

# Summary of Activities

Celebrate the Children



## **Arrival/Free-Play/Floortime™(DIR®)/Regulation/Data**

As the children come into the classroom, they are expected to put away their belongings independently. Once their things are organized in their cubbies, they may go to the toy corner/play area.

## **Journals**

Older children will be responsible for keeping a journal. They will be encouraged to write and draw about their experiences including emotions, opinions and reflections.

## **Daily Responsibilities**

Each child will have a job chart and be responsible for doing their job(s) independently each day. Organization, responsibility, pride, sense of self and independence are all a strong focus of our program. We want to support our children in feeling good about themselves and their accomplishments. We want to encourage a feeling of self-worth and pride in being independent and an intrinsic motivation to be successful.

## **Community Experience/ Work Place Readiness**

Children will participate in activities in the community such as going to the post office, bank, gift shop, florist, children's theatre, pizza restaurant, etc. These trips will target teaching the children important living skills and giving them a sense of responsibility. Some trips will be purely for pleasure and learning, including fun outings for reinforcement for completing weekly job charts. Teachers will notify parents prior to any off-site activities and parents will be required to sign a permission slip.



The work place readiness component will include curriculum and community opportunities to support future employment for our students, the earning and benefits equal to those of their non-disabled peers, gain independence, self-worth, social connections and many of the other advantages of working.

## **Self-Help**

As independence and having a strong sense of self are cornerstones of our program, self-help goals will be set for each child and worked on daily. These goals will range from simply unpacking and packing book bags to grooming, food preparation and higher-level responsibilities.

## **Morning Circle/Self-Esteem/Self-Expression/Star Power**

Greetings, peer awareness and interaction, music, emotions, abstract thinking (building bridges, sequencing, predicting), theory-of-mind, specific social and language skills, attention and independence are all targeted during circle time. The principles of DIR® are incorporated into every aspect of Morning Circle. For example, children are encouraged to engage in extended circles of interaction, abstract thinking, problem solving, etc. Self-esteem and sense of self are supported, as the students are active participants in the group.

Children are seated in a semi-circle around the teacher. Although the children are required to attend to one teacher, at times, the children run activities themselves, taking turns at playing teacher. Additionally, all initiations made by the students during circle are treated as purposeful and intentional. This is a time for open discussions and sharing. Therefore, a strict schedule is not always followed.

The students are encouraged to greet their peers and various activities are used to increase peer awareness. Some of these activities include the "who is missing?" game and the "what's different about \_\_\_\_?" game. Songs and games are always favorites of the students. These activities are alternated with the more instructional portions of circle to keep the students focused.

Circle time for the older children focuses more on group discussions targeting specific social issues. Language, self-expression, consideration, empathy, theory of mind, abstract thinking, reasoning, problem solving and reflection are encouraged.

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## **Snack**

Snack time is the perfect opportunity to build circles of interaction between staff and peers. Language and socialization are both targeted during this highly motivating time. Students are encouraged to ask their friends to share or trade snacks. Commenting and joking are facilitated during this time.

## **Floortime™ (DIR®): Play Skills/Peer Play/Regulation Games**

This is the time for individual Floortime™ sessions. Floortime™ is a philosophy developed by Dr. Greenspan and Dr. Wieder. This approach allows staff to interact with the child at her level, while teaching through meaningful interactions. The basis of DIR® is to help children achieve regulation through relationships while providing them with the foundations needed for all learning. These foundations include the ability to sustain attention to activities and interactions, engage in interactions through a range of emotions, develop adaptive and coping strategies, be initiators of independent ideas and have the ability to sequence these ideas in meaningful ways, develop a good sense of self and the ability to string together ideas and social interactions to problem solve, to think and play symbolically and understand emotions, to use creativity and imagination, to think abstractly, reason and problem solve. Individual, specific language, social, behavioral and academic goals are layered upon these foundations. All goals are targeted through motivating, experience-based interactions with staff and peers.

Children have a program book based on their IEP, classroom assessments, and staff observation. This book contains specific goals for each area of development. Data is taken on all skills and monitored closely by classroom staff. Students are moved through the steps of each program based on data and their ability to generalize skills to all environments. Additionally, transition skills are worked on to support students transitioning to less restrictive environments. For example, if a child is having trouble raising their hand in circle time in their mainstream classroom, that skill will be taught and reinforced on an individual basis to make the mainstream experience more successful.

## **Semi-Structured Play/Peer Play/Play Skills**

Specific play and social skills are taught using a hierarchy based on our curriculum. Introductory skills include finding hidden objects, peek-a-boo games, and physical games such as chase, symbolic play and turn taking. More advanced skills include imaginary play, sustained interactions and group games.

Skills are taught in the same areas the students use them. Staff takes on the role of the students and play at their developmental level modeling specific skills. Activities are based on the students' natural motivations and incorporate familiar themes. For example, students use dolls to act out riding home on the bus and familiar afternoon and evening activities.

Once children become more independent in their play, staff facilitates sustained peer play and is eventually faded out completely.

## **Language Programs/Speech and Language**

Speech and language is a part of every component of the program but targeted most intensively during speech and Floortime™/DIR® sessions. Visuals are often used to teach and support children with auditory processing difficulties. Specific language goals from the program's curriculum follow a hierarchy of typical language development with a heavy emphasis on age-appropriate social language. Intensive oral motor and augmentative communication programs are implemented when appropriate.

Each child's learning style is unique. This is assessed and considered when setting language goals and assigning specific language programs. Programs range from purely experience-based learning experiences targeting specific language to very structured, table-top language lessons. Language goals are worked on all day. However, language is worked on more intensively during individual work time. Data is taken on each child's language goals daily and a scope and sequence of skills is followed from our language curriculum.

## **Independent Seat Work**

The only goal of this activity is independence, pride and developing a sense of self. This is not a time to teach new skills or to insist on perfection. Independent task completion, self-regulation, listening skills and following group instructions are skills targeted to prepare students for less restrictive environments. Students are expected to independently listen to directions, retrieve work materials, bring them to their desks, complete their work and return them when done. Recognizing their accomplishments and sharing them with others when finished is encouraged.

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## Academics

Academic goals are set for each child reflecting the Core Curriculum Content Standards (CCCS) and are targeted using a variety of approaches including DIR® (experience-based learning), breaking concepts down into smaller steps and the use of visuals. Teachers incorporate activities that target the different levels and learning styles of the children. Visuals, sensory materials and activities, music and movement are often part of academic lessons. Academic areas targeted include Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, Social Studies, and Health. Socialization, creativity, problem solving and abstract thinking are also infused into every learning experience. As soon as the children are ready, they are introduced to academic activities that mirror the mainstream environment they will (or do) participate in. During these activities, independence is encouraged.

## Lunch/Facilitated peer interactions

Lunchtime is the perfect opportunity to build circles of interaction between staff and peers. Language and socialization are both targeted during this highly motivating time. Students are encouraged to ask their friends to share or trade food (staff is made aware of children with any food allergies). Commenting and joking are facilitated during this time.



## Group Floortime™/ Social Skills Group: (social theme, peer turn-taking, shared timing, emotions, Theory of Mind, abstract thinking, problem solving)

Peer awareness and interaction, abstract thinking (building bridges, sequencing, predicting), problem solving, emotions, theory-of-mind, specific social and language skills, attention and independence are all targeted during this time. These skills follow a hierarchy based on our curriculum and the individual needs of the children. Each skill is extensively covered using books, videos, role-play, puppet and doll shows and experience-based activities. After being targeted through a structured lesson, children are encouraged to generalize the skills outside of circle. Facilitation of these skills followed by verbal reinforcement assist this process.

## Abstract thinking/Sequencing/Problem Solving

This section is a large focus of our entire program and also reflects the Greenspan/Wieder philosophy. Our main goal is to help the students become independent thinkers. If they are able to think on their feet, they can do anything. Often children engage in inappropriate behaviors, lack social and language skills, or may seem self absorbed due to a poor understanding of the world around them. These deficits are targeted through critical thinking activities.

The ability to think abstractly, sequence and problem solve are crucial to being an independent thinker and understanding the world. Activities used to target these skills include sequencing events using visuals and toys, understanding cause and effect through thought provoking activities, problem solving and story analysis through role-play, social stories and games. All activities reflect themes familiar to the students.

Abstract thinking, sequencing and problem solving are targeted throughout the day incidentally. Recognition of these skills and skill specific reinforcement is given regularly.

**Note:** If a child is not able to benefit from this group lesson, they are removed to receive one-on-one Floortime™ with a therapist and reintroduced to the group when ready.

## Visualize and Verbalize

This visualize and verbalize technique was created by Nanci Bell. She identified “visualization as a primary factor basic to language comprehension and critical thinking.” Activities requiring the verbalization of visuals in the mind are used to target this skill. Students are required to describe something from memory including visual descriptions, smells, touch, sounds, tastes, and emotions related to the topic. The activities are based on each child’s individual abilities and become progressively more challenging as they improve.

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## Emotions/Art/Creativity

Because we believe all learning is emotionally based, this area of instruction is a priority. Instruction includes extensive lessons on specific emotions. Teaching the students to recognize and respond to emotions in self and others through experience-based learning promotes independent generalization of skills. Enabling the students to acquire a good understanding of their own emotions, and encouraging awareness of peer's emotions, leads to recognizing the motivations behind others' emotions (Theory-of-Mind). The concepts of cause and effect and problem solving are targeted, emphasizing their relationship to emotions. Emotion lessons include discussion, books, videos, puppet shows, role-play and games. The emotion lesson is always a favorite of the children.

The art activities during this group focus on the child's ability to think abstractly and express themselves from their own imagination. In conjunction with this program, children learn to copy simple shapes from a model, trace shapes and simple pictures independently, fill in the missing details of a picture, develop an understanding of prepositions, and learn to follow oral directions. The older children are encouraged to expand on detail and perspective in their pictures. As they become better artists, models and prompts are taken away and their imaginations take over. Different sensory modalities are incorporated into every activity and self-expression is encouraged during this time. The children are encouraged to share their work with others. When they explain what they have done, the children are challenged to give purpose behind the choices they have made. Once again, cheering for students fully expressing their individuality is a regular occurrence.

## Theory of Mind

"Theory of Mind" is the ability to understand another person's point of view. The understanding of what someone else might be thinking is an ability that typically develops around the age of five. However, some children do not develop this on their own and must be taught. Our program targets these skills through role-play, puppet shows, worksheets, videos and books. It has been our experience that with practice, most children make significant progress. Acquiring this ability results in better overall socialization, behavior and language. "Theory of Mind" is an essential component to obtaining a better understanding of the world around us. The levels taught are based on Teaching Children with Autism to Mind Read, Howil, Baron-Cohen & Hadwin, John Wiley & Sons and are as follows:

- situation-based emotions (e.g., the girl is scared because she thinks the dog is going to bite her)
- desire-based emotions (e.g., the girl will be happy when her mom gives her a present)
- belief-based emotions (e.g., the girl is sad because she thought it was her turn)
- simple visual perspective taking (e.g., identifies what another person can or cannot see)
- complex visual perspective taking (e.g., identifies what another person sees and how they see it)
- understanding that "seeing leads to knowing" (e.g., people only know things they have experienced [directly or indirectly])
- predict actions based on another person's knowledge (e.g., making action predictions on the basis of where another person believes an object to be)
- recognize false beliefs



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## Regulation/Music/Shared Timing

Many of the children we work with have difficulty with regulation and the ability to maintain rhythmic interactions with others. This is often the result of a sensory processing difficulty that makes organizing incoming information difficult, hence, challenges in rhythm and timing. Celebrate the Children considers work in this area critical to a child's overall development, specifically in the area of socialization, emotional regulation and behavior. Throughout the day, staff encourage well regulated back and forth interactions. Additionally, specific activities are designed to intensively target rhythm and timing, and these activities are called 'Shared Timing' activities. Shared Timing activities require the child to engage in a turn-taking activity with another person. This can be playing on a drum, yelling into a bowl (for sound feedback), jumping on a trampoline, etc. The idea is to get a steady back and forth rhythm with the other person. In the beginning, no language is required. However, as the child moves through the program, specific language and conversation skills are targeted as appropriate for each individual. Staff also encourage the generalization of shared timing to play (e.g., a game of chase or tag that is sustained in a back and forth manner without fragmenting).

**The overall goal of each step in the Shared Timing program is to facilitate a sustained rhythmic back and forth interaction for as long as possible.**

**Shared Timing  
Monica G. Osgood/CTC/2002**



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## Hierarchy of Interactions on a Musical Instrument

For non-verbal children, the following activities can be modified using PECS, gestures, affect, etc. However, these children should be required to move as far through the program as possible as they are often very good at using affect in place of language.

At the beginning of each step, the child may need gentle prompting to stay with the activity and to sustain a rhythmic back and forth. An adult sitting behind the child to facilitate this is recommended only when necessary. Please be careful to fade this prompt as soon as possible. Do not move to the next step until the child can consistently do the present step without support.

- Keep a steady beat with another person
- Maintain changes in rhythm with another person
  - Fast/Slow
  - Hard/Soft
  - Stop/Start
- Copy Simple Beats/Tunes
- Play Simple Beats/Tunes with another person
- Engage in a sustained simple back and forth rhythm (e.g., child hits the drum, adult/peer hits the drum. Repeat.). This stage sometimes needs to be facilitated with an adult helping the child, hand-over-hand, feel the rhythm of turn taking. Please be very careful to fade this prompt as soon as the child begins to maintain the rhythm on their own. Don't let them become dependent on the support.
- It is sometimes helpful, and fun, to use a known script, such as counting, songs, etc., to facilitate this step (e.g., Adult/Peer: "One!" while hitting the drum. Child: "Two!" while hitting the drum...and so on. Try this one saying "One a snake, two a snake" until "someone eight a snake! YUK!" The kids love this one.).
- Engage in a sustained back and forth rhythm while verbalizing a familiar script such as, counting, songs, etc.
- Engage in a sustained back and forth rhythm while verbalizing words from categories (this requires more processing than a script). Encourage the child to maintain a steady back and forth rhythm with another person while they verbalize words in a category (e.g., Staff/Peer: "Foot!" while hitting the drum. Child: "Head!" while hitting the drum). It can be very reinforcing to use subjects that are motivating to the child (e.g., Adult/Peer: "I love Pokemon!" Child: "I love Digimon!"). Sustain the activity for as long as possible. Make a game out of it in a group.
- Engage in a sustained back and forth rhythm while verbalizing nonsense words (this requires a much higher level of processing). For example, Adult/Peer: "Oooglie!" Child: Doodlie!"
- Engage in a sustained back and forth rhythm while asking and answering simple, familiar questions.
- Engage in a sustained back and forth rhythm while asking and answering complex, unfamiliar questions.
- Engage in a sustained back and forth rhythm while engaging in a simple conversation (topic may need to be supplied, but should be motivating to the child). Encourage the child to keep the conversation going for as long as possible.
- Remove the musical instrument and have the child engage in a conversation with another person. Encourage them to sustain it for as long as possible. Go back to the musical instrument to obtain rhythm and shared timing as needed.

This hierarchy can be applied to any activity: Musical, Physical, Verbal, Play, etc.

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## Exercise/Yoga/Regulation

Children should be warned of the activity five minutes prior to cleaning up and getting together. The goal of this activity is to get the blood flowing and bring body and mind together. Most of the children we work with have particular difficulty coordinating their minds and bodies. Exercise, stretching, yoga, rhythm and timing activities, Brain Gym, Thinking Goes to School or Star Power activities may be used during this time. No matter what the activity is, music as part of the activity is recommended. Different types of music can encourage different types of regulation.

## Relaxation/Imagery

During this time, mats are laid out for the students to lie down as relaxing music is played in the background. Students are encouraged to focus on breathing and participate in using visual imagery (closing eyes and picturing a scenario the teacher describes in a calm, soothing voice). A child's form of yoga often follows to help students release built up tension or anxiety, which allows everyone to start the day fresh and renewed.

## Thinking Goes to School/Motor Planning

Activities are done daily based on the book *Thinking Goes to School* by Hans G. Furth and Harry Wachs. This book is Piaget's theory in practice and teaches thinking through experience. The activities target improving general movement thinking, discriminative movement thinking, visual thinking, auditory thinking, hand thinking, graphic thinking, social thinking, and problem solving.

## More on Motor Planning and Exercise

Obstacle courses are set up to target regulation, motor planning and sequencing. Another goal of this activity is to enhance self-expression and self-esteem by encouraging pride in independence and showing off. Cheering for students fully expressing their individuality is a regular occurrence. We provide games that challenge students to self-regulate in a fun and playful manner. For instance, we will play an adapted "follow the leader," where students will do what the leader is doing (jump, run, skip) but be able to stop/start, go fast/slow, etc., according to the leader's command. *Star Power for Preschoolers* by Andrew Oser is a program that we incorporate into this time (adapted for older children). "Star Power" teaches a child life success skills (concentration, self-esteem, relation, imagination) through physical play.



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## Technology

Many of the children in our program benefit from the use of technology in both learning and interacting. This may include some or all of the below:

- AlphaSmart
- Computer with Adaptive Technology
- FM Tuner
- Augmentative Communication Device
- Interactive Metronome
- Auditory Integration Training

## Supported Typing

Facilitated communication is one form of augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) that has been an effective means of expression for some individuals with labels of autism and other developmental disabilities. It entails learning to communicate by typing on a keyboard or pointing at letters, images, or other symbols to represent messages. Facilitated communication involves a combination of physical and emotional support to an individual who has difficulties with speech and with intentional pointing (e.g., unassisted typing). Individual sessions support children to communicate through typing.

Institute on Disability. About FC. Retrieved February 2, 2012, from [http://www.ioid.unh.edu/projects/fc\\_skill\\_builders/about\\_FC.aspx](http://www.ioid.unh.edu/projects/fc_skill_builders/about_FC.aspx)

