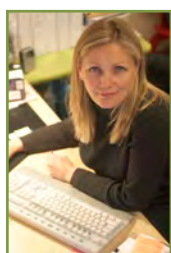


The main thing.....

The other day I overheard a mainstream principal telling a very busy and harassed looking teacher ...'**The main thing to remember is to keep the main thing the main thing**'. I thought about what the principal had said. I believe his intention was to guide the teacher to be less stressed, and to focus on what was really important....



I reflected that 'focusing on the main thing' is a key phrase often used in our work in the area of autism.

The 'main thing' usually refers to our top priority in intervention. Parents will share wanting their child to talk, play with other children, or gain entry into mainstream primary school as their main priorities.

Teachers can be heard describing their main priorities as engaging with their students, developing on-task behaviour or developing work habits.

Therapists may want to focus primarily on modulation and self regulation, or using PECS exchanges to request 80 times per day!

It is easy to see that different people working with the child will have different priorities depending on their roles and perspectives. Potentially this can be a cause for conflict or at the least confusion.

An important aim for the intervention team is to develop a common understanding of autism and a consistent intervention framework in which intervention is crafted.

Intervention priorities can then be determined through assessment, information sharing and a collaborative Individual Education Plan (IEP)

process involving all members of the team.

The main priority for our intervention team is to work well together to meet the diverse needs of a child with autism in a positive, energetic and self-reflective way.

Ensuring Access to Education for All

- Every Child has a fundamental right to education, and must be given the opportunity to achieve and maintain an acceptable level of learning
- Every child has unique characteristics, interests, abilities and learning needs
- Education systems should be designed, and educational programs implemented, to take into account the wide diversity of these characteristics and needs

Salamanca World Conference of Special Needs (partial report)

What do Parents really want?

Understanding what parents want for their child involves asking questions and listening very carefully.

It sounds really simple, but in fact I believe it is one of the hardest things to do in intervention..... because we all have our own

agendas of what to teach, how to teach it, and when to teach.



What do Parents want?

For people working with our child to...

- Take time to establish a relationship with our family - *walk a mile in our shoes* and understand our strengths and stresses
- Respect our preferences and be supportive of what we see as the main priority for our child
- Be flexible on how sharing feedback and information can occur i.e.: emails, in person chats , classroom observation
- Help us to identify opportunities for learning activities at home and teach us what to do in a practical way
- Be able to provide resources i.e. intervention materials, library resources, articles, specialized professional contacts, support groups...in the areas that specifically relate to our child's needs
- Be patient- sometimes it takes a little while for us to understand or re-think about the 'main thing'
- Include us in a way that we understand. Using autism jargon words can be really intimidating
- Understand that a welcoming smile and words of encouragement are needed on a regular basis
- Love our kids and EXPECT them to do everything !

What do teachers & therapists really want?

Understanding how your child learns best and his/her individual learning style & preferences can lay the foundation for a positive and successful intervention program.

Working closely and collaboratively with family carers helps the team set goals that are accurate & meaningful. We acknowledge that carers know their child best!

Matching teaching steps to your child's ability will lead to more success in understanding, doing and applying the skills that are taught.

What do Teachers & Therapists want?

- To promote each child's skills to 'be and do' by helping caregiver's practice and work with their child successfully
- To work along side family carers on agreed priorities, using each families strengths and resources
- To generate learning opportunities and activities that will lead to desired skills and behaviours in the home environment
- To develop an open, trusting and positive relationship with families
- For carers to understand that working in autism involves a learning journey for everybody concerned - including the teacher / therapist...we don't know everything!



'One of my greatest joys was working and learning together with Amanda's family...through the highs and lows....and now we are all so proud of what she has achieved!'

Teacher Mei

WeCAN Early intervention programme

Our main team priorities for 2008 will include:

1. Becoming more knowledgeable about autism and how this will affect the development of skills in the key areas of thinking, social and communication

▶ **Autism Caregiver Training 2008**

- Getting Started Series
- My Child with Autism Series
- Autism Toolbox Series
- Autism Application Series

See our website for more information:

<http://www.wecaneip.com/arc/web/>

▶ **'Diploma in Autism Studies' 2008**

- Open to parents and professionals working in the field of autism

2. Providing a consistently high quality and effective early intervention programme

▶ **Accreditation Process** with The 'National Autism Society, UK' (October 2007 - June 2008)

▶ **Development of autism competency standards for teachers at the EIP level**

3. Focussing on intensive teaching of skills within a differentiated curriculum

▶ **Development of tracks of learning and differentiated skills curricula**

In Summary, the setting of priorities helps us to know where we are and what we want to achieve for the next year.

At ARC(S) we champion the rights and interests of people with autism. Our various programs and services aim to provide individuals with autism and their families with guidance, support and direct intervention services during their life journey.

Our knowledge & understanding of autism, coupled with a deep respect for each person with autism directly influence our policies, processes and teaching practices.

We look forward to working together with you in the new year.

On behalf of our intervention team I would like to take this opportunity to wish you and your families a happy, safe and joyous New year in 2008.



Anita Russell
Autism Consultant
WeCAN Early Intervention Programme

