DISCUSS THE YOUTH’S NEEDS WITH THEIR FAMILY

Parents are a child’s biggest advocates and should be the first resource for information about their youth’s needs. Do not be afraid to ask parents about their child. They will not be offended, but rather impressed at the fact that you care enough to ask.

USE VISUAL SUPPORTS

Visual supports can greatly help individuals on the Autism Spectrum by helping others communicate better with the individual and also helping the individual communicate better with those around them. Additionally, visual supports can help explain the rules, schedule for the day, make task completion easier, explain social situations, and make the environment more manageable. Visual supports might include: picture schedules, timers, Augmentative Alternative Communication (AAC) systems, First-Then Boards, visual setting parameters, etc.

FOLLOW A ROUTINE

Routine is very important to individuals with autism because most have little flexibility to changes in routine. For this reason, it is important to allow extra transition time. Posted schedules can help individuals know the expectations for the day and better prepare them for when something out of the ordinary may occur.

USE SOCIAL STORIES

Social stories model appropriate social interaction by describing a situation with relevant social cues, other's perspectives, and a suggested appropriate response. They most often focus on the nuances of interpersonal communication in an effort to help individuals learn how to respond in an effective and appropriate manner. Social stories can also help prepare youth for new and unfamiliar situations.

GO STEP BY STEP

Individuals with autism benefit from being given literal, short, and to the point step-by-step instructions to complete a task. This should include only one or two directions at a time. Visuals can also help further support oral directions being given.
TRY TO UNDERSTAND, BE PATIENT, & BE FLEXIBLE

There will inevitably be times when no one can understand what individuals with autism are experiencing, but it is important to try to. These individuals often need extra patience and flexibility than others around them.

INTEGRATE SENSORY INTEGRATION

Many individuals with autism are either over- or under-reactive to sensory stimuli. Potential triggers that the rest of us do not even notice may include: buzzing of florescent lights, echoes in a hallway, appliance running noises, etc. Tools that may improve focus include: stress balls, weighed vest or lap pads, chewing gum, hand fidgets, seat cushions, special chairs, etc.

MAKE ROOM FOR SPACE

Sometimes individuals may just need a break from all of the chaos that a 4-H setting may provide. They may need to remove themselves from the group for a break. This should be viewed as totally acceptable and individuals should not be forced to come back to the group until they are ready. A break space in the back of the room or another area close by may be helpful to provide. Needing to visit it should not be viewed as a punishment and should be encouraged, when needed.

CREATE UNDERSTANDING

Other youth in the group and the individual will benefit from honest conversation about autism. This will help everyone feel more empathic, better understand the needs of their friend, be able to better interact with the individual, and not see their actions as “weird”.

SEE THE CHILD, NOT THE DISABILITY

Most importantly, see the individual for the child that they are, not their disability or what they are not able to do. Children with autism have their own unique interests, skills, and abilities.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Minnesota 4-H Diversity and Inclusion Resources: http://www.extension.umn.edu/youth/mn4-H/volunteer/diversity/4-h-resources/index.html

Youth and Autism Fact Sheet: http://www.uwyo.edu/4-h/volunteers/inclusive/files/autism.pdf


QUESTIONS OR COMMENTS?

Contact Darcy Cole, Meeker County 4-H Program Coordinator at (320) 693-5275

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