

Some Strategies for Catechetical Instruction for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder*

BEFORE CLASS

Welcome

- Your most important task is to be welcoming
- Seek first to understand the learners in front of you
- Focus on their individual strengths
- Meet with parents/guardians individually
- Learn as much as possible about the students you will teach

Prepare

- Be well prepared
- Do not allow for downtime
- Provide structure and consistency
- Actively engage the child
- Make things predictable

Provide structure

- Create a routine
- Use visual schedules/reminders
- Limit “down time”
- Classes should be no longer than one hour
- Each hour should be divided into 5, 10 or 15 minute individual and small group activities

DURING CLASS

General

- Create a positive environment
- Spend time developing rapport
- Use repetition of concepts in a variety of ways
- Involve as many modalities as possible
- Use music – play songs during seatwork
- Provide choices
- Connect material to personal interests
- Encourage peer interaction

Think about the language you use

- Use concrete language
- Always phrase comments in the positive
- Catch them “being good” then praise them for it
- Give five affirmations for every one statement of corrective feedback
- Use behavior-specific praise
 - Example: Instead of “Nice job!” Say, “I like the way you colored in the lines!”
- Don’t ask a question if it’s not a choice
 - Example: Instead of, “Do you want to sit down?” Say, “Please sit.”
- Or offer two appropriate choices:
 - Example: “Patrick, are you going to sit in this chair or this chair?”
- Name the behavior you want, not the behavior you *don’t want*.
 - Example: Instead of “Don’t run!” say, “walking feet” or “please walk nicely”

Attend to transitions

- Anticipate changes and transitions
 - Give a two-minute reminder before transition
 - Signal transitions – use non-verbal signals for transitions in addition to verbal ones
- Give advance notice
 - “Two more minutes!”
- Transition signal
 - Ring bell
- Follow challenging transition with rewarding activity
 - Snack after playground

Sensory

- Be aware of possible sensory issues
 - Room temp; florescent lights; noise level
- Allow for “processing time”
- Wait before repeating yourself
- Allow student to choose a “fidget”
- Create opportunities for movement
- Allow different types of seating, breaks
- When things get challenging, consider what you can do to change the *environment*, not the child...

SCHEDULES

General

- Use visual cues whenever possible
- Develop picture schedules
- Post schedule on chalk board or large poster board
- Picture or symbol of next activity
 - “If I can’t see it, you didn’t say it!”

Sample schedules

Sample Schedule I

- Opening prayer (group)
- Circle time (group)
- God & Jesus stories (individual)
- Packet time (individual with aide)
- Group activity
- Video or music (group)
- Closing prayer (group)

Sample Schedule II

- 10:00 Arrival/remove coat and hat
- 10:05 Puzzle time
- 10:15 Greeting Song: “Jesus Asks You to Say Hello”
- 10:20 Work Session
- 10:30 Snack
- 10:35 Work Session
- 10:50 Prayer time with song
- Closing Song “Good Bye, It Was Great to See You”
- 11:00 Dismissal

Advanced strategies

Task analysis: Detailed descriptions of each behavior needed to accomplish a task

Social Stories: Practice, prepare, rehearse

Prompting and prompt fading

- Types of prompts:
 - Gestural
 - Model
 - Verbal
 - Physical
 - Textual
 - Photographic
- Examples of what to prompt
 - Attending
 - Following instructions
 - Sitting appropriately
 - Raising hand/Not raising hand
 - Peer interactions
 - Talking about age-related topics—use of slang
 - Following text
 - Gestures used in Liturgy: sign of the cross; greeting of peace

*Not every child responds to every tactic. Choose the best strategies for the individual child. These ideas can also be used with children with other needs than autism, such as intellectual/developmental disabilities.