



Programming Strategies for Supporting College Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders

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Abstract

As greater numbers of individuals with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) are identified, more students with ASD are enrolling in post-secondary education settings. However, many college professionals have little experience assisting students with ASD. This poster presentation will display the specific concerns associated with college students with ASD and three specific practical intervention recommendations which can be adapted for the population and implemented on a college campus: freshmen introductory courses, social thinking groups, and peer mentoring.

Common Concerns

| Academics | Mental Health | Socialization | Life Skills |
|---|--|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficulty understanding material • Limited motivation for specific subjects • Writing and written expression • Organization • Group work • Breaking tasks down • Abstract assignments • Long-term projects • Preference for visual presentation of material • Time management | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Depression • Anxiety • Obsessions and perseverations • Anger management • Emotional coping skills • Stress management • Loneliness | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connecting to others • Making friends • Joining special interest groups and clubs • Inappropriate social behavior • Disclosure • Knowledge of "hidden" or subtle rules and cues • Perspective taking • Relationships, dating, consent | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Living with others; living alone • Cleanliness; home living skills • Personal hygiene • Self-advocacy • Self-determination • Community participation • Leisure activities • Safety behaviors • Diet, nutrition, exercise • Knowledge of legal system • Vocational skills |

Programming Strategies

Freshmen/First- Year Introductory Seminars

DESCRIPTION: As many colleges and universities now have Introductory Seminars specifically designed for assisting with the transition of freshmen (or first-year) students to the post-secondary education environment, such courses can be adapted and modified to meet the specific needs of students with ASD. These courses should be smaller in size than other similar seminars and should require special permission for enrollment. Modifications to the usual course syllabus and structure should include increased step-by-step instruction of "presumed" college abilities, such as time management and organization skills, or physically navigating the campus. Discussion of the typical challenges faced by students with ASD as well as useful strategies and supports should be a consistent theme offset by similar focus on strengths and talents. The inclusion of trained "typical" college students is recommended.

FOCUS:
Differences between high school and college
Study and learning strategies
Organizational strategies
Stress management techniques
Time management skills
Campus culture
Identification of campus resources

POSSIBLE SPONSORS:
Success Programs
Student Affairs
Student Counseling

FREQUENCY AND DURATION:
Weekly
90 minutes (up to 2 hours)

METHODS:
Multi-modal teaching
Lectures
Small group activities
Student presentations
Visits to campus resources
Projects
Demonstrations

PEERS:
Teaching leaders or teaching assistants
1:4 ratio
Facilitate discussion and social interaction

Social Thinking Groups

DESCRIPTION: College students with ASD need an opportunity to learn concretely and directly about how to process social situations and act or respond in an appropriate manner. This is not to be considered a support group, although a separate and distinct support group is also beneficial for some students. Such groups are best led by an experienced education or mental health professional and should include typical peers as models of appropriate social behavior. Inclusion of other populations, such as students with social anxiety disorder, is discouraged. Consistency and strong structure is highly recommended.

POSSIBLE SPONSORS:
Psychological Services (Psychiatry, Counseling)
College of Education
Department of Psychology
Office of Disability Services

METHODS:
Didactic/discussion
Model, role play, practice, feedback
Repetition

PEERS:
Include as models of typical and appropriate behavior
Peer training and supervision recommended

FOCUS/TOPICS:
Social initiations
Social responses
Social rules
Workplace skills
Awareness of strengths and challenges
Self-advocacy
Disclosure
Peer relationships
Emotion regulation
Attribution

FREQUENCY AND DURATION:
Weekly or twice monthly
1 to 2 hours

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Peer Mentoring

DESCRIPTION: Peer mentoring for college students with ASD is a support in which trained peer volunteers meet regularly with students with ASD. Mentoring sessions involve progress monitoring in the areas of academics, mental health, socialization, and life skills. Mentors offer guidance on common strategies to facilitate positive outcomes in course work and academics, referrals for significant mental health challenges, suggestions for social interaction opportunities in areas of interest, and recommendations on addressing life skills goals for young adults. Supervision of mentors is strongly recommended, and supplemental small group didactic instruction for both mentors and mentees is encouraged. Mentees benefit by having a peer to model appropriate social interaction as well as provide motivation and monitoring for important goals for college students with ASD.

POSSIBLE SPONSORS:
Office of Disability Services
Counseling
Department of Psychology
College of Education

FOCUS:
Academics
Mental health
Social skills
Life skills

METHODS:
1-on-1 mentoring meetings
Small group supervision meetings

FREQUENCY AND DURATION:
Weekly (fewer or greater depending on concerns)
45 minute meetings

PEERS:
"Typically" developing peer volunteers
Same area of study as mentee
Leadership organizations
ASD student group
Psychology majors
Education majors
Future medical professionals
Upper classman
Graduate students