



Are you looking for strategies that will promote peer interaction for children with autism?

By: Julia Brewer

Teachers who facilitate peer interaction among children with autism and their typically developing peers through adult guidance, modeling, and addressing child questions promote children's language and social learning. Studies conducted by Laci Watkins, Mark O'Reilly, Michelle Kuhn, and Katherine Ledbetter-Cho demonstrate increased initiation and responsiveness to conversations among autistic children when employing these approaches. Moreover, these strategies have led to a more inclusive classroom environment and sustained peer communication.



The Steps:

1. GUIDENCE WITH INITIATIONS

Pair or group together a child with autism alongside one or more typically developing peers. Select an activity based on shared interests that can be enjoyed together, such as floor puzzle or block building. Then, guide the students to the designated play area within the classroom.



2. MODELING

Next, briefly show the students how to play the activity by demonstrating and engaging the students. Be sure to offer example language to use as they play. After the introduction, move away from the play rug for about 10 minutes.

3. RESPOND TO CHILD QUESTIONS

The teacher can clarify instructions and answer questions regarding the play activity. Give children the language to use to respond. Avoid offering too many prompts, rewards for social interaction, or teaching social skills. Let the play and interaction build naturally.



For Example...

Ms. Johnson has noticed that one of her students is having trouble communicating with other children during playtime. This student has limited verbal communication skills and could make requests to adults using two or three word phases. They regularly seek adult attention but infrequently interacts with peers. This student has scored a 32.5 on the CARS-2, indicating mild-moderate symptoms of ASD.



Step 1:

She notices that this child has a preference to play with trains as well as train tracks. She prepares an activity where the student with autism and their peer who has a similar interest to build a train track together using transportation play sets.

Step 2:

Ms. Johnson brings the two students over to the block play area where the train sets are available. She asks engaging questions like, "What is your favorite toy train?" or "Do you have a train set at home?" Then she demonstrates with verbal explanations how the students build this train track together. Ms. Johnson helps the pair get started by putting down the first piece. Once the children are engaged, she will step away from the area.

Step 3:

Ms. Johnson lets the interaction happen naturally. After a moment, one child looks up at Ms. Johnson. She says, "You are building the train track, add some track" to remind the child what to do. She only intervenes when the students have a question, or if a problem arises.

