

Strategies for Including Children with Additional Needs in Group Time

Strategies for including children with additional needs into different aspects of the Early Education and Care program and making the group accessible

1. Group times

Group times can be difficult for children with additional needs. Planning the group time can be helpful in determining its success. Some of the problems that may arise during this time may be more easily managed if the underlying issue is appropriately identified and preventative strategies used.

To begin with, it is important to gather some information through observing 'what happens' during group times. Do the children listen and participate attentively, or are they easily distracted and disruptive? At what point during the group time are problems occurring?

Consider this example:

Jenny is the group leader of a kindy group of 18 children where the children are primarily aged between 3 and 4 years. Jenny has a child in the group (Jacob) who has been recently diagnosed with a developmental delay and whose parents have indicated that the child's pediatrician has said the child displays some ASD behaviours. Before morning tea, Jenny holds a 'group session' where the children participate in a 'show and tell' experience. This involves the children sitting in a circle on the carpet mat. Jenny manages this session on her own as her assistant busily sets the tables up for morning tea.

This time has, however, become increasingly more difficult for Jenny to manage. The children take a long time to get organised and sit on the carpet. They don't seem to care whose turn it is and all like to talk, often calling out inappropriately when other children are speaking. Not only this, John appears to have no interest in the session at all and refuses to sit on the carpet, let alone the group.

Jenny is disappointed as she feels that she has organised the session well. The children's parents have been informed about the session and have been very supportive in helping children prepare at home. She wants to be able to provide an enjoyable group session for the children, but doesn't feel as though it is working at all.

When considering this scenario, there are some practical strategies that Jenny may be able to consider.

Timing – the time that the session is held may play a big part in the children's behaviour. If children are tired or hungry, they may not have the energy to concentrate.

Children's development –for children to be able to attend to a task or activity for a certain amount of time, they need to be developmentally ready.

Interest – are the children interested in the group session. Children who lack interest may also lack attention.

Expectations – children need to know what is expected of them during this time. Children with disabilities may not be able to comprehend verbal instructions of what to do and may need other ways to receive these messages. Pictorial cues with a 'group time' story may be useful.

Visual/Auditory distractions - Many children may be distracted by too much visual or auditory information. Limit these distractions for children with disabilities so that they may focus on the group session.

Environment - Consider the environment for children with ASD. A tactile surface such as carpet may be difficult for children because of the extreme sensory information that it provides. This may lead to concentration issues.

2. Music
3. Story telling
4. Dramatic Play
5. Outdoor Play
6. Transition Times
7. Toileting
8. Packing/Tidying up
9. Social inclusion
10. Art/Craft and creative activities
11. Rest time
12. Departure/Arrival times
13. Program Planning
14. Blocks, Building and Manipulation
15. Computers and Technology
16. Puzzles

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