

This concept of *communities within communities*, and how they fit into the community at large, can be confusing and disorienting to some students.

### Solution

Visual aids such as concentric ring diagrams can be very helpful. Students and teachers can write where each community fits into the bigger picture, adding key words and images. Some individuals on the autism spectrum struggle with recall of new information. Concentric ring diagrams support retention and comprehension and reduce student confusion. These diagrams can remain posted to remind students of what they discussed and how they relate.



Maps can be of great value throughout the community module. Draw on a laminated map with dry erase markers. Different areas can be color coded and highlighted as needed: walking routes, bus and trip pathways, common destinations, and other important community reference points. Pins can be color coded and placed on locations students have been or want to go.

For individuals who struggle with spatial ordering and active working memory, posted maps provide a constant reference during discussion and activities. Post maps in an area easily accessible to students. Staff can encourage students to use them to seek information independently or with assistance.

### General Guidelines Point #5

Establishing a conceptual understanding of community with students is complicated because it encapsulates concrete, abstract, and multi-dimensional aspects. In order for them to grasp where they fit in and how they might participate, students will need to grasp:

- What are the vital parts that make up a community
- How these parts work in harmony for a community to thrive

They will begin to see the fabric of a community depends upon relationships, communication, and collaboration – and that these are important skills to becoming independent and interdependent.

### Solution

A multi-sensory teaching approach helps students gain a strong conceptual understanding of the preceding points. Use:

- Auditory teaching methods that incorporate music, guest speakers, presentations, and discussions to strengthen understanding and build essential listening skills
- Visual representations in the form of photographs, drawings, symbols, and concept maps to provide students with a way to organize thinking, build visual processing skills, and bolster comprehension
- Kinesthetic learning techniques such as movement games and art projects to capitalize on physical and sensory experiences, enliven learning, and bolster comprehension through engaging the body
- Experiential learning approaches such as field trips, role-play, group activities, and projects that support understanding through interactive and engaging experiences

### A note on structure and repetition



Note that the following sections dealing with School and Local communities are arranged intentionally so concrete aspects of communities are repeated with each layer (physical, residents, government, businesses, etc.). Throughout, we include recommendations on **Points of Emphasis** and **Drawing Conclusions**. This repetition and predictability reinforces the similarities that run through the different types of communities. It also makes it easier to compare and contrast communities, which is a more difficult cognitive task

### 13.03 Our Local School Community

A good starting point for building a conceptual framework for community is the student's school community. By drawing upon these immediately visible examples, teachers can help students understand community on a small scale and then expand into larger examples as student comprehension strengthens. Some students may have difficulty conceptualizing the school as a community because of its structure. This offers opportunities to work on critical thinking skills such as comparisons, contrasts, similarities, and differences.

For example:

- What is the physical layout of the school? What are the resources and people available to me and where do I find them?
- What town or neighborhood government position is similar to/different from our (head teacher, school principal, other staff position)
- How are their positions of authority different?
- How do their decisions affect us as members of their communities?

#### 13.03.01 Physical Space: Creating a Map of My School

Starting with a pre-made basic blueprint of the school and school grounds, students fill in the information below. Color-coding, symbols, and pictures are great ways to enhance the map. If repeated symbols are used, a legend can be created at the corner of the map for reference. Once the map is complete, post it in the student lounge or a common area where students can use it as needed. Building a three-dimensional model of the school would engage the student's artistic skills as well as support individuals with spatial ordering challenges. Include:

- Locations (lunchroom, library, offices, gym, music room, art room, etc.)
- Resources (first aid, fire extinguishers, community event postings, information sources, etc.)
- Services (where staff offices are located and the services they offer to students)

#### Points of Emphasis

Each school community will have its own unique feel and layout. It is important to orient students to their physical space in terms of function, but also awaken their awareness to the ways in which different places – and moving around these places – affects their moods, thoughts, and energy levels. Having individuals relate to their surroundings on a more personal and emotional level provides them with opportunities to identify preferences as well as evaluate thoughts and feelings in relation to something outside themselves.

- How do I navigate through different parts of my community? (*Example: What is the best way to get from the library to the gymnasium?*)

- What is the relationship between the different locations? (*Example: Food is prepared in the kitchen but eaten in the cafeteria.*)
- What are my reactions and feelings about the different places? (*Example: The library is a comfortable place to relax and read; the kitchen is very busy, crowded, and loud during meal preparation. I prefer to go to the kitchen between meals when it is quieter and calmer.*)
- Where do I find who or what I need? (*Example: When I want to know what is happening today, I can check the bulletin board in the student lounge, go to my advisor's office, or ask, etc. If I need a Band-Aid, I go to the nurse's office.*)
- When I have a request or want something changed, who is in a position of authority to make a decision? (*Example: I want to change the day of a school outing, I would like the school cafeteria to serve pizza, I would like permission to miss class/leave campus, etc.*)
- Where are my favorite spots, short-cuts, or quiet places? (*Examples: I love staring out the giant picture window in the library. It is faster to get to my cubby from the gym if I cut through the dining room. When I am giddy, I like to sit in the courtyard next to the front entrance and calm myself down.*)

### Drawing Conclusions

Examples: "It takes a lot of people to run a school program. There are many places and activities to explore in my school. Our school has done a lot to make sure they can handle emergencies if they happen and that makes me feel safe here."

#### 13.03.02 Residents: Profile of Peers

Examine the residents of the school community:

- Gender
- Age
- Ethnicity and race (this is a useful place to define and illustrate ethnicity)
- Which peers would I like to know better or engage with in a specific activity? (seed for personal and interpersonal goals)

### Points of Emphasis

When we are aware of the presence of those around us, it can help us to feel more grounded and oriented. If we are in a crowd of strangers or in a time of stress, seeing someone familiar is often calming and soothing. In these instances the defining characteristic of a person is *familiar vs unfamiliar*. When we are not under duress, we are typically available to observe more about people and these observations can become points of curiosity, interest, conversation, and connection. Taking time to identify and discuss the characteristics, similarities, and differences among fellow peers gives students opportunities to develop people-based observational skills and practice how to make meaning and connection from the similarities and differences found.

- What is the range of ages in my peer group? What are the benefits to having friends/peers of similar ages? If there is a range, what is good about having people of different ages in my group? What age range do I prefer for making friends? Why?
- What is the distribution of males and females in my peer group? Do the different genders bring/contribute different things? What are the benefits to having a mixed gender group? What are the benefits to same gender groups? Which do you prefer and why?
- What is my ethnicity? What cultures do my family members come from? What ethnicities and races are represented by the people in my peer group?
- Sometimes friendships are based in shared interests. What are the interests of other people in the group? Do I share any of their interests or are they interested in something I would like to know more about?

### Drawing Conclusions

Example: “My fellow students have a lot in common with each other because we are all around the same age. There are more males in the program and it would be nice to have more females.”

### 13.03.03 Government/Management

A great project for this section is to have students design and construct an “About the Staff” or “About the Student Government” board. It can contain staff members or student government portraits (photo or drawn), a list of their responsibilities, hobbies or other outside interests, and any other interesting information they would like to include. Students can interview staff members or student government leaders. This reinforces language skills and relationship building.

- Staff members / student government leaders and their roles
- Authority/hierarchy – who makes decisions, chain of command, what are set campus rules, and what is up for negotiation (which decisions and rules are decided by authority and which are decided by consensus), how do students make requests/have their suggestions heard, etc.
- Which staff members or student government leaders would I like to get to know better, do something specific with or have difficulty with (seed for personal and interpersonal goals)

### Points of Emphasis

Government, rules, and authority are important concepts for students on the autism spectrum to grasp. External rules, guidelines, governing bodies, and people in positions of authority dictate a significant aspect of adulthood. A conceptual and literal understanding of these rules, guidelines, governing bodies, and positions of authority are vital for successful experiences on the job, while interacting with agencies, or managing personal finances to name a few. Students can begin to understand these complex concepts by starting with the student’s experiences with staff and school policies, as they relate directly to their lives. Once the concept is anchored and meaningful, it will be easier for students to stretch their thinking to understand larger forms of government in a wide variety of settings (work, stores, banks, local government, etc.).

- Who are the staff members at my school? What are their roles and responsibilities? Who is in charge of what? How do their roles and responsibilities contribute to the overall operation of my school? Why are their jobs important? How do their roles affect my life?
- How are decisions made and problems solved at my school (chain of command, key decision makers, and in what areas of the school)? If I have a question or problem with the rules or staff member enforcing them, what do I do, who do I talk to, and how?
- What things am I allowed to control or choose? What decisions and situations in which school rules or staff decide what I do? What school rules are set in stone? Who enforces them?
- What are points of negotiation? With whom would I negotiate? When things are decided by consensus how are they approached (voting, group discussions, submit idea to a posted suggestion box, student request form, approach advisor, etc.)
- What are the consequences for not complying with school rules and authority?
- How would I describe my relationship with different staff members? Are there staff members I would like to get to know better? Why? Are there staff members (or rules) whose authority I have trouble following?
- What positions of authority do students have at my school? Which students currently have those positions? Would I like to have one of those positions? Why?

To support students in understanding how decisions are made in an organization or group, the following abstract concepts are important to build:

- Voting – what it is, how it works, who is included (*a more complete discussion of voting and citizenship can be found below in Part 2 of this module, Section 13.21, Developing a Community View.*)
- Identifying the issue and containing the solution – what salient facts, people, etc. do I need to include in this discussion; developing a clear desired outcome or goal; assessing the realism of the situation (cost, logistics, related factors/contingencies, who is affected by this idea/decision, timing)
- Group brainstorming – how to think together productively, how to keep track of everyone’s ideas, expressing oneself and managing emotions, giving feedback
- The art of negotiation – how to share ideas respectfully and agree or disagree; the importance of listening fully to other’s ideas before commenting; tips and tricks for reaching a compromise
- Making informed decisions – what I need to know before making a decision or casting my vote
- Managing expectations – what happens after the vote or decision is made, when can I expect to see changes, and in what form(s) will they come? Having realistic expectations of others/organization, managing emotional aftermath (how do I handle disappointment, frustration, giddiness, etc. if the vote/decision does not go my way; and how do I manage my emotions if the result is not what I imagined?)

Starting this discussion on a micro level with the school community helps students more easily develop a conceptual understanding of group decision making and external authority with real-life examples that



affect them directly. It also gives them a chance to work on the social-emotional aspects of group decision-making and rule adherence, something that can be quite challenging for individuals on the Autism Spectrum. As students move through the widening concentric circles of their communities, they can explore what these concepts mean on increasingly more complex levels. In doing so, students receive practice in strengthening their critical thinking, language, and executive function skills as it relates to making decisions, personal empowerment, collaboration, and effecting change.

Suggestions:

- Go through the school handbook with students and discuss the rules, why they were written and how easy or hard they are to comply with. Discuss concepts such as fairness, equality, and balancing the needs of members of a group. Have students discuss what they do or do not agree with. Tap into imagination and creativity by picturing the “perfect” school rules and describe why they would or would not work.
- Group discussions about rules they are aware of in various settings based on experience (no running at the pool, being quiet in a library, etc.). Share what was hard or easy about complying.
- Group discussions about experiences students have had in arriving at a decision by vote (*Examples: family or friends choosing a restaurant or movie, deciding what color to paint bedroom walls, etc.*)
- Practice understanding voting and other ways to reach group consensus with a wide range of low stakes activities (*Examples: best superhero, worst pop star, best place to vacation*). As the group becomes more adept with the dynamic, begin adding increasingly higher stakes decisions (*Examples: which restaurant to go to on an outing, what color to paint the student lounge, deciding on a school mascot, theme of an upcoming event*). Flex the ways in which people vote (*Examples: ballot, raising hands, standing up, etc.*) so students experience a range of voting/decision-making methods.
- Please note that staff should be prepared to manage all aspects of the group decision-making process:
  - executive function: logistics, method, and organization of the process
  - critical thinking: weighing ideas, comparisons, contrasts, brainstorming, creativity, evaluation, causal relationships, detail and big picture thinking, generation and visualization of possible outcomes
  - social cognition: compromise, collaboration, listening to others, responding to others, respectful agreeing/disagreeing, fairness
  - emotion regulation: managing emotions as they arise in the process, how to stay regulated, how to become regulated if get upset, controlling impulses and outbursts

Because group decision making is so complex and there are a wide range of important dynamics and aspects, it is better to break the process down as needed and not rush it. It is important for students to experience the



entire process as meaningful and understand that decisions can take time to arrive at rather than rushing and missing valuable teachable moments because of an imposed deadline.

### Drawing Conclusions

Examples: “Staff members are very friendly. I prefer to be close with a few staff members who are my personal go-to people. I am comfortable asking for help from any staff member.” “When I fill out a student request form with my advisor it is easier to organize my ideas and ask for what I want.” “Voting and deciding things in a group is complicated and takes time because everyone’s ideas need to be heard and considered. This is hard because sometimes I am impatient and want changes to happen fast.”

#### 13.03.04 Businesses

Many roles are needed to start and maintain a business. As this section is covered, teachers are encouraged to note which students get energized by which ideas and/or specific roles as it will inform work and career planning, as well as goal setting.

- Does your program or school have any businesses (*Examples: student store, print shop, café...*)
- What businesses might we start here?
  - Brainstorm ideas
  - In what ways would each idea benefit the school and its members?
  - Who would do what tasks in the business?
  - How much do you think it would cost to start the business? Whose time, and how much of it would the business require to be successful?
  - What would be the most difficult part of running this business at school or in our program? Do you think we could be successful?

### Points of Emphasis

There is great merit to discussing and brainstorming business ideas with students on the spectrum because the experience is ripe with opportunities to apply critical thinking, creativity, and executive function skills. All ideas, including those that are impracticable, have value because they can be visualized, discussed, acted out, represented through art, and analyzed. This generates additional brainstorming, inspiration, and group collaboration. The bigger picture goal is to identify and develop student-generated business ideas that can become individual or group projects, school-wide endeavors, or seeds for collaboration with community partners and businesses.

- One way to come up with a business is to see what is popular. Brainstorm a list of businesses you know of that are already in existence that are popular or you like. Help students organize their thinking by putting them into categories (food, services, entertainment, etc.)
- Would a smaller version of any of those businesses be a good idea to try here? What would that look like?

- Another way to come up with a business idea is to identify needs people or places have and imagine those needs being filled. Can you think of anything the school or its members need or would benefit from? What would that look like?
- Who is going to be involved in making decisions about a school business? How will we make decisions? (voting, board/committee, representative, school rules and restrictions that may affect the business idea)

### Drawing conclusions

Examples: “Starting a business sounds like fun. The school could get lots of positive benefits from having its own business. It is wise to start small and then grow the business as it becomes successful.” “it was hard to decide on which school business might be the best because there were so many good ideas and a lot of facts to consider!”

### 13.03.05 Services Available

Students find it fun and informative to have staff make mini presentations about what they do. This gives students the opportunity to ask questions and, at the same time, open doors for developing new relationships, collaborations, or projects.

- What services does my program offer?
- Who qualifies for each service?
- What services am I currently using?
- Services I would like to try or feel I need? (note for future planning)

### Points of Emphasis

This section is related to information covered in 13.03.3 Government/ Management and provides a wonderful opportunity for students to review staff members and their roles. It prompts students to analyze staff roles and responsibilities at a higher level of complexity. It illuminates what services staff represent and why those services are vital to the school, its student body, and each individual. Connections can be made between services the school provides and the parallel services provided within the larger communities around them (*Example: Cafeteria or school kitchen provides food vs. community restaurants, fast food places, and grocery stores as sources of food*).

- Brainstorm a list of school services. Have students “discover” new information by making a list of unknowns and discussing how to find the answers by asking questions, referring to a student handbook, reading posted signs, etc. Do this in a way that students can be active in their learning (discovering information on their own or with facilitation) rather than passive (being told the information).
- Each student makes a school services chart containing a list of all services, who provides them, any important guidelines (*Example: Kitchen is open from 9am-8pm*), and which ones they are currently using. This chart can be useful as a source of information and a tool during advisement and goal setting.

- Compare among group members who is using these services. Detect similarities and differences of needs. Encourage the exchange of stories and “advice” among students (*Example: The librarian is really nice, she knows a lot about Anime, you should try to talk to her*). Anticipate services each individual may want or need to make use of in the future. Identify services the student may want to explore further.
- Are there any services offered in which I would like to partake? (*Examples: Cooking in kitchen and sorting office supplies*). These are seeds for potential campus internships, business ideas, and career paths.

### Drawing Conclusions

Examples: “There were a lot of services in my program I was not aware of. I am happy with my current use of program services.”

#### 13.03.06 Connections between My Program and Local Community

This step examines connections between the school program and resources in the local community. Use concept maps to help students understand and keep track of the connections discussed. Note areas of high student interest, where collaborative connections can be capitalized upon for internships, guest speakers, and student-driven collaborations.

- Services the program uses
- Services that benefit me directly
- Partnerships and sponsors
- Brainstorm potential partnerships and how they would benefit both the program and the local community

### Points of Emphasis

The biggest challenge for students in this section is the critical thinking activity of “bridging” or transferring knowledge. Bridging the knowledge is the ability to take information known in one context and apply it in a different context, taking into consideration any changes or adjustments needed to make it applicable. Developing this ability is greatly assisted by the use of visuals to reinforce connections, similarities, and differences.

- Using the School Services chart made in 13.03.5 Services Available, have students brainstorm which local community services have roles in each school service. This approach provides teachers with a concrete platform to help students bridge and think critically. Students can generate questions to ask staff members and search for information on the internet to fill in unknowns.

- Provide students with a list of school sponsors, established community partners, and other resource providers. Discuss their roles and contributions, including any role the school takes in a given partnership (*Example: Local bakery provides baked goods with the agreement that the school will use only their baked products and puts their logo on the school banner*).
- Brainstorm other potential partners. Teachers may have to generate a few starter examples, including some that are unrealistic, to activate critical thinking and brainstorming. Discuss how the school decides which businesses to partner with.

### Note regarding brainstorming potential partnerships

Students will likely need teacher assistance to come up with ideas, especially viable ones. Collect all brainstormed ideas, no matter how implausible they may be (*Examples: building Disneyworld on campus, having Nike sponsor new sports equipment*). There is great value in including even the most implausible since they generate excitement, promote engagement, and support creativity and dreaming big.

Next, assess the ideas one by one to determine the level of challenge for each. This supports critical thinking. Staff and students should decide together which to act on now versus which to table for later. This part gives excellent executive function practice.

From this exercise, maintain a running list of organizations, businesses, and entities to approach for future staff-facilitated projects (generating a proposal or plan, correspondence, collaboration, negotiation, pitching ideas, etc.).

### Drawing conclusions

Examples: “We have a lot of options available. There are only a few ideas that interested me and they all had to do with food.”

#### 13.03.07 Special and Historical Lore (Local Flavor)

- History of my program
- Interesting facts or lore related to my program

### Points of Emphasis

Approaching this section as an exercise in digging up fun facts engages students in an enjoyable and adventurous activity. Teachers will want to identify important points prior to this section and prepare novel and interesting ways to introduce the fact or historical event. Using experiential learning can make this section come alive, such as campus scavenger hunts, interviewing staff, creating artistic representations (collages, dioramas, drawings, short film, etc.).

Students may need help with the abstract concept of “making history” through visualization, imagination, creativity, and brainstorming concrete examples.

### Drawing Conclusions

Examples: “My program does not have a long history because it is new. I want to make my mark in the history of this program by adding something special that future students will benefit from.”

#### 13.03.08 Culture and Ethnicities

- Given the ethnicities represented by staff and peer in my program, what are we doing to celebrate and teach one another about our ethnic/cultural similarities and differences?
- Cultural or ethnic program events
  - events occurring or planned
  - brainstorming cultural events the program could do

### Drawing conclusions

Examples: “I am excited to learn more about different races and cultures. There is not much variety of races and cultures in our student body.”

### Points of Emphasis

In *Section 13.03.2 Residents: Profile of Peers*, students identified the various races and ethnicities represented in the school (student and staff). This section is designed to help students take a closer look at culture and ethnicity from a more interpersonal standpoint: what do the different ethnicities and cultures represent.

- What do I know/understand about different ethnicities and cultures of those around me? Share experiences (Epcot Center, travels, ethnic parade/event, ethnic food, friends or family members of different ethnicities/cultures).
- Are there things about another peer’s race or ethnicity that interest you or you are curious about? How do I get my questions regarding race and ethnicity answered (facilitated work on how to discuss race and ethnicity with others in a respectful manner)? How do we show respect for other races and ethnicities (socially accepted dos and don’ts)?
- How does a group benefit by having members of different races/ethnicities? What can we learn from one another?

#### 13.03.09 Big Picture: If I Were in Charge of My Program

- Things I would keep. What and why?
- Changes I would make
  - things I would add. What and why?
  - things I don’t think need to be there. What and why?

- How will decisions be made, who is in charge of what?
- Student-generated ideas

### Points of Emphasis

To support students in big picture thinking, we recommend there be a strong visual component to this section's discussions. Students may also need to review the different parts discussed previously in this section to bolster memory, identify important points to consider, and help lead them to drawing larger conclusions and thinking critically.

### Drawing Conclusions

Example: "Overall I am satisfied with what my program has to offer. My program experience would be better if xyz changes were made. This program is meeting my current needs and interests."

**"But if I ran  
the zoo," said  
young Gerald  
McGrew, "I'd  
make a few  
changes.  
That's just  
what I'd do..."**  
-- Dr. Seuss

## 13.04 The Local Neighborhood / Local Community

### 13.04.01 Physical Layout

To help students visualize their immediate neighborhood and be able to organize the information below meaningfully, create a map. Using a basic pre-made map of the local streets, students can explore the neighborhood and learn a lot through discovery (driving in a car, walking, biking, etc.). There is great benefit to walking the area by foot because it engages the body while students are learning, opens the door to spontaneous interactions with local people, and provides valuable data to teachers as they observe what students notice about their surroundings. Creative ways to explore one's surroundings include scavenger hunts, riddles, I Spy, and other engaging games.

Additional benefits to getting to know the local neighborhood on foot:

- Generates ideas for local walking, biking, and jogging routes
- Begins to establish a comfort level with one's surroundings; students may feel more comfortable leaving the school grounds
- Creates visual familiarity with the local layout – if a student wanders, goes for a walk, or runs an errand and becomes lost, he will have a sense of how to get back to school
- Pairs movement in the physical area with a bank of information about it, which increases understanding and bolsters memory recall
- Inspires student project ideas (*Examples: photography, building a bench, upkeep of a park, having a bake sale, etc.*)
- Increases interaction with local residents who may become mentors, community allies, and helpers for students who become lost and need help finding their way back to school

### Drawing Conclusions

Examples: “This neighborhood looks a lot like the one where I grew up. I really like the local coffee shop – it is a cool place. I want to come back here again.”

### 13.04.02 Residents

The topic of *residents* is touched on throughout this module. It provides teachers with valuable inroads to discuss similarities and commonalities people have despite differences in appearance, beliefs, and practices. It also creates opportunities to address important social-relational issues such as knowing appropriate terms/words for different races, as well as more complex issues such as diversity.

Some students may not be ready developmentally or cognitively to discuss abstract issues such as diversity and racism. These topics can be the inspiration for small group classes or 1:1 discussions at another time for students who find these topics compelling.

- Who lives in my neighborhood?
- What types of people live in my neighborhood (race, culture, religion, age)

- What are the ways residents in a neighborhood interact? (yard sales, neighborhood groups, churches, etc.)
- Do I want to become involved in any of these activities? (seeds for goal setting, outings, and projects)

### Points of Emphasis

As in the prior section, students on the autism spectrum may have difficulty drawing conclusions that are more abstract from the concrete details discussed. The following will require more scaffolding, examples, and modeling to move from facts to more evaluative thinking:

- Personal preferences/favorite places (*Example: what makes a place “cool” or “welcoming”*)
- The “feel” of a community (*Examples: friendly, busy, politically active*)
- Formulating opinions (*Example: the benefit to living in a close community is people look out for one another more, they detect and report crimes more, and the elderly and sick get more help from neighbors*).

### Drawing Conclusions

Help students draw their own conclusions about residents in their area. (“People are very similar in my neighborhood. There are a lot of different kinds of people living around me.”)

#### 13.04.03 Government/Management

Before beginning this section, be sure students have a working concept of someone being “in charge” (discussion begins in *Section 13.03.3*). Some students may need to learn what government or management is before they can proceed.

Local chambers of commerce, city websites, town halls, libraries, and courthouses offer great sources of information on local government.

- Who is in charge of my neighborhood? (Who makes the rules and laws we follow?)
- What do the citizens of my neighborhood have control over and how do they get their voices heard? (*Examples: voting, town meetings, rallies, picketing, groups/organizations, newsletters and websites, etc.*)
- What neighborhood groups exist? Is there a town hall?
- What roles do the above play in local government?
- What are some places I might want to visit or people I might want to meet on this topic? (seeds for goal setting, outings, and projects)

### Points of Emphasis

This section runs the risk of overwhelming students with facts and details. Students need to build a conceptual understanding that gives them places to put the details and facts covered. Visual manipulatives such as charts, tables, and video clips are helpful. Teachers should decide ahead of time which facts and



details are salient and how to present the information in a dynamic manner that avoids listing of rote facts and superficial processing. Additionally, experiential learning such as internet research, going out and about to visit places, and asking people questions to get information are all ways to help this section become more alive and connect students to the information on a personal level.

### Drawing Conclusions

Examples: “Is there anything missing in my neighborhood? Are there too many rules or not enough rules? Are there things that need fixing? Who would be in charge of fixing or building it? Do I want to get involved and how?”

#### 13.04.04 Businesses

Begin by engaging in a group brainstorming session on what comes to mind when we talk about businesses (*Examples: store, money, boss, cash register, etc.*). Next, create a list of businesses (the longer the better), regardless of whether or not they are local.

As their thinking and creativity is stimulated, teachers can move into categorization (*Example: Make a column on a whiteboard of big chain stores vs. local businesses; high-end vs. discount stores; service vs. entertainment vs. retail businesses, etc.*).

Once they are engaged, bridge to the content below. In the local neighborhood (or in “my neighborhood”):

- What businesses operate in my neighborhood?
- How do I find out more about local businesses? (*Examples: web searches, customer reviews, local laws and regulations, better business bureau, franchises/chains/locally owned, etc.*)
- Which ones do I use?
- Which businesses are popular?
- Which places might I want to visit (seeds for goal setting, outings, and projects)
- What places might I want to work at?

### Points of Emphasis

Projects such as creating maps or 3D dioramas help students learn by activating their creativity and visualization, and engages them in active rather than passive learning. Exploring, field trips, and scavenger hunts offer opportunities for executive function practice (planning and executing) and engages the body as well as the mind and emotions. Students can also get important practice in evaluative thinking by using an external scale to rate businesses. Teachers can provide students with a scale (such as a Likert-type scale rating from 1 to 10) and explicit guidance on what they are evaluating (*Example: how much you like it, how important it is*). For individuals with more advanced skills, teachers can enlist students in the design of the scale and what it will measure (*Example: we will use a star rating: 1 star = bad, 5 stars = excellent; we will evaluate it based on “coolness” or “usefulness”*). Collaboration and independent work can also be emphasized, depending on what works better for the student (*Example: students are assigned their own grid section of the*

*town and have to coordinate as a group how to make one large map; each student makes his or her own map and then compares with peers).*

### Drawing Conclusions

Examples: “There are a lot of restaurants in my neighborhood. We need more grocery stores nearby. I always shop at the same places.”

#### 13.04.05 Civic Services and Locations

As students become more aware of their needs, they will want to learn about the services that their community has to offer. This will decrease their dependence upon caregivers and take them another step closer towards independence.

Some students will have picked up skills along the way, are innately curious, have sought out learning about community resources, or have begun to do some things on their own. These students can bring a lot to the table in terms of sharing experiences and knowledge, modeling independence for their fellow students, and encouraging peers.

Students who approach this section with little knowledge or experience will need more facilitation and coaching to identify their needs, locate available services, research and compare options, arrive at a decision, and execute a plan to get a need met or desire fulfilled. In these situations, staff efforts will be to:

- Activate curiosity and interest
- Help students find personal meaning in the content
- Increase sense of ownership of own needs
- Help them manage any anxiety that arises.

Executive function and critical thinking will likely need support since navigating resources successfully will draw heavily upon these two cognitive domains.

Topics to cover include:

- My local police station, fire department, etc.
- Public schools
- Garbage, recycling, and other pick-up services, recycling centers, local dump
- YMCA and other community places in my neighborhood
- Community organizations (community watch, neighborhood clean-up, etc.)
- Services and places I use
- Services and places I would like to visit/know more about (seeds for goal setting, outings, and projects)
- Where are the parks in my neighborhood and who takes care of them?
- What do people vote on neighborhood decisions, how does it work and where do people go to vote?

### Points of Emphasis

As with other sections in this module, it is vital that this work not rest solely on facts. Of equal importance is emphasis on **executive function** (HOW to organize details and facts covered and HOW to navigate each place successfully), **interpersonal elements** (what people and communication skills are needed to navigate the various services and locations), and **life skills** (identifying needs, the correlating agency, and what you can expect them to do to help or provide, waiting times, etc.).

### Drawing Conclusions

Example: “What community services help me do (this task)? Will that be helpful to me? Now that I know about it, how will I do things differently in the future?”

#### 13.04.06 Special and Historical Lore (Local Flavor)

For this section, guest speakers, media, and the internet offer excellent access to local lore. Engaging activities can enliven this section of the module and make learning more community-based and experiential.

*Examples: Field trip to the famous donut shop to watch them bake and taste a donut hot out of the pan, dressing up in costume to fit a particular theme or time period, doing a hunt to find a famous statue.*

- Is my neighborhood known for anything special (a food product, historical event location, local lore)
- Places I would like to visit
- Events I would like to know more about (seeds for goal setting and projects)

### Points of Emphasis

This section is intended to be highly interactive and engaging. Teachers should assemble a list of neighborhood facts ahead of time that can be explored with students. In addition to internet research, there are many creative ways to explore neighborhood history: visiting local chamber of commerce or library branch, local historians, and talking to people who have lived in the neighborhood a long time.

### Drawing Conclusions

Examples: “My neighborhood is interesting because (fill in the blank). Is that a good or bad thing to be famous for?”

#### 13.04.07 Spiritual Places and the Beliefs They Represent

It can be helpful to ask the group initially if they or their families practice a religion or identify with a particular ethnicity or culture. Sharing what is known is a wonderful way to tackle new material.

This step also gives staff a chance to assess whether there are any students who have any sensitivities or biases. Religion can be a hot topic for some. Staff will need to be sensitive to this as they progress through the module.

Some students may have a strong interest in religion and a wide knowledge base. They might be excited to share insights with their peers. Teachers will need to decide how much is appropriate for the group. If there is an individual or small group that wishes to explore religion and culture in depth while others are not interested, these topics can become inspiration for a small study group, discussion, future field trips, or independent/small group projects.

Teachers should test out creative, experiential ways to expose students to different cultures (music, food, dance, rituals, clothing, special holidays, guest speakers, and performances, etc.).

- Local churches, temples, meditation centers, etc.
- Places I might want to visit
- Questions I have about religions discussed (seeds for goal setting, outings, and projects)

### Points of Emphasis

Students will have discussed race and ethnicity in prior sections. It is likely that the issue of spiritual practice, religion, and places of worship will have arisen in those contexts. Any related threads and any glimmers of interest or curiosity that came out of prior discussions can be brought forward and examined more closely (or revisited if time was spent discussing them in detail prior). Since religion can be a hot topic for some, teachers should be aware of the potential for emotional dysregulation, anxiety, or disagreements to surface within or between students. For this reason, it is recommended that teachers facilitating these discussions explicitly set and consistently review rules for respectful discussion and maintaining a climate for a productive dialogue.

### Drawing Conclusions

Examples: "There are a lot of different religious beliefs among people in my community. I would like to know more people who have different religious beliefs."

#### 13.04.08 Big Picture Thinking: If I Were in Charge of My Neighborhood

This section stretches students' critical thinking and creativity skills. It has the potential to generate ideas for individual, small group, or program-wide projects. Teachers can have fun helping students dream up both realistic and far-fetched ideas for play and debate.

- Changes I would make to my neighborhood
  - What would I add and why?
  - What would I eliminate and why?
- What would I keep the same and why?
- Other student generated ideas

### Points of Emphasis

To support students in big picture thinking, it is recommended there be a strong visual component to this section's discussions. Students may also need a review of the different parts discussed previously in this section to bolster memory, identify important points to consider, and help lead them to draw larger conclusions and thinking critically.

### Drawing Conclusions

Examples: "Overall I am pretty happy with my neighborhood and the things I would change are small. There are many things I would like to be different in my neighborhood. I like thinking about being in charge; I have a lot of creative ideas for making my neighborhood a better place."

### 13.05 What is Happening in the Community

Students will have different levels of interest in community events. Nevertheless, they should be encouraged to explore a variety of events to see if a new interest piques, or to become more civically aware.

Since the volume of information can be overwhelming, it might be helpful to break this section into chunks and intersperse with web research, discussion, and activities to anchor each topic.

Once students identify civic activities they wish to observe, learn more about, or participate in, natural groups may form where they can explore an event in more depth. This might lead to planning a group outing.

**Idea:** In a central place, create a giant corkboard and post community information for students and staff: calendars of community events, flyers, maps, bus schedules, brochures, and pictures or drawings of past or upcoming events.

Encourage students to post flyers they collect, sign-up sheets for events, or add events to the calendar.

Initially, staff can maintain the board and, when appropriate, a student can assist in managing the board as an in-school internship. Among other duties, tasks could include finding and soliciting for new events to post.

In addition to supporting students in previewing, selecting, attending and participating in community events it is vital to offer post-event follow-up. Follow-up and post-event discussions will help students strengthen their ability to reflect, make meaning of their experiences, evaluate them and use them to inform future decisions. It is recommended each event be revisited afterwards to process, discuss, share, form opinions, and draw conclusions. By establishing a predictable protocol of questions and discussion points that students engage in each time they attend an event, we not only help students organize their thinking but we also model strategies for ways they can begin to independently assess their experiences.

**Reminder:** When planning an outing, be sure to incorporate awareness of student environmental sensitivities (including crowds), sensory sensitivities, and other regulatory needs. Create contingency plans for individuals who become dysregulated or overwhelmed and need a quiet place or must return to the program.

### 13.05.01 Community Events

Consider all of these different types of events, ask students whether they may have participated in them, then discuss the series of questions that follows.

- Community building examples: parades, festivals, concerts in the park, etc.
- Community service examples: tree plantings, community clean-ups, soup kitchens, homeless shelters, animal rescue, etc.
- Public Education event examples: college and health fairs
- Recreational event examples: parades, festivals, outdoor movies in the park, sporting events, etc.
- Cultural Event examples: Ethnic festivals, food festivals, ethnic parades, holiday celebrations
- Political Event examples: voting days, rallies, protests, topics up for vote, people up for election/re-election, hot issues

#### Questions for discussion

- Why are these types of events important? How do they benefit the community? How does attending benefit me?
- Why these types of projects important? How do they benefit the community? What valuable things do we learn about other people and ourselves when we participate in them? How does helping others benefit me?
- What I would like to learn more about or participate in
- What personal needs and sensitivities could arise if I were to participate in these events?
  - environmental factors
  - internal factors
- How can my needs be met so I can attend this event, feel comfortable, and enjoy myself?
  - What I can do
  - What others can do to help

## 13.06 Finding Information

### 13.06.01 How to Learn About Upcoming Events

- Flyers, banners, billboards, and other public postings
- Websites and social media
- TV and radio ads
- Local news and local papers
- Putting my name on an email list to receive notifications

### 13.06.02 Getting the Details I Need So I Can Plan

- What information source will best provide me with the information I need – print, web, asking someone, going to the location to find out
- Locating the point person/contact within the organization for asking my questions
- Calling or emailing my questions (how to do it, what to ask)
- What I may need to know when deciding whether to go
  - cost
  - time commitment
  - location and how I will get there
  - expectations of participants (bring 2 cans of food for a food drive, have to stay a specific amount of time)
  - Does the event conflict with plans I already have?
  - Is this event compatible with my environmental and sensory needs? If not, can I take measures to take care of myself so I can still participate?

**Reflection:** What was easy about finding the information? What was difficult?



### 13.07 Locating Services

- Internet (visiting websites, finding directions, using Google maps, etc.)
- Telephone
- Asking someone for help (parent, staff member, peer)
- Local maps and GPS

**Reflection:** What was easy about locating services? What was difficult?

### 13.08 Entertainment and Recreation

- Review options and places from earlier discussions, and add new ones
- Rate list according to preference, fun, sensory, emotional reactions, relates to a personal affinity or interest, etc.
- Explore unknown or unfamiliar options student might want to add
- Things I need to/want to learn so I can enjoy these options better (*Example: practice roller skating in basement and get confident before going to the rink*)
- Things I am scared or hesitant to try but want to do
  - What is scary/unsettling (*Examples: want to go to concert but afraid it might be too loud; want to go to car show but I'm reactive to crowds*)
  - Things I (or someone else) can do to help me overcome my fear or hesitation (*Examples: wear earplugs; attend car show during slow times so there are fewer people*)

**Reflection:** What feelings surfaced when I talked about entertainment and recreational activities? What have I learned about my preferences for entertainment and recreation?

### 13.09 Where and When to Buy

Students will need a certain level of foundational understanding for this section to be meaningful and lead to independence with money management. Students who struggle with math or money sense may need small group or 1:1 work to strengthen specific areas.

#### 13.09 .01 How Do I Spend My Money?

- Food: groceries, restaurants
- Entertainment: games, video games, movies
- Collecting: stamps, coins, or other collectible items
- Personal care: haircuts, shampoo, toothpaste, etc.
- Impulse buying
- Gifts
- Other
- Assessing what I buy
  - I am happy with it
  - I want to change my habits by setting goals

#### 13.09.02 Where Do I Like to Shop?

- In store (list places and why I like them)
- Online (list sites and why I chose them)
- Satisfaction level
  - I am happy where I shop
  - I would like to try new places to shop (identify and why)

#### 13.09.03 Saving Money for Big or Special Items Such as Electronics or Trips

- Ways to save
  - savings account
  - give it to trusted person to hold for you
  - piggy bank or money box in room
  - reducing expenses to save
- Delay gratification and wait until I have enough money
  - managing excitement
  - self-control
  - ways and tricks to keep my eye on the prize

### 13.09.04 My Spending Habits

- Saver/conservative
- Impulse buyer
- Easily persuaded (salesman, TV, etc.)
- Anxious about spending
- Independent and confident
- Buyer's remorse, return things a lot
- Dependent on parent or staff to help (anxiety, numbers, organization, limit setting, etc.)
- Cash vs. credit or debit card
- Do I have a system for keeping track of my money?
  - If yes, discuss and refine as needed
  - If no, begin working on an individualized plan
- Personal goals for spending

**Reflection:** What was easy about spending money? What was difficult?

### 13.10 Where to Eat

Food can be problematic for individuals with developmental disabilities because of sensory sensitivities, preferences, oral-motor issues, and gastrointestinal problems. Some students may be anxious about food and restricted in what they can or will eat.

Given this individual variation, staff may want to split students into groups that share similar eating preferences. This will make lesson planning easier and more effective. For example, some students will approach a food taste/test activity with great excitement and curiosity. Others may resist participating and not find it an enjoyable activity.

Forming *Lunch Clubs* with students who share similar or compatible developmental levels and food preferences will allow teachers to design goals that best target individual needs. For example, one group may focus on the basics of eating out: navigating menus, self-regulating, initiating and maintaining conversation, and managing the bill. Other small groups may be more experienced and comfortable with the basics but struggle with some of the more nuanced issues involved with dining out. They may require focus on negotiating which restaurant to go to, tipping, interacting with the wait staff, or trying food outside their comfort zone.

Establish lunch groups before eating out. Preparatory steps might include:

- Strengthening collaboration
- Establishing group goals
- Voting on ideas generated by the group
- Previewing menus online
- Identifying places to go
- Looking at a calendar to plan when
- Planning logistics – how getting there, how long it will take

Regardless of developmental levels, all students need some support in managing anxiety, money, executive functions, and social navigation.

#### 13.10.01 What to Think About When Choosing Where/What to Eat

- Dietary needs
- Cravings
- Healthy choices
- How much time you have
- How much money you can spend
- Logistics (getting there, how far away)
- Collaborating with others

### 13.10.02 Fast Food Places

- Ordering
- Pick up or delivery
- Health concerns with fast food – identify “healthier” fast food places

### 13.10.03 Restaurants

- Ordering and menu options
  - Previewing menu online
  - Special dietary needs and whether they can be accommodated
- Environmental and sensory issues and preferences
- Preferences
  - ambiance
  - food types, favorite ethnic foods, etc
- Identifying new restaurants I might like to try

**Reflection:** What is easy about eating out? What was difficult?

### 13.11 Getting Around

Maps used in previous sections will be helpful here. They can be displayed on a Getting Around Town board that posts related information such as:

- Bus and train schedules
- Taxi and shuttle contact numbers (if possible make alliances with a cab company and even specific drivers so they are sensitive to student needs)
- Safety reminders
- Executive function tips (lists of what to carry when going out such as money, cell phone, important telephone numbers etc.)
- Signup sheets and posted notes to encourage students to coordinate doing errands and outings with one another
- Other vital information related to transportation, personal safety, and independence while out and about

#### 13.11.01 Walking

- Directions/distances
- Places to stop and rest
- Being comfortable
  - good walking shoes
  - things I may want to take with me (inhaler or other medication, tissues, water bottle, sunglasses, money, etc.)
- Walking safety (with sidewalks, with no sidewalks, safety tips)

**Reflection:** What is easy about walking? What was difficult? What do I like or dislike about getting around on foot?

**Tip:** Pedometers are a fun, meaningful and engaging way to help students connect information with movement.

### 13.11.02 Cycling

Due to coordination and motor planning issues, some students will not be cyclers. They should cover the basics, such as when a bike rider has the right of way when one is walking or driving but the rest of the section will likely not apply.

For students who do like to cycle or want to learn, this section could be the seed for a program bike club.

- Road etiquette
- What to do if have a flat tire or other mechanical problem
- What to do if I fall off my bike, get hit by a car, or are injured
- Locking up my bike, where and how
- What I need to take with me and where to put it

**Reflection:** What is easy/difficult about biking? What do I like or dislike about getting around by bicycle?

### 13.11.03 Public Transportation

Public transportation offers students the opportunity to get around more independently. For students to feel comfortable taking advantage of these services, they have to understand and acclimate to rules, environments, and people connected with them. The main issues will be:

- Self-regulation
- Executive function – knowing the steps, what to attend to, and keeping track of information
- Spatial reasoning – staying oriented and knowing what to do at each point of change

A sample general sequence for increasing competence in using public transportation is as follows:

1. Create practice scenarios using role play and improvisation
2. Undertake small excursions with staff to accomplish very limited goals (*Example: quick trip to the local post office*)
3. Make trips without any concern about the destination (*Example: take a train trip to an arbitrary station and then return*)
4. Have purposeful destinations (to purchase something) and back

By phasing the experiences, students gain and solidify skills incrementally. This results in better retention and is less overwhelming compared with undertaking a more complex excursion before they are ready.

Points to address incrementally:

- Cost
- Safety
  - stranger safety (pan handlers, pickpocketing, etc.)
  - asking for help



- Timing (missed bus, have to wait)
- Time required
- Logistics (transfers, etc.)
- Etiquette
- Modes of transportation I use
- Mode of transportation I would like to use or try

**Reflection:** What was easy about using public transportation? What was difficult? What do I like/dislike about getting around this way?

**Note:** All students will benefit from learning and practicing how to use public transportation. For many it opens doors for increased independence. It is important to recognize, however, that for some students, public transportation, especially alone, can be too great a challenge given their preferences, environmental sensitivities, personalities, or regulatory needs. In these cases, public transportation should still be encouraged and used whenever possible but it may not become a practical part of their personal path towards building independence.

#### 13.11.04 Rides from Friends and Family

- Who it is okay to ask for a ride
- What and how to ask
- Etiquette (contributing money for gas, not taking over the radio, etc.)

**Reflection:** What was easy about riding in a car? What was difficult? What do I like/dislike about riding in a car?

#### 13.11.05 Taxis and Shuttles

- Safety
  - making sure it is a legitimate company
  - making sure you are going where you want/need to go
  - being dropped off in a familiar area
- Cost (negotiating cost of ride, including tip)
- Etiquette

**Reflection:** What was easy about taking a taxi or shuttle? What was difficult? What do I like/dislike about it?

### 13.11.06 General Safety

General safety while out and about requires self-regulation, managing the unexpected, critical thinking, executive function, and social awareness. Therefore, although short in outline, this section requires much discussion and practice – through “rehearsal”, role-playing, and facilitated interactions out in the community.

- Carrying ID
- Cell phone with numbers you need programmed in
- Who to ask if lost
- Stranger safety (do not accept rides from strangers, etc.)

**Reflection:** What was easy about staying safe when I was out and about? What was difficult?

### 13.12 Identifying My Favorite Places, Businesses, and Events

This section offers students the opportunity to review what they learned in the module. They might wish to expand on preferences expressed, reflect on experiences, and notice how these experiences affected their preferences.

Students evaluate whether the places they have listed or visited should remain on their favorites list and what new places should be added. This mental exercise focuses on flexibility and evaluation skills. It is also an excellent opportunity for staff to remind students of places they found enjoyable but had forgotten.

### 13.13 Places I Might Want to Visit

It is very helpful for students to have checklists or forms they can fill out that walks them through the planning process, highlights what information they need to execute an outing, and supports their executive function.

- Generating goals
- Planning trips and visits

### 13.14 Where to Meet People

To assure strong skill building, reduce anxiety, and allow each student to work at his own pace, take an incremental approach to this topic. We suggest the following sequence:

1. Use role play to practice meeting people
2. Organize an outing just to observe
3. Organize outings where staff can model for students how to engage others in the community

Here are a few proven steps for learning how to interact successfully with others in the community:

1. Casual and brief social interactions
  - Stores
  - Recreational places (parks, etc.)
  - Standing in line
  - Public transportation
  - Community events (parades, rallies, etc.)
2. Longer and more involved social interactions
  - Community events
  - Volunteer activities
  - Clubs and meetings

### 13.15 Places I Might Want to Volunteer

1. Review ideas generated in the Community Service section of *Section 13.06 What is Happening in My Community?*
2. Brainstorm and discuss additional volunteer tasks, organizations, and community needs
3. For each volunteer idea evaluate:
  - Feasibility (time commitment, location)
  - Meets my environmental and sensory needs
  - Volunteer expectations and requirements
  - Break down of tasks and skills required for volunteer position
  - Whether my skills and strengths are a good match for each place/volunteer position
4. Plan trips to tour a volunteer location, shadow a volunteer on his/her shift, or invite guest speakers to learn more
5. Narrow down list and exploring deeper according to personal needs and sensitivities. Individualized according to each student's needs, skills, timing, developmental level, etc.
6. Do further research. Some volunteer positions have age and skill requirements or have a minimum shift length or time commitment. Staff should discuss with volunteer organizations of interest extent to which they can accommodate student needs and challenges. This research will save time and help staff and students focus on viable options.

### 13.16 Places I Might Want to Work

Use same steps listed in *Section 13.15 Places I Might Want to Volunteer*.

### 13.17 General Guidance for Being Out and About in the Community with Students

When staff members feel students are ready to experience being out and about in the community, the following will help guide initial planning, contingency planning, organization, plan implementation, and post-experience management.

#### 13.17.01 Examples of Community-Based Learning Experiences

- Attending a community event (dedication, concert, handing out water at a bike race or walk-a-thon)
- Volunteer (organization, community garden, event of interest such as an anime convention)
- Tour a facility
- Observe a specialist or a process in a facility (glassblowing, making doughnuts)
- Internship
- Putting up flyers for an event
- Scavenger hunt
- Shopping (items for a project, ingredients for a recipe, school supplies)
- Attending a rally or protest
- Outdoor performances
- Entertainment
- Shadow a professional for a day
- Informational interviews
- Mock interviews
- Job interviews
- Reporter interviews (for a school newsletter, article)
- Dining out
- Learning how to do something (tire changing demonstration at auto shop, firemen show how to check batteries in smoke detector)
- Exercise (YMCA, park, hiking)
- Fact-finding mission (go to army recruitment to ask questions about being in military)
- Compare places (style, environment, feel, etc.)
- Outings just to get acclimated to being in public – destination – *where* not as important as *the process*)
- Attend a lecture/audit a class
- Meet a professor/someone with expertise on a subject of interest (tour robotics lab at local state college)
- Understand community systems (tour police station, do mock traffic court improvisation, sit in police car, attend a public trial, etc.)



- Join a club or attend a club meeting
- Participate in a community cleanup or group volunteer event
- Participate in fun activities (city wide scavenger hunt, local 5k race)

### 13.17.02 Managing Individual Differences in Core Capacities When Out and About

#### Regulation

The ability to self-regulate or receive regulation support can determine whether someone is able to navigate successfully being out and about in a public milieu. It is important to have a thorough understanding of an individual's regulatory capacities in selecting readiness for and appropriateness of community outings and experiences.

#### Engagement and Reciprocity

Successful social interaction requires both engagement and reciprocity. Some community experiences can be shaped or controlled to limit the range of social interactions – these make previewing and preparing students for the outing much simpler. Many other community experiences have inherently unexpected aspects and would require a more sophisticated level of engagement and reciprocity.

When selecting community experiences, keep in mind each individual's level of development with respect to engagement and reciprocity. Identify opportunities that offer an appropriate level of challenge.

#### Social Problem-Solving

Most community-based learning experiences provide opportunities for both planned and spontaneous practice with social/shared problem solving. It is wise to select experiences appropriate to each individual's level of skill in this area. It is best to keep the problems appropriately challenging but not surpassing the threshold beyond which the challenge becomes overwhelming.

#### Self-Reflection/Self-Knowledge

The reactions, feelings, thoughts, and actions resulting from our interaction with the environment provide rich data about who we are. However, much of our self-understanding grows only when we see ourselves in relation to others.

Interacting with other people, we see ourselves in a new light. The interactions give us perspectives impossible to achieve when we are isolated or in predictable and limited relationships.

Self-evaluation is a high-level function. However, most people can engage in it to some degree given support, adjustment of language, and adaptation of the process to their capabilities. Community-based activities offer very effective opportunities to support individuals in building self-awareness through experience, interaction, and feedback sessions.

### 13.17.03 Organization and Planning for Community Outings

Planning and organizing community-based learning experiences require attention on three levels: individual, group, and the community itself.

#### Individual experience guidelines

- Align plans with the individual's goals. Establish clearly defined relationships between the outings and the therapeutic and big picture treatment plan. Do they support timeline, expectations and goals?
- Design plans that match the individual's profile:
  - select realistic choices given individual's expectations, challenges, and current functioning
  - match the individual's affinities and aim to build or expand on interests
  - make plans compatible with environmental needs (sensory, sensitivity to crowds, triggers, phobias, etc.)
  - incorporate individual's strengths & weaknesses; ideally capitalize on strengths and use them to minimize weaknesses
  - maintain appropriate levels of challenge in light of individual's resiliency, adaptability & flexibility
  - design highly individualized support
  - provide optimal amount of time and modalities for previewing (online research, discussion, visit, meet someone from place, drive by, etc.)
  - permit time for sufficient experience
  - anticipate potential problems and triggers, discuss with individual
  - plan contingency / exit strategies (both with individual and with staff)
  - provide a comfort person on-site and who will also support in other sessions or aspects of program
  - establish the context and meaning of the outing with each individual: What is the goal of outing? (social, anxiety management, learning something, practice, managing logistics, exposure, reality testing, career exploration, job exploration)
  - if relevant, support individual in deciding what to disclose and when regarding his disability
  - post-experience support/debriefing sessions: extremely important when working with individuals who have a tendency to distort or omit key aspects of an experience. Debriefing sessions should follow an experience immediately and also be ongoing to ensure meaning is gleaned from the experience, reinforced, and incorporated
- Ensure use of *step-wisdom* (proper ordering and sequencing as applied to processes or tasks)
  - assess individual readiness and use as guidance to design rate, volume and complexity of experience

- recheck: How does this experience fit into the individual's short- and long-term goals and planning?
- timing: Is the timing right for this experience given what else is going on in student's life?

### Group Experience Guidelines

- Form compatible groupings (size, personality, ratio of support staff to clients, logistics)
- Offer group sessions pre- and post-experience to process, validate, normalize, and inform
- Provide opportunities within experience for group consensus, problem solving, and planning
- Build in frequent previewing that includes not only dissemination of information and discussion, but also experiential activities such as role playing and improvisation of possible scenarios (supports preparing for the unexpected, creative problem-solving, collaboration, negotiation, social appropriateness, and emotion regulation in a wide range of situations)

### Community Guidelines

- Assess community opportunities for good matches (events, locations, environmental factors, level collaboration, latitude for accommodations, advantages/disadvantages to a given event or venue, etc.)
- Establish community relationships (individuals and organizations)
- Outline the terms, timing, expectations, and parameters of outing with the organization, venue, or individual in charge
- Follow-up (thank you, post-event communication from both the program and students)
- Maintain and grow partnerships beyond a single visit (develop internship and work possibilities, identify ongoing or future opportunities)

### 13.17.04 Preparing for Potential Risks and Obstacles

There are obstacles and risks inherent in the pursuit of anything of value. It is unrealistic to think they can be eliminated, and often these barriers become valuable learning opportunities.

Many of the unknowns involved with community outings can be discovered in advance by staff, finding the wisest ways to proceed. The goal is to enter community-based learning experiences equipped with contingency plans, bypass strategies, and any other tools needed to calm and soothe, or if necessary, quickly remove the individual from a stressful situation.

Remember, the goal is not to remove all obstacles and risks but to know them well enough going in, and to know the individuals involved well enough so that any difficulties that surface can become learning opportunities for problem solving and coping rather than showstoppers.

#### Risks

When staff members fully understand the neurodevelopmental profile of each participant, they are equipped to plan community-based learning activities. They will know which risks are worth taking and which should be delayed.

The primary areas to watch for clues predicting how well an individual will manage distress in a public, unfamiliar environment:

- Emotional and regulatory responses
- Social anxiety
- Social awareness and thinking
- Maturity
- Impulsiveness
- Reactivity
- Rigidity
- Resilience

Some individuals on the autism spectrum are vulnerable to being traumatized by distress and will avoid returning to a location associated with that distress. Therefore, trial and error should be planned and parceled out in manageable bites.

Key questions for assessing whether a risk is worthwhile:

1. *Based upon the evidence gathered (above), what is the predicted severity of the individual's reaction?*
2. *How likely is it that the severity might cause a negative chain reaction counterproductive to the student's growth?*

More typical risks that might surface during community outings:

- Individual is unprepared – not enough previewing, discussion, or other readiness strategies.  
**Note:** Some students may do fine during the previewing and planning phase, but when it comes time to go out into community they may stall out or have spikes of anxiety.
- Too much too soon – improperly individualizing rate, volume, timing, and complexity of the community experience
- Activities that don't fit well with the individual at his current state of development, causing him to avoid similar activities in the future. (*Example: Eating at a busy fast food place during lunch hour, which requires deciding quickly what to eat, having to wait a long time for the food, not being able to get a table in the corner or have music turned down, etc. The environment is too rushed or complicated for the individual and the situation does not allow for accommodations.*)
- Feeling overwhelmed and dysregulated, which leads to socially unacceptable behaviors (public meltdowns, yelling profanity, etc.)

### Obstacles

Typically, fielding obstacles consumes quite a bit of staff energy while out in the community, whereas risks can be often predicted and accommodated for in the planning phase. The following are some common obstacles that can arise:

- Environmental factors that spark sensory sensitivities or dysregulation
- Lack of understanding, compassion, or collaboration on the part of community members
- Logistical challenges that cause changes in plans (bus late, flat tire, etc.)
- Safety concerns arising
- Crowds – it can be difficult to find events where sensitivities to large groups of people or long lines can be made manageable. Look for times of day and week when attendance at large events is low.
- Resource availability (destination is closed, not enough of something to go around, etc.)
- The unexpected

By implementing all guidelines above carefully – together with large doses of optimism, creativity, and flexibility – staff can support transition students successfully in understanding, exploring, and participating in their communities.

When students show readiness, the next natural steps following this module are threefold: (1) ongoing practice and refinement, (2) developing long-term options for community relationships and involvement, and (3) expanding understanding to include one's larger society.

### 13.18 Part 2: Understanding Why We Learn About Society

**Note:** Part 1 of *Understanding and Participating in Community* should be covered prior to beginning this section. This sequencing increases readiness to tackle societal topics by expanding the scope of student thinking beyond just the immediate surroundings.

Understanding the society we live in broadens all of our lives. It illuminates where we came from, what forces and influences have impacts on our daily lives, and where we fit into the big picture. It helps us to expand our thinking beyond our immediate neighborhood or community and invites us to experience a larger sense of connectedness. Once we awaken to the dimensions, expectations, and rules of our society, doors open for us to:

- Explore new ideas with creativity
- Follow current passions and interests and discover new ones
- Identify potential new jobs and careers
- Develop and pursue our new curiosity about current events, politics, environmental issues, and other societal concerns
- Find options unavailable in our local communities (cultural, economic, political)

Building meaningful awareness of the larger world around us can be challenging for individuals on the autism spectrum, because it challenges their ability to feel safe and calm in the face of so many new and unfamiliar experiences. The vastness of “the world” may give rise to anxiety, and a potential overload of new information (both factual and conceptual). Abstract concepts like government may be difficult to comprehend. Additionally, some individuals on the autism spectrum have spent so much time and energy mastering discrete tasks that they haven’t had the opportunity to think or be curious about society and the world.

Once again, the process we utilize consistently throughout the Transition Curriculum proves useful in this module as well. Staff should use creative, individualized approaches with each student that capitalizes on their interests and passions. Always use enthusiasm to ignite wonder and curiosity. Acknowledge and support an individual’s regulatory needs so the student is available to engage and learn. Finally, adapt language level, rate, complexity of the material, and volume to match each individual learning style.

Awareness and a growing understanding of society will encourage students to *choose to participate*. Participation comes in many forms, but whatever shape it may take, celebrate it. The conscious choice to participate with the outside world prompts an individual to engage and contribute in her own creative way; this in turn adds great meaning to the student’s daily life.

Before starting, establish the general climate for studying this module. Lay out what will be covered and ways in which information can impact their lives, both directly and indirectly. It will be helpful to keep a list of topics each student wants to learn more about – community, state, country, and world – as these will become personal goals for this section.

Individuals with autism present great variation in terms of their interest in and/or awareness of the larger society in which they live. Some individuals are largely unaware of society and societal issues, while others may already possess some understanding. However, all will benefit from starting with this question:

### Why should we learn about this?

All students, even those with considerable background knowledge, should begin here, as there may be gaps in knowledge worth addressing. Taking the time to build a foundation will pay off later on.

We suggest presenting the material in this module by creating a set of concentric rings. Staff can use a white board or large poster board to draw the concentric rings presented below. As students explore wider realms of knowledge (local community, state, country, world), fill in the rings with notes or pictures. This helps students to visualize, make connections, and track what was covered. It also serves as a visual record for review.



Students who already have passions or interests in topics related to society (*Examples: they love politics, are interested in world geography, care about the environment, etc.*) will likely bring a lot of their own knowledge, interest, and excitement to this section.

If their interests are narrow (*Example: only interested in military battles*), the challenge lies in widening their awareness to see how other societal topics relate to their favored topic.

If a student's interests are more confined (*Example: individual can list names of countries but does not know anything else about them*), the challenge will be to activate critical thinking and expand their understanding starting with what they already know.

Capitalize on existing societal knowledge and interests by using creative methods to keep students engaged, such as designating certain individuals as "experts" or "fact checkers" within their preferred areas. This provides opportunities for sharing their interests with others in meaningful ways. Students who become dysregulated or dominate the conversation by talking about their areas of interest may need support to reign

in their excitement and manage their contributions so as not to overwhelm fellow students or control the discussions.

Students who come to this section with their knowledge reserves empty will benefit greatly from creative teaching strategies designed to awaken interest, introduce new concepts, explore meaning, make connections to their own lives, and discover new potential interests and passions.

The contributions of more knowledgeable peers will enliven discussions and deepen knowledge. Establishing the importance of being aware and involved in one's society gives these students a starting point.

Society is an abstract concept based on common beliefs. You cannot touch a society, hold it in your hand, taste it, or otherwise experience it directly through the physical senses. For this reason, it is possible to be too focused on information dissemination, which can overwhelm students. To make this module more fun and creative:

- Emphasize that the point of understanding society is so students can identify areas of interest, form their own opinions, and discover ways to participate and contribute
- Information should be broken down into manageable portions and brought to life using activities involving movement, the senses, humor, creativity, interaction, and other forms of engagement.
- Use visual materials to establish abstract concepts. All information should be paired with visual support – maps, media clips, articles on the web, concept maps, pictures, etc.
- Play popular board games such as Monopoly or Risk. In Monopoly, players are capitalists intent on amassing great wealth. The premise of the game will generate great discussion about social values and society's winners and losers. Likewise, Risk is about world domination. Why does a country want to dominate another? These games and others can be played with single players or small teams. They will generate a great deal of discussion and reflection about societal interactions.
- Use examples from the students' direct experiences
- Engage in projects and group research as fun ways to explore society
- Use field trips, guest speakers, and create mock situations in the program that model or highlight content
- Examine decisions made on a societal level through explicit examples. Include an experiential component so students can connect cognitively and emotionally (incorporate visuals and film clips, make analogies to their lives, conduct mock votes, etc.). *Examples of societal decisions include: choosing presidents, protecting national parks/endangered species, declaring war, water restrictions during a drought, gas prices, immigration, World Health Organization, Global AIDS relief, helping poor nations, international disaster relief, etc.*

Most of the information needed for teaching this section is accessible on the internet. This can be a double-edged sword because although surfing the net is fun and easy, it is also time-consuming and not



always interactive. Staff should seek to download information ahead of time to design fun and interactive activities, games, and debates.

### 13.19 Developing a Community View

This will be a review of material gained from *Part 1: Understanding and Participating in the Community*.

Depending on the individual memory, processing, and attention of students, the extent to which students were able to grasp information presented in Part 1 of this module might vary significantly. For some students this section may be a relatively easy review. You will also encounter students who appear to be learning this material for the first time. In such cases, jogging memories through experience rather than information can be very helpful.

For example, a student may come up blank when asked about famous local places covered in the Community module but when reminded of a field trip (an incident, something he ate, or something he saw) the information may come back to him. Peers can also be helpful with students who cannot recall information covered previously.

One area that may prove challenging for some students to tackle on a societal level is voting. In the Community module, the conceptual and practical foundation on voting is established with students: what is voting, how it is done, what the results mean, etc. Part 1 of this module offers many opportunities to understand voting through both language and experience, starting with simple low-stakes voting topics (*Example: best restaurant in town*) and moving into more hearty and complex topics (*Example: should our town vote on a new recycling program*) as skills and understanding strengthens.

Even though all students will receive exposure and practice in the Community module, each individual student will emerge with his or her own understanding of voting based upon their unique cognitive and language processing profile. Teachers should be prepared for a range in sophistication and readiness to apply voting on a societal level:

- Students who experience difficulty understanding abstract concepts and applying them to real-world situations will need continuing exposure and practice voting on a concrete level. Until this is anchored, addressing the meaning of voting within a society may be too abstract. These students may need exposure to ongoing opportunities to vote on small, low-stakes concrete issues until their skills strengthen.
- Students who understand voting on a conceptual, non-verbal level but have language processing challenges and become bogged down in the process will need non-verbal and verbal language support to learn how to approach and navigate voting. Until the right language-based strategies and accommodations are put into place, a discussion on society and voting may be too much of a demand on their receptive and expressive language systems. These students may need ongoing voting experiences that pair action, visual supports, nonverbal communication, and language together until they are able to navigate the process with success and are ready for more language-based work on voting.
-

- Students who understand the basic concept of voting, but need significant coaching and facilitating to navigate the process will need continuing practice to learn how to become more independent. Until they reach a level of independence with real-time voting, a discussion on the meaning of voting in a society may be too overwhelming. These students may need ongoing practice voting on a wide range of low-, medium-, and higher-stake topics with support weaned off slowly as they become more adept and independent.
- Students who are very rule-oriented are often able to navigate voting activities independently but may struggle when the process strays from the expected rules (Example: someone votes twice, a vote is done then redone because something was not done right, other students do not follow the voting rules). This can lead to emotional dysregulation and hyperfocus on details at the expense of the big picture. Until they can learn to manage their emotional reactions, understand the role flexibility might play, and not get too bogged down in details, a discussion on voting and society may feel upsetting and confusing.
- Students who enjoy the activity of voting and are also fascinated by the concept will likely be energized by discussions on voting and society. Those who also have an interest in history, politics, and other social sciences are often quick to understand voting in society on a more abstract and sophisticated level. These students may be best served by forming their own small groups so they can navigate the content at a pace and complexity that does not overwhelm other peers.

Cover or review the following:

1. Famous or well-known things (historical sites, popular places, items associated with community, local celebrities, etc.). *Examples: Boston Red Sox, cheese head hats in Green Bay, Georgia Tech vs. UGA sports rivalry, Philly cheese steak.*
2. Cultures, ethnicities, religions
3. Population
4. Current local events, popular culture, local sports teams
5. Responsibilities as a community member
  - Legal (abiding by local laws, voting)
  - Ethical (Do I have a responsibility to my community as a member, community issues, local elections?)
  - Having choices/making changes (volunteering, raising awareness to community issues, attending a rally, should I recycle, etc.)
6. In review
  - Most interesting facts about my community
  - Goals: Things I may want to learn more about, places I would like to visit, activities I want to engage in (*Examples: recycling, attending local farmer's market, etc.*), people I would like to meet
  - Any new ideas come from this? (career paths, hobby ideas, creative insights, new interests)

### A word about the right to vote

Unlike other classes of disabled people, people with developmental disabilities can be denied the right to vote based entirely on the nature of their disability. Loss of voting rights can occur under state Constitutions and election laws that deny the vote to people judged “mentally incompetent,” including those under guardianship.

These laws, intended to prevent voter fraud and to protect vulnerable people from manipulation, have been applied too broadly in some locales.

More recently, though, courts in many areas have taken action to mitigate the disenfranchising of disabled people by ruling that guardianship for financial reasons need not necessarily result in a loss of the right to vote, and that individuals with developmental disabilities are entitled to accommodations, including a person to help them at the polls.

More information and resources are available online from Disability Justice:

<http://disabilityjustice.tpt.org/right-to-vote/>

### 13.20 Developing a State View

For those students who come from a different state, staff can decide what would be more meaningful – exploring their original home state or their new one. It is recommended that the focus be on the state where the program is being delivered since that is where they will be living for the next few years.

There are many creative ways for staff to weave other states into the discussion. This will give students a chance to stretch their thinking skills (*Example: comparing and contrasting this state with where students came from*).

Explore these topics:

- History and Geography
- Government
- Local government
- Political parties
- Voting (right/responsibility, when, how)
- Major issues and events
- Population
- Cultures, ethnicities, religions
- Current state events and statewide pop culture
- Famous/well known things (historical sites and events, popular places, celebrities, and items associated with state)
- Sports teams
- Responsibilities as a citizen of my state
- Legal (abiding by state laws)
- Ethical (Do I have a responsibility to my state to stay aware of state issues?)
- Choice (*Examples: volunteering, raising awareness to state issues, attending a rally at capital, etc.*)

In review:

- Most interesting facts learned about my state
  - Goals: Things I may want to learn more about, places I would like to visit, activities I want to engage in, people I would like to meet (Fall Garlic Festival, state fair, Native American burial mound, etc.)
  - Any new ideas come from this? (career paths, hobby ideas, creative insights, new interests)

### 13.21 Developing a Country View

A discussion about United States government may be a hot button for some students. Talk radio shows, blogs, and other media that express extreme views with high affect and strong language can influence all individuals, including individuals with autism. Some students may adopt extreme viewpoints without understanding the associated implications or meaning of the content, because they are drawn to the high affect used to express views. This provides staff with an opportunity to discuss content separate from the inflammatory rhetoric so students can first evaluate the content and then consider how different viewpoints can affect how we interpret the content.

Explore these topics:

- States of the country, famous or popular cities
- Geography, famous sites, and national parks
- Cultures, ethnicities, religions
- Government
- Branches of government
- Political parties
- Voting (right/responsibility, when, how)
- Major issues and historical events
- Monetary
- Stock market
- Economics
- Imports/exports
- National debt
- American symbols, country identity, meaning, etc.
- Country-wide current events
- American pop culture
- Responsibilities as an American
- Legal (abiding by federal laws)
- Ethical (Do I have a responsibility to my country?)
- Choice (Examples: volunteering, raising awareness to country-wide issues, attending a rally, working for a political campaign or party, etc.)

In review:

- Most interesting facts learned about my country
- Goals: things I may want to learn more about, places I would like to visit, activities I want to engage in
- Any new ideas come from this? (career paths, hobby ideas, creative insights, new Interests)

### 13.22 Developing a World View

Developing a gestalt of the entire world is more complex than developing a national or country view. The following guidelines will be very familiar by now but are especially important during this section:

- Adjust the complexity to fit each student’s cognitive, language, and processing style
- Use visual charts and other representations so connections are easier to make
- Deliver content or parts of the content at a speed that the student can digest and find meaningful
- Media (websites, movies, clips, etc.) are very helpful for presenting concepts in ways that are engaging and fun
- Use projects, field trips, and other experiential methods for understanding information  
*(Examples: trying foods from different cultures, trying to learn a popular dance such as Gangnam Style, looking at pictures and images that are visually compelling and represent a lot of information that can be broken down and discussed)*

Explore these topics:

- Geography of the world and its component parts (continents, oceans, north/south, east/west)
- Nations and national identity
- Cultural identities
- Religious identities
- Government and Politics
  - Different types of government
  - Major issues
  - Major historical events
  - World court/ International Court of Justice
  - United Nations
  - Allies to America
  - Countries in conflict with America (war, disagreements, etc.)
- Global current events
- World pop culture *(Examples: viral videos on You Tube like Gangnam Style dance, latest craze from other countries such as Anime from Japan, etc.)*
- Global issues *(Examples: war, poverty, historical events, global warming, world peace)*
- Responsibilities as a citizen
  - Legal (abide by international laws)
  - Ethical (do I have a responsibility to the world since I live in it)
- Choice *(Examples: volunteering, raising awareness to global issues such as world hunger, attending a rally, signing a petition to free a political prisoner in another country, stay up on world news, etc.)*

In review:

- Most interesting facts learned about the world
- Goals: things I may want to learn more about, places I would like to visit (*Examples: Great Barrier Reef, Pyramids*), activities I want to engage in (*Examples: join global animal or nature conservation club, etc.*)
- Any new ideas come from this? (career paths, hobby ideas, creative insights, new interests)



### 13.23 Teacher Resources and Links

- The History Chanel has several compelling series. For example, World Without People is a powerful way of representing how people keep the infrastructure of cities and nations going: <http://www.history.com/shows/life-after-people>
- Jamestown Publishers has several high interest books geared towards adolescents that include lesson plans, charts, visuals, and project ideas. For example, their series “World Works”: [http://www.glencoe.com/gln/jamestown/world\\_works.html](http://www.glencoe.com/gln/jamestown/world_works.html)
- Many societal/global issues have websites dedicated to them. They often include links to lesson plans and project suggestions for teachers. For example, understanding the importance of water quality: <http://www.safewaterscience.org/>
- YouTube has an abundance of excellent content. However, there is also a lot of inappropriate and poor content as well. Staff should screen all clips before showing them. Also, keep in mind some individuals on the autism spectrum find YouTube quite compelling because of the high energy and high affect in many of the videos. Some young adults on the spectrum are vulnerable to obsessive or repetitive watching of YouTube clips because it excites their regulatory systems. Often dysregulation can occur when they reach overload. Staff can be sensitive to a student’s desire to share favorite clips by separating it out as an activity done 1:1; as a tool to engage, share, discuss, and even raise self-awareness related to regulation. Use of YouTube requires clear boundaries to keep it within the context of a lesson plan.
- Interactive teaching strategies that can be applied to enliven the module content: [http://www.fctl.ucf.edu/teachingandlearningresources/coursedesign/assessment/content/101\\_tips.pdf](http://www.fctl.ucf.edu/teachingandlearningresources/coursedesign/assessment/content/101_tips.pdf)
- There is a board game called “Modern Society” that can be modified and used as an interactive teaching tool: <http://www.coolstuffinc.com/p/136744>
- SimCity Societies takes real world information and applies it in a virtual world setting, allowing students to visualize and experience content: <http://www.ea.com/simcity-societies>

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<http://disabilityjustice.tpt.org/right-to-vote/>

# Section 14.0

## WORK AND CAREER: Exploration and Development

*"Remember, parts of Silicon Valley wouldn't exist without people with autism."*  
**Dr. Temple Grandin**

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## 14.01 Introduction

In this module, we focus on exploring and developing work and career paths. In our Transition Curriculum, we consider it essential that each student has the opportunity to pursue jobs or careers that are personally meaningful and interesting. We accomplish this by focusing on each student as an individual, examining their passions and goals, strengths and challenges, as we support them to explore and develop their career interests and skills as workers. By taking this approach, we increase motivation, independence, personal satisfaction, and self-determination.

### The power of exploration

Neal was hating high school. Challenged with autism, apraxia and a lot of other language issues, Neal had overcome a number of hurdles, but one year, he'd had enough. Just talking about school left the six-foot-two student so dysregulated that his petite mom worried about whether she could handle him. She finally managed to get him to his doctor, where the thoughtful, creative professional communicated with him through typing.

"Neal, what do you like to think about?" the doctor asked.

"Bees, bees, bees," he typed back to her. She thought about that for a moment.

"Neal, would you go to school if we created a whole curriculum about bees?" the doctor asked, and to Neal, that sounded great.

That year, Neal learned about history by studying the history of bees and bee keeping. He learned the science of bee behavior. For literature, he read "The Secret Life of Bees." Despite serious sensory issues, he donned a beekeeper suit and put his hand in a hive to observe the insects up close.

Several months later, he had an epiphany.

"I figured it out!" he typed to his doctor and mom. "It wasn't the bees that I loved. It was the flowers!"

Following up on his insight, Neal, with help, started a plot in a local community garden. He began to grow flowers. Before long, Neal had created a logo for the landscape design business he was planning. Several years later, he had fulfilled those plans and was working and consulting as an organic gardener.

The bees had led Neal down to the path to his future ... and it was sunnier than anyone had imagined!

*From "Creating a Meaningful Life for Every Child with an Autism Spectrum Disorder," a presentation by Dr. Ricki Robinson, M.D., M.P.H. Used with permission.*

This module seeks to increase awareness, to enable students to reflect, stretch their thinking, self-evaluate, and begin to make informed choices. This cognitive work in other modules of the Transition Curriculum prepares them for adventures of trial and error and to experiment to find what tasks, environments, and experiences feel rewarding and which cause challenges.

In most cases, creating real, personally meaningful work and career possibilities requires taking the time and necessary steps to construct a solid foundation. Traditionally, work and career exploration involves taking inventory of one's skills and interests, conducting lots of research, completing questionnaires, making site visits, and drawing upon executive function support and other commonly used tools and methods. In this curriculum, we incorporate additional key ingredients into the process to ensure the experience is positive, motivating, and ultimately successful for each student:

- Placing high value on curiosity, creativity, passion, and personal preference
- Leading with individual strengths and finding creative ways to acknowledge and address challenges
- Supporting flexibility and resiliency: trial and error, trying new things, changing one's mind, going in a different direction, and learning from experiences that did not go well
- Accepting that this process is dynamic – interests change and shift as students grow, learn, become interested in new things, and discover new talents
- Underscoring that work and career choices come from thoughts, feelings, sensations, and opinions generated within us. There is no external rulebook for what career or job we are supposed to have.
- Modeling a healthy balance of optimism and realism
- Informing students about the types of work supports that are available for people with disabilities and about the right to accommodation in the workplace, and helping them determine what might be appropriate for them
- Emphasizing that career choice is something that can be re-evaluated at any time and that most people will change their job and/or career several times during their lifetime
- Infusing the process with joy, humor, enthusiasm, and wonder

Working together through this module, students and staff will begin at the foundational level focusing on interests and passions, strengths and challenges. At that time, background investigation begins, followed by exploration that is more field based. These two processes enable students and staff to examine options through the lens of reality-based considerations such as suitability and opportunity. Once a career or job is selected, staff and student review the requirements to confirm or modify selection, and develop goals and an action plan for beginning work. Once in a job, the student and staff continue to evaluate, reflect, and make changes where necessary.

## 14.02 Understanding the Process and Setting the Stage for Work and Career Development

When working with individuals on career development consider utilizing five essential tools: **information, dialogue, exploration, readiness (timing), and strategy.**

### 14.02.01 Information

To find the right starting point for career development, it is important to have a comprehensive understanding of the individual's interests, experiences, successes, and strengths and challenges as a thinker, learner, and performer.

The following sections of the Student Individual Profile should provide some of the raw information needed:

- Student's educational information and history
- Educational and learning information that resulted from the student's participation in the Awareness Development and Executive Function (ADEF) module and the Discovery Phase
- Staff observations about processing style, learning strengths and challenges, and emerging themes related to learning

Insights by specialists (educational, developmental, psychologists, social workers, OTs, SLPs, etc.) may be useful as well. They may identify learning patterns and draw conclusions about learning styles that will inform the work and career development process.

### 14.02.02 Ongoing Student Dialogue and Mentorship

The career development process requires ongoing dialogue with the student. Staff must utilize all tools and methods possible to sustain a dialogue with the student. To include the student, staff must understand the individual's communication style and information processing skills. This way, staff can meet the student at a language and comprehension level that matches his or her capabilities.

Individuals who are non-verbal or have language difficulties will need creative, engaging ways to exchange ideas, express curiosity, indicate preferences and interests, and select options.

This approach ensures options explored are meaningful and viable. The general process of career development is outlined below, however, the exact methodology and approach will be dictated by each individual's needs.

## 14.02.03 Exploration

***“A ship in harbor is safe, but that is not what ships are built for.” John A. Shedd***

Exploration of work or career options includes examining how one’s own strengths, skills, preferences, interests, and challenges fit with possible work tasks and environments. Students should be encouraged to factor in the importance of their preferences and sensitivities in selecting a good work/career match. This is particularly important with regard to work environments.

Understanding individual regulatory and social needs and styles provide great insight for guiding exploration. Students may feel their sensitivities and challenges are barriers to finding jobs or developing careers. Although in some cases this may be true, teachers can help reframe self-limiting thinking. They can redirect students to use their creativity to come up with ways to bypass obstacles, accommodate needs, and explore related fields that may be better suited for them.

Another key step in investigation is helping students experience firsthand the actual living reality of each option. Without this step, even typically developing students would have a hard time understanding the consequences of their choices. For those with developmental, cognitive, processing, and emotional challenges, the ability to know without doing is even more restricted. Individuals on the autism spectrum have additional challenges in executive function, conditional thinking, and predicting possible outcomes.

If true insight and meaningful self-reflection about their future is to occur, experiential learning must be a top priority.

**Examples of active group or 1:1 investigation include**

- Career-based questionnaires, quizzes, games
- Researching potential jobs or careers online and in the community (strength and/or interest driven)
- Activities aimed at using different skills and tasks
- Interviewing professionals from various fields
- Tours and onsite observation of businesses in the community
- Visiting a worksite to observe a specific job
- Shadowing a professional
- Watching informational videos
- Making personal job/career boards that allow students to track everything they research and find interesting. This also gives them the opportunity to reflect, see patterns, and revisit ideas.
- Using career-oriented, critical-thinking games (Example: Imagine if the world did not have XYZ job/career. What effect would it have on me, my community, *my country, the world?*)
- Breaking down jobs and careers into different categories: tasks, income, availability, education and training required, level of competition, etc. This can be helpful to individuals who struggle with whole-to-parts thinking and may reject ideas because they do not understand what the job entails.



- Playing games that require visualization, imagination, role-play, or improvisation using jobs or careers students have expressed interest in. (*Example: Imagine yourself as an airline ticket agent. What would your day look like? What challenges would you face? What would be fun about the job? Act out various scenarios to establish reality.*)

#### 14.02.04 Readiness and Timing

The age-old adage “timing is everything” holds true for the undertaking of successful career development. Some young adults with ASD or other developmental disabilities may be ready, enthusiastic, and motivated about planning their future and eager to dive in but they may need support to be strategic, realistic, and organized.

Other students may be less ready. They might be reluctant to engage in discussions about their future because of anxiety, low self-esteem, and other emotional barriers. For some, difficulty with visualization, conceptualization, temporal ordering, and executive function make the process of projecting into the future very difficult.

Still other students are emerging from a long history of learned helplessness and far greater challenges. They may struggle to navigate even basic daily functions. These students (and their families) may be oriented toward survival and coping in the present day. They simply do not have a context for thinking forward into the future.

The timing for when to undertake this module depends solely upon each individual’s readiness. Even if the pace of progress is slow, it is better to be slow and effective than push forward with conversations and decisions the student may not be ready to face.

#### Here are some ways to foster work/career investigation readiness

- Student outings to attend events
- Create a student job system so students can experience rotating responsibilities and tasks. The system can begin simply, then branch out to mimic real-world work situations. Match students up with jobs to align with their interest.
- Volunteer projects with either low social interaction or more social interaction (depending upon the individual)
- Volunteer at community event where students have jobs with clear responsibilities
- Scavenger hunts requiring students to interact with businesses
- 1:1 sessions or small group work individualized to address specific needs, confusions, anxieties, fears
- Career board games
- Role play and Improvisation games with work/career themes
- Watching video clips or TV shows of people in different jobs
- Visiting internet sites such as “How Stuff Works” (<http://www.howstuffworks.com/>) to ignite curiosity

- Conducting small survey in the community, asking people what they do for a living and if they like it. Return to class to discuss.
- Observe people working in the community (*Examples: shadowing someone, watching an assembly line in action, or going to a park and observing what groundskeepers are doing*)
- For students who find writing enjoyable, journaling/writing about their thoughts and feelings on various careers
- Individual or group storytelling (make up stories about different careers with each participant adding ideas and elements)
- Creating short- and long-term student-driven options for businesses (*Examples: bake sales, delivering lunches, cottage business, arts and crafts sales with student-made art*)

#### 14.02.05 Strategy

Most individuals with ASD and other developmental disabilities have challenges in executive function – the vital processes needed for planning a successful future (strategic thinking, step-wisdom, evaluative thinking, planning, previewing, organizing, etc.). It is essential that those who guide the individual's career development process provide the scope, sequence, organization and meaning needed. Their role is to:

- Help develop lists of possibilities
- Evaluate compatibilities
- Assess skill sets required for each possible career path
- Select viable options based on individual profiles
- Strategize for networking
- Establish contacts with educational institutions and prospective employers
- Assist in negotiations with prospective employers

As much as possible, students should be co-managing this process. Despite struggles with executive function or strategic thinking, they should be encouraged to be as active and contributive as possible.

#### Make it a partnership

Student drivers learn how to operate a vehicle with an instructor in a car equipped with dual controls. Similarly, transition students learn best by co-piloting rather than sitting in the backseat. The more they receive practice in strategic thinking and planning, the more likely they are to internalize these skills and go on to become agents of change in their own lives.

### 14.03 Guidance for Staff

#### 14.03.01 When to Start

The timing of when to introduce job and career exploration into individual student programs will vary between participants. To help staff assess when and where to begin, we provide exploratory questions below for each critical domain. We have designed the questions to prompt *staff reflections* about each student. They are also designed for use in staff meetings to help guide collective thinking, discussions, and planning.

While these questions are not designed for direct use with students, *if appropriately reworded*, the themes behind the questions can be used as discussion topics in 1:1 or group work.

If staff members cannot answer a key question or if there are opposing views, further exploration and observation can help bring clarity. The answers to these questions should indicate the degree of student readiness and provide valuable information for individualized goal setting.

#### 14.03.02 General Readiness

##### Questions

- Does the student have defined affinities and interests that can be used to explore options?
- Does the student have the maturity and emotional readiness to talk about entering a new phase of life that includes more responsibility and independence?
- Does the student have a fund of general knowledge about careers and jobs?
- Does the student have specific knowledge about a particular job or career track that can guide exploration and discussions?
- Does the individual require a better understanding of the concept of jobs, work, and careers in general?
- Does the individual understand what a job is?
- Can the individual generate a list of jobs on her own or identify a job if she sees a person doing it?
- Does the individual understand the difference between careers and jobs?
- If given a job or career category, can the individual generate or identify related tasks?

##### Note

There is no value judgment implied here. Some people choose a career path that follows a theme or builds on previous training, whereas others select a job or series of jobs not connected to a larger theme or life path.

### Teacher Guidance

The questions above can be reworded and used in 1:1 or small group discussions. There is a wealth of information students may be able to offer to indicate they understand working, jobs, and careers. If reworded for student use, the format for their use should be lively, fun, engaging, and playful.

Brainstorming sessions and games associating tasks with a given job (verbal games such as mock game shows, miming and guessing what task the person is doing or what profession they are, improvisation scenarios, making job collages from magazine pictures, etc.

### 14.03.03 Level of Regulation and Engagement

#### Questions

- Is the individual emotionally regulated and available to engage in this process or does she need more foundational work to develop basic emotional regulation skills first? (If regulatory issues interfere with the process minimally or intermittently, both could be done concurrently.)
- Is the individual able to sustain engagement with the depth and consistency needed for this type of work, or does the individual need more foundational support in engagement and reciprocity for the process to be meaningful?

#### Teacher Guidance

Regulation and engagement can vary tremendously depending on many factors: time of day, interfering health issues, level of interest, anxiety, etc.

- If an individual struggles with regulation and engagement across the board, intensive work such as DIR/Floortime can help individuals make tremendous progress.
- If an individual has intermittent windows of regulation and engagement, there are many ways to accommodate such as capitalizing on interests and passions, using high affect, breaking the work into small chunks, and capitalizing on the most optimal times in the individual's day.

### 14.03.04 Work Experience

#### Questions

- Has the individual held a job? (Ongoing responsibilities and tasks at home or at school can be considered "jobs" even if they were not paid. This can include "odd jobs" for family or family friends.)
- Does the individual communicate thoughts, feelings, opinions, or preferences surrounding these job experiences? If not, explore ways of accessing the student's thoughts and opinions through alternate communication modalities.

During the initial interview process, prior employment experience is explored with the individual and family. Staff working with students on work and career development should become familiar with each student's prior experience.

Students who have held jobs can participate in small group discussions with other peers who have had work experience and/or discuss with staff 1:1. Their contributions during this group and individual work will enable staff to understand how they can communicate about past work experiences.

### Teacher Guidance

It is important not to make assumptions about an individual's ability to recall experiences, apply meaning, and communicate about it with others. Additionally, students may recall those experiences clearly but may be challenged to communicate them.

Autobiographical memory (what we have experienced in the past) is often helped by our episodic memory (remembering a scenario or episode, usually with a strong sensory component) and our emotional memory (one of the strongest memory systems). Students may be able to access memories of prior work experience through their emotions and senses.

Strategies and creative teaching methods that support memory recall (such as thought organization and making evaluations) are instrumental in helping students recall, organize, and reflect on what they have done in the past and communicate about it with others. Likewise, strategies that support communication output through a variety of modalities is also critical to this process.

## 14.03.05 Career Awareness

### Questions

- Does the individual have basic understanding of those having jobs or careers? (Does she know what Mom, Dad, or other people in her life do for a living?)
- Does she have a general awareness that most adults have jobs or careers?

### Teacher Guidance

This subject is covered in *13.0 Understanding and Participating in Community* and is touched upon in *11.0 Relationships*. As students progress through these modules and participate in a wide range of discussions about family, work, and adulthood, their levels of understanding will become apparent.

## 14.03.06 Critical Thinking

### Questions

- How strong is the individual's critical thinking?
- Are there any weaknesses in critical thinking that could hamper, confuse, or increase difficulty in navigating the career exploration process?
- Can the student navigate this module with the appropriate strategies and accommodations, or is more foundational work needed before the individual is ready?

## Teacher Guidance

Critical thinking skills are key to successful work and career development as it requires the abilities to plan, preview, predict, organize, implement, and execute. As there is a strong correlation between critical thinking challenges and ASD, it is wise to reinforce these strategies program-wide for all students.

### 14.03.07 Self-Awareness of Skills and Interests

## Questions

- Does the individual possess sufficient self-awareness to engage in the career exploration process?
- Does the individual know her strengths and challenges when it comes to performing a variety of tasks?
- Has the individual expressed interest, either directly or indirectly, related to jobs or careers?
- Can the individual create a list of jobs or careers matching her personal interests, passions, and strengths; or can she respond to a list given to her?

## Teacher Guidance

Some students do not initiate discussions or express curiosity about jobs and careers, so the last question may be difficult to answer.

In this case, staff can initiate small group and 1:1 discussions and activities that focus students on self-assessment and matching themselves up with possible jobs and careers. This work will reveal their levels of self-awareness on the topic. It will also indicate their capabilities to predict and make choices based upon self-knowledge.

### The Autism Advantage

Increasingly, employers are looking at individuals with autism and other developmental disabilities as untapped human resources.

A Germany-based software company, SAP, has been working to fill up to 1 percent of its workforce with individuals with autism for positions in customer service, media development and software debugging, citing strengths such as “nonambiguous, precise outcomes” and “a very precise nature.” The company offers a mentoring program to support individuals with autism in their adjustment to the job, and also has offered additional training and some work schedule accommodations.

The mortgage lender Freddie Mac offers career-track internships for people with autism in testing and data-modeling positions. “Harnessing the unique skills of people on the autism spectrum has the potential to strengthen our business and make us more competitive,” the Freddie Mac corporate policy says.

### 14.04 Work and Career Exploration

"When you are inspired by some great purpose, some extraordinary project, all your thoughts break their bounds. Your mind transcends limitations, your consciousness expands in every direction and you find yourself in a new, great and wonderful world. Dormant forces, faculties and talents become alive, and you discover yourself to be a greater person by far than you ever dreamed yourself to be."  
Patanjali, 2nd Century BC

#### 14.04.01 Precursors to Work and Career Exploration

Traditional work and career development for many, especially individuals with developmental challenges, often pursue a linear approach. This is especially true when large agencies are engaged in making vocational matches. Historically, the process consists of assessment, skill inventory, work readiness, supportive employment, and ending (hopefully) in independent employment. Although these steps are valuable and included in this curriculum, there are several additional ingredients essential to successful and meaningful employment:

- Inspiring the process with optimism, humor, and enthusiasm, which generate engagement and satisfaction
- Encouraging collaboration and students “co-driving” the process, which enhance student ownership and buy-in
- Flexibility, which increases options, decreases emphasis on failure, and allows students to change their minds
- Accepting student self-pacing, which increases overall success by permitting individuals to advance at their own rates and allowing them a degree of control

Work, job, and career exploration is intended to be an invigorating, unfolding journey that begins with self-discovery and activities designed to increase self-awareness. If this journey is not energizing for the student, then the timing may not yet be right for the use of these guidelines.

As the exploratory phase of the Work and Career process evolves, students have opportunities to try new skills, manage their emotions, self-regulate in a range of situations, receive mentoring and guidance, accommodate their challenges, and expand their world views.

The exploratory phase lasts as long as needed. Move through the checklists that follow at each individual’s own pace. Some students identify a job, career, or field of interest quickly. Others require more time to develop a sense of what works and what does not before they are ready to narrow their choices down to a particular field.

Even those individuals who begin the process with an identified job, career, or field of interest will benefit from covering the foundational step of career or work exploration because

- The experience exposes them to an approach for self-evaluation. It gives them a model for making important life decisions they may not otherwise incorporate into their thinking or experience (support for critical thinking).

- There may be gaps in understanding themselves or their chosen fields of interests. Once these gaps are filled, they may re-evaluate their original choices and be open to exploring new possibilities.
- Often young adults get attached to career paths or jobs because they have seen examples of mastery in the field (*Example: video game design*) without factoring in the educational requirements, level of commitment, work environment, level of competition, etc.

The following exploration process helps students evaluate careers they may be enamored with but for various reasons may not be good matches. (*Example: video gamer developers often require a 4-year college degree in computer science; the field is very competitive and most do not succeed; the work hours can be up to 16 per day seated at a computer in the race to finish a deadline, etc.*).

#### 14.04.02 Examine How Learning Styles Affect Career Choice

This section helps students understand how our learning strengths and challenges affect how we approach work, and ultimately how successfully we can complete tasks. *For example, visual learners do well in jobs and careers where information is distributed visually through memos, guidelines, posters, and the work has a strong visual component.*

Auditory learners do well in jobs and careers where training, feedback, reminders, and instructions are delivered orally – where they can use their auditory strength to advantage. Kinesthetic learners prefer training, instruction, and feedback through experience (demonstrations, modeling/shadowing, trial and error, etc.). They are more successful in jobs and careers that are hands-on to some degree. Many people may need a combination of two or all the above to navigate their work experience successfully.

We recommend that staff utilize concept mapping, charts, and other visual representations during discussions to bolster understanding and engagement. Additionally, provide experiential activities that engage student strengths and challenges. These deepen student understanding, and provide opportunities to reflect and discuss emotions that arise when faced with something easy versus hard.

This process helps each student to step back and focus less on a specific job, and more on themselves and what types of activities they might find satisfying and fulfilling.

#### Checklist:

- Establish connection between learning and working in terms of:
  - Education required as preparation for a career or job (*Example: certification, degree, etc.*)
  - On the job training (type of job training [classroom vs experiential] and typical duration)
  - Learning new tasks on the job

Because making connections between working and learning can be complex and abstract, approach it as concretely as possible using specific examples and visuals (such as flow charts and time lines) to establish concepts. Begin by exploring familiar professions that students have some understanding of – such as policeman, teacher, farmer, etc. This will increase their ability to contribute to the discussion based on what they have experienced, heard, or seen on TV or in the movies.



This step provides great opportunities to discuss with students important employment facts, such as the wide variety of ways people enter into the workforce and how salaries are set based on level of training. It provides opportunities to infuse optimism (that all workers make contributions to the community) and discover personal biases (good job = a lot of money, hierarchical thinking, implication that some jobs are “above or beneath consideration”). These discussions provide great opportunities for brainstorming, debate, and insight.

- Explore examples of known, successful people in careers. Highlight how their learning style fits the careers they chose. This step can lead to generating questions to ask of workers, doing internet research, inviting and hosting guest speakers, sending emails, etc.
- Have student pick careers and identify skills and learning styles required to be successful. Engage them in entertaining games in which students have to match learning styles to professions. *(Example: What kind of learner would make a good auctioneer? Air traffic controller, deli sandwich maker, gardener, etc.? What aspects of various jobs are visual vs. auditory vs. hands on, etc.)*

#### 14.04.03 Increase Self-Awareness

Most of this section is best done 1:1, as students tend to feel more comfortable evaluating themselves and receiving feedback without peers present. As much as possible, infuse discussions with experiential activities to “test” the individual’s ideas about their strengths and challenges.

The process should be infused with enthusiasm, curiosity, and non-judgment. The idea is to raise self-awareness to help students evaluate options based on their individual needs, preferences, skills, and challenges. There is no wrong answer to any of these questions.

#### Checklist:

- Understanding my learning strengths
  - What I am good at?
  - What is easy for me?
  - How do I apply these strengths in my daily life? (be specific)
- Understanding my learning challenges
  - What am I not good at?
  - What is hard for me?
  - How do these challenges affect my daily life? (be specific)
- In what areas of my life right now am I learning, progressing? (identify specifics)
  - What am I currently learning and what would I like to learn in daily life?
- Identifying how working on learning will affect me positively by
  - Increasing options for career and job choices, including options for career and job training
  - Increasing success in accomplishing tasks

- Increasing independence and self-advocacy
- Reducing anxiety, frustration and struggles associated with learning at a computer in the race to finish a deadline, etc.)

#### 14.04.04 Develop Action Plan

Action steps include any interventions needed to support the work and career development process. Focus on topics essential for most job and career domains, such as:

- Interpersonal skills (*Example: receiving feedback from a job coach or supervisor, interacting with co-workers, cooperating on a group task, asking questions or reporting on a problem or progress, , self-advocacy*)
- Regulatory issues (environmental sensitivities, anxiety prompted by new tasks, dysregulation triggers in public places)
- Basic skills (*Example: following a task sheet, schedule or checklist, using a computer to check emails or a schedule posted online, time-management using a variety of supports, etc.*)

#### Checklist:

- Outline with student areas identified as strengths and challenges. Be specific how each impacts the work/career experience
- Discuss and map remediation plan that addresses the skills, environmental issues, and regulatory challenges that are relevant to the individual given their work and career goals.
- Brainstorm what experiences related to job/career goals could be pursued while working on remediation (to keep enthusiasm, learning, and optimism strong)
- If there is resistance, collaborate with the individual to reduce anxiety, provide information, and establish a sense of personal ownership in the remediation plan.

Most people in the world gravitate toward jobs and careers compatible with their skills and strengths. The same applies to students with developmental disabilities. Sometimes, however, there are specific skills that prove very challenging in light of the chosen career objective. For example, a student might have strong interest in becoming a jeweler.. He has a good grasp of design and has received much encouragement in this area. However, he has great difficulty with fine motor skills. Staff will need to work with individual to explore options while incorporating realistic obstacles. The objective is not to quash enthusiasm but rather to bring elements of reality into an individual's thinking about job and career choices. . Remediation is specific to each individual's career interests. Remediation work should also look at possibilities for alternate paths closely related to initial career goals

Staff must enter discussions artfully with each individual about aspects of a career that may prove challenging despite specific talent. Discovering and discussing these issues help students with specific talents, skills or interests to:

- Become realistic about options (how much education is required, what type of work environment can be expected, what does a typical day look like in this job)

- Strategize ways (when possible) to bypass or learn to tolerate aspects of career or job that would be challenging
- Explore options for modifying work environment or creating alternate work environment where the same type of work can be done successfully
- Identify related fields that make use of talents without the challenging aspects of the original choice
- Conclude it may be better to apply talents in more flexible environments (as hobbies, part of a club, etc.)
- Examine career possibilities not previously considered
- Examine obstacles students might need to overcome, understand the effort it might take to do so, and evaluate whether they are committed enough to complete the remediation

#### 14.04.05 Implement Strategies or Accommodations to Support Skill Building

Self-advocacy is a critical employment skill. In this context, it involves (1) knowing what one needs to complete work tasks competently and (2) being able to ask for it successfully. This section is designed to give students practice with strategies and accommodations to increase work-related self-advocacy.

Practice can come in the form of:

- Group project (each individual has an assigned role related to the job/career interest)
- Supported individual projects
- On-campus jobs and responsibilities
- Watching a video and then trying a task
- Taking a class or lessons in a work/career related area

When given practice in a safe, supportive environment, students become comfortable using strategies and accommodations during future work and career experiences.

#### Checklist:

- Through trial and error, experiment with various strategies and accommodations to find those that work well
- Make sure the student has access to materials, support, and guidance needed to utilize strategies and accommodations
- Establish an ongoing feedback loop so the student is engaging with staff regularly on how well the strategies and accommodations are working and which areas need adjustments
- Encourage and cultivate self-advocacy, independence, and personal responsibility regarding student's use of strategies and accommodations

### 14.05 Begin Exploration of Work and Career Options

The sky is the limit in exploration! Students are immersed in the exciting realm of possibility and how to be good thinkers and researchers. Both staff and students are encouraged to be creative in how they explore jobs and careers.

The local community offers resources and partners. It furnishes relationships and provides the stage for future volunteer, internship, or work opportunities. Staff might consider enlisting students to hold their own in-house career fair, inviting members of the community to come talk about what they do and perform demonstrations.

Although the career and work exploration is outlined below, it is important to remember individuals need to move at their own pace for a variety of reasons:

- Some may need support and encouragement to manage anxiety about trying new things
- Some may need help slowing down and becoming more methodical in their thinking
- Some students struggle with critical thinking, language processing, and regulation. They may need the flow and sequence adjusted to fit their needs, or do 1:1 work for better individualization.
- Students who come to the program further ahead in their work and career development may skip steps they do not need and spend a longer time in other areas filling in gaps.
- There will be students who require longer periods with volunteer and internship experiences to work on communication, regulation, and social interaction before they can be employed.

Teachers are encouraged to supplement, vary, repeat, and revise the steps as needed.

#### Checklist:

- Brainstorm a list of careers based on:
  - Curiosity
  - Interests, hobbies, and affinities
  - Skills
  - Environments
  - Understanding of own learning style
  - Career-based assessments
- Do internet research on each job/career on list
  - Job description – establish basic understanding of job
  - A day in the life (intensity, duration, flow, variety, etc.)
  - Training or education required
  - Availability/competition
  - Possible challenges or red flags
  - Generate new ideas as they surface
- Narrow down list based on information gathered above
- Brainstorm ways to learn more about the careers on the shortened list

- Plan outings, activities, and experiences to “test”
- Do guided reflection
- Again, narrow down the list using results from above steps
- Deepen exploration
  - Engage in creative experiential activities at the school/program site and in the community
- Take steps to get an Internship
  - Information seeking
  - Resume building
  - Correspondence
  - Interview
  - Assess internship needs, accommodations, strategies, level of support, duration of shift
  - Determine internship goals
- Perform internship/volunteer (with coach/facilitator)
  - Long- or short-term arrangement in a specific career
  - Multi-faceted internship involving rotating careers
- Establish internship feedback loop (performance and goal setting/revising) with
  - Student regarding performance and progress
  - Staff
  - Internship site personnel
- Assess progress
  - Involve student in feedback meeting with supervisor
  - Process feedback, support the understanding of being evaluated
  - Are goals being met?
- Assess internship status
  - Continue internship as is
  - Modify as needed
  - Assess skills gained
  - Continue internship, increase responsibilities or duration
  - Refine goals
  - Switch to a new internship

## 14.06 Work and Career Preparation for Identified Career or Job

### 14.06.01 Review requirements, expectations, and standards

Understanding career requirements, expectations, and standards while keeping one's self-worth intact is a critical life skill. It is also an important part of preparing individuals for adulthood. It is helpful to model to students how to evaluate themselves according to external standards with grace, humor, and style.

If continuing education for a chosen work and career path is required, students may need help with the critical thinking skills required to pursue this path. Under these circumstances, the process should be broken down into manageable chunks, the pace adjusted, and the critical information outlined clearly.

It may be helpful for each student to have a binder to collect information, pictures, pamphlets, etc. on their chosen work or career. A journal to record experiences and reflections throughout the career and work development process might help the student see their progress and organize their thinking. Establishing visual timelines delineating steps a student must take to reach his goal. Infuse the exploration process with optimism, curiosity, humor, creativity, excitement, and wonder. Help students remember that working through these career and job tasks is part of being an adult and making your own decisions to help them connect the work to their desire to become more independent.

Some research on continuing education is best done ahead of time by staff, especially if a student's area of interest requires a larger educational commitment such as a certificate or degree program. Staff can discuss in meetings how to approach these larger commitments with students, brainstorm alternatives, and design creative baby-step approaches to the student's larger goal. For example, a student may not be ready to get certified as a lab tech yet, but she may be ready to have a supported internship. This could help her decide if the work suits her and if the certificate is worth pursuing.

As mentioned earlier, support students in driving the direction of work and career planning as much as possible. Although they will need their co-pilots (staff) to develop and implement plans, students should be encouraged to follow their passions and interests and think creatively about ways to make them part of their future employment.

If staff feel a particular student has chosen an unrealistic path based on learning style and cognitive capability, the most respectful way to manage the disconnect is to lead the individual to discover this on her own through supported discussions, research, and low-stakes experiences. For example, a student with challenges in math may gravitate to physics or chemistry – two math-based sciences requiring advanced calculus as a prerequisite. One way to deal with this is to explore these sciences and determine what math requirements are for each. During the process, the student is helped to see the mismatch. She might also discover a better-matched science such as biology or environmental science.

### Factors to consider

Some items below are intended to be discussed more in depth among staff than with students. Initially, keep students focused on those that bring about self-reflection and promote thinking about their personal

preferences and needs. These include environmental factors, mental stamina, social issues and regulatory needs.

Later, have them move on to less personal factors such as cost, logistics, and time commitment. Working this way helps students arrive at their own conclusions.

Sometimes a student may work through the above factors and still choose a path that is likely to become difficult. At that point, it becomes necessary to discuss more sensitive factors such as learning support needed, acknowledging limitations, and self-evaluating ability to succeed.

Staff may want to research and prepare a list of the extent to which different educational institutions can accommodate learning needs with respect to

- Cognitive limitations
- Social impairments
- Regulatory issues
- Mental stamina
- Environmental factors
- Cost
- Time commitment
- Logistics
- Advisement
- Ability to succeed

#### Checklist:

- Assess need for further training or education

Continuing education needs will arise differently for each student. Some students will initiate or show motivation on their own, while others will need support and encouragement to consider new learning ventures.

Most job and career paths require some form of education such as hands-on training, classroom learning, online courses, distance learning, and more. Some work and career paths offer on-the-job training or apprenticeships, whereas others require certification training or degrees.

Reviewing the individual's SIP and transition program learning experiences will help staff identify options that fit student learning style, cognitive strengths, and information and language processing needs.

Supporting students in exploring work- and career-based education can be anxiety provoking, particularly for students who carry negative associations with learning. Actions that lessen anxiety and promote positive thinking include:

- Summarizing/reminding students of their learning strengths and recalling specific learning successes they have had so far in the program
- Providing ongoing assurance the process will move at their pace and they will not be rushed

- Assuring students they will have the learning support they need
- Supplementing discussions with experiential-based approaches (*Examples: trying samples of learning tasks to get a taste, talking to peers with continuing education experience, visiting college campuses, trying different versions of learning to see what works best—sample lectures, online lecture, paper quiz, online quiz, hands-on tasks, etc.*)
- Peer mentoring by students further along in their continuing education process
- Community mentoring in fields of interest with local professionals
- Assess current skills in relation to chosen fields
  - Performance strengths and challenges
  - Goals
- Build experience related to field outside of internship (*Example: Attend a flower show*)
- Assess readiness for employment
  - Maturity
  - Organization
  - Ability to handle responsibilities
  - Social behavior
  - Regulation
  - Skill level
  - Independence level



### 14.07 Establish Goals for identified Work or Career

Students will need guidance from staff to develop their work or career goals. Goal development may require significant critical thinking support. It is also important to convey to students that goals can be changed easily if a student changes their mind and chooses a different work or career direction.

With students, research careers in greater depth utilizing the internet, guest speakers, or through site visits with the objective of identifying goals established by others pursuing that career.

Collaborate with student to design career or job goals

- Short term (within the year or shorter if appropriate)
- Longer term (within five years)
- Long term (five plus years)

Students who struggle with critical thinking, visualization, and prediction may find constructing a long-term plan difficult and potentially not very meaningful. Staff may choose to help them define very general goals or to focus on shorter goals, returning to longer-term goals at a later time.

### 14.08 Implementing Career or Job Plan

This step provides valuable opportunities for staff to infuse the career and job implementation process with optimism, humor, dignity, creativity and to model coping mechanisms for managing stress and anxiety that may arise.

#### Checklist:

- Identify places to work (with student)
- Visit sites identified (with student)
- Network with potential employers (staff)
  - Approach
  - Disclosure of disabilities
  - Extent of request (part-time job, job coach will be needed, etc.)
  - Evaluating work environment in light of individual's needs
  - Matching employee expectations
- Get ready to apply (with student)
  - Build the resume
  - Prepare for interviewing
    - practice
    - etiquette
    - what to expect
    - how to prepare
    - what to wear
    - follow-up
  - How to respond to a job offer
  - How to handle rejection
    - interview went poorly
    - did not get job
    - told to improve skills before re-applying
- How to begin a new job
  - Organizational needs (staff)
    - adjusting the individual's program schedule
    - building the individual's schedule at the career or job site, including transportation plans
    - staffing needed for on-site facilitating, observation, and support
    - social strategies (with student)
  - Self-disclosure (with student)
  - Establishing feedback loop and point person at job (staff)
  - Establishing on-the-job needs, accommodations, and strategies (with student)
  - Money management / paycheck (student)
- Ongoing maintenance and monitoring (student, staff, and site)
  - Progress with skill level

- Progress with goals
- Motivation and attitude
- Assessment
  - What is student gaining from experience?
  - Are there gaps or issues to address or requiring intervention?
  - Is the site or business benefiting from the individual?
  - Is the level of support on site adequate? Does it need to be revised?
- Ongoing feedback loop among student, staff, and site
- Monitor social interaction (supervisor, co-workers, etc.) and intervene as needed with coaching, support, and problem-solving
- Organization and executive function
- Intermittent assessment of whether student’s overall time commitment and/or length of shifts need adjustment
- Self-care, self-advocacy, and level of independence
- Creative problem-solving
  - Work-related
  - Social-related
  - Regulatory issues
- Assessment of strategies and accommodations – are they working or do they need revising?
- Refine goals as needed based on progress assessment and site feedback
- **Obtain Feedback and Follow-up through formal and informal channels:**
  - Meetings with supervisor(s) and staff present
  - Written evaluations and scoring rubrics (standards of performance)
  - Formal feedback meetings with advisor
  - Small-group feedback discussions with other peers who are also working

#### 14.08.01 The Right to Workplace Accommodations

Finding a job that will be a good fit over time ideally involves a process of educating and negotiating with a potential employer. Transition staff should read about and know the legal rights of their students, help them understand the accommodations to which they might be entitled, and be prepared to help them negotiate with employers as needed.

The federal Americans with Disabilities Act requires employers to provide accommodations for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities, both in the application process and after they are hired. Additional protection is provided by the U.S. Rehabilitation Act of 1973. It is important, however, to view this as a collaborative, interactive process between all parties.

Employers must make reasonable accommodations for employee disabilities as long as the requested modifications do not pose an “undue hardship” to the employer. Accommodations do not require omitting essential functions of the job or lowering performance standards, but they can involve some fairly large and potentially helpful changes to the workspace and management structure.

“Accommodations should be developed in a spirit of collaboration with employers,” advises the Institute for Community Inclusion of UMass Boston, in a web publication about how people with autism can best request accommodations. “Think of it as a joint problem solving exercise with many possible solutions to any one issue... Be proactive. Don’t expect employers to know all the answers. Explain needs and solutions clearly, respond to concerns, answer questions, and provide information.”

Accommodations during the application process (drawn from a publication of the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission) might include:

- providing someone to read or interpret application materials for a person who has limited ability to read or to understand complex information;
- demonstrating, rather than describing, to the applicant what the job requires;
- modifying tests, training materials, and/or policy manuals
- replacing a written test with an "expanded" interview.

#### An example

A person with an intellectual disability applies for a position as a baker and is scheduled for an interview with the employer. The applicant also has a speech and hearing impairment. The employer can accommodate the applicant by conducting an expanded interview to allow the applicant to demonstrate his ability to do the job.

On-the-job accommodations are developed on an individual basis. Examples provided by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission include:

- reallocation of marginal tasks to another employee
- training or detailed instructions to do the job, including having the trainer or supervisor:
  - give instructions at a slower pace;
  - allow additional time to finish training;
  - break job tasks into sequential steps required to perform the task;
  - use charts, pictures, or colors;

#### Examples

As part of his job, a restaurant worker with an intellectual disability refills condiment containers. The manager uses color-coding so the employee can identify the specific condiment that goes in each container.

A retail store employee with an intellectual disability and attention deficit disorder loads customers' cars with purchased items. The store has a dress code that he often fails to follow. His supervisor gives him a sheet with photographs illustrating both proper attire and items of clothing prohibited by the store's employee dress code.

- provide a tape recorder to record directions as a reminder of steps in a task;
- use detailed schedules for completing tasks; and
- provide additional training when necessary.
- a job coach, who can:
  - assist the employee in learning how to do the job;
  - provide intensive monitoring, training, assessment, and support;
  - help develop a healthy working relationship between management and the employee by encouraging appropriate social interaction and maintaining open communications; and
  - assist the parties in determining what reasonable accommodation is needed.
- modified work schedule or shift change
- help in understanding job evaluations or disciplinary proceedings
- acquisition or modification of equipment or devices
- work station placement
- reassignment to a vacant position when the employee is no longer able to perform current job

The website for the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission provides a wealth of information on practical application of the ADA in the workplace: [http://www.eeoc.gov/laws/types/intellectual\\_disabilities.cfm](http://www.eeoc.gov/laws/types/intellectual_disabilities.cfm)

### 14.09 Employment Resources

The following resources may be useful in envisioning work and career options with young adults with autism and other developmental disabilities, and helping them learn to advocate for themselves.

- “Employment Tool Kit” from Autism Speaks. Available at: <https://www.autismspeaks.org/family-services/tool-kits/employment>
- “Employing Adults with Down Syndrome” from Down Syndrome Education Online. Available at: <http://www.down-syndrome.org/practice/170/>
- “Requesting Workplace Accommodations: Tips and Resources.” Available at: [http://www.autism.com/adults\\_accommodations2](http://www.autism.com/adults_accommodations2)
- The Autism Job Club: The Neurodiverse Workforce in the New Normal of Employment by Michael S. Bernick and Richard Holden, 2015 Skyhorse Publishing San Francisco (hardcover)
- “Employment Issues for People with Disabilities” employment news and resources from The Arc. Available at <http://www.thearc.org/what-we-do/public-policy/policy-issues/employment>

### 14.10 Summary

For everyone in the working world, work and career development is a lifelong process. Whether we change jobs many times or stay on a single career path for a lifetime, we face the same questions: What will make me happy? What will make me proud? What will allow me to have the lifestyle that fits me? What will challenge me to grow and learn at a pace that works for me?

The same employment dynamics and questions are true for individuals with autism and other developmental disabilities, but with added challenges. This module equips staff and students with the skills and knowledge to seek a work/career path that is productive and satisfying. The community-based, person-centered approach provides assurance to hesitant employers who are often not aware of the power, potential, and benefit of hiring individuals with disabilities. The employment scene for individuals with disabilities is changing, for the better.

With trained staff and community advocates involved at the point of hire and throughout employment, we can ensure these individuals have opportunities to develop independence and pride as contributing members of their communities.

For individuals with developmental disabilities to become and remain active members of the workforce, career exploration must include decisions and planning concerning levels of support needed. To remain competitive in the face of ever-changing technology, individuals may need continuing education and training. Many individuals will require ongoing support to stay organized and complete job assignments successfully according to guidelines. Many will need ongoing practice, support, and facilitation to manage on-the-job social interactions and relationships.

With the proper support, training, advocacy, and communication in place, individuals with autism and other developmental disabilities can enjoy rewarding and successful employment, and many may go on to develop distinctive career paths that enrich themselves and others throughout their lives.

Beginning this module with a quote from Dr. Temple Grandin, we end with one as well:

**"The emphasis needs to be on what individuals with autism CAN do."**

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## Appendices

### A.01 Glossary

#### accommodation

An *accommodation* is an environmental change or approach put in place to help a student overcome or work around an area of need or challenge. Accommodations are used when the individual has a challenge, deficit, or disability that prevents her from accomplishing a task successfully but she has the capability to do part of it. They are put into place to bypass, eliminate, or reduce the challenge so she can devote energy to a more limited area to reach success or mastery.

#### ADEF

The Transition Curriculum's *Awareness Development and Executive Functions (ADEF)* module. The ADEF is designed to build self-awareness and strengthen executive functioning. Through an individualized process, students are exposed to experiences, concepts, activities, and interactions designed to strengthen the skills needed to become as independent as possible. The sequence, scope, depth, detail, and instruction methods used in delivery of the ADEF module are adjusted according to the *Student Individual Profile (SIP)* to ensure that content is delivered at a rate, volume, and complexity that suits individual learning and emotional needs.

#### affect

*Affect* is facial, vocal, gestural, or body language that shows the experience of feeling or emotion.

#### affective skills

*Affective skills* are the ability to show emotions and feelings.

#### affinities

Affinities are beloved subjects and activities that have great meaning to an individual and are a pleasure to participate in.

#### assistive or facilitated technology

*Assistive or facilitated technology* includes a wide range of devices and services used by individuals with disabilities to assist in the performance of tasks or functions that might otherwise be difficult or impossible. This can include computers (hardware and software), peripheral devices such as special keyboards and screens, mobility devices such as wheelchairs and walkers, etc.

**auditory processing**

*Auditory processing* is “The ability to hear auditory messages, distinguish between similar sounds or words, separate relevant speech from background noise, and the ability to recall and comprehend what was heard.” (Source: Stroke Terms in Plain Words, <http://www.speech-therapy-on-video.com/stroketerms.html>, accessed January 17, 2013)

**Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC)**

*Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC)* refers to all types of communication (with the exception of oral speech) that are used to make known one's wants, needs, ideas, and thoughts. ACC includes both low-tech approaches (gestures, facial expressions, sign language, drawing pictures) and high tech devices such as computer- or web-based software, speech synthesizers, handheld devices, etc.

**ASD**

*Autism spectrum disorder (ASD)* is a neurobiological disorder defined by impairments in social interaction and verbal and nonverbal communication, accompanied by restricted interests and repetitive behaviors.

**autonomic nervous system**

*Autonomic nervous system* is the part of the nervous system that regulates involuntary systems such as gastrointestinal functions, heartbeat, blood pressure, etc.

**Awareness Development and Executive Functioning**

See ADEF

**causal relationship**

*Causal relationship* is the connection between one event (cause) and a second event (effect) where the second is understood to be the result of the first.

**code switching**

*Code switching* is the ability to understand how social contexts change the meaning of language – that social communication varies depending on the context and the people involved.

**cognitive capability**

*Cognitive capability* is brain-based skills needed to understand information being presented and to carry out tasks such as planning, problem solving, perception, and using language.

**cognitive regulation**

*Cognitive regulation* is the ability to control the rate, volume, patterning, and complexity of thoughts. Because of the effect biochemistry and the endocrine system has on cognition, cognitive regulation is strongly tied to emotion, attention, motivation, and memory.

**complexity**

*Complexity* is the depth, detail, and breadth of information being presented; the details, components, and nuances inherent in a task or activity.

**concept formation**

*Concept formation* is the extent to which an individual can understand both concrete concepts (example: “a frog”) and abstract concepts (example: “democracy”).

**concept mapping**

*Concept mapping* (also called mind mapping) is a means of visually representing information using words and pictures related by lines drawn amongst them in a similar way to how sentences are diagrammed in English grammar textbooks.

**critical thinking**

*Critical thinking* is the ability to evaluate information, draw connections, make conclusions, and apply logic.

**depth and detail of processing**

*Depth and detail of processing* is the extent to which an individual is using her attention to stimuli in such a way that it can be processed and encoded into memory. The extent is indicated by the degree to which the individual has a comprehensive, detailed level of understanding rather than just a superficial understanding. Often memory recall problems are linked to weak depth and detail of processing (example: “in one ear and out the other”).

**descriptive language**

*Descriptive language* is words used to describe an object, image, event, etc. that appeals to the senses.

**discovery phase**

*Discovery phase* is the initial period after the student enrolls lasting about three months. During this time the student is under minimal stress, giving her time to adjust to the new environment and form new relationships. It also gives staff the time to gather more information so they can tailor the program to the student’s needs. Guidelines covering how to do this are detailed in section 4.0 Intake and Individualizing the Transition Curriculum.

**distractibility levels and triggers**

*Distractibility levels and triggers* are the degree to which an individual is distracted by internal thoughts and feelings or external environmental sensory inputs. Example: student pays attention to an itchy tag instead of a lecture.

**down-regulate**

*Down-regulate* refers to calming or soothing.

**dyad work**

*Dyad work* is work done by two individuals working together

**dysregulation**

*Dysregulation* is a failure of the regulatory mechanism for some system or function of the physical body (such as immune response or metabolism), of the emotional aspect of one's personality (such as becoming explosively angry when the situation does not call for it), or of one's cognitive processes (such as compulsive thoughts).

**emotional hijacking**

*Emotional hijacking* is a condition where one's emotional reaction to some stimulus overwhelms her cognitive abilities and self-control.

**emotional regulation**

*Emotional regulation* refers to how an individual experiences emotions, attempts to influence them, and the contexts and triggers that dictate when the emotions surface (Gross, 1998b).

**endocrine system**

*Endocrine system* is a system of glands in the body that secrete hormones to regulate the body's activities including growth, development, metabolism, mood, and organ and tissue functions.

**engagement**

*Engagement* is the extent to which an individual can participate in a shared emotional experience.

**evaluative thinking**

*Evaluative thinking* is the ability to reflect upon or judge the value – positive or negative – of some event or experience. A person with good evaluative thinking can evaluate an experience and draw meaningful conclusions about her performance, success, challenges, and what to do differently in the future.

**executive functions**

*Executive functions* are cognitive abilities to perform activities such as organizing, problem solving, planning, strategizing, paying attention to and remembering details, verbal reasoning, and managing time and space. Also used to manage emotions, attention, and behavior.

**expressive language**

*Expressive language* is the ability to use spoken language and body gestures to communicate emotions, thoughts, needs, and preferences.

**focal maintenance**

*Focal maintenance* is the extent to which an individual can sustain concentration for the appropriate amount of time needed given the task, lecture, etc.

**higher order thinking**

*Higher order thinking* is a concept that some types of thinking and learning require cognitive processes beyond simple memorization and repeating back of what was learned. Higher order thinking involves manipulation of information and ideas in ways that transform their meaning and implications. The additional skills required may include *strategic thinking*, *critical thinking*, creativity, brainstorming, *problem solving* and an understanding of *causal relationships*.

**humor regulation**

*Humor regulation* refers to the ability to make use of tasteful, appropriate humor. Also includes the ability to detect and respond appropriately to other people's jokes and humorous statements.

**IDEA**

*Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)* is a U.S. federal statute that governs how states and public agencies provide early intervention, special education, and related services to children (birth to age 21) with disabilities. In 1975 the U.S. Congress passed the Education for All Handicapped Children Act, renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 1990, which established federal standards for the provision of special educational services to children with disabilities. Until that time, public schools either excluded these children or segregated them into separate facilities with little or no appropriate instruction or assistance.

**ideational range**

*Ideational range* is a wide or narrow range of ideas about a given subject.

**IEP**

*Individualized Education Program (IEP)* is a documented program mandated by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) that defines methods, approaches, and objectives tailored to the specific needs of a person with a disability. It is intended to help the individual more easily reach educational goals than would otherwise be possible.

**Individuals with Disabilities Education Act**

See IDEA

**intake process**

*Intake process* is used by a skilled educator or clinician to tailor the Transition Curriculum to each individual student.

**intermittent reflective thinking**

*Intermittent reflective thinking* is the ability to reflect on personal feelings in relation to one's internal sense of self. Example: "It's not like me to feel so angry" or "I shouldn't feel this jealous".

**language processing**

*Language processing* is the way spoken or written language is processed. This ranges from the construction of spoken or written messages to the abstraction of meaning from language.

**limbic resonance**

*Limbic resonance* is the capacity for sharing non-verbal, emotional states.

### meta-skills

*Meta-skills* are skills used to acquire or make use of other skills. For example: a person who is good at teaching herself new skills has the meta-skill of being able to learn things; a great teacher is someone who has the meta-skill of being able to learn any subject and then teach that subject back to others.

*Meta-cognitive skills* are abilities to examine and change how one is thinking or evaluating information.

### mindfulness

*Mindfulness* is the focusing of one's attention on each present moment as it occurs with curiosity, complete acceptance, and without judgment.

### mindset

*Mindset* is a set of attitudes or beliefs about the self, others, and the world that dictates the perspective one uses to interpret information and draw conclusions about one's experiences.

### motor planning

*Motor planning* is the ability to plan out body movements to bring about coordination, balance, and spatial awareness in relation to the body.

### neuropsychology

*Neuropsychology* is the study of the relationship between function and structure of the brain as related to psychological processes and behaviors.

### noble certainties

*Noble certainties* are fixed beliefs one has about the world that one will go to great lengths to defend as absolute truths.

### olfactory

*Olfactory* relates to the sense of smell.

### OT

*Occupational therapist (OT):* "In its simplest terms, occupational therapists and occupational therapy assistants help people across the lifespan participate in the things they want and need to do through the therapeutic use of everyday activities (occupations). Common occupational therapy interventions include helping children with disabilities to participate fully in school and social situations, helping people recovering from injury to regain skills, and providing supports for older adults experiencing physical and cognitive changes."

(Source: About Occupational Therapy, <http://www.aota.org/consumers.aspx>, accessed January 17, 2013)

### pacing

*Pacing* is the ability to adjust and control the rate at which one approaches, engages, and performs a task. (Examples: not rushing, not moving too slowly).

**parasympathetic nervous system**

*Parasympathetic nervous system* is one of the two major parts of the autonomic nervous system that regulates the functions of the body's glands and organs. It is intimately involved in supporting a large number of functions that occur when the body is not involved in a "fight or flight" response such as urination, defecation, digestion, and reproduction.

**parts-to-whole thinking**

*Parts-to-whole thinking* is the notion that understanding the parts of a subject is important to understanding the subject as a whole; the ability to grasp how the parts or elements of some topic add up to a conceptual whole.

**performance consistency**

*Performance consistency* is the ability to keep up a reliable and predictable flow of mental energy to function dependably over time. (Examples: Being able to do something competently one day and not the next, being unreliable, inconsistent task performance.)

**person-centered approach**

*Person-centered approach* is a psychological approach that provides an individual with the awareness to see how her beliefs, emotions, and behaviors affect her life as well as her decision-making ability, and helping to find her own solutions to problems.

**phonological processing**

*Phonological processing* is the ability to detect and discriminate differences in speech sounds.

**previewing**

*Previewing* is the ability to project and anticipate what comes next; visualizing consequences.

**prioritization**

*Prioritization* is the extent to which an individual can identify and order key information within what is being discussed; the ability to recognize, emphasize, and act upon key components inherent in a task or activity; the ability to order what is important when communicating oral or written information or when trying to produce some end result.

**problem solving**

*Problem solving* is the ability to approach problems, work through the details, and seek solutions.

**proprioceptive**

*Proprioceptive* is awareness of posture, movement, position, weight, and resistance of objects as they relate to the body.



**PT**

*Physical therapy (PT); physical therapist (PT);* “Physical therapists (PTs) are highly-educated, licensed health care professionals who can help patients reduce pain and improve or restore mobility - in many cases without expensive surgery and often reducing the need for long-term use of prescription medications and their side effects. Physical therapists can teach patients how to prevent or manage their condition so that they will achieve long-term health benefits. PTs examine each individual and develop a plan, using treatment techniques to promote the ability to move, reduce pain, restore function, and prevent disability. In addition, PTs work with individuals to prevent the loss of mobility before it occurs by developing fitness- and wellness-oriented programs for healthier and more active lifestyles.”

(Source: Who Are Physical Therapists?, <http://www.apta.org/AboutPTs/>, accessed January 17, 2013)

**rate**

*Rate* is the speed at which the flow of information is disseminated and absorbed (receptive, cognitive); speed of the flow of a task or activity (experiential, physical); speed at which an individual speaks, writes, or performs a task (expressive).

**receptive language**

*Receptive language* is the ability to hear and derive the intended meaning from spoken and written language. It involves several skills, such as the abilities to pay attention, to hear or read what was said or written, to comprehend its meaning correctly, etc.

**reciprocity**

*Reciprocity* is the ability to understand the give and take and timing of social conversation or interactions.

**reinforceability**

*Reinforceability* is the ability to use previous experience to correct behavior and work output; to learn from experience. (Example: “Last time I rushed through my math test and failed it. I should slow down on this math test”; “Last time I teased her she broke into tears. I should take a softer approach next time and know she is not a good person to tease”.)

**representational thought**

*Representational thought* is the ability to imagine, think in analogies and metaphors, understand symbols, and infer meanings from them.

**RVCP**

*Rate, Volume, Complexity, and Prioritization (RVCP).* See each term for its definition as it applies to the Transition Curriculum.

**saliency determination**

*Saliency determination* is deciding what incoming stimuli is important to attend to; when exposed to information, the individual is able to identify what is important and what is a small detail; the degree to which an individual gets distracted by or over-focused on information of lesser importance. (Example: Not knowing what to take notes on in class.)

**satisfaction threshold**

*Satisfaction threshold* is the level of interest needed for an individual to sustain attention on a subject. A person with a low threshold of satisfaction on a subject can pay attention to what is being taught even if it is “boring” whereas a person with a high satisfaction threshold will only pay attention if the subject can be linked to some activity for which she has a passion.

**self-regulation**

*Self-regulation* is the ability to take control of, evaluate, and regulate one's own learning and behavior.

**self-advocacy**

Self-advocacy is “An individual’s ability to effectively communicate, convey, negotiate or assert his or her own interests, desires, needs, and rights. It involves making informed decisions and taking responsibility for those decisions.” (Source: Transition and Self-Advocacy, <http://www.ldonline.org/article/7757/>, accessed Jan 17, 2012 quoting Van Reusen et al., 1994)

**self-marketing**

*Self-marketing* is the ability of a person to intentionally build and display an image that is appealing to others.

**self-monitoring**

*Self-monitoring* is the ability to watch, analyze, and evaluate self as one is doing a task. (Example: “How am I doing? “What/Who do I need to accomplish this task?”)

**sensory processing**

*Sensory processing* is the nervous system's ability to receive messages from the senses, organize and make sense of the different kinds of sensation entering the mind at the same time and turn them into appropriate motor and behavioral responses.

**sensory reactivity**

*Sensory reactivity* refers to how an individual reacts negatively to some particular sensory stimulus (smell, taste, etc.).

**shared attention regulation**

*Shared attention regulation* is the ability to regulate one’s attention and behavior while being interested in a full range of sensations (sights, sounds, smells, own movement patterns, etc.); the ability to enter into a state of shared attention with another person; the ability to process one’s environment, filter out distractions, and engage with others, attend to games, activities, or tasks.

**SIP**

*Student’s Individual Profile (SIP)* a multi-purpose hard copy or electronic portfolio created during the Transition Curriculum intake process and used throughout the student’s participation in the program; a tool for individualizing the curriculum that allows staff to store sample work and information about the student as well as track ongoing changes in patterns, gains, goals, strategies, accommodations, difficulties, achievements, and personal experiences.

### **sleep/arousal balance**

*Sleep/arousal balance* is getting enough quality sleep at night to be able to wake in the morning and stay awake during the day.

### **SLP**

*Speech-language pathologist (SLP)* is a clinician who assesses, diagnoses, treats, and helps to prevent speech, cognitive, language, communication, swallowing, voice, fluency, and other related disorders.

### **social awareness**

*Social awareness* is the ability to perceive and understand viewpoints and feelings of others and act in a manner that shows understanding of such.

### **social cognition**

*Social cognition* is the way in which cognitive processes play a role in social behavior in relation to the encoding, storage, retrieval, and processing of information in the mind; the way people think about others and the effect this has on social behavior.

### **social information processing**

*Social information processing* is the ability to understand underlying meanings and agendas in social interactions (reading between the lines, getting the big picture of a discussion, etc.)

### **social-emotional development**

*Social-emotional development* allows young children to interact with others and show their emotions to express themselves. Social Emotional development includes the ability to initiate and maintain secure relationships. During this development a child learns how to approach other children, how to negotiate issues, how to take turns, and how to communicate effectively.

### **somatic nervous system**

*Somatic nervous system* is that part of the nervous system that regulates the voluntary systems of senses and movement. Includes sensory regulation, which involves both the physical ability of the brain to detect through the senses and how that input is processed.

### **special education**

*Special education* is instruction specifically designed to meet the needs of a student with disabilities. Includes classroom instruction, home instruction, instruction in physical education as well as instruction in institutions and hospitals.

### **speech-language pathology**

See SLP

### **step wisdom**

*Step wisdom* is the sense of proper order and sequence as applied to processes or tasks in life. It is composed of:

Sequencing – the ability to order steps, tasks, and priorities in a logical sequence to complete a task successfully

Visualization – the ability to visualize the sequence in which one is to perform a task

Prioritization – the ability to itemize all the demands, expectations, and parameters of a task and detect priorities.

### **strategic thinking**

*Strategic thinking* is the ability of an individual to design or apply strategies to approach tasks in an organized, sequenced, and successful manner; the ability to think in a manner that best exploits existing or emerging resources or possibilities.

### **strategies**

*Strategies* are techniques used when an individual needs support to approach, navigate, and complete a task successfully. They are methods for approaching learning that increase an individual's ability to absorb information successfully, make experience or study meaningful, and generally become productive based on exposure to learning.

### **strengths and challenges assessment**

*Strengths and challenges assessment* is an analysis of what the individual is able to do well versus not do well throughout the execution of a task.

### **stressor**

*Stressor* is anything that causes stress in an individual.

### **Student's Individual Profile**

See SIP

### **sympathetic nervous system,**

*Sympathetic nervous system* is one of the two major parts of the autonomic nervous system that maintains the internal stability of the basic properties (such as temperature, pH levels, etc.) and also controls the body's flight or fight response mechanism.

### **temporal-sequential processing**

*Temporal-sequential processing* is the way in which we recognize and follow time, including the skills we use and steps taken to accomplish things in a given time, place, and order.

### **Theory of mind**

*Theory of mind* (also known as mind reading) is the ability to attribute a mental state (intentions, emotions, beliefs, desires, knowledge, etc.) to another person in order to predict or understand that person's behavior and recognize they may be similar to or different from those held by others. Individuals with ASD often have deficits with respect to this ability.

### **transition services**

Transition services are services that meet the unique needs of young adults with ASD and other developmental disabilities and help to prepare them for further education, employment, and independent living.

### **triad work**

*Triad work* is work done by three students working together.

### **up-regulate**

*Up-regulate* is to stimulate in order to provoke action.

### **vestibular**

*Vestibular* is the sense that provides orientation in space using motion, gravity, and balance perceptions from the inner ear.

### **visual-spatial processing**

*Visual-spatial processing* is a set of cognitive skills that allow one to organize and interpret meaning from visual information.

### **volume**

*Volume* is the amount of information disseminated; the size and scope of a task or activity; the amount of oral or written information and end result individual can produce.

## A.02 Communication Strategies and Accommodations for Students with Low or No Verbal Ability

Communication is not one size fits all, nor does it always follow consistent patterns. Since communication capabilities and styles are related to a multitude of factors, it is essential that the approach to designing communication support is comprehensive, flexible, and dynamic.

Communication is affected by:

- Phonemic awareness and other phonological processing issues
- Receptive language skills (vocabulary, language comprehension)
- Expressive oral language skills (word retrieval, vocabulary, syntax, pragmatics)
- Expressive written language (graphomotor, grammar, motor planning, idea generation, letter formulation, visual-spatial processing)
- Auditory processing
- Visual processing
- Visualization capability
- Higher order thinking
- Memory
- Motor planning, oral-motor functioning, and articulation
- Learning differences
- Processing speed
- Anxiety
- Saliency determination (process of selecting and thinking about which information stands out or is most important)
- Thought organization
- Executive function
- Regulatory issues (sensory, emotional, physical)
- Habits and learned behaviors
- Personality and temperament
- Mutism (inability to speak - elective, selective, etc.)

Since the range of potential communication strengths, challenges, and barriers is so vast and highly specific to each individual, the communication plan must be tailored to fit. Furthermore, one's communication needs change over time as interests, goals, and preferences evolve and the activities and demands in life change. For this reason, communication plans must be flexible.

For individuals who are nonverbal or have low verbal ability, the need to individualize communication approaches becomes even more important. Life opportunities expand greatly when avenues are available for an individual to initiate and sustain emotional and social connections, show preference and opinion, display

humor, express will and personal desires, share joy and accomplishments, convey pleasure and displeasure, request assistance, and convey affection. Those for whom traditional forms of communication do not work well depend upon their caregivers, educators, specialists, and friends to connect and communicate with them in other, equally as valuable communication formats.

Examples of successful communication approaches and modalities for non-verbal and low verbal individuals include:

- Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) approaches and devices. *See Appendix 7.03 for further information about this.*
- Story-boarding (drawing a story-based pictorial representation)
- Art
- Photography
- Writing notes
- Facilitated writing
- Keyboarding
- Movement (gestures, pantomime, etc.)
- Pictorial images
- Vocalizations (sounds, utterances)
- Sign language
- Use of objects
- Symbolic representation (use of symbols to communicate)

Transition programs should offer a wide range of communication interventions, techniques, and methods so all individuals are able to access and respond to the content in a manner that meets their individual needs.

### A.03 Use of Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) in Transition Curriculum

For many decades sign language has been instrumental in opening up a venue for many individuals with expressive language and articulation challenges to enable them to communicate their thoughts, feelings, preferences, and desires. As the field of technology and specifically assistive technology exploded in scope and complexity, practitioners, families, and educators have expanded their thinking of communication support in ways never imagined before. Technology offers a new future for individuals with expressive language challenges and a much needed expansion of options in addition to and above and beyond the more traditional method of sign language, which is not a viable option for all individuals. The field of Augmentative and Assistive Communication holds tremendous promise in Transition work with adolescents and young adults with ASD and other developmental disabilities across a wide spectrum of capability and severity.

The benefit of technology's speed, accuracy, specificity, and flexibility of design means that it can be individualized and adapted to meet the complex and varied challenges of non-verbal individuals. AAC devices and methods enable an individual with expressive language challenges the opportunity to develop a relationship with language that otherwise would not exist. Its use spans a wide range of possibilities:

- Opening up avenues for relationships
- Developing spontaneous language expression
- Increasing self-advocacy
- Better identifying interests and affinities
- Permitting more specificity and nuance in communication exchanges
- Practicing the reciprocity and flow of language and rapport
- Building emotional language understanding and expression

Now with the help of AAC devices, participation in community outings, group activities, and navigating public places becomes much more possible. In addition, as jobs become more technology based, an individual's skill level, comfort, and familiarity with AAC devices can form a bridge to learning new technology associated with an internship, job, or career.

The cultural trend towards technology as a tool for everyone in everyday life encourages practitioners to think beyond applying devices just for their non-verbal clients. Some practitioners have begun to use AAC technology in their work with individuals who have expressive language skills but need remediation and help with cognitive difficulties.

- Those with slow processing speeds could benefit from the increase in momentum, reciprocity, and response time that an AAC device offers
- For students with weak symbol decoding (letters or shapes), assistive devices provide opportunities to work on and strengthen symbol recognition
- As remediation and assistive tools for writing instruction, devices can help with brainstorming during the idea generation phase of writing or as a replacement for writing for those with high writing anxiety or difficulty with graphomotor and keyboarding



- Individuals with challenges in syntax and language sequencing could benefit from using devices to decelerate the language process and practice sequencing and word choices
- From an interpersonal standpoint, AAC devices can help individuals with more advanced skills to communicate with peers who have reduced skills, and help them understand that non-verbal individuals can have a lot to say, reducing the false impression that they are not intelligent
- It may be a great exercise to have students strong in language have to adjust to communicating through a device as an activity to get first-hand experience in what it feels like to have a different relationship with language. Examples can also be drawn from individuals without ASD who have a great mastery of language and strong cognition but need AAC devices to communicate it to the outside world (e.g., Stephen Hawkins, a brilliant author, physicist, and Professor of Mathematics at the University of Cambridge who had a motor neurone disease and was unable to communicate).
- Lastly, technology- or communication-based affinity classes for students with more advanced skills can include AAC information and research.

Amidst all the new AAC devices on the market, it is still important to understand the low tech approaches (such as sign language), which may be valuable tools for certain individuals with expressive language challenges.

### A Comment on Sign Language

Because sign language requires a certain level of motor planning and hand dexterity and because it requires an investment of time and staff training, it is not a good fit for all programs and students. However, it can be an effective alternative for many:

Individuals with more advanced skills, particularly students seeking degrees may opt for sign language to fulfill their foreign language requirements. Individuals needing to improve their motor planning, body awareness, and motor sequencing might find that learning sign language can help to remediate their challenges.

Learning sign language can be a wonderful way to practice decelerating expression for those who engage in rushed or pressured speech.

It may also offer tremendous benefit for students who have weak visual and auditory memory for language but have strong motor memory, as signing enables them to enlist their muscles and body memory systems as a means to strengthening language.

Lastly, the process of learning sign language affords a student the chance to work 1:1 with a staff member on engagement, reciprocity, and learning through mirroring.

### A Comment on Supported Communication

“Supported communication is the term used when a child is given emotional, communicative and sensory-motor support (a parent's or therapist's hand supporting the child's hand or arm) so that he is more

able to use an augmentative communication device (most often a keyboard) to point to pictures, letters or other symbols in order to express his feelings and thoughts. In the past, research into supported communication indicated that the communication was being directed by the therapist rather than the child. As a result this technique has been disregarded by many, which is unfortunate. When used properly, supported communication can be an incredibly effective resource for children with severe motor-planning challenges, especially for those who can't point reliably. Many have progressed from supported to independent typing. The most effective means of providing these children with a "voice" that I have encountered in clinical practice is supported communication on a keyboard, which the child uses to type.” (Robinson, 185)

### In Summary

There is little doubt that technology is here to stay and that its effect on how people communicate socially and professionally is immense. It is vital that we equip our young adults with the ability to use technology if we wish them to be able to participate in their communities, have a voice among their neurotypical peers, and compete for jobs and careers. AAC builds bridges across the communication gaps many individuals with ASD and other developmental disabilities experience on a daily basis.

For young adults with ASD who are in transition, taking advantage of both traditional and innovative uses of these devices reduces their chances of social isolation, increases their capacity for functional and creative expression, and widens their job and career options.

### References

Robinson, R. (2011). *Autism Solutions: How to Create a Healthy and Meaningful Life for Your Child*. New York, NY: Harlequin.