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Special Education Service Agency Newsletter

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Letter From The Editor

By Jennifer Schroeder, SESA Multiple Disability Specialist

As Special Education Teachers, SLP's, OT's, and PT's, you face unique challenges every day. The students you work with may have developmental, cognitive, behavioral, communication, vision, hearing, or other challenges. These students often have the highest needs in the school, but show the smallest amount of growth... and that is okay!

When you think of student growth, you may need to shift what you have been taught. For those students with the most significant disabilities, growth often comes in small, widely spaced increments. Sometimes, when growth is small and takes time, it can be hard to see it happening... but it is there! Your students are making progress, growing, and changing. Things that look like small steps to adults are often major steps for the kids. Just because something is not listed as an IEP goal, does not mean that there is not growth to be celebrated.

In this newsletter, you will find different ideas of basic first and small steps that you can look for with your students. It is important to not only be aware of those achievements, but also to celebrate them! Point out growth to the school staff, paraprofessionals, and families. Those small steps and the awareness that things are changing are motivating for the student as well as everyone invested in the student. When you start looking at the individual steps, you will be amazed to see all of the ways your student is growing and changing!

Jennifer

My SESA Story

Successes From Teachers Around Alaska

Celebrate the Successes - No Matter the Size!

"Today is your day, your Mountain is waiting, so get on your way!"

- Dr. Seuss



"Today my student, who is non-verbal, used her iPad with LAMP to tell me to, "Go Away!" Yea! She is using her voice to say what I am sure she has been thinking for a long time!" -- 16-year-old student with Angelman's syndrome, about a year with a communication device.

"He reached for his friend's hand before the song started. He looked at his classmates when the music started and wiggled his hips. He may not have done the exact same thing, but he participated and had fun!" -- 7-year-old student with developmental delays and sensory challenges, first time being in a class Holiday presentation.

"Wow, she is making magic with her eyes!" -- Parent comment at watching his daughter with Cerebral Palsy use her eyes to control a computer mouse and play a video game.

"Remember when she used to just throw the crayons? Now she loves to scribble, she would do it all day if I let her." -- 7-year-old student with Down Syndrome.

"She was able to sit with the other kids and eat her cupcake. She even played a game of bingo. And when she was done, she told me she needed a break instead of getting upset!" -- 16-year-old student with Smith Magenis Syndrome.

"She has a friend, and it doesn't matter that they can't always understand each other, they are BFF's . . . always have to give each other a hug before leaving the room." -- 8-year-old student with communication delays and behavioral challenges.

"Today she sat in a chair, at the table, with her peers... and she loved it! I have never seen her sit that still for that long, she was so engaged." -- 11-year-old student with multiple disabilities.

Celebrate the Small Steps!

by Angel Black, Vision Impairment Specialist

For most of us, learning something new is like the old adage, "taking one step forward, then two steps back." However, we lose the excitement found in the success of that one step forward because we tend to concentrate and focus on those two steps back. With a student who has a visual impairment, it is vital to celebrate those steps forward, regardless of how tiny they may be. By doing this, you will increase the student's motivation and outcomes, they may become more involved, and it will definitely increase their self-esteem. Any steps forward in these specific areas (and many others) are cause for a celebration:

- A student's ability and/or willingness to access information that is acquired casually and incidentally by their sighted peers.
- The development of "alternative skills." For example, reading and writing in large print or Braille, using appropriate assistive technology, using auditory materials for learning, using a sighted guide or white cane for independent travel, or even finding appropriate ways to socialize with other students.
- Developing strategies to interact with and organize their environment - experiential learning.

These three areas are vital to the success of a student with low vision and should be celebrated at whatever level or rate they occur! Always remember, any step forward is a step in the right direction!



Sait, a 19-year-old student with vision loss, is learning how to trail in the school hallways. This skill is one that he has been resistant to in the past, but now that he is ready, this will really help with his independence.

New Year's Resolutions - Small Steps Add Up to Big Change

by Olivia Yancey, Hearing Impairment Specialist

A new year comes with new resolutions for many individuals, including teachers of students with hearing loss. Resolutions could be generated from a number of areas, including: academic readiness, listening skills, independence/self-advocacy, language use and processing, social skills/pragmatics, and speech perception/device use. The list could go on, but one very important piece to the puzzle is celebrating the small steps that eventually build up to strides in growth.

A student with hearing loss who uses an assistive listening device to help access spoken language needs the device to function everyday. Although this device does not "fix" all areas of concern, it is a foundational piece of the student's individual education plan. If you can answer yes to three or more of the following, count that as small step of success. If you cannot, consider adding one of these to your new year's resolution list as an educator.

_____ I have a listening kit that helps me listen to and troubleshoot my student's assistive listening device (i.e., listening stethoscope, extra batteries, wax removal tool, battery checker, cleaning supplies, and a manual on how to troubleshoot this device).

_____ I listen to the hearing aid every morning to see that it is on using a listening stethoscope.

_____ My student and I go through the Ling 7 Sound Check (i.e., oo, ee, ah, m, s, sh, th, silence) every morning to make sure the device is giving him/her clear access to speech.

_____ My student comes to me when the hearing aid isn't working.

_____ If I were to place a dead battery in the hearing aid or cochlear implant, my student would be able to tell me the device isn't working without being prompted.

_____ I keep a daily record of whether or not the hearing aid/cochlear implant works and how often the batteries are being replaced.

Small Steps as Part of the Big Picture

by Julie Burger, Multiple Disabilities Specialist

Oftentimes as teachers we tend to focus on the "big picture"- the quarterly IEP progress reports, the yearly meeting, transition planning, or even question 'how will I cover all of these standards this year?'. While each of these big steps taken toward goals are vital, it is important to recognize the small steps we successfully help the child take to get there. Small steps will look different for each student, and it may be these tiny successes that when recognized, become the building blocks for mastery.

- The child may begin to do a task independently
- They might ask for a given item or activity
- The child may use their AAC device more willingly
- They may greet others without prompting
- Communication may be carried over to other settings

Overall, small steps lead up to the bigger picture. They may be little things that a child does on a day to day basis that go seemingly unnoticed or blend into the background that are their (and the team's) biggest successes.



A student is shown two of his preferred toys and makes a choice with his eyes.



A young student uses a switch for the first time to greet his classmates.

Introducing New Skills to Your Student with Autism *by Kendra Wolf, Autism Impairment Specialist*

When introducing a new skill or working on current skills with students with autism, it is important to teach students in small steps while slowly advancing your expectations as the child progresses. Progress looks different for each student and it is important to celebrate each small victory with your students and classroom staff! It is important to praise or reinforce the child's current progress while working towards the "next step". Here are examples of what some of your student's successes may look like:

Transitions

A student is progressing in transitions from daily routines or changes in their environment when they are able to:

- Follow a daily visual schedule independently.
- Tolerate change and redirection from a teacher or classroom staff.

This could mean that you have been providing your student with a consistent schedule or greater predictability in understanding what activity is coming next. Great job! Maintain use of visual timers or transition cards.

Self-Regulation

A student may show signs of self-regulating their emotions by:

- Recognizing when they need to take a break.
- Utilizing break time or calming activities and space independently.

Strive to continue the use of social stories and *The Zones of Regulation* to assist students. Use these resources to discuss strategies to control behavior and responses to situations that may arise in the classroom and throughout stressful daily routines.

Communication

Students with autism may display developing language skills and nonverbal communication by:

- Utilizing PECS or other AAC.
- Verbalizing wants or needs.

Well done! Your student is using functional communication!! Continue consistent use of PECS or other AAC with students. Model short, simple verbal phrases for students with beginning language.

Students with autism may display progress in social communication by:

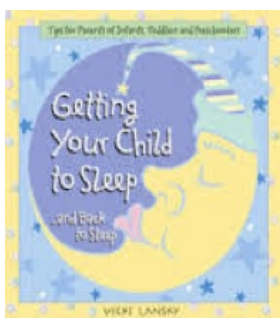
- Initiating a conversation with a peer or adult (i.e. appropriately gaining someone's attention by calling name, touching their arm, or raising their hand).
- Maintaining appropriate social interaction with a peer or adult (i.e. taking turns talking and listening).

Continue to encourage social communication between your student and others! Try role-playing to practice appropriate body language, facial expressions, eye gaze, and tone of voice. To continue to be successful communicators, students can practice how to interpret and respond to these cues.

Resources for Tips, Tricks, and Quick Solutions

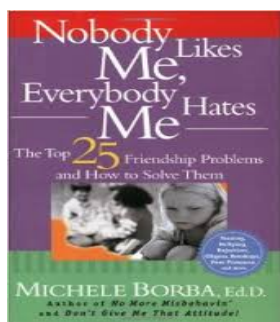
by Anne Freitag, Librarian

For more information on any of the titles listed below or questions about the SESA Lending Library, please contact: [Anne Freitag, SESA Librarian.](#)



Getting your child to sleep ..and back to sleep: tips for parents of infants, toddlers and preschoolers / Vicki Lansky ; illustrations by Chris Wold Dyrud. rev. and upd. 3rd ed. Book Peddlers, 2004.

Description: "No one technique will work for every child ... here you will find a wonderful selection of choices that are appropriate at various ages and stages that should work for your child."--p. 4 of cover.



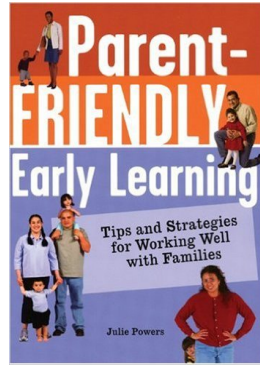
Nobody likes me, everybody hates me: the top 25 friendship problems and how to solve them / Michele Borba. Joseey-Bass, c2005.

Description: "...shows how to teach your child the 25 most essential friendship-building skills kids need to find, make, and keep friends, as well as survive that social pressure from peers."--publisher's website.

Strategies at hand [activity card]: quick and handy positive behavior support strategies / Tracy G Mueller and Robin D. Brewer. Autism Asperger Publishing Co., 2010.

Description: Created to provide special and general education teachers as well as paraeducators and others with a variety of educational tools that can be easily accessed to

address behavior management with students in school, classroom, and community.




Parent-friendly early learning : tips and strategies for working well with families / Julie Powers. Redleaf Press, c2005.

Description: A thoughtful and practical resource for classroom teachers seeking to create positive relationships with parents of young children. Six chapters address specific challenges in working with parents, including:

improving parent/teacher communication; developing and upholding policies; discussing child development; understanding and dealing with parent fears; addressing issues of identity. Also contains real-life examples from the everyday experiences of early childhood teachers.

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