

## Self-knowledge, Communication, Life Skills, and Goal Setting

**Objectives:** To help students with autism develop an understanding in the areas of self-knowledge about autism, communication, life skills, and goal setting.

### Setting and Materials:

Setting: Classroom

Materials: A visual organizer, notepad for each participant, quotes from autistic authors, video camera and monitor and large sheet of white paper (17x17) for each participant.

### Content Taught

#### Unit 1: Self-knowledge about the impact of autism in the student's life

1. Discuss how self-knowledge is needed for self-determination
2. Explore students' knowledge of how autism influences their experience, and what strategies they and others use to cope with the challenges stemming from those experiences

#### Unit 2: Communication

1. Focus on informal dyadic conversations
2. Give guidelines for effective communication (turn-taking, eye contact, paraphrasing)
3. Give actions that hinder conversation (interrupting, giving unwanted advice)

#### Unit 3: Life planning and goal-setting

1. Create a "picture" of students' life now and in 5 years
2. Set personal goals; identify, prioritize, and sequence steps to accomplish goals

### Teaching Procedure

#### Unit 1: Self knowledge about autism

1. Use a visual organizer as a framework to organize experiences related to autism. The organizer should depict a student in the center circle and the concentric rings represents the sensory, cognitive, and social experiences that are between oneself and one's experience of or relationship to the world.
2. Give students readings from authors who have written about their experiences with autism, organized into the three realms of sensory, cognitive, and social experiences.

3. Ask them to read the quotes and highlight any experiences of others that they want to discuss in class.
4. In the next class session, review the visual organizer and organize the experiences of authors into the framework. Only three of curriculum's seven units are described in the article.
5. Then, use a second blank copy of the organizer to discuss and organize the students' own experiences in the sensory, cognitive and social realms. Remember to put the students' strengths, challenges, and coping strategies into the framework.

## **Unit 2: Communication**

1. Start with a discussion of the importance of effective communication with regard to self-determination, focusing on informal dyadic conversations.
2. Provide guidelines of actions that facilitate conversation (such as turn taking, eye contact, and paraphrasing) and actions that hinder a conversation (such as interrupting, and giving unwanted advice).
3. Develop an observational checklist based on the guidelines.
4. Role-play each action during a conversation, while students note on the checklist when they saw an action occur. Videotape the role-played conversation. As the tape is replayed, further pinpoint and discuss each action.
5. Then have students identify communication situations that they want to role-play and discuss.
6. Have students form pairs and role-play with the help of the teachers, and engage in role-play conversation in front of the class. Videotape these role-plays. As each taped scenario is replayed, discuss communication strengths and challenges using the checklist.

## **Unit 3: Life planning and goal setting**

1. Help students develop what is called a "life map". Within a square drawn in the center of a large sheet of paper, students use pictures and words to depict the important aspects of their life at present. Then the outside of the square, students depict what they wanted their life to look like about 5 years from now. All life domains – work, social activities, place of residence, and so on – are included in the life map.
2. Once completed, each student shares his or her life map with the class and explains the various components of his or her life now and how he or she would like life to be 5 years from now.

3. As students share their life map, teachers and peers ask questions to help the student clarify and elaborate students' views of their life now and in the future. The map is then used to visually illustrate the concept of a goal and to identify each participant's personal long term goals.
4. Once personal goals are identified for each student, an activity called goal-planning meeting is conducted for each student for one of his or her goals.
5. These meetings are structured with specific goals and rules so that the teacher and peers can suggest possible action steps that a student can take to attain a goal, but ultimately leave the final selection of action steps in the hands of the students.
  - a) First, a student states his/her goal and it is written on a large piece of paper.
  - b) Second, each person in the meeting asked the student questions to clarify his/her definition of the goal. These clarifications are written next to the goal.
  - c) Third, everyone brainstorms the actions that the student might take to accomplish the goal. The actions are listed on the paper.
  - d) Fourth, the student categorizes the actions as
    - i. "something that I would want to do to meet this goal,"
    - ii. "something that I might do later to meet this goal,"
    - iii. "something that does not work for me, or that I have already tried."
  - e) Fifth, all actions marked by the student as a "A1" are typed on paper and cut into separate strips. These strips are laid on the table and, with the teacher's assistance, the student sequences the actions into steps. Last, the steps are used to prepare an action plan used to monitor the steps for attaining the goal.

## **Method of Evaluation**

### **1. Student Interviews**

- a) The interview is divided into seven sections, with each section including three to four questions focusing on a topic or a presented situation intended to elicit an application of the concepts and strategies taught in class.
- b) Situations that could be used: life planning and goal setting, sensory challenges, learning, and communication.

- c) For each interview section, a picture depicting the situation or topic is displayed. In the post-interview, the life maps that the students constructed in the class can be used as a visual for the life-planning question.

## **2. Parent Interviews:**

- a) All interviews with parents could be conducted by phone.
- b) Parents are asked questions to determine if students initiated and self-directed use of the class information in their lives.

## **Lesson Plan Based on:**

Fullerton, A., & Coyne, P. (1999). Developing skills and concepts for self-determination in young adults with autism. *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities, 14*, 42-52.

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