

COMPREHENSIVE PROGRAM PLANNING FOR STUDENTS WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDERS

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Evidence-based practice indicates that children and youth with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) require comprehensive interventions to address their complex needs, (National Research Council, 2001). Specifically, students with ASD often require multiple interventions that include: (a) structure/visual supports (Tsatsanis, Foley, and Donebower, 2004), (a) communication and social supports (cf., Bellini, Peters, Benner, & Hopf, 2007), (c) reinforcement (cf., Cooper, Heron, and Heward, 2007), and (d) sensory interventions (cf., Baranek, 2002). Despite empirical support for comprehensive interventions, educators feel ill-prepared to accomplish this task (cf., Zions, Shellady, & Zions, 2006). This session will introduce a comprehensive program-planning model that is useful across settings (i.e., school, community, vocational settings) and age groups (preschool through adulthood). This planning process is composed of the Ziggurat Model (Aspy & Grossman, 2007) and the Comprehensive Autism Planning System (CAPS; Henry & Myles, 2007) that provide a unique *process* and *framework* for designing and implementing comprehensive interventions. The models can be used alone or together.

The Ziggurat Model

The Ziggurat Model was developed to address true needs or underlying deficits that result in social, emotional, and behavioral concerns. The model begins with an assessment of the individual's underlying needs and characteristics – a key component of the Ziggurat Model. To that end, the Ziggurat Model includes the Underlying Characteristics Checklist (UCC) that provides a snapshot of how ASD is expressed for an individual. UCC items address the following characteristics validated by research: (a) social, (b) restricted behaviors/interests, (c) communication, (d) sensory differences, (e) cognitive differences, (f) motor differences, (g) emotional vulnerability and (h) known medical and other biological factors. The Intervention Ziggurat, the centerpiece of the Ziggurat Model, contains five-levels derived from ASD research. Starting with the foundation level—from Sensory and Biological Needs to Reinforcement, Structure and Visual/Tactile Supports, Task Demands, and Skills to Teach. Each level represents an area that must be addressed in order for an intervention plan to be comprehensive. Interventions at each level are selected to address the student's true needs (identified with the UCC) to ensure that “the autism” is addressed. Thus, interventions are meaningful – meeting underlying needs instead of masking them. Another strength of the model is the interaction of the five levels. Each level contributes to the effectiveness of the others.

The Comprehensive Autism Planning System

The Comprehensive Autism Planning System (CAPS) allows professionals and parents to answer the all-important question: What supports does the student need for each activity? The CAPS is a list of a student's daily tasks and activities, the times they occur, along with the delineation of supports needed for student success. In addition, the CAPS includes space for

making notations about data collection and how skills are to be generalized to others settings. Using information generated from the Ziggurat, educators “drop” information into the student’s CAPS. The CAPS consists of the following components developed from evidence-based best practices for students with ASD: (a) *Time* indicates the clock time of each activity throughout the day; (b) *Activities* include *all* tasks throughout the day; (c) *Targeted Skills to Teach* include goals or standards that lead to school success; (d) *Structure/ Modifications* include visual supports and peer networks; (e) *Reinforcement*; (f) *Sensory Strategies* identified by an occupational therapist; (g) *Communication/Social Skills* include social or communication skills or augmentative communication systems; and (h) *Data Collection*; and (i) *Generalization Plan* that directly addresses who to use information and skills across settings.

The Ziggurat Model and the Comprehensive Autism Planning System

The Ziggurat Model and the CAPS are valuable resources for school professionals who emphasize the use of evidence based research approaches. In addition, it is compatible with the strong push for incorporating positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS). They are consistent with these practices. First, evidenced-based interventions are incorporated in the Ziggurat and the CAPS model. Both also emphasize a proactive, positive approach by requiring reinforcement and antecedent-based interventions. Finally, the Ziggurat and CAPS promote collaboration among parents and professionals.

References

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