



(314) 635-5400

jan.butler@victoryspeechtherapy.com

---

# Teaching Techniques for Kids on the Autism Spectrum

## Homeschool Expo 2011

Jan Butler, SLP CCC/Autism Consultant

Victory Speech Therapy and Autism Consulting, LLC

Teaching all kids can have its ups and downs, struggles and challenges, yet be exciting and rewarding. Teaching kids with autism is the same, but add to that frustrating and confusing! They don't seem to learn by traditional methods.

"They are so smart, yet I can't seem to get through to them."

"They know something one day, then the next day it seems like they never heard the concept before!"

"They only do what they want to do. If they don't like a subject, I can't get them to do it, let alone learn it!"

"How do I teach this kid?"

If you have ever had these thought, or similar thoughts, this workshop is for you!

### 1. SPEAKER INTRODUCTION

## 2. **LEARNING STYLE:** How do autistic children learn?

- a. Visual
- b. Tactile
- c. Concrete
- d. Literal

Rewards: What motivates your child?

Food, toys, movie, computer, puzzles, books, legos, etc.

Premack Principle:

- Pair a liked activity with a disliked activity.
- The more disliked activity, the stronger the liked activity must be.
- Must be rewards they will not get later just because.

A word about Sensory: Autism IS a disturbance in how we process information coming in through our 5 senses. Our senses are: sight, sound, touch, smell, taste, touch. In addition, there are disturbances in vestibular and proprioceptive senses.

*Vestibular:* movement and balance, found in our inner ear.

*Proprioceptive:* How we know where our body parts are in space; awareness of our body.

Hyposensitive VS Hypersensitive

BEHAVIORS ARE MESSAGES!!

Sensory Integration Therapy can help balance a child's sensory imbalance.

Things to try at home: (It is always a good idea to consult an OT before beginning a sensory diet!)

**Sight:** Symptoms: cover eyes, squint, look out of side of eyes, avoids certain rooms, hides face; stares into lights, flick finger by face, etc.

AVOID FLORESCENT LIGHTS! Including new energy efficient bulbs.

Hyper: darker room, away from distractions, sunglasses, study carrel

Hypo: bright room, bright colors, make sure you are in their visual field.

**Sound:** Symptoms: cover ears; non-responsive to noise.

Hyper: Quiet, ear plugs/head phones, separate room if needed.

Hypo: Sit close, get attention, speak clearly/softly (often hypo is misunderstood and child is actually hypersensitive), fm system.

**Touch:** Symptoms: pulls away from touch; touches everything, puts things in mouth, flicks objects.

Hyper: brushing program\*, hugs, fidget objects.

Hypo: fidget objects, brushing program\*, deep pressure, touch many different types of materials.

**Smell:** Symptoms: does not seem to smell; or avoids places and things with strong smells.

Hyper: gradually introduce mild smells, play games to identify smell.

Hypo: introduce strong smells, try to identify.

**Taste:** food avoidances (tactile?); or cravings

Hyper: introduce new foods

Hypo: introduce new foods

**Vestibular:** Symptoms: spinning, swinging, rocking, rolling, constant movement; insecure walking, slow and cautious movement, insecure, gravitational insecurity.

Hyper: Very slow and slight swinging, rocking, rolling, spinning.

Hypo: swinging, rocking, rolling, spinning, seat cushion or therapy ball.

**Proprioceptive:** Almost always crave this! Walk heavy, bounce into walls, jump, bump into things, hitting, biting, physical injury, fall down, run, etc.

Hyper: Rare, but do the same things gradually.

Hypo: trampoline, therapy brush\*, deep pressure, wall push-ups, seat push-ups, jump in place, jumping jacks, etc.

\*Therapy Brushing Program MUST be done under the supervision of an OT!

If your child at any time gets flushed, sweats, vomits, diarrhea, immediately STOP sensory activity and apply deep pressure. Consult your OT before continuing.

**3. ORGANIZE YOUR DAY!** This will save your sanity! Remember:  
*predictability and routine.*

- a. Schedules: variety of schedules. Change daily. Include academic and non-academic activities.
  - 2 schedules?? 1 general for day, one for school.
- b. Organization techniques: drawers, cubbies, shelves, etc.
- c. Sensory Time: build it into your schedule! 15-20 minutes every 2 hours. Every day. Make a schedule for sensory time. This is therapy, not free play time. This is part of the school day.

- 4. CURRICULUM SUGGESTIONS:** There are lots and lots of curriculum ideas out there. These are some that I have found extremely successful within the autistic community, and for kids with any learning difficulties.
- a. Reading: SPIRE . Many kids seem to lean by chunking, and by sight reading. SPIRE is a wonderful phonetic, hands-on approach to teaching the basics. It starts with breaking down words into individual phonemic units. It really helps kids on the spectrum make sense out of words and sounds. It also teaches spelling.
  - b. Math: Saxon. This math curriculum teaches one concept every few days, and reviews previous concepts every day. So even if they don't get it the first day, it keep practicing every day. This also helps so they don't forget things taught earlier (regression). I also like how it teaches addition/subtraction, and multiplication/division together. I think this helps learn these abstract concepts easier.
  - c. Language: Shurley Grammar. I can't say enough about this program for this population. It teaches language and grammar through rote memorization and repetition, which is the autistic child's greatest strength! It is amazing how quickly they can learn these abstract concepts. It also teaches vocabulary and writing.
  - d. Writing: Step up to Writing. This can be used in conjunction with Shurley, they parallel quite nicely. This just happens to be more tactile and concrete.

- 5. TEACHING STRATEGIES AND IDEAS:** Use as many visual aids and tactile manipulatives as possible. Use a white board or chalkboard to write on a lot. VISUAL! TACTILE! CONCRETE!

- a. Reading:
  - use manipulatives.
  - Break up sentences into words, words into syllables, sounds.
  - Use flash cards.
  - Flash cards with glue.
  - Write on chalkboard/erase/wet sponge.
  - Write with marker/crayon/finger.
  - Write in sugar/jello, etc.
  - Frequent checks for comprehension, especially abstract and "reading between the lines".
  - Use objects to act out a story to aid comprehension.
  - Draw pictures to recreate the story.

TEACH:  
rhyming!!  
Word families  
Substitute sounds/words  
Word play

b. Math:

Use manipulatives as much as possible.  
Draw pictures.  
Use graphs and charts.  
Color code + - x ÷ etc. to draw their attention to it.  
Repetition, rote memorization.  
Use pictures and manipulatives to show how clocks, money, etc are all numbers, same process to add/subtract.  
Color code clocks. Use manipulatives, then use a real clock to set the time to teach carryover.

c. Language:

Visuals! Use the board as much as possible.  
Use flash cards and play: memory, go fish, fly swatter game.

TEACH:

- Basic vocabulary and definitions
- categories.
- What doesn't belong?
- Synonyms/antonyms/homonyms
- Analogies
- Idioms

d. Writing

Many kids with autism have fine motor issues and have a hard time writing. I spent way too much time and money trying to improve my daughter's handwriting, and for no real purpose now! Think about the future and what will be beneficial to them as adults. Our society now does not put weight on penmanship like it used to. Be creative! Let them pick a way to write that will be less frustrating, but unconventional.

Write with a crayon, marker, chalk, etc.

Write on a chalkboard, white board, easel, etc.

Type it!

Speak it into a tape recorder.

Use magnetic words/letters.

Use pictures to put a story in order.

Let them speak, you scribe, then they can re-write if needed.

## **How Teachers Can Help Kids on the Autism Spectrum in the Classroom**

Kids on the Autism spectrum thrive on predictability and routine!

A daily schedule is a MUST! Even if it appears as though the student knows the schedule, having it posted for them to see gives them a sense of security. Every major event when a transition is required should be on this schedule.

Mini schedules may be needed for each class period. For example: Turn in homework, listen to teacher lesson, do practice problems in book on page 22 together with the class, complete problems 1-4 at your desk, free time until 10:45.

Use "Pre Mac" principal; pair disliked activities (school work) with liked activities. They can do their preferred activity after they finish the disliked activity.

Any changes in routine should be put on the schedule, for best results, discuss any changes as much in advance as possible.

Remember sensory issues. Provide areas of quiet/safety for kids to calm down when over stimulated.

Provide a sensory diet. Consult an O.T. for ideas.

Sensory seeking behaviors are messages. Try and discover what they are saying with their behaviors. If you meet their needs, you will reduce the behaviors.

Remember Autism is a language disorder. They do not get much of the social language we use. Keep your language **literal** and **concrete**. Avoid using idioms and figures of speech.

Don't assume they understand "the look", gestures, body language, or vocal intonations we commonly use. Assume they don't understand. Kids with Autism don't get social cues we take for granted. Explain everything that is abstract.

**Remember: Literal, concrete, visual.**