Reading to Young Children with Special Needs

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Overview

- Introduction to Children with Special Needs
- Characteristics of Children with Special Needs
- General Strategies
- Specific Strategies
- Activity/Discussion
- Conclusion
Why Do We Read to Children?

• Reading aloud to children is the single most important activity we can do to help children be ready to learn to read when they get to school.
• Reading to children is fun!
• Reading is a wonderful interactive experience that promotes intimacy and language development.
What do children learn when we read to them?

• Vocabulary
• Print Awareness
• Story Structure
• Phonological Awareness
• Basic Concepts
What about children with special needs?

• ALL children can benefit from being read to!!
• You may need to make accommodations
• Can occur in all settings
  – Preschool, daycare, home, library, community center, etc.
Who are children with special needs?

• Sometimes it is obvious
  – Physical disabilities
  – Down syndrome

• Sometimes it isn’t
  – Language delays
  – Social delays
  – Autism
Language Delays

What you may see:

• Child talks a lot but is difficult to understand
• Child has difficulty following verbal directions
• Child loses attention quickly
• Child has difficulty answering questions
• Child follows gestures
• Child knows the actions to every song
• Child is disruptive
• Child is reluctant to participate

What you may not see:

• Child does not understand the words you are using
• Child is using behavior to communicate frustration
• Child believes he/she is saying something understandable
• Child does not want to admit that he/she does not understand
• Child is embarrassed
Cognitive Delays

What you may see:
• Short attention span
• Disruptive behavior
• Difficulty answering questions
• Difficulty following directions
• A change in behavior when material is at appropriate level (for the better)
• Immature social interactions with peers
• Physical characteristics
  – Fetal Alcohol Syndrome
  – Down Syndrome

What you may not see:
• Accompanying health or medical concerns
Physical Delays

What you may see:
- Vision impairment
  - Walking stick, guide
- Hearing impairment
  - Hearing aids, cochlear implant, interpreter
- Mobility devices
  - Braces, walker, wheelchair
- Other assistive devices
  - Feeding tubes
  - Catheters
  - Oxygen

What you may not see:
- There may or may not be an accompanying delay
  - e.g., cognitive delay, autism
- Degree to which disability impacts participation
Social Delays

What you may see:
- Short attention span
- Easily distracted
- Disruptive behavior
- Aggression
- Difficulty initiating and responding to peers and adults
- Difficulty sharing, taking turns, waiting for a turn, cooperating
- Difficulty following directions

What you may not see:
- Mental health disorder
  - ADHD
  - Emotionally disturbed
  - Bipolar Disorder
  - OCD
- Physiological Factors
  - Child may be hungry, tired, sick...
- Environmental Factors
  - Prenatal exposure to drugs and/or alcohol
  - Child in foster care
Autism Spectrum Disorder

• Autism is a broad neurological spectrum disorder

• Characteristics include:
  – Difficulties with social interaction
  – Communication impairment
  – Repetitive, restricted or stereotypic behavior
Pervasive Developmental Disorders

- Autistic Disorder
- Childhood Disintegrative Disorder
- Rett’s Disorder
- Pervasive Developmental Disorder NOS
- Asperger’s Disorder
ASD

What you may see:
• Poor eye contact
• Limited gestures
• May not interact with peers
• May not point to objects of interest
• Reduced interest in other people’s ideas
• Limited or no spoken language
• Monotone or unusual pitch or rhythm to voice
• Limited conversation
• Echolalia or scripted speech
• May not respond to name
• Restricted or repetitive behavior

What you may not see:
• May not understand simple questions, jokes or sarcasm
• May have specific routines that need to be followed
• May have sensitivities to various sensory stimulation
  – Visual
  – Auditory
  – Tactile
  – Smell
  – Oral
• May have limited interests
• May be focusing on irrelevant stimuli
Examples of Restricted Behavior

- Chin-tapping
- Head-banging
- Clapping
- Tearing paper
- Breaking glass
- Spinning things
- Spinning oneself or running in circles
- Colored and shiny objects

- Matching objects
- Blinking compulsively
- Switching lights on and off
- Dropping things repetitively
- Jumping
- Rocking
- Hand-shaking
- Flicking objects
Stimulus Over Selectivity
Why do they do this?

• Behavior is a form of communication
• What do they want? What are they communicating?
  – Attention
  – Escape from demands
  – Sensory stimulation
  – Tangible object
  – May be bored, hungry, tired, overwhelmed…
General Strategies

- Plan, plan, plan!
- Environmental modifications
- Predictability
- Appropriate length and material
- Setting Rules
- Maintaining Participation/Engagement
Planning Your Time

• Keep story time short
  – Quality versus quantity
  – Stop before you’ve lost their interest!

• Have several activities ready to use in case you need them

• Plan for each activity lasting a shorter time than you planned

• Have your materials ready and organized before the activity starts

• Know what to do in case of any type of emergency, big or small
Environmental Modifications

- Reduce distractions
  - extraneous materials
  - loud noises
  - fluorescent lights
- Only one person talking at a time
  - Can try a “talking stick”
- Child-size furniture
  - Children with physical disabilities may need special furniture
- Make sure all participants can see what you’re doing
- Make sure each participant has a “personal space”
  - e.g., chair, carpet square
Making it Predictable

• Keep things the same each time
  – Rules
  – Behavioral Expectations
  – Consequences of Behavior
  – Order of Activities
  – Seating Arrangement
Making Rules Clear

- Have a few rules that children must follow
- Review the rules before each session
- Have a picture chart to remind children of the rules
- Praise children for following rules
- Examples:
  1. Stay on your carpet square
  2. Raise your hand before speaking
  3. Be quiet when someone else is talking
Choosing Appropriate Books

• Materials should be simple
  – Few words on a page
  – Pictures to explain the words

• Materials should match the interests of your audience
  – Maybe take a survey to find out if children have special interests

• Materials should match the attention span of your audience
  – Start with 3-5 minutes, then build up as children are able
  – Know the warning signs of flagging attention!
Keeping Children Engaged

• Encourage participation as much as possible
  – Ask questions
  – Sing songs or read books with actions
  – Use children’s names
  – Maintain a brisk but not rushing pace
  – Use a child as an assistant

• Ignore distracting behavior

• Praise children for following the rules
 Specific Strategies

• Visual cues
• Picture schedules
• Behavior charts
• Incentives
• Social Stories
Visual Cues

• Intent is to communicate through pictures
• Makes activity more structured and predictable
• Can be supplemental to verbal and/or gestural cues
• Especially helpful for children with language delays and/or autism
commands

- yes
- sí
- no
- no
- please
- por favor
- Thank you
- gracias
- wait
- esperar
- stop
- pare!
write
escribir

show me
muéstrame

How do I ____?
¿Cómo puedo ___?

watch
mirar

give
dar

take
tomar
**amenities**

- **men’s room**
  - cuarto de baño para hombres
- **ladies’ room**
  - cuarto de baño para dama
- **changing room**
  - baño el bebé
- **phone**
  - teléfono
- **water fountain**
  - agua para beber
- **elevator**
  - el ascensor
Circle Rules

inside voice

Sit on your Bottom

hands to yourself

listening ears
Picture Schedules

- Uses pictures to cue child about what is happening next, step by step
- Can be used for any routine
- Can be adapted or individualized for specific needs of child
Story Time Picture Schedule

- sit on floor
- hello
- sing
- story
- all done
- goodbye
## Behavior Charts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Behavior</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10:00 – 10:05 am</td>
<td>Enter room&lt;br&gt;Sit on chair or carpet square</td>
<td>☺ ☹ ☩</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:05 – 10:10 am</td>
<td>Hello Song</td>
<td>☺ ☹ ☩</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:10 – 10:20 am</td>
<td>Read Aloud</td>
<td>☺ ☹ ☩</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Incentives

• Reward good behavior with desirable
• Can be for individual or group
• Keep track of good behavior frequently
  – e.g., marbles in a jar, tallies on a poster
• Can be tangible item (e.g., stickers)
• Can be activity (e.g., be teacher’s assistant)
Social Stories

• Individualized story that explains a process or activity to child
• Used to prepare and remind child of what is going to happen
• Makes actual activity more predictable and therefore easier to manage
• “This is My Library”
Activity

- Get into groups of 3-4 people
- Read the description of the child and situation
- Complete the Planning Form describing how you could accommodate this child in your story time
Conclusion

• Reading aloud should be fun for you and the child!
• Children with special needs can benefit from reading aloud as much as any other children
• Children with special needs do not need to be intimidating – you just need a few tools in your toolbox!