

The number of individuals presenting with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) continues to escalate. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (2007) reports current prevalence of 1 in every 150 children. What was once classified as a low-incidence disorder is now one of the most common disabilities in the educational system. Speech-language pathologists (SLPs) practicing in the public school setting are continually faced with the unique educational challenges presented by this population.

Educational Goals

ASD is considered a syndrome because there are many developmental areas encompassed within the profile of deficits. Generating a comprehensive individualized educational plan (IEP) for students with ASD is a team responsibility. Educational goals should be curriculum-relevant and consistently delivered across all settings. The multiple developmental areas impacted by ASD are interrelated. Deficits in one skill often have a dynamic impact upon other skills. For example, poor joint attention compromises the ability to attend and benefit from the stimulation provided by a teacher or therapist. Apraxia of speech has a negative impact on willingness to engage in pragmatic-social interaction. Social isolation prevents individuals from attending to nonverbal, environmental, and communicative information. The domino effect of ASD can be overwhelming when selecting a hierarchy of goals to include on an IEP.

Most individuals with ASD have extensive IEPs in order to address the multiple characteristics of the syndrome. It is sometimes necessary for the SLP to help teachers and parents understand skills that must be developed in order to address identified problems. The SLP must determine an appropriate manner to approach skill development, including an effective progression of goals. Energy and focus need to be directed toward goals that generalize and have a positive effect on other deficit areas.

Several states have passed legislation specific to addressing educational goals with ASD. A few states require additional paperwork when developing an IEP for a student with ASD. Some states have developed an educational certificate or credential based on the completion of coursework specific to best practices for this population. When developing IEPs for students on the autism spectrum, it is important to check state mandates for service delivery.

Purpose and Content

The purpose of *The Autism Spectrum Disorders IEP Companion* is to highlight some of the most significant communication, social, and behavioral challenges presented by students with ASD and to provide programming guidance consistent with the learning profile of these children. *The Autism Spectrum Disorders IEP Companion* outlines a sequence of goals to address deficits specific to children with ASD. It provides programming suggestions to make teaching visual, concrete, and understandable to children with the unique challenges of ASD.

Each unit addresses a major deficit area that is a characteristic part of the ASD profile. Each skill area is identified and explained, followed by a long-term goal and a series of short-term goals to build skill acquisition. The first short-term goal typically reflects the earliest or most basic skill to be acquired.

Introduction, *continued*

The last skill listed is generally the highest or most complex skill in the unit. An example activity is provided for each short-term goal.

The goals cover a wide range of ages and severity levels within the autism spectrum. Some goals are appropriate to early intervention with preschool children, while others are geared toward higher functioning individuals and older clients. Use clinical judgment and assessment results to determine appropriate goals for a specific client. Modify, put in extra steps, or possibly skip steps, based on the individual's competency. Enhance the language in the short-term goals by adding criteria that measures the student's progress toward skill development.

A list of therapy resources for each unit is provided on pages 164-172. These resources can help you find materials to conduct the type of activities suggested under each of the short-term goals.

An IEP includes both assessment data and a plan for intervention. It delineates major objectives that teachers and therapists will use as guideposts for ongoing evaluation and treatment. The IEP is not intended to be a lesson plan. Many lessons and activities will be generated and completed to attain each short-term goal on the IEP. Consistent with that concept, *The Autism Spectrum Disorders IEP Companion* is not intended to be the complete teaching guide for an individual with ASD. Rather, it guides assessment and treatment of skill areas pertinent to students with ASD.

We hope *The Autism Spectrum Disorders IEP Companion* will spark creativity and help guide program planning for the students with ASD on your caseload. We look forward to working together with you to help students with ASD reach their potential!

Gail and Tina