

Reading to Young Children with Special Needs



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Overview

- Introduction to Children with Special Needs
- Characteristics of Children with Special Needs
- General Strategies
- Specific Strategies
- Activity/Discussion
- Conclusion



Why Do We Read to Children?

- Reading aloud to children is the single most important activity we can do to help children be ready to learn to read when they get to school.
- Reading to children is fun!
- Reading is a wonderful interactive experience that promotes intimacy and language development.



What do children learn when we read to them?

- Vocabulary
- Print Awareness
- Story Structure
- Phonological Awareness
- Basic Concepts



What about children with special needs?

- ALL children can benefit from being read to!!
- You may need to make accommodations
- Can occur in all settings
 - Preschool, daycare, home, library, community center, etc.



Who are children with special needs?

- Sometimes it is obvious
 - Physical disabilities
 - Down syndrome
- Sometimes it isn't
 - Language delays
 - Social delays
 - Autism

Language Delays



What you may see :

- Child talks a lot but is difficult to understand
- Child has difficulty following verbal directions
- Child loses attention quickly
- Child has difficulty answering questions
- Child follows gestures
- Child knows the actions to every song
- Child is disruptive
- Child is reluctant to participate

What you may not see:

- Child does not understand the words you are using
- Child is using behavior to communicate frustration
- Child believes he/she is saying something understandable
- Child does not want to admit that he/she does not understand
- Child is embarrassed

Cognitive Delays



What you may see:

- Short attention span
- Disruptive behavior
- Difficulty answering questions
- Difficulty following directions
- A change in behavior when material is at appropriate level (for the better)
- Immature social interactions with peers
- Physical characteristics
 - Fetal Alcohol Syndrome
 - Down Syndrome

What you may not see:

- Accompanying health or medical concerns

Physical Delays



What you may see:

- Vision impairment
 - Walking stick, guide
- Hearing impairment
 - Hearing aides, cochlear implant, interpreter
- Mobility devices
 - Braces, walker, wheelchair
- Other assistive devices
 - Feeding tubes
 - Catheters
 - Oxygen

What you may not see:

- There may or may not be an accompanying delay
 - e.g., cognitive delay, autism
- Degree to which disability impacts participation

Social Delays



What you may see:

- Short attention span
- Easily distracted
- Disruptive behavior
- Aggression
- Difficulty initiating and responding to peers and adults
- Difficulty sharing, taking turns, waiting for a turn, cooperating
- Difficulty following directions

What you may not see:

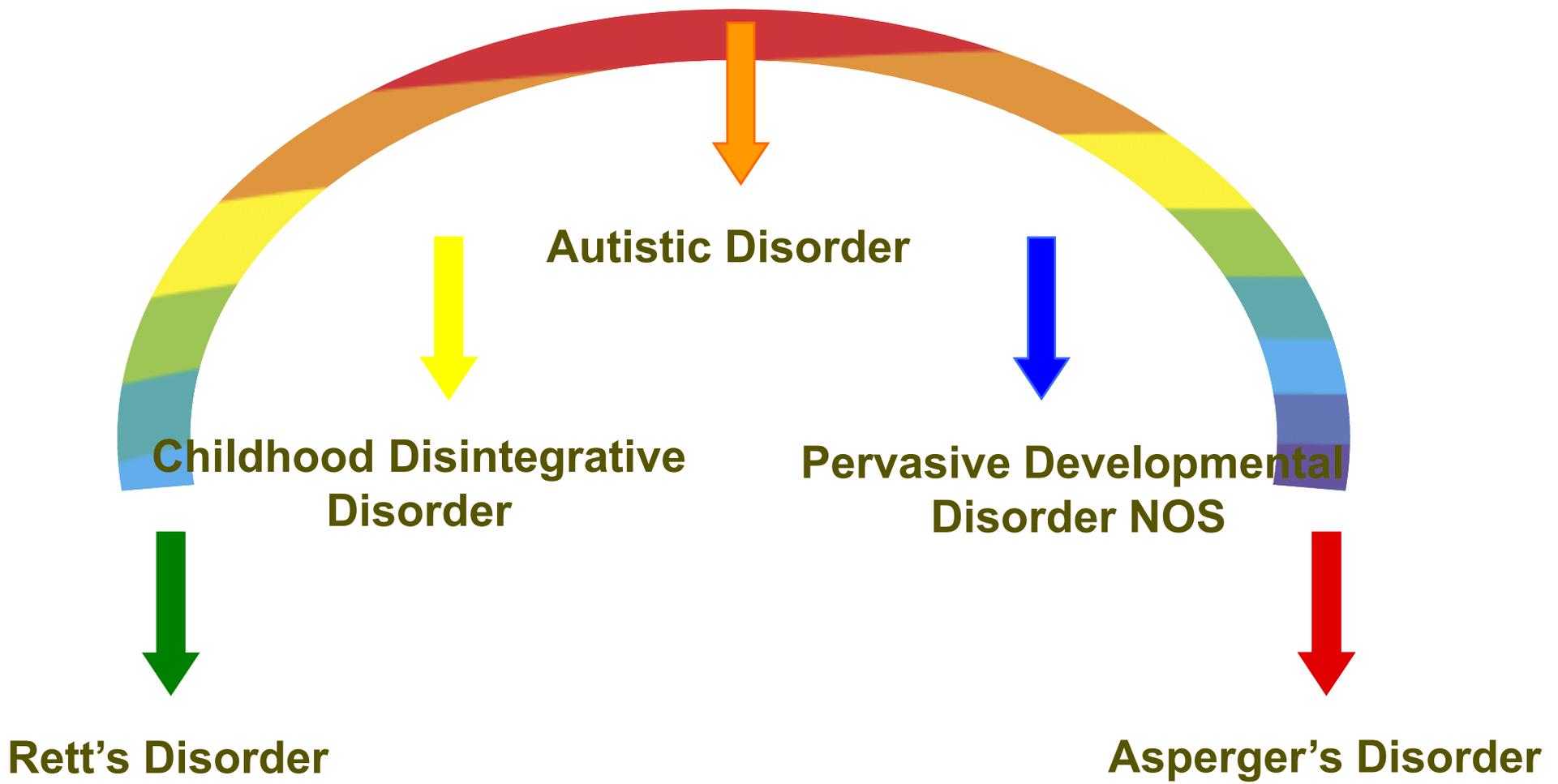
- Mental health disorder
 - ADHD
 - Emotionally disturbed
 - Bipolar Disorder
 - OCD
- Physiological Factors
 - Child may be hungry, tired, sick...
- Environmental Factors
 - Prenatal exposure to drugs and/or alcohol
 - Child in foster care



Autism Spectrum Disorder

- Autism is a broad neurological spectrum disorder
- Characteristics include:
 - Difficulties with social interaction
 - Communication impairment
 - Repetitive, restricted or stereotypic behavior

Pervasive Developmental Disorders



ASD



What you may see:

- Poor eye contact
- Limited gestures
- May not interact with peers
- May not point to objects of interest
- Reduced interest in other people's ideas
- Limited or no spoken language
- Monotone or unusual pitch or rhythm to voice
- Limited conversation
- Echolalia or scripted speech
- May not respond to name
- Restricted or repetitive behavior

What you may not see:

- May not understand simple questions, jokes or sarcasm
- May have specific routines that need to be followed
- May have sensitivities to various sensory stimulation
 - Visual
 - Auditory
 - Tactile
 - Smell
 - Oral
- May have limited interests
- May be focusing on irrelevant stimuli

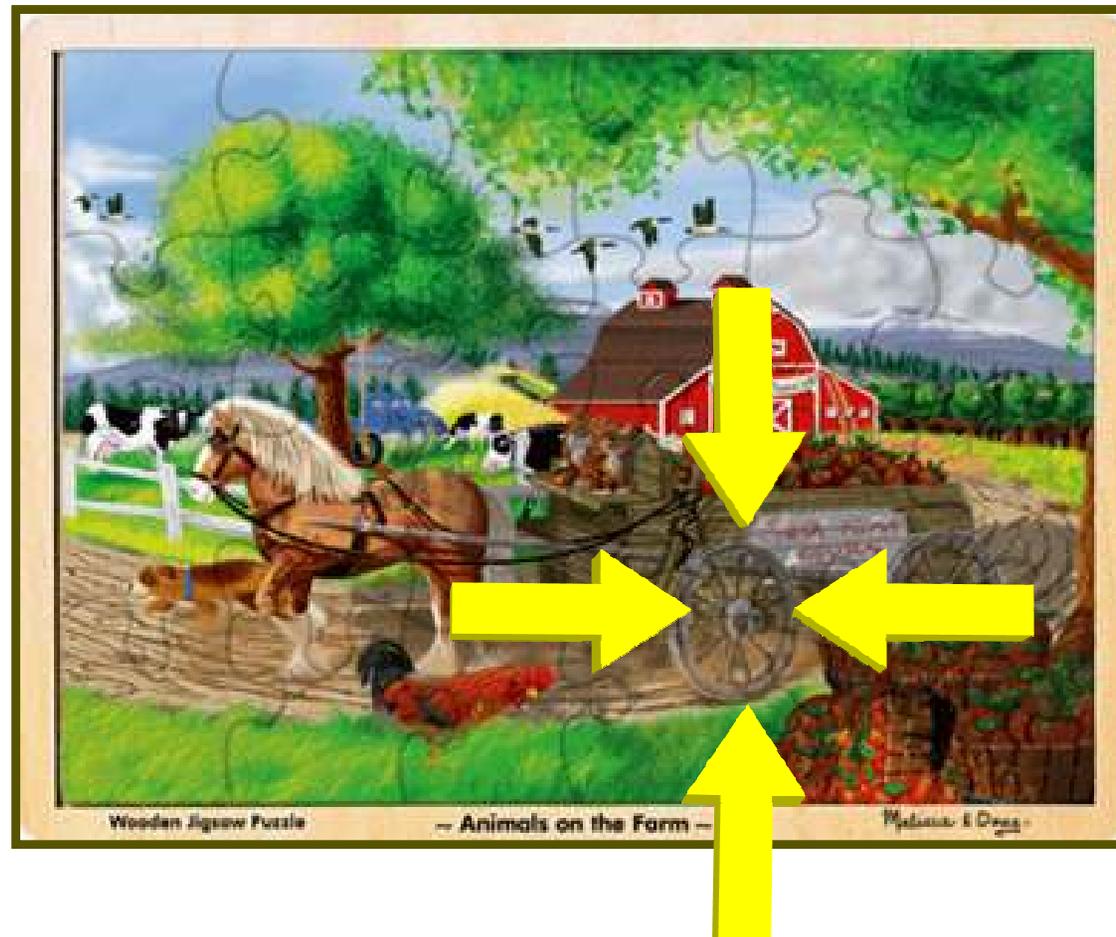


Examples of Restricted Behavior

- Chin-tapping
- Head-banging
- Clapping
- Tearing paper
- Breaking glass
- Spinning things
- Spinning oneself or running in circles
- Colored and shiny objects
- Matching objects
- Blinking compulsively
- Switching lights on and off
- Dropping things repetitively
- Jumping
- Rocking
- Hand-shaking
- Flicking objects



Stimulus Over Selectivity





Why do they do this?

- Behavior is a form of communication
- What do they want? What are they communicating?
 - Attention
 - Escape from demands
 - Sensory stimulation
 - Tangible object
 - May be bored, hungry, tired, overwhelmed...



General Strategies

- Plan, plan, plan!
- Environmental modifications
- Predictability
- Appropriate length and material
- Setting Rules
- Maintaining Participation/Engagement



Planning Your Time

- Keep story time short
 - Quality versus quantity
 - Stop before you've lost their interest!
- Have several activities ready to use in case you need them
- Plan for each activity lasting a shorter time than you planned
- Have your materials ready and organized before the activity starts
- Know what to do in case of any type of emergency, big or small



Environmental Modifications

- Reduce distractions
 - extraneous materials
 - loud noises
 - fluorescent lights
- Only one person talking at a time
 - Can try a “talking stick”
- Child-size furniture
 - Children with physical disabilities may need special furniture
- Make sure all participants can see what you’re doing
- Make sure each participant has a “personal space”
 - e.g., chair, carpet square



Making it Predictable

- Keep things the same each time
 - Rules
 - Behavioral Expectations
 - Consequences of Behavior
 - Order of Activities
 - Seating Arrangement



Making Rules Clear

- Have a few rules that children must follow
- Review the rules before each session
- Have a picture chart to remind children of the rules
- Praise children for following rules
- Examples:
 1. Stay on your carpet square
 2. Raise your hand before speaking
 3. Be quiet when someone else is talking



Choosing Appropriate Books

- Materials should be simple
 - Few words on a page
 - Pictures to explain the words
- Materials should match the interests of your audience
 - Maybe take a survey to find out if children have special interests
- Materials should match the attention span of your audience
 - Start with 3-5 minutes, then build up as children are able
 - Know the warning signs of flagging attention!



Keeping Children Engaged

- Encourage participation as much as possible
 - Ask questions
 - Sing songs or read books with actions
 - Use children's names
 - Maintain a brisk but not rushing pace
 - Use a child as an assistant
- Ignore distracting behavior
- Praise children for following the rules



Specific Strategies

- Visual cues
- Picture schedules
- Behavior charts
- Incentives
- Social Stories



Visual Cues

- Intent is to communicate through pictures
- Makes activity more structured and predictable
- Can be supplemental to verbal and/or gestural cues
- Especially helpful for children with language delays and/or autism

commands



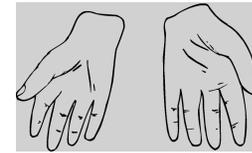
yes

sí



no

no



please

por favor



Thank
you
gracias



wait

esperar



stop

pare!



instructions



write

escribir



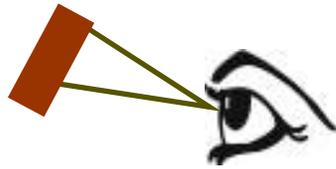
show me

muéstrame



How do I _____
?

¿Cómo puedo



watch

mirar



give

dar



take

tomar



amenities



men's room

cuarto de baño
para hombres



ladies' room

cuarto de baño
para dama



changing room

baño el bebé



phone

teléfono



water fountain

agua para
beber



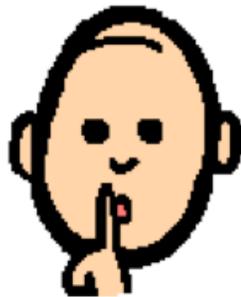
elevator

el ascensor



Circle Rules

inside voice



Sit on your Bottom



hands to yourself



listening ears



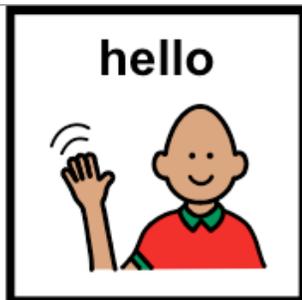


Picture Schedules

- Uses pictures to cue child about what is happening next, step by step
- Can be used for any routine
- Can be adapted or individualized for specific needs of child



Story Time Picture Schedule





Behavior Charts

Time	Activity	Behavior
10:00 – 10:05 am	Enter room Sit on chair or carpet square	  
10:05 – 10:10 am	Hello Song	  
10:10 – 10:20 am	Read Aloud	  



Incentives

- Reward good behavior with desirable
- Can be for individual or group
- Keep track of good behavior frequently
 - e.g., marbles in a jar, tallies on a poster
- Can be tangible item (e.g., stickers)
- Can be activity (e.g., be teacher's assistant)



Social Stories

- Individualized story that explains a process or activity to child
- Used to prepare and remind child of what is going to happen
- Makes actual activity more predictable and therefore easier to manage
- “This is My Library”



Activity

- Get into groups of 3-4 people
- Read the description of the child and situation
- Complete the Planning Form describing how you could accommodate this child in your story time



Conclusion

- Reading aloud should be fun for you and the child!
- Children with special needs can benefit from reading aloud as much as any other children
- Children with special needs do not need to be intimidating – you just need a few tools in your toolbox!