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New Year... New Ideas

Letter from the Editor

by Jennifer Schroeder, SESA Deafblind and Multiple Disability Specialist

Happy New Year!

I hope that everyone is back from their Holiday Break refreshed and ready to tackle the joys and challenges of second semester. This is the time of year when we start to look ahead towards the end of the year; and for many, it is also the time when we look back and see just how far our students have come. While we are looking forward to the weather improving, the days getting longer and longer, and (for some) the end of the year, this is also the time to think about one idea we can add to our day to help our students continue to learn and progress.

Making a change can be challenging, especially if things are going along pretty smoothly in the classroom. When we think of change, it often feels large and overwhelming. But really, for change to be lasting and effective, we need to look at small and steady. One small change that is worked on with fidelity is often what makes the lasting change that gives students the boost they need to hit that next goal. It might be moving from a communication board with 5 words to a communication board with 5 words and a new communication partner. Or, moving from scribble writing to scribble writing with a few real letters added in. You might have a student who does well just listening in class but is ready to add in a scripted answer to calendar or sharing time.

Keep your new idea realistic, recognize the small change the team is creating for each student, and soon you will see the idea that seemed so small, creating a lasting and noticeable change for your student. There is nothing better than when the janitor, the kitchen staff, and the office staff notice that “something” is different with your student, or, when your student creates a real bond with someone in their class (I was recently told by a group of 6-year-olds that their friend didn't need a para anymore – they would take care of her and make sure she was okay all day).

Cheers to the Small Changes!

Ring in the New Year with PEACE

by Nicole Taylor, M.S.E., SESA Emotional Disturbance Specialist

It's a New Year and a great time to change up your learning space. By now the students have enjoyed time away and everyone is relaxed, refreshed, and ready to jump back into learning. Peace Corners are an evidence based approach to social/emotional learning through exploration. A Peace Corner is a private, highly structured way to promote student's being invited to experience their feelings and take care of themselves in a designated place in the classroom. The use of a Peace Corner is a powerful way to build a positive culture in your classroom.



Steps to setting up a Peace Corner:

1. Find a private space in your classroom that is secluded but would still be in your view at all times.
2. Decorate the space in warm colors with a comfortable seating area and low lighting.
3. Place sensory items or personalized toolkits for each student that would aid them in calming down if they get frustrated or angry.
4. Make sure that the peace corner is equipped with two very important items. The first is a form that the student must complete prior to returning to their seat that documents their feelings and what lead them to the peace corner. The second is a timer that helps the student to use the calm down corner responsibly by signaling when it is time for them to return.

List of items you may consider including in the Peace Corner:

1. Journals- Pens/Pencils/Crayons/Markers
 2. Calming images
 3. Smelly Spots
 4. Noise-canceling headphones
 5. Glitter Jars
 6. Mirrors
 7. Balloons
 8. Small blankets
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Making Resolutions Work Without Changing Everything

By John Barrowman, SESA Lead Autism Specialist



It can be a difficult time sliding into second semester knowing how much work there is still left to do. I recall feeling as though there was not enough time left in the year to make any significant changes while also thinking that there had to be a way to still improve how my classroom ran. The secret here is to find something you can do that maximizes the impact of what you are already doing. To put that another way, how can you simplify your day to get better results? Here are a few tips from my own experience:

1. **Make Data Fun:** So taking data is often not seen as a fun job, but it really can be! If you have a record showing growth, it can help with end of the year fatigue by validating both adult and student efforts. Consider using something other than a chart to track your data: marbles in a jar, Lego towers, cutting a picture into chunks and awarding pieces like tokens or a bulletin board to show how close students are to meeting a goal.
2. **End the Week on a Good Note:** An end of the week party may seem like a good idea to motivate students, but oftentimes, it is too great of a change to be beneficial. Parties can take too much energy and be distracting to students. Consider looking for some calmer, smaller options that are still interesting to your students. A few possibilities are to have a short clip of a movie, allowing students to work in different parts of the room, allowing changes to the lighting, or a slightly longer recess that day.
3. **Switch Roles:** By this time, students should know their classroom routines and it could be fun to switch roles. Identify a student or two who can be the teacher for a brief period. This provides a change in pace, but also allows new opportunities for social skills. If a student can run a group, that frees up the teacher to support the students in the group.
4. **Work Smarter:** You very well may have all of the tools you need to meet your New Year's resolution, but not enough time to get it all done. Remember that an objective met is better than three objectives that are never started. Consider simplifying your program to provide more practice with a more specific set of goals. This may require an IEP amendment depending on what you change.
5. **Increasing Motivation Using Student Interests:** This can be the most fun and simplest change you can make. If student interests can be built into the routine instruction, everyone is just a bit more focused and a bit more engaged. I had a student who loved Halloween and although I could not get my hands on a pumpkin in February, we were able to make a paper mache one instead.

The One Thing to Add to a Student's Day

by Angel Black, SESA Visual Impairment and Multiple Disability Specialist

Choosing one thing to add to a student's day that will have a huge impact is a tough assignment. It's the marriage of many different activities, lessons, and experiences that have the most influence on a student's success. What is the one thing a teacher can do? Drum roll, please . . . to provide meaningful activities that teach functional skills to their students with low vision/blindness is a very important thing that can be added easily to your day. Students with low vision/blindness do not have the luxury of incidental learning. All skills must be modeled and taught. According to Carmen Willings of *Teaching the Visually Impaired*, "Functional skills are those that students learn that offer them the opportunity to work, play, socialize and take care of their own personal needs to the highest level possible".



Functional learning activities should be meaningful to the student and be relevant to their world. When designing a lesson or activity, reflect on the functionality of a specific skill, then focus on those skills that will produce the greatest independence possible. Almost all functional activities will provide the chance to teach many different skills all at the same time. Think general skills, i.e. critical thinking, personal management, organization, problem solving, collaboration, communication, even literacy, and fine and gross motor skills just to name a few. For example, during a simple snack math activity students can work on these skills:

- **Number Concepts:** counting, addition, subtraction, measurement, more or less.
- **Literacy:** Making a list of the snacks offered, writing a story about a favorite snack, writing word problems to go with the activity.
- **Language:** Identify the snacks being offered, discussing the math problems, and how to solve them.
- **Problem Solving:** Solve the math problems, figuring out what to do if one person has more of the snack than someone else.
- **Social Skills:** Sharing, practicing good manners, talking to peers in appropriate ways.
- **Positional Concepts:** above/below, top/bottom, in/on and under, in front of/in back of.

Once you begin to look for those teachable moments, you will discover that there are many different ways to add and develop functional skills right in the midst of your daily routine. It's the one thing that does not take any extra time, but does have "a lot of bang for your buck"!

Resolving to Increase Use Behavior Specific Praise in 2019

by Lyon Johnson, SESA Emotional Disturbance Specialist

New Year's resolutions are easy to make, but can be challenging when it comes to the follow through-- whether they be for your professional or personal life. Often, we make the mistake of biting off more than we can chew, especially when a resolution involves a complicated skill or a change that requires excessive time and effort. However, resolving to use behavior-specific praise (BSP) with your students is a goal that is both achievable and worth implementing because it can positively impact student performance in your classroom. Basically, BSP is a verbal statement that praises and describes an appropriate and desired behavior. For example, the teacher might say, "I like the way John is working quietly at his desk with his eyes on the speaker." BSP lets students know what they need to do in order to receive praise. It also instructs the student, and those within earshot, how to behave in similar situations, settings, or routines in the future. When comparing BSP to a teacher's use of general praise, BSP has resulted in higher rates of on-task student behavior (Chalk & Bizo, 2004), increases in student engagement and appropriate behavior (Myers, Simonsen, & Sugai, 2011), and a decrease in noncompliant and disruptive behavior (Thompson, Marchant, Anderson, Prater, and Gibb, 2012).

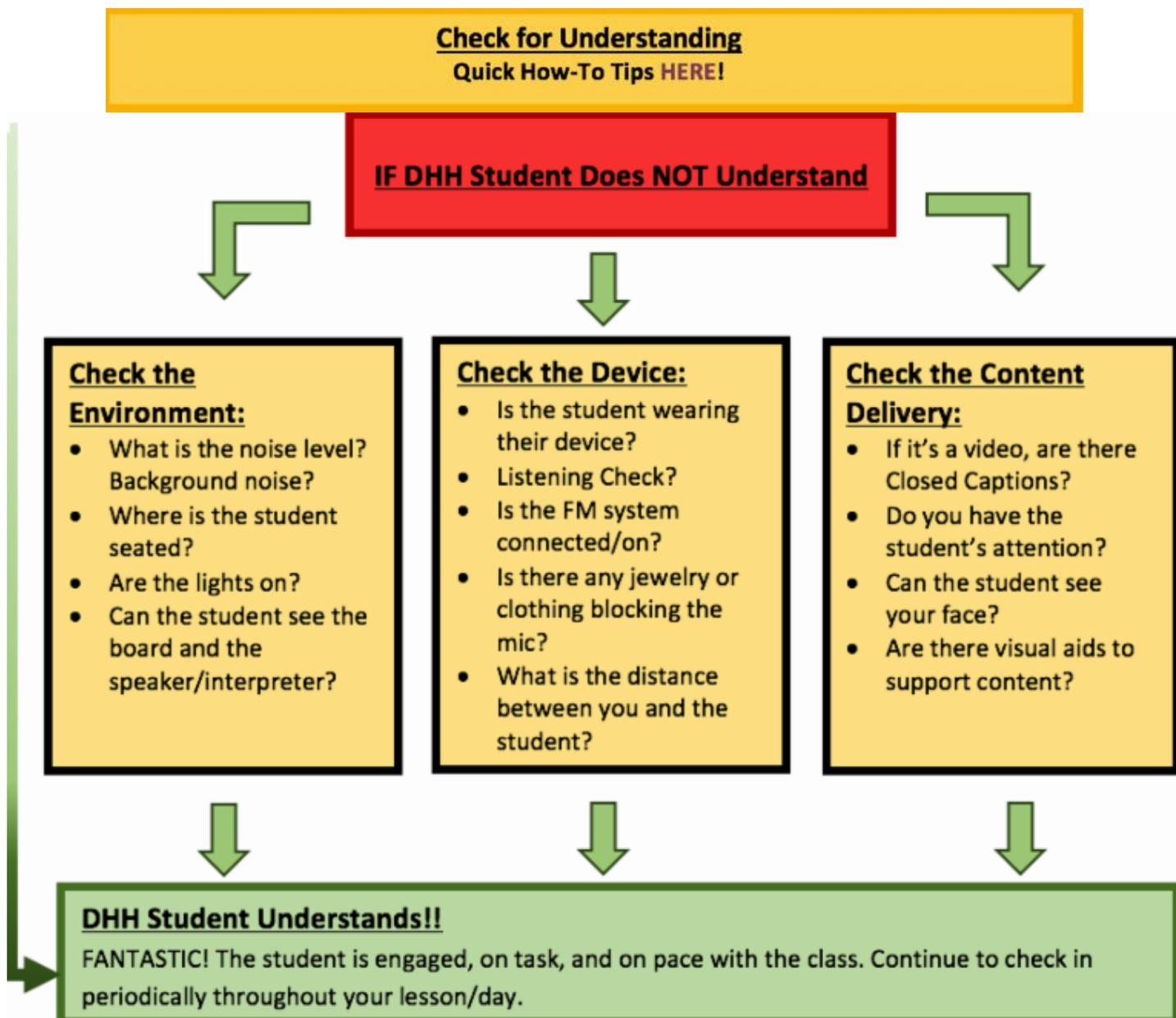
Of course, the sticking point with any New Year's Resolution is how to make it an actual habit. Using BSP statements seems easy enough. It isn't a complicated skill, but it does require diligence. Moreover, old habits, such as providing excessive attention to problem behaviors or overusing general praise, can be challenging without a strategy. Even harder, is achieving a ratio of teacher-to-student interactions with four times as many specific praise statements to redirection or reprimand statements. That 4:1 ratio of interactions can be difficult to achieve without a plan. So, what is the most effective way to make this behavior specific resolution a reality? In order to turn your resolution into a reality, use a simple self-monitoring procedure to obtain a baseline of how often you use BSP. Even consider tracking the rate of BSP statements you make by each class or with specific groups of students throughout the day. You could use a golf counter or simply keep track using tally marks on clip board. If your initial baseline is low during a certain class or period of the day, set a realistic goal to increase the rate of BSP for that time period. By incorporating a simple self-monitoring plan, you can increase the use of BSP in your classroom. Have a productive, happy, and safe 2019 school year!

References

Happy New Year: Ready, Set, Time to Check!

by Kelsey Koenigs, SESA Deaf & Hard of Hearing Specialist

The New Year tends to fill everyone with a rush of optimism and confidence in exploring new endeavors. As educators, this can be just the spark we need to reenergize and revamp our classrooms and our students' experience. It also marks the half way point of the academic year. At this time, you probably have a pretty good handle on each individual student's personality and unique educational needs, but maybe there are one or two that still eludes you? Perhaps that student has hearing loss? If you are still looking for an easy to implement, most *bang for your buck* tool to add to your teacher toolbox when it comes to your kiddo with hearing loss, here it is... **check for understanding** (pertinent for ASL users, TC users, and LSL users).



Click [HERE](#) for more detailed suggestions for creating a Deaf/Hard of Hearing friendly classroom.

Shifting Expectations for Students with Severe Disabilities

by Meriah Cory, SESA Multiple Disability Specialist

In the middle of the year we often get stuck in our routines. Routines are great, they help understand expectations and participate more fully in classes, but they can also sometimes stop us from pushing ourselves and our students to the next level. It is often helpful to take a look at the routines we have set up as well as the activities themselves to see if there is **one** time a day that we could be asking more of our students. Now, with any change there can be resistance and struggles, but that is often when learning really takes place.

The act of taking a closer look, letting go of our expectations, and being willing to try something new is the easy part. It is following those thoughts up with structured actions that can be challenging. Below are some areas to look at as ways that students can be pushed and where you can try just **one** new thing.

Communication: Is there new vocabulary that students could be working on? Are there other people that we can expect them to talk with? Does staff need to start modeling a new way to use the vocabulary they already have? Is there an area or time of day where communication is lacking and what do they already know that will help them with this? Do situations need to be set up with gentle sabotage so that the student is forced to communicate in order to successfully navigate throughout the day?

Academics: Are your students ready to move from physical prompts to just verbal or gestural prompts? Is there a way to include them in class activities that is not passive, but as an active participant? Is what the student is working something that is going to help them 10 years from now? Are there non-human supports that can be set up so that they can be more independent in class? Are there ways for peers to give instructions instead of adults?

Behavior: Does the student know how to ask for help or a break? Is there a way to make transitions more independent (maybe with the use of a timer or transition objects)? Is the student learning self-calming techniques or how to identify their own emotions? Does the student know when they are ready to get back to work? Does the student feel safe and if not, do they have the communication to talk about it? Has the same behavior with the same outcomes been going on for a very long time? Does that mean something needs to be changed?

Every student is unique and what works for one child might not work for another, but increasing expectations with the proper supports has the potential to help students show us what they know. Many times, students with significant disabilities are included throughout their day, but the inclusion is passive. Even finding 1 or 2 ways during passive times where they can take an active role can change the whole school's perception of what your students can do and who they really are. This can often be challenging because of time and the comfort level of staff, but it can also be the idea that changes that student's life. So, look at the above list, get some ideas, put on your creative hat, and think of one or two ways that passive can be active (or a little activity can become more involved) and watch and see how expectations from everyone will change. Remember that change is hard and it takes time, but it can be so rewarding.

Reviewing Progress to Make Progress

by Aimee Smith, AARC Resource Specialist

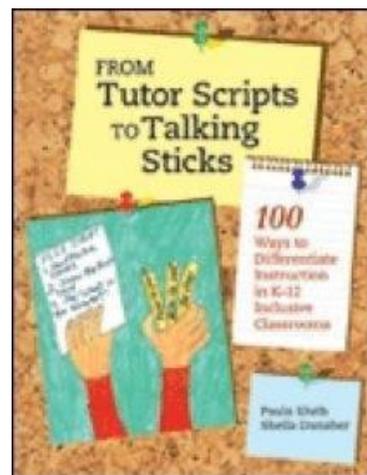
A new year or a new school term brings a great opportunity to review and set a path for growth. A great way to do that is to review each student's goals and objectives and make a plan to make the most growth before the end of the year. The spring time is generally very busy with sports, school activities, assessments, and a myriad of other scheduling impacts. Knowing where you are and where you are going with each student and each goal will help make the most of the short sprint to summer. Here are a few guiding questions as you review each goal:

- Has this goal/objective been addressed well? Is it getting put on the back burner or does it need more attention?
- Is the student making significant progress toward this goal/objective? If not, what needs to be changed to kick start progress?
- Is the goal being measured in a meaningful way? Is there enough data to adequately measure progress?
- Is the student moving towards independence or becoming prompt dependent?
- How can I help the student see their progress and motivate them to work towards their goal?
- Is there carryover into the home environment? How can I engage with parents?
- Is there training that staff need to better support this student on this goal/objective?

SESA Library Resources

From Tutor Scripts To Talking Sticks: 100 Ways To Differentiate Instruction in K-12 Inclusive Classrooms by Paula Kluth and Sheila Danaher. Paul H. Brookes Pub. Co., c2010.

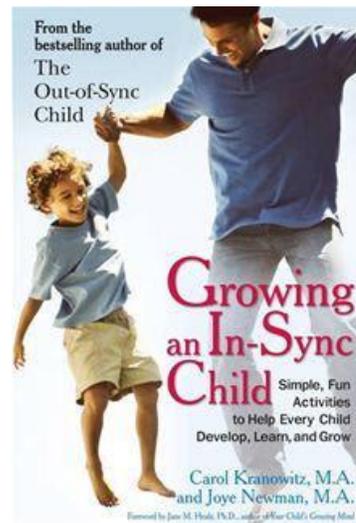
Description: "Differentiated instruction engages students of all abilities as active learners, decision-makers, and problem solvers—making educational experiences more meaningful for all. This one-of-a-kind book proves that designing differentiated instruction can be simple and fun! [Read More](#)



Growing an In-Sync Child: Simple, Fun Activities to Help Every Child Develop, Learn, and Grow

by Carol Kranowitz and Joye Newman. Perigee, c2010

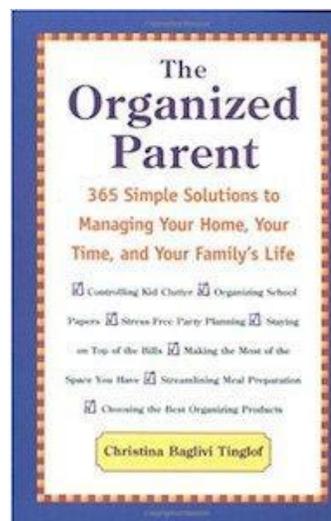
Description: "...provides parents, teachers, and other professionals with the tools to give every child a head start and a leg up. Because early motor development is one of the most important factors in a child's physical, emotional, academic, and overall success, the In-Sync Program of sixty adaptable, easy, and fun activities will enhance your child's development, in just minutes a day." [Read More](#)



The Organized Parent: 365 Simple Solutions To Managing Your Home, Your Time, And Your Family's Life

by Christina Baglivi Tinglof. Contemporary Books, c2002.

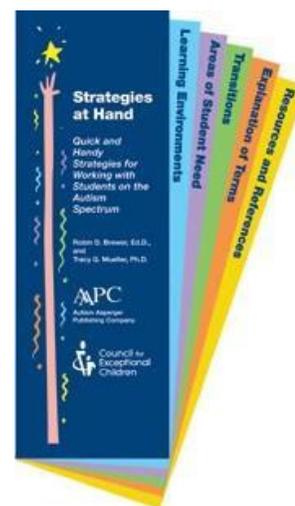
Description: "... a collection of tips and advice on how you can create an organized and efficient home and family schedule. Three hundred sixty-five tips--divided into quick fixes and major tune-ups--focus on parent-specific organizational problems." [Read More](#)



Strategies At Hand [Activity Card]: Quick And Handy Positive Behavior Support Strategies

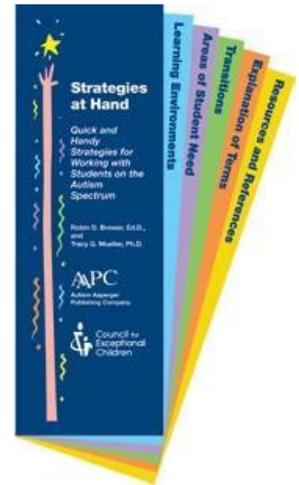
by Tracy G Mueller and Robin D. Brewer. Autism Asperger Publishing Co., 2010

Description: Created to provide special and general education teachers as well as paraeducators and others with a variety of educational tools that can be easily accessed to address behavior management with students in school, classroom, and community.



Strategies At Hand [Activity Card]: Quick And Handy Strategies For Working With Students On The Autism Spectrum by Robin D Brewer and Tracy G Mueller. Autism Asperger Pub. Co., 2008

Description: These resource cards were created to provide special and general education teachers and paraeducators with easily accessible tools for working with students on the autism spectrum.



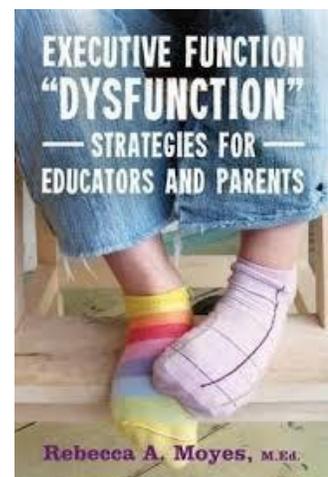
Top Ten Tips: A Survival Guide For Families With Children On The Autism Spectrum by Teresa A. Cardon. Autism Asperger Pub. Co., c2008

Description: This book is meant to be a quick and helpful tool for navigating your way through everyday activities and occurrences when you live with a child with autism spectrum disorders (ASD).



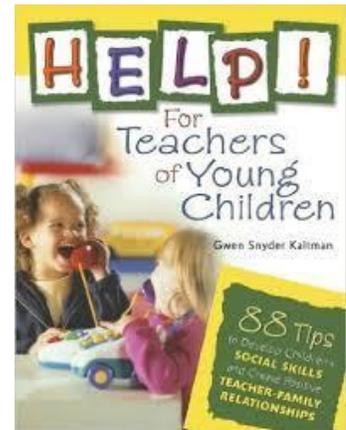
Executive Function "Dysfunction": Strategies For Educators And Parents by Rebecca A. Moyes, M. Ed. Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2014

Description: This book describes the cognitive processes that make up the executive functions and uses real examples to show how difficulties may manifest - from organizational and time management problems, to lack of attention and behavioral difficulties. [Read More](#)



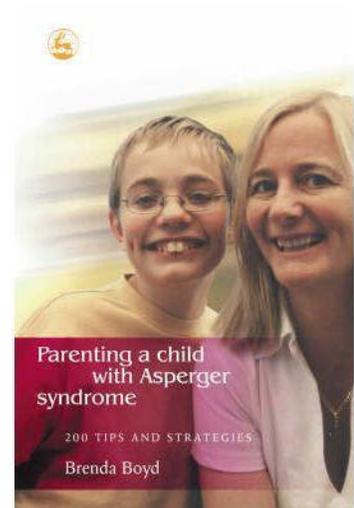
Help! For Teachers Of Young Children: 88 Tips To Develop Children's Social Skills And Create Positive Teacher-Family Relationships by Gwen Snyder Kaltman. Corwin Press, c2006

Description: This entertaining and informative resource offers tips on teaching communication and cooperation skills, instilling a positive self-concept in children, and creating effective team relationships with families.



Parenting A Child With Asperger Syndrome: 200 Tips And Strategies by Brenda Boyd. Jessica Kinglsey Publishers, c2003

Description: For parents of children with Asperger Syndrome ordinary parenting just doesn't always do it - AS kids need a different approach. Brenda is mother to thirteen- year-old Kenneth, author of Asperger Syndrome, the Universe and Everything, and since his diagnosis at the age of eight she has gathered together the parenting ideas and tips that have had a positive effect on Kenneth's life. [Read More](#)



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