Preparing Children with Autism for Kindergarten - A Short Term Intervention Program focused on Relationship Enhancement

Presenter: Terry De Toledo, Israel
Supervisor: Dr. Smadar Dolev

Introduction

- Autism Spectrum Disorder is a neuro-developmental disorder that effects a child’s ability to communicate and interact with others (American Psychological Association, 2013).

- Studies indicate that despite challenges associated with autism, children with the disorder become attached to and show positive interactions toward their parents (Rutgers, Bakermans-Kranenburg, Van Ijzendoorn, & Van Berckel, 2004).

- After a child is diagnosed with autism it is important to enroll him/her in an early intervention program, which may contribute to the child’s development in all domains (Harris & Handleman, 2000).

- Higher quality teacher-child interactions were found to be related to improved child outcomes for pre-school aged children (Hamre & Pianta, 2005).

- Furthermore, studies have shown that positive teacher-family communication increases student’s class engagement within the kindergarten. (Mcgee, Morrier & Daly, 1999).

- Inclusive preschools (called also mainstreaming, and in Israel - Shiluv Kindergartens) are classrooms in which students with special needs learn together with their typically developing peers, this in turn supports students adjustment to life outside of school.

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- Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) is a intervention which aims to evaluate the child’s specific challenges and to modify his/her behavior in order to produce socially significant improvements. The ABA approach teaches social, motor and verbal behaviors as well as reasoning skills, and can be effective in managing challenging behaviors (Mcgee, Morrier & Daly 1999).

Goal

- The goal of the program is to support children with ASD’s adjustment to a mainstreaming kindergarten by providing a secure and developmentally appropriate kindergarten-like environment.

Participants

- 4 newly diagnosed children with Autism (3 years old) and their mothers. The intervention staff will include: 2 special-education preschool teachers and 1 assistant.

The Intervention Program: Shine A Light

- The intervention program will be based on enhancing positive relationships as well as Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) techniques: Picture exchange communication systems, social stories and educational activities.

- The program will be 3 days long, 4 hours each day.

Day 1

Goal:

- Meeting day.
- Children will be introduced to the school environment.
- The first day will focus on improving mother-child-teacher relationships.
- Teachers will help the children feel comfortable in the classroom environment.

Objectives:

- Based on ABA approach the first day will focus on breakfast time, circle time, group activities, free play, and visual picture activity with the teachers’ guidance and support.
- The first day of the program will focus on social interactions and communication.
- Children will be start to get to know their kindergarten teachers and peers.

Day 2

Goal:

- The second day will focus on helping children to be engaged in kindergarten activities and with peers.
- Children will be encouraged to express their needs.

Objectives:

- Based on ABA approach teachers will work with picture exchange activities to enhance children’s self expression.
- Children will be encouraged to take on some responsibilities.

Day 3

Goal:

- The third day will focus on getting to know and adapting to the daily routine, alongside with encouragement of children’s independence within the classroom.

Objectives:

- Based on ABA approach teachers will practice with children everything they learned in the last 3 days.
- Children will be able to recognize their kindergarten, teachers and friends, and feel more comfortable and secure entering their new kindergarten class.

Conclusions

- This program will support children with Autism’s adjustment to inclusion classroom settings.
- This program emphasizes the importance of incorporating an early intervention program before children with Autism start kindergarten.

E-mail: terryde Toledo87@gmail.com