



Autism & Recreation Programming for Youth

Children on the autism spectrum account for an increasing percentage of the populations we serve at summer camps, after-school programs, recreation opportunities, and other youth development programs. In order to create successful experiences for them and the other kids they will meet, youth development professionals need proper training and support. This training series offers a practical introduction to autism and a framework that is accessible to both novice and experienced professionals alike. The training covers skills and best practices for integrating children on the spectrum seamlessly into existing programs. Through activities, small and large group discussion, lecture, case studies, role-playing and scenarios, the trainers will facilitate multi-media based learning and review sessions. This series will give frontline staff and supervisors a research-based foundation from which to create successful and supportive accommodations for children in your program.

Available in 8hr, 6hr, & 3hr formats

Learning objectives:

- Participants will learn 8 best practices for integrating child on the spectrum into recreation programs
- Participants will review, discuss, and breakdown case studies of classic challenges and proven strategies in reaction programs
- Participants will have hands-on practice through facilitated role plays and scenarios, with a specific debrief to facilitate confidence and learning
- Participants will have an opportunity to ask specific questions and air concerns

Curriculum outline

Introduction to autism & recreation programming

- Philosophy
 - The difference between offering autism specific behavior-management or therapy, and creating an accessible recreation program for children on the spectrum.
 - Fulfilling the mission of your organization by including a more diverse group of children in your recreation programs
 - The power of acceptance and diversity for all children and families involved in the organization.
 - Bridging best practices for children on the spectrum with techniques and skills associated with typically developing children.
- Definition & framework
 - Diagnosis versus behavior based observation



- Understanding children on the spectrum using metrics and observable behavior based on communication & anxiety
- Defining successful experiences in your organization and recreation program

Best practices for integrating children on the spectrum into recreation programs: Skill introduction and facilitation techniques

- Schedules
 - Using different types of schedules – visual, writing, verbal
 - Redirecting to the schedule, time intervals, creative schedule management
- Supported transitions
 - Understanding transition anxiety
 - Using timers, warnings, and review or preview strategies
 - Creative transition ideas: games, competition, timing
- Clear & defined choices
 - Fostering a sense of power and control
 - Creating choice within structure or unstructured activities
 - Offering real choices
- Writing vs talking
 - Literal thinking and how you speak
 - Verbal processing time
 - Writing instructions and directions
- Redirection
 - Understanding redirection as a behavior management technique
 - Components of redirection: awareness of behavior, ability to get attention or focus, ideas for motivating or rewarding activities
- Creating visuals
 - Understanding the visual nature of literal thinking
 - Breaking down tasks, instructions, or directions into small steps
 - Creating a system for using visuals
 - Creating & using social stories
- Time & space (meltdowns)
 - Understanding the need for additional time and space, when children need a break or are having a hard time
 - Maintaining the integrity of a program or activity by using breaks
 - Supervision strategies when someone needs to take a break or have extra processing time
- Sensory experiences
 - Understanding a heightened sensory experience
 - Creating sensory experiences in typical activities
 - Using sensory experiences as a motivating activity



Classic challenges and proven strategies *(8hr & 6hr workshops only)*

- Inclusion with typical peers
 - Introducing neuro-diversity to a group
 - Encouraging positive & safe peer interactions
 - Specific activities to highlight group and individual strengths
 - Inclusion trouble-shooting
 - Case study review and discussion
- Anxiety related aggression
 - Introduction to the wide variety of anxiety related aggression
 - Aggression as a form of communication – what does the behavior, environment, and triggers tell you
 - Using best practices to prevent, redirect, and/or correct anxiety related aggression
 - Case study review and discussion
- “Stimming”: running, flapping, odd verbalizations
 - Introduction to the wide variety of stimming behaviors
 - Understanding stim behaviors: what they do for the individual, why society has labeled some inappropriate, and what to and what not to correct
 - Using best practices to ignore, prevent, and/or redirect stimming behaviors
 - How to discuss stimming or other surprising behavior with other children
 - Case study review and discussion

Questions & Answers – facilitated discussion

- Open forum for questions
- Facilitated activity to get embarrassing questions and engaging shy participants



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The Meltdown Carnival *(8hr workshop only)*

This is a facilitated, experiential activity that will give all participants an opportunity to work through a behavior scenario using the skills and best practices they learned in the training. The stations and situations are tailored to your specific recreation program using the facility, activities, environment, and staff that are available. After the carnival, there will be a facilitated debrief of the experience and how it applies to your recreation program.

Sample situations:

- Put-downs or bullying
- Socially awkward interactions
- Running from the group
- Inability to sit and listen to directions
- Aggressive meltdowns
- Rigid thinking and expectations
- Transition anxiety

Sample debrief topics:

- What worked and what didn't – combining ideas and techniques in real time
- Reading and understanding the individual child's behavior
- Staying calm and involved
- Structure, routine, schedules, and boundaries
- Distraction and redirection
- Praise and positive attention
- Silence, time, and space
- Directions, instructions, and expectations