



PROJECT ACCESS FACT SHEET #27



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WHAT IS AUTISTIC-LIKE?

Q. One of my new students came with a diagnostic report saying he has autistic tendencies. What does that mean? How do I program for him? Signed, Puzzled

A. Dear Puzzled,

Your student's report isn't the first to have the phrase "autistic tendencies" or "autistic-like." It's one of those phrases, which causes more confusion than clarity.

What comes to mind first when you hear the word "autistic-like?" Perhaps you visualize a child who is spinning, rocking, or hand flapping, or who has tactile defensiveness. For many people unfamiliar with autism, these odd or stereotypical movements represent autism.

Usually, the phrase "autistic tendencies" indicates that the child experiences significant sensorimotor integration disturbances such as rocking, spinning or hand flapping. In most cases, the report writer was unaware of the other three characteristics of educational autism, or felt reluctant to make a definite diagnosis of autism.

To determine programming for your student, you'll need to read the rest of the report carefully to find information about what behaviors the report writer noticed. Remember that programming will address the student's educational deficits, regardless of what they've been called. If your student does have odd movements, you may elect to ask for a sensorimotor integration evaluation to find out what to do.

Hopefully, the report contains good information on the communication, relatedness, and cognitive functioning of your student so you can address needs in those areas. Your student's educational team will use the information to write an effective IEP.

The educational team may elect to review the diagnostic label once you've dissected the report for its hidden and buried information treasures. I've met several students with severe communication disorder plus severe sensorimotor disturbance who did not have autism. In regards to programming, we still must address the deficits experienced by the child.

Legally, a student has educational autism, or he doesn't, but he doesn't have tendencies. An old friend of mine once responded to questions about tendencies by asking, "How many retarded-like students do you have?" That question really clarified the issue for me!