

## Think "Comprehension" rather than "Compliance"

1. Meet the child at their level:
  - ◆ functional assessment (blend of standardized and non-standardized testing procedures) to determine functional developmental level (auditory comprehension, verbal expression, visual processing, non-verbal communication)
  - ◆ consider "complicating" or "dis-ordering" factors (sensory issues, attention difficulties, fears and phobias, disruptive behaviour)
2. Engagement
  - ◆ experiment with materials and activities to find optimal engagement (you should see eye contact - maybe fleeting, you should see signs of happiness and relaxation, you should see voluntary attention to activities - may see "circling attention")
  - ◆ think "entice" and "encourage", rather than "require" and "demand"
  - ◆ teach using favourite subjects
3. You can teach concepts using any topic
  - ◆ you need to become accustomed to thinking about what basic concepts are being taught through any given academic activity
  - ◆ then "brainstorm" with other team members re: how to teach that information using the child's special interests
  - ◆ when you work through favourite topics, you immediately have the strong focused attention necessary for learning (the child is also willing to try new and difficult things that they otherwise would run from)
  - ◆ my experience has been that interests broaden when the child is allowed to work in their "comfort zone"
4. Support "weak" input channels with information through "strong" processing channels
  - ◆ visual supports work because the visual information is stable and can be examined over a long period of time (even if the child's visual skills are not perfect)
  - ◆ science and math curriculum should be "hands-on" experiential learning
  - ◆ a modified "whole language" approach is also useful where the child learns to read with understanding by reading their own written output (strength is that the child has already done the "thinking work" and is reading back their own thoughts)
  - ◆ computers/keyboards can be essential to by-pass fine motor difficulties
  - ◆ computer games and videos can be used to introduce new concepts (strength is visual nature and ability to replay 100 times if necessary to get complete information)
5. Generalization will happen when the child understands
  - ◆ please ignore the conventional wisdom that says that children on the autism spectrum can't generalize information learned, from one situation to another - no one generalizes information that they don't understand
  - ◆ if you see generalization, a concept has been understood - if you don't see generalization, you need to try to teach the concept another way

6. Mind the gaps
  - ◆ keep at the front of your mind a fact that we all know, but all too often forget - children with ASD have not followed the usual developmental path in the pre-school years - they have not taken in the amount of basic information that a typically developing child has
  - ◆ even a highly verbal child will have many "gaps" in critical knowledge - this will affect their ability to understand classroom curriculum
  - ◆ it is not uncommon for a child on the autism spectrum to learn the "form" of an academic task before they truly understand the "content"
  
7. Behaviour and comprehension are linked
  - ◆ the more a child understands a situation, the calmer they will be, and consequently the less disruptive behaviour they will produce
  - ◆ consider behaviour to be a "warning signal" that the child is out of his/her depth, then experiment with the situation to see how you can bring them back to calm comprehension
  
8. Asperger's children
  - ◆ high "structure" of verbal expression (perfect grammar, advanced vocabulary)
  - ◆ language comprehension is usually significantly lower than the structure of language you hear the child produce
  - ◆ listening in a group is very difficult (signal/noise, distraction of others, decoding of long string of verbal information, unfamiliar topics) - these children typically miss many pieces of critical information in a group learning situation - when they go back to their desks to complete the learning activities, they will tend to do what's most visually obvious, or copy the actions of a child near to them
  - ◆ vocabulary knowledge is "thin" - may know a word in only one circumstance, may not know multiple meanings, idiomatic meanings
  - ◆ comprehension of storyline is affected by lack of comprehension of emotions and thoughts/perceptions/motivations of others (can't see the "invisible steps" that make the plot of the story go forward) - tend to see stories as a sequence of events without truly understanding the cause-effect relationships where one event causes the next event to happen (eg. I tease you, you cry because I hurt your feelings)
  - ◆ lack of comprehension causes stress/anxiety - when stress/anxiety rises, you get difficult behaviour - the child is reacting to his/her stress, rather than choosing to be bad - these children often first become apparent as behaviour problems