



Educational Services for Students with Autism

The Day School at The Children's Institute of Pittsburgh

The Autism Program at The Day School provides a comprehensive, transdisciplinary approach to helping students with autism or autistic-like behaviors increase their cognitive skills, social communication skills, emotional regulation skills and personal relationships with family, staff and peers. Throughout the school day, students are taught to accomplish life skills with increased levels of receptive and expressive communication.

Our Philosophy

Staff members at The Day School use Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA), which is a verbal behavior approach, with each student to stimulate communication, academic skills and other learning goals. Staff members complete a detailed assessment of each student's skills using the Assessment of Basic Language and Learning Skills (ABLLS) or the Verbal Behavior Milestones Assessment and Placement Program (VB-MAPP) assessment at the beginning and end of each school year. Goals for each student are developed for the school year based on this assessment and parent input. All therapists, teachers and staff monitor progress through detailed data collection, analysis and reporting.

Classroom Environment

Our classrooms for students with autism are in a newly renovated, secure area that enables students to have freedom of movement and exploration within a safe, restricted space. The space, specifically designed for students with autism, includes a multi-sensory room developed by an interdisciplinary team of educators and related service professionals. Throughout the instructional area, only incandescent lighting is used to avoid the distraction and discomfort of fluorescent lighting. Students have a multi-purpose room for both lunch and gross motor activities. Lunch is served family-style, and The Day School team emphasizes social interaction and appropriate behavior as well as functional life skills, such as clearing the table and caring for the dishes.



Social Skill Development

The classroom staff members work together with the speech/language pathologist and occupational therapist to establish appropriate social goals for students. The school psychologist also works with students to develop age-appropriate play and leisure skills. Lunch also is a social time. Throughout the day, students use the communication methods most appropriate to their specific needs. Based upon the individual student's needs, The Day School provides programming in visual communication, augmentative communication, sign language and produced speech.

To learn more about The Day School's program for students with autism, please contact Eva Bizzozero at 412.420.2388, or ebi@the-institute.org.



Behavior Regulation

The program at The Day School is designed to support goals in self-regulation for all students with autism. Staff members use a verbal behavior approach implementing strategies such as pairing, reinforcement and schedules, all with a focus on developing functional language. Students are encouraged to expand their coping skills within the structure of the program. Sensory supports are available through integrated occupational therapy and sensory equipment and a sensory diet can be developed for students. Staff members encourage students to use gross motor movement to self-regulate between activities as needed. A gross-motor space and a multi-sensory room have been designed to meet this need.

Activities for Students

The Day School staff provides each student with adapted physical education, art, music and library services. Students also are scheduled to use our temperature-controlled swimming pool.

Medical Services

There are three full-time nurses in the school. Since The Hospital at The Children's Institute is also located at the Squirrel Hill campus, additional medical resources are readily available if needed.

Family Involvement

Students with autism and autistic-like behavior are most successful when the skills they learn in school can be applied to their home and community environment. Families and community support personnel work hand-in-hand with educational supports to produce a cohesive and sequential presentation of skills that promotes more success in school, home and community. The staff emphasizes training for all members of the team and encourages them to engage the student in a positive and proactive approach.

Transitional Programming

The Day School includes a transition plan for all students when they reach age 14. Our transition coordinators work closely with families and staff to develop an individual plan for each student. In addition to focusing on education, staff members work with older students with autism to develop work tasks and vocational training. These students also work on improving their leisure skills, and enjoying community outings and other social activities on a regular basis. Staff members also assist with transition planning for employment opportunities in and out of the school environment.

Staffing Our Classrooms

Students in The Day School enjoy a staffing ratio of approximately one team member for every two students. Students also benefit from the services of full-time occupational and speech/language therapists as well as the related services of physical therapists, a school social worker and a school psychologist. Furthermore, the program is supervised by a board certified behavior analyst.