

Hot Tips for IY Autism Programs How to Use the Incredible Years Spotlight Poster

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The Incredible Years Autism Programs for teachers and parents emphasizes the importance of getting into the child's spotlight. This metaphor means that the teacher or parent strives to enter the child's world view, or spotlight of attention, by joining their preferences in games, following their lead in play and preferred activities. It is important to do this even when the child's spotlight of activity may seem unconventional, repetitive, and narrow. Adults can get into a child's spotlight by imitating what the child is doing in play, by repeating their actions, using gestures, sounds, and words, or by engaging in physical games or songs the child enjoys. When teachers and parents do this, they will capture their child's attention and interest and the social interaction will become as or more interesting than the child's normal repetitive play. This spotlight approach will eventually result in the child being more likely to tune into others, watch them and want to be with the person who has entered their spotlight. As children become more interested in others, there will be more opportunities for them to observe and learn from the

behaviors that others are modeling. The goal is to promote the child's social interactions and interest in communicating with others. Once the child feels safe including an adult in his spotlight, parents and teachers can expand the spotlight to include new ways of playing, helping noticing what peers are doing, including them in the play, and helping them learn from the modeling or imitating actions or words of others.

The first step to entering a child's spotlight is *positioning*. The adult should sit so that the child can notice them. This means sitting in front of the child at the same level so there is face-to-face contact and the child can see the adult's face, eyes, and gestures. For example, when reading together, the adult and child should be facing each other, with the book turned towards the child. This will enhance social communication. Avoid having the child sit on a lap, or to the side of the adult when reading, as this cuts off the child's ability to see facial expressions. While cuddle times are important the best learning is face-to-face.

Help parents and teachers understand the importance of avoiding distractions for both the child and parent during these interactions. Turn off cell phones, TVs, and background music. Avoid toys that make sounds or mechanical movements and limit the number of toys in the spotlight. These can compete with the child's attention to the social interaction. At first, the spotlight should be limited to one adult and one child; including others in the interaction will be distracting for the child. More learning will occur in a spotlight with fewer distractions.

Help parents and teachers understand how to follow the child's lead in terms of what they want to play with, using imitation of what they are doing, narrating their activity with sound effects, words, or repetitive songs, and using social, emotion, and persistence coaching. Adults need to be responsive to the child's receptive and expressive language level, use nonverbal gestures with words, and appropriate pacing, and limit questions and offers to help. These same interactions may also be modeled by puppets and toy characters and the use of simple songs.

Group leaders can refer to the Spotlight Poster as they pull out key principles from the discussions of homework or classroom assignments between sessions, setting new goals, and mediating the IY video vignettes and setting up role play practices. The poster can also be used as a review of the key principles covered in a session

discussion. The group can add additional Spotlight ideas to the poster using sticky notes.

As part of the homework review, parents and teachers might write down one spotlight idea that they have used since the last session (record on a blank spotlight circle). As parents share their examples, they might add their circles to the chart. Group leaders can ask parents to goal-set by planning how they will use one of the spotlight ideas at home or in the classroom before the next meeting. Group leaders might copy spotlight circles so that parents and teachers can take a copy of their proposed spotlighting goal at the end of the session.

The metaphor of spotlighting helps parents and teachers get in the child's spotlight of attention and to spotlight appropriate social behaviors, language and emotions to highlight and strengthen during play. Think of the attention spotlight like a theater spotlight that directs the audience attention to the important action on a stage. Parents and teachers using their spotlight to help the child to know what is important to pay attention to, model, and engage in, and what will result in applause and attention from the important adults and eventually peers in their lives.