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Special Education Service Agency Newsletter



Issue No. 5
SESA Staff Q & A

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SESA will be closed for winter break from
Monday, December 12th, 2016 - Monday, January 2, 2017
We will reopen on Tuesday, January 3rd
Have a wonderful holiday season!

A SPED Teachers Holiday Wish

From SESA Director, Patrick Pillai

Dear Santa,

I have been a good teacher all year, you see.
If you don't believe me, look at the service page of my IEP!
I don't want two turtle doves or a partridge in a pear tree.
All I really want is to be paper free!

ESERS and BIP's have crowded my year.
Will you please mediate and grant me my Christmas cheer!
I don't mind the extra work and grind,
but fewer reams of paper would certainly be kind!

As I set out my milk and cookies this year,
My objective, Dear Santa, is perfectly clear!
When I look to my stocking and under the tree,
It will be with the wish to be paper free.

Letter From The Editor

By Jennifer Schroeder, SESA Multiple Disability Specialist

Ah, it is that time of year again. A few weeks off from school, no lesson plans, no IEP's, no need to worry about what you will do to help keep the kids focused on school and not on the upcoming holiday. This is a great time of year for teachers, paraprofessionals, administration, and kids to take some time to just relax. Take some time to focus on those fun, relaxing things that you never seem to have quite enough time for. I, for one, plan on reading a big stack of books!

Every year, the specialists that travel with SESA get many questions from staff, families, and other team members. This year, we have worked to compile a list of the most common questions and have given our best answers. Maybe these are questions that you have had; maybe they will spark other questions. Either way, we hope they are a support to you and your students in the upcoming year. So, peruse them on that long flight, or as you ready your classroom to be closed for a few weeks, and then relax, enjoy time with friends and family, and have a wonderful holiday!

Happy Holidays!
Jennifer

SESA STAFF Q & A

Where can I go for an ASD (Autism Spectrum Disorder) 101 training?

Answered by Tara Maltby, AARC Program Coordinator

- Special Education Service Agency (SESA): There are a number of training videos on the autism page (Autism 101, Asperger's 101, Using Visual Supports, etc): <http://sesa.org/content/autism-impairment-services>
- If you are looking to schedule an ASD 101 training with a live presenter, please contact [Tara Maltby](#), Program Coordinator for the Alaska Autism Resource

Center (AARC). AARC services are free and Tara is able to travel for groups of 10 or more.

- SESA also has a lending library where you can access books and technology. The Librarian, Anne Freitag, is really knowledgeable and can help you find some great resources: <http://sesa.org/content/library>
- Seattle Children's Autism Center has a number of great ASD videos on a number of topics, ASD 101 included. They also have great lectures available online: <http://www.seattlechildrens.org/clinics-programs/autism-center/resources>
- Autism Speaks has a number of printable toolkits that are useful. One we recommend is the *100 Day Kit* for families with children who were recently diagnosed. <https://www.autismspeaks.org/family-services/tool-kits>

My student (child) has a 20/200 acuity, what does that mean?

Answered by Angel Black, Vision Impairment Specialist

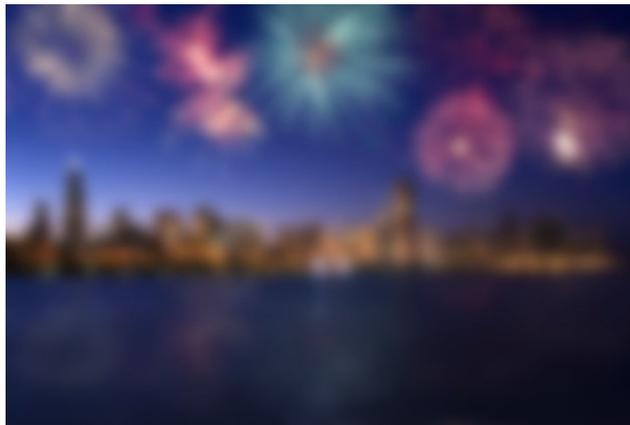
The definition of legal blindness set by the Department of Health and Human Services reads like this:

"A person whose central acuity does not exceed 20/200 in the better eye with corrective lenses, or whose visual acuity is greater than 20/200 but is accompanied by a limitation in the field such that the widest diameter of the visual field subtends an angle no greater than 20 degrees." -- National Association for the Visually Handicapped

And what that means is this: The visual acuity of 20/200 is what a person with a visual impairment can see at 20 feet can typically be seen by a person with 20/20 vision at 200 feet. And the same goes for any acuity, for example, 20/100 is what a person with a visual impairment can see at 20 feet, a person with 20/20 vision is able to see at 100 feet.

According to the State of Alaska's Special Education eligibility determinations, "Visually impaired refers to a child (student) whose visual acuity falls within the range of 20/70 to 20/200 in the better eye after correction or who have limitation in the field of vision that adversely impacts educational progress."

Below you will see some images of what it looks like through the eyes of a person with a 20/200 visual acuity.



Images provided by: BuzzFeed Images

So, a person who is legally blind may still be able to see and function very well independently. It is always best to keep in mind that visual acuity measurements do not determine a person's level of function or their ability.

My student has many physical and cognitive challenges and doesn't really communicate. How can I make sure that my student has the opportunity to communicate during the day?

Answered by Julie Burger, Multiple Disabilities Specialist

Working on communication can be very challenging for teams working with kids who have multiple disabilities, but it does not have to be! My number one piece of advice about communication? Give as many opportunities as possible every day. If your student has ANY type of augmentative or alternative communication devices such as iPad apps, switches, PECS boards, or choice cards, make sure these go with the student wherever they go. Give them time to say what they want, especially when greeting and interacting with peers. If you know your student will have a daily interaction with, for example, the cafeteria monitor or principal, set them up for communication success. Give them whatever tools they need to communicate, anything from high tech to body language, and modify the situation so they can succeed in a direct communication interaction. Once a student feels successful or understands that attempting to communicate is fun and worthwhile, you will begin to see many more attempts being made. You know how frustrating it can be if you lose your voice due to illness? Imagine how your student feels without theirs.



Using an iPad at snack can let your friends know what you want or how good it tastes!



With a BigMac and a Jellybean Switch, you can quickly tell someone that you really want your favorite toy.



Having a recordable switch allows you to sing along with your favorite book and song (in this case - Wheels on the Bus!)



Using a BigMac when properly positioned helps you to request more of something... such as a squeeze or a tickle.

It is so hard to motivate my student with multiple disabilities / cognitive impairment. S/he doesn't appear interested in anything. What can I use to motivate him/her to work?

Answered by Meriah Cory, Multiple Disabilities Specialist

The first thing you can do is a preference assessment. This will help you figure out what their motivators are. You might have to think outside of the box for reinforcement that people may not normally think of. Please find several assessments at: <http://www.sesa.org/content/multiple-disabilities/md-trainings>

Next, look at how long the student is being asked to work before a break/reward. Make sure that the reward is worth the time that they are working. For students with complex bodies, the physical needs can be very tiring and the reward for a particular student will vary.

Finally, look at the task and make sure that the work fits the goal you want to work towards. Make sure that there are not too many things being asked of the student at one time. This will cause frustration and shut down behavior.

Fun reward ideas: Dancing to your favorite song, singing a fun song with your teacher, taking a walk in the hallways, a toy you can only have after you work, a tiny bite of your favorite food, getting to sit in the "teacher chair", Skyping with a friend, painting nails, drawing on the whiteboard, listening to a story, quiet time in the beanbags, extra stickers/smiley faces to show mom, 2 minutes of a favorite movie... the list is really endless!

My student is in high school and still cannot read or do basic math. What should I be teaching them?

Answered by Meriah Cory and Jennifer Schroeder, Multiple Disabilities Specialists

A student in high school needs to be getting ready for a real, functional life. The work and activities they participate in daily should reflect that. Reading tasks do not have to be story based anymore (they have spent the last 10 years learning to read

stories). Instead, reading can be more for information gathering, invitations, sales, advertisements, and/or safety signs. Math should be focused on money, measuring, and/or time. Making all of their tasks personally significant to them can really help with motivation and understanding of the task. Make sure to look at the skills they are really going to need after school. Where are they going to live? What kind of job will they have? Who will be taking care of them?

What is the difference between visual support and PECS (Picture Exchange Communication System)?

Answered by Samantha Weiland, Autism Impairment Specialist

PECS is a type of alternative form of communication in which the student uses the pictures to indicate his or her wants or needs. Visual supports are pictures that accommodate students with daily routine, providing step-by-step pictures of what to expect throughout the day. Visual supports can also be in the form of social stories, providing pictures of appropriate social interactions in various environments.

What positive behavior supports can parents use with their children? How can parents promote a happy holiday season with their children?

Answered by Lyon Johnson, Emotional Disabilities Specialist

Accentuate the Positive: Three Tips for a Joyful Holiday Season

The holiday season can make memories that last a lifetime for you and your children. However, large doses of time together can sometimes be stressful. Even the smaller problem behaviors can add up and be a "Holiday Season Spoiler." Here are three small tips that can help maintain the peace at home:

- First, frequently acknowledge the behaviors you want to see more frequently by your child. The key is to use specific, praise immediately after your child demonstrates these positive behaviors.
- Second, when a problem behavior occurs, instead of making a "stop statement", focus on the behavior you want to see by using a "start statement." For example, instead of saying, "Stop roughhousing with your brother!" ... you could tell your children, "The expectation is you stay in your own personal space." Or, instead of saying, "Stop making rude comments to your sister!" ... you could tell your children, "The expectation is we make helpful, polite comments"
- Third, use visual reminders (notes) in the room or area where specific problem behaviors tend to occur. If your children "roughhouse" in the family room, put a letter size reminder of the expected behavior with the expectations in large, attention grabbing text, such as:

***Stay in your own personal space
Make helpful, polite comments***

The best way to strengthen your child's understanding of expectations is to involve

them in the design of the visual reminders. Then, ask them where these reminders could be helpful. Place them around the house based on your child's suggestions. With younger children, you could take a picture of them demonstrating the positive behavior and print it out with the header.

Sometimes, small changes in what and how we communicate can result in positive changes in your child's behavior and the parent-child relationship.

What can I do to help my child during busy family gatherings?

Answered by John Barrowman, Autism Impairment Specialist

1. **Prepare** - If there are items or routines that are important to your child, plan to keep those as much as possible. Be sure to have enough of whatever you need to do it ahead of time.
 2. **Activities** - Planning an activity family members can do with your child with autism not only will help your child have something familiar to do, but can help guide family members on how to interact with your child.
 3. **Trade-Off** - Take turns with other family members spending time with your child. Allow your child a way out of activities and events too. It is important for everyone to know how they can get a calm moment if they need it.
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