



Alexander County Schools Autism Team Newsletter

March 2022

2021-2022 Autism Team Meeting Date Schedule:

- April 7th at 3:30pm
(*new date*)
 - May 19th at 3:30pm
- **All meetings will be held by Zoom until further notice*

Core Members of the 2021-2022 Autism Team:

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Helpful Classroom Strategies for Pragmatic Language

Students with Autism often exhibit challenges with social skills. Social skills are comprised of a variety of skills such as social behaviors (i.e., conventional gestures, facial expressions, and social actions), paralinguistics (i.e., prosody, eye gaze, nonverbal and verbal gestures, and proximity), and social pragmatics.

The Autism Team would like to highlight the significance of social pragmatic skills. Pragmatic skills are developed over time as people are not innately born with them. Pragmatic skills help people engage in social connections with others and they are highly dependent on factors such as joint attention, perspective taking, comprehension, and social interest.

Social pragmatic skills include the intent and frequency of communication, the ability to reciprocate in conversations, perspective-taking, understanding social roles, and an individual's ability to be respectful and polite. These skills can be exhibited in a variety of ways and they can be influenced by an individual's environment or group size.

With all this being said, you may be wondering what this looks like in a classroom setting. Students who have difficulty with the use of pragmatic lan-

guage skills may overly participate in class discussions or ask too many questions without allowing another person to reciprocate in a conversation. They may have difficulty understanding that others have differing thoughts, feelings, and experiences. Students may talk about one topic for too long and may not pick-up on verbal or nonverbal gestures that a topic should shift. Students may be able to understand and verbalize literal or factual information but may have difficulty with inferential information or questions, humor, and sarcasm.

So, what can teachers do to assist students who may have difficulty with the intricacies of pragmatic language? Within whole-group or class discussions, provide students with verbal and/or visual structures so that they know how many times they should participate in a lesson/class. Verbal cues or tangible items (such as a card system) can help students monitor their frequency of communication.

Within a small-group environment, modeling and role playing can help students learn how to appropriately interact with their peers. Students can work on developing appropriate nonverbal gestures as well as learn

how to take turns and understand others' perspectives. When completing activities in a small-group setting, provide students with a cue sheet or list of prompts/questions to help them stay on topic.

It is important for everyone (school staff and students alike) to be aware of communication differences so that we are able to take the perspective of students with Autism or individuals who struggle with typical pragmatic behaviors. There is often a lot of pressure put on individuals with atypical communication skills to bend towards the unwritten social rules of standard communication. We have the opportunity to educate others in a proactive manner so that the "why" behind social behaviors can be understood in a more accepting manner in our schools.

If you have questions or need additional recommendations, reach out to a core member of the Autism Team or the Speech Language Pathologist that serves your school.

Reference

Vicker, Beverly. *Meeting the Challenge of Social Pragmatics with Students on the Autism Spectrum*. Indiana Institute on Disability and Community. <https://www.iidc.indiana.edu/ira/articles/meeting-the-challenge-of-social-pragmatics-with-students-on-the-autism-spectrum.html>

Autism Awareness Day in Alexander County Schools - Friday, April 1, 2022

The month of April is deemed World Autism Month with World Autism Awareness Day being observed on Saturday, April 2, 2022. The Alexander County Schools Autism Team would like to invite staff, students, and the greater community to celebrate Autism Awareness Day on Friday, April 1, 2022.



Let's **Light It Up Blue** (by wearing blue) in recognition of people with Autism and those who love and support them. It is our hope to increase knowledge, understanding, and acceptance of people with Autism so that people with Autism can reach their full potential.