Effective Mentoring for Youth with Autism Spectrum Disorders

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Agenda

- PEER Pilot Program
- Background on Autism
- Communication
- Behavior Management
- Building Social Skills
- Helping Youth Understand Autism
- Inclusion Reflection
- Questions/Evaluations
PEER Program

Studies in the general population have shown that mentoring is an effective way to promote positive youth development, including improved social outcomes.

Mentoring for youth with Autism Spectrum Disorders has not been described.

We developed a short-term program in which college students served as mentors for teenagers with Asperger Syndrome and High Functioning Autism, and assessed its effect on their self-esteem, social anxiety and quality of life.
Structure

• Nine youth, ages 14-18, were each paired with a college-aged mentor to complete a 6-month program called *Partners Exploring Education and Recreation* (PEER).

• Mentoring pairs met once a week for two hours at a local Boys & Girls Club (BGC). They chose activities from six core areas: Art, Education, Leadership, Life Skills, Recreation and Technology.

Evaluation

• Program feasibility was evaluated by satisfaction reports from youth, parents, mentors, and BGC staff.

• Program efficacy was assessed by comparing baseline and outcome measures of quality of life, self-esteem, and social anxiety.
Mean Scores
Before and After Intervention

Teen Peds-QL
- Health & Activities
- Feelings
- Getting Along
- School

Parent Peds-QL
- Health & Activities
- Feelings
- Getting Along
- School
Results

Self Esteem

Social Worries

- Before
- After
Results

Parents
All parents described the mentoring relationship as very positive. 75% of them reported their child’s progress on set goals was somewhat or very successful. Parents on average reported increased quality of life in all domains, and somewhat fewer signs of social anxiety.

Youth
89% of teens reported that it was “very true” that they felt happy around their mentor, while 11% reported that this was “sort of” true. Their reported self-esteem, social anxiety, and quality of life in all domains improved over the 6 months of the program.

Mentors
All mentors reported that the PEER program was a good experience.

BGC Staff
Staff of the Boys and Girls Club rated the program as “very successful” and reported positive changes in mentees’ behavior.
What is Inclusion?

An attitude and approach that seeks to ensure that every person, regardless of ability or background, can meaningfully participate in all aspects of life.
The Autism Awareness Ribbon

The puzzle pattern of this ribbon reflects the mystery and complexity of autism.

The different colors and shapes represent the diversity of people and families living with this disorder.

The brightness of this ribbon signals hope – hope through research and increasing awareness in people like you.
“If you have met one person with Autism, you’ve met **ONE** person with Autism.”
Demographics

- 1 in 88 children have an ASD; some report as high as 1 in 50 (CDC, 2013)
- Boys are nearly five times more likely than girls to have an ASD
- ASDs across all ethnicities, socioeconomic statuses
Common Strengths of Individuals with ASD

- Good visual memory and long term memory
- Attention to detail
- Ability to learn rote material easily
- Tendency to be logical
- Perfectionism, eagerness to please.
- Taking things apart and putting them back together.
- Ability to learn routines, adherence to rules and schedules.
- Knowledge of specific subjects of interest.
- For some, exceptional abilities in art, music, technology etc.
Triad

1. Language and Communication
2. Social Interaction
3. Repetitive Behaviors or Limited Interests
Hidden Curriculum

The hidden curriculum is composed of skills we are all expected to know in order to function in society such as:

- Non-verbal communication
- Conversational skills

Elements of Communication

- Spoken Word: 38%
- Tone of Voice: 55%
- Non-Verbal: 7%
Pragmatics Exercise

Try saying the word “Really” five times in a row, but change the meaning each time as follows:

• I don’t believe you
• I’m shocked
• I’m delighted
• I’m telling the truth
Literal Interpretation
Inclusive Language

Use “PERSON FIRST” language

A disability is one characteristic of a person, and language should reflect this i.e. “People with disabilities” not “the disabled”
Visual Communication

TRAYS
Includes Cole Slaw & Hush Puppies
Chopped BBQ...................... 5.75
Sliced or Coarse BBQ ........... 6.90
Baby Back Ribs..................... 7.50

BARBECUE
Chopped BBQ...................... 6.50
Sliced or Coarse BBQ ........... 6.75
Baby Back Ribs..................... 7.50

CHICKEN
BBQ Chicken......................... 6.50
Fried Chicken...................... 6.50
Chopped Boneless Chicken........ 7.50

LARGE ALL WHITE: ADD 8.50

COMBINATIONS
Served with Choice of two vegetables & Hush Puppies
Chopped BBQ and Chicken........ 8.00
Chicken & Baby Back Ribs ....... 8.50
Baby Back Ribs & Chopped BBQ .. 8.50
COARSE OR SLICED - ADD 8.25

DESSERT
Lemon Pie or Carrot Cake .......... 1.75
Banana Pudding..................... 1.75

Beverages
Iced Tea ..................... Reg. 1.25, Isg. 2.00
Lemonade ..................... Reg. 1.25, Isg. 2.00

SANDWICHES
Chopped BBQ...................... 3.25
Chopped Chicken.................. 3.25
Sliced.................. .................. 3.50
Coarse................... .................. 3.50

SANDWICH SPECIAL
(Chopped BBQ or Chicken, Fries, Tea or Lemonade) 5.50

VEGETABLES/PLATE
Choice of 4 Vegetables Served with Hush Puppies
Collard Greens
Steamed Cabbage
Corn & Butter Beans
Boiled Potatoes
Potato Salad
Cole Slaw
French Fries
Brunswick Stew

SIDE ORDERS
Any Vegetable ........................ 1.75
French Fries ......................... 1.75
Brunswick Stew Cup ............. 1.75
6 Hush Puppies..................... 1.00
Bag of Skins......................... 1.75
12 Hush Puppies................. 1.75

BEVERAGES
Iced Tea ..................... Reg. 1.25, Isg. 2.00
Lemonade ..................... Reg. 1.25, Isg. 2.00

Menu & Prices Subject to Change Without Notice
Activity
Meltdown Cycle

Adapted from Curts and Dunn (personal communication, 2000).
Tips for Adults

• Remain Calm
• Use a quiet voice
• Take deep breaths
• Avoid power struggles
• Be flexible
• Less is more
• Do not take behavior personally
Nurtured Heart Approach

Relentlessly look for and reflect back the positive behaviors, qualities and success in the moment they are happening.

Consistently set limits on negative behaviors or broken rules with mild and brief consequences. (Example: taking a break).

Refuse to get drawn into, and feed negativity with attention and relationship.
Helpful Strategies

- Clear, consistent expectations
- Structure and routines
- Preview and review
- Visual Supports
- Reinforcers
Positive Reinforcement: Following a behavior, a consequence that increases the likelihood that the behavior will happen again in the future. For example:

- When you use your store discount card, you pay less for the stuff you need, and you’ll be more likely to use the card in the future.

- If a co-worker compliments your new hairstyle, you may wear it that way more often.

- When you wake up early to get to the gym before work, you feel energized all day and, consequentially, you may do early morning workout more regularly.
Positive Reinforcement

Positive Reinforcer: the consequence after a behavior (sometimes called “reward” or “incentive”).

- Individualized
- Some are intrinsic, some are extrinsic
- General examples:
  - Feelings of pride/ accomplishment
  - Thank you note
  - Compliment
  - Credit card rewards programs
- Anything that serves to increase behavior.
Role Modeling Proper Social Etiquette

- Role-play different scenarios
- Practice conversation skills
- Observe
Making Social Opportunities Enjoyable

- Ensure that the social demands aren’t too high and don’t require too much effort.
- Use a lot of humor, games and fun activities.
- Incorporate youth’s special interests.
Tips for Encouraging Active Participation

- Meeting before youth enters the activity
- Debriefing after activity
- Providing covert cues
Activity
Helping Children Understand their Peers with Autism

Examples for explaining differences in:

Behaviors

Sensory Experiences

Communication
Tips for Facilitating Friendship

- Plan cooperative games and activities that build a team.
- Model an open and accepting attitude.
- Highlight the capacity of all children to “give”.
- Teach children to slow down.
- Establish your program as a “No Teasing Zone”.

Partners for Youth with Disabilities
Kevin and Igor’s Story
Inclusion Checklist

- What stood out or surprised you?
- What are you doing well?
- What would you like to work on or learn more about?
Thank you!

Questions?