



# ADVOCACY AND ALLYSHIP

Creating Positive Learning Environments for  
Students with Autism



## **ROOM L026**

Friday March 3rd, 2023  
10:30 AM – 11:30 AM



## **PRESENTED BY**

STAR Autism Support

## Advocacy and Allyship: Creating Positive Learning Environments for Students With Autism

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### Who Is STAR Autism Support?

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graph LR; A["Evidence-based curricula and resources  
Training and support for educational staff and caregivers"] --> B["Building school- and district-wide capacity to serve students with autism and other developmental disabilities"]; B --> C["Comprehensive approach across all grade levels  
Student growth and achievement in all learning environments"]; style A fill:#e0f0ff; style B fill:#e0f0ff; style C fill:#e0f0ff;
```

**Evidence-based curricula and resources**  
**Training and support for educational staff and caregivers**

**Building school- and district-wide capacity to serve students with autism and other developmental disabilities**

**Comprehensive approach across all grade levels**  
**Student growth and achievement in all learning environments**

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### Goals for Today

- ★ Define **allyship** and explore how unconscious bias affects our teaching practices
- ★ Consider the **language** we use when discussing autism and our students
- ★ Discuss **communication** as a right, how to address **behavior** in a supportive and respectful way, and the building blocks needed for meaningful **inclusion**

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### What Is an Ally?

**Allyship involves:**

- ★ Supporting others to promote a **common interest**
- ★ Recognizing **prejudice** and discrimination
- ★ Being **willing to act** with and for others to pursue **equity** and **inclusion**



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### Group Discussion

**Share out:**

- ★ What comes to mind when you think of **allyship** in relation to individuals with autism and other developmental disabilities?



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**Where Do We Begin?**

**With Ourselves!**



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### Attitude Affects Behavior

- ★ **Self-awareness** is a crucial first step to being an ally or advocate!
- ★ Being aware of one's own thoughts, actions, beliefs, attitudes—and whether they align with your personal values.



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### What Is Unconscious Bias?

- ★ Negative associations that we **all** unknowingly hold
- ★ Impacts our attitudes, behavior, and interactions with others



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### Addressing Unconscious Bias

<b>Self-assessment</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>★ Awareness of one's own biases</li><li>★ Harvard's implicit bias tests</li></ul>	<b>Conscious action</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>★ Critique your thoughts and behaviors</li><li>★ Align your actions with your personal values</li></ul>	<b>Step outside your comfort zone</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>★ Continue learning and unlearning</li><li>★ Connect with people who are different</li><li>★ Be an advocate</li></ul>
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### Allyship Practice: Battling Microaggressions

#### What is a microaggression?

- ★ Brief, everyday indignities that people experience from generally well-intentioned individuals
- ★ These are often indicators of implicit bias



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### Microaggression Scenario

- ★ A father is at the grocery store with his teenaged son when he runs into his coworker.
- ★ The coworker says hello while giving a sidelong look at the teenager, who is rocking and clapping his hands. The dad says, "This is my son Adam. He has autism."
- ★ "Oh, I LOVE the movie *Rainman!*" says the coworker, "What's your kid's superpower? Is he a math genius?"



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### Group Discussion

- ★ What microaggressions or assumptions did you notice in this scenario?
- ★ What harm could they cause?



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### Language Considerations

<p><b>Person-first language</b></p>  <p>"I am a person with autism"</p>	<p><b>Identity-first language</b></p>  <p>"I am autistic"</p>
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### Conversations with Ivanova



People-first and identity-first language

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### Autism Is a Spectrum

★ Support needs **vary** by the person and context

★ **Functioning labels** (i.e., high-functioning and low-functioning) don't always provide an accurate description

<p><b>Example 1</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>★ Enjoys participating in circle time</li><li>★ Talks to peers</li><li>★ Needs help staying safe in parking lots</li><li>★ Struggles with changing activities</li></ul>	<p><b>Example 2</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>★ Loves to read and draw</li><li>★ Uses an iPad to communicate instead of using verbal language</li><li>★ Uses the toilet and gets dressed independently</li></ul>	<p><b>Example 3</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>★ Has many friends</li><li>★ Loves telling jokes</li><li>★ Has meltdowns over small changes</li><li>★ Needs reminders to eat</li><li>★ Drives a car</li></ul>
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### Potential Pitfalls

"High-functioning"	"Low-functioning"
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>★ Experience of autism might not be seen as valid</li><li>★ Burnout from masking</li><li>★ Others may be less understanding during challenging times</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>★ May lead to lowered expectations from others</li><li>★ Other people tend to speak for them</li><li>★ Infantilization and/or dehumanization</li></ul>



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### Group Discussion

★ What are some **replacement words or phrases** that can be used instead of functioning labels?



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### "My Student is non-verbal!"

★ What are some potential **negative consequences** of labeling a student as non-verbal?



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## Everybody Communicates!

- ★ Non-verbal ≠ the student doesn't communicate
- ★ Non-verbal ≠ the student can't understand you
- ★ Non-verbal ≠ the student is unable to learn
- ★ Non-verbal ≠ we lower our expectations

**Communication is crucial for independence and agency over one's life!**




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## Communication Is a Right

**Not every autistic person can talk, but we all have important things to say.**  
Autistic Self-Advocacy Network (ASAN)

National Adult Commission for the Communication Needs of People with Severe Disabilities (NAC)

COMMUNICATION BILL OF RIGHTS

The rights listed below are intended to guide the development of policies, procedures, and practices that support the communication needs of people with severe disabilities. The rights are not intended to be used as a checklist or a checklist of requirements. The rights are intended to be used as a guide to ensure that the communication needs of people with severe disabilities are met.

1. The right to choose one's communication mode and technology.
2. The right to choose one's communication partner, setting, and time.
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## Alternative and Augmentative Communication

- ★ Many individuals with autism or developmental disabilities use **AAC** to communicate.
- ★ **Model and encourage** the use of AAC in the classroom—all day long!
- ★ Partner with **families and caregivers** to consider which options are accessible and how to incorporate communication opportunities in multiple settings.


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### Let's Talk About Behavior

"If only you knew how challenging **your** behavior is for **me**... wearing perfume, not saying what you mean."

**Dr. Wenn Lawson**  
Autistic advocate, psychologist,  
researcher, writer, speaker



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### Not All Behaviors Justify Change


#### What is "challenging behavior"?

- ★ Many behaviors could be described as challenging—but challenging to whom?
- ★ Behaviors may be used to help the student regulate or communicate.

#### Considerations

Is the behavior...

- ★ Harmful or dangerous?
- ★ Interfering with the student's learning?
- ★ Frequent and disrupting to the learning and well-being of others?
- ★ Limiting the student's ability to participate with peers?



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### Interpreting Behavior as Communication

**When a concerning behavior occurs, ask yourself:**

- ★ What is the student trying to **communicate**?
- ★ What is the **function**?
- ★ Is this a **self-regulating** behavior?
- ★ Is this a **meltdown** or a tantrum?
- ★ How can I respond in a way that won't sacrifice my **relationship** with the student?



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### Keys to Success: Behavior

- ★ Focus on teaching new, **socially significant skills** instead of behavior reduction and compliance.
- ★ Make the **environment** fit the student—not the other way around!
- ★ Behaviors are not a barrier to instruction—they are the **purpose** behind it.



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### The Assets-Based Approach

- ★ Focus on **strengths** (assets) instead of challenges (deficits)
- ★ Believe that all students are **capable** of learning—maintain high expectations
- ★ **Embrace** differences
- ★ Build **positive** relationships



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### Group Discussion

- ★ What are some **strengths** or **interests** of your students?



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### Meaningful Inclusion

**“Diversity** is being invited to the party, and **inclusion** is being asked to dance.”

**Amy Gravino**  
Award-winning writer, speaker,  
and autistic advocate



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### What Is Inclusion?

**Inclusive Schools Network:**  
“Simply stated, inclusive education means that all students are **full and accepted members of their school community**, in which their educational setting is the **same** as their non-disabled peers, whenever appropriate.”



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### Inclusion Numbers

Students Learning in Inclusive Settings

All Students with Disabilities	64%	Students with Significant Cognitive Disabilities	4%
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\* IRIS Center, 2022; Burnes & Clark, 2021; U.S. Department of Education, 2021



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### Individualize Inclusion for Each Student

**Inclusion Support Checklist**  
Inclusive Settings

Consider the student's participation in various components of an inclusive setting to determine where they might need additional supports to ensure they are fully participating. Use the Inclusion Support Recommendations to generate ideas that will help you best individualize supports for your individual students.

Component of Inclusive Setting	Expectations	Needs Support
<b>Attention (e.g., tasks, tasks, needs, social responses)</b>	Participates in most activities independently or with minimal assistance	
<b>Attention Following Directions</b>	Follows directions independently most of the time	
<b>Social Interaction</b>	Engages independently with peers including reciprocal social interactions (e.g., sharing, taking turns, etc.) most of the time	
<b>Play and peer interaction</b>	Engages in play with peers independently most of the time	
<b>Group Interaction</b>	Participates in group or structured activities independently most of the time	
<b>Academic activities</b>	Participates in academic activities in the general education classroom setting	
<b>Participating in school activities</b>	Participates in school activities in the general education classroom setting	
<b>Working Independently</b>	Works independently with the general education classroom setting	

**Consider routines in the inclusive setting:**

- ★ What are the expectations?
- ★ What supports are needed to ensure success?
  - ★ Visual and environmental supports
  - ★ Breaking down routines into manageable steps
- ★ Team meetings/planning

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### Inclusion Support Recommendations

**Inclusion Supports**  
Strategies for Meeting the Needs of All Students

**Criteria:**

- Supports that are evidence-based and research-based
- Supports that are easy to implement and use
- Supports that are cost-effective
- Supports that are easy to understand and use
- Supports that are easy to implement and use
- Supports that are easy to understand and use

**Picture dig:**

- Supports that are easy to understand and use
- Supports that are easy to understand and use
- Supports that are easy to understand and use
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- Supports that are easy to understand and use

**Specials (e.g., music class, PE, art, etc.):**

- Supports that are easy to understand and use
- Supports that are easy to understand and use
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- Supports that are easy to understand and use

**Inclusion Support Recommendations**  
Inclusive Settings

Use the Inclusion Checklist to determine the areas in which an individual student shows strengths in the general education environment and where supports are needed. Use the Inclusion Support Recommendations to generate ideas that will help you best individualize supports for your individual students.

Component of Inclusive Setting	Support Type	Specific Supports
<b>Attention (e.g., tasks, tasks, needs, social responses)</b>	Behavioral supports Instructional supports Behavioral supports Instructional supports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use visual supports to help students understand expectations and directions</li> <li>Use visual supports to help students understand expectations and directions</li> <li>Use visual supports to help students understand expectations and directions</li> <li>Use visual supports to help students understand expectations and directions</li> </ul>
<b>Attention Following Directions</b>	Behavioral supports Instructional supports Behavioral supports Instructional supports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use visual supports to help students understand expectations and directions</li> <li>Use visual supports to help students understand expectations and directions</li> <li>Use visual supports to help students understand expectations and directions</li> <li>Use visual supports to help students understand expectations and directions</li> </ul>
<b>Social Interaction</b>	Behavioral supports Instructional supports Behavioral supports Instructional supports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use visual supports to help students understand expectations and directions</li> <li>Use visual supports to help students understand expectations and directions</li> <li>Use visual supports to help students understand expectations and directions</li> <li>Use visual supports to help students understand expectations and directions</li> </ul>
<b>Play and peer interaction</b>	Behavioral supports Instructional supports Behavioral supports Instructional supports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use visual supports to help students understand expectations and directions</li> <li>Use visual supports to help students understand expectations and directions</li> <li>Use visual supports to help students understand expectations and directions</li> <li>Use visual supports to help students understand expectations and directions</li> </ul>
<b>Group Interaction</b>	Behavioral supports Instructional supports Behavioral supports Instructional supports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use visual supports to help students understand expectations and directions</li> <li>Use visual supports to help students understand expectations and directions</li> <li>Use visual supports to help students understand expectations and directions</li> <li>Use visual supports to help students understand expectations and directions</li> </ul>
<b>Academic activities</b>	Behavioral supports Instructional supports Behavioral supports Instructional supports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use visual supports to help students understand expectations and directions</li> <li>Use visual supports to help students understand expectations and directions</li> <li>Use visual supports to help students understand expectations and directions</li> <li>Use visual supports to help students understand expectations and directions</li> </ul>
<b>Participating in school activities</b>	Behavioral supports Instructional supports Behavioral supports Instructional supports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use visual supports to help students understand expectations and directions</li> <li>Use visual supports to help students understand expectations and directions</li> <li>Use visual supports to help students understand expectations and directions</li> <li>Use visual supports to help students understand expectations and directions</li> </ul>
<b>Working Independently</b>	Behavioral supports Instructional supports Behavioral supports Instructional supports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use visual supports to help students understand expectations and directions</li> <li>Use visual supports to help students understand expectations and directions</li> <li>Use visual supports to help students understand expectations and directions</li> <li>Use visual supports to help students understand expectations and directions</li> </ul>

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### Do With, Not For

- ★ Empowers students to be **active participants** in the classroom and gives **meaning** to daily activities
- ★ Provides **opportunities** for communication, preferences, decision-making, and self-determination
- ★ Allows **participation** by all students at different levels (maximum independence)
- ★ Decreases frustration and confusion—provides a sense of **accomplishment**



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### Tips for Doing “With”



- ★ Involve the student in **all phases** of a task
  - ★ Getting and arranging materials, doing the task, and cleaning up
- ★ Keep **materials** in consistent and easily accessible locations
- ★ Follow the **student's lead**
  - ★ Set a pace that is appropriate for the student
  - ★ Be a careful observer
  - ★ Allow plenty of processing time (wait time)



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### Advocacy Begets Self-Advocacy

#### What is self-advocacy?

- ★ “An individual's ability to effectively communicate, convey, negotiate or assert his or her own interests, desires, needs and rights. It involves making informed decisions and taking responsibility for those decisions.” (VanReusen et al., 1994)

**Be a voice—but not “their” voice!**



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### Gather Student Input

**All About Me**

**My Facts**

My name is \_\_\_\_\_

I like to be called \_\_\_\_\_

Gender: \_\_\_\_\_ grade and I am \_\_\_\_\_ years old.

I communicate best by (circle all that apply)

Talking Using Pictures Using a Device Writing Drawing Other \_\_\_\_\_

**My Strengths**

\_\_\_\_\_

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\_\_\_\_\_

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### Representation Matters

**Critically analyze the materials you have in your classroom:**

- ★ Toys
- ★ Food items
- ★ Activities
- ★ Books
- ★ Music
- ★ Images/visuals that are representative of students' identities

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### Group Share

★ Share your favorite materials for **diverse representation** (books, toys, songs, etc.)

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### Peer Modeling Is Powerful

- ★ Train peers how to initiate and respond during social opportunities.
- ★ Pair students with peers who are willing to participate, socially skilled, and regularly available.
- ★ Teach in both structured and school-wide settings.

#### PEER POWER

Tips For A Successful Time with Your Peer Buddy

Student's name: \_\_\_\_\_

Specialist's name: \_\_\_\_\_

Teacher's name: \_\_\_\_\_

Classroom: \_\_\_\_\_

Room: \_\_\_\_\_

Start Date: \_\_\_\_\_


End Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

Example:

Getting started with your buddy

1. Get your buddy's attention before talking to them.
  - Use hand signals.
  - Use eye contact.
  - Use hand to hand or eye.
  - Use a signal from your classroom or peer.
2. Be clear and direct.
  - Use simple language.
  - Use short sentences.
  - Use visual aids.
  - Use a clear start and end to your activity.
3. Practice with your buddy.
  - Practice with your buddy in a safe and controlled environment.
  - Use a timer to keep the activity on track.
  - Use a peer to peer buddy to help with the activity.
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  - Use a peer to peer buddy to help with the activity.



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### Recess With a Peer Buddy



Play and Social Interaction  
Recess: With Peer Buddy

starautismsupport.com



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### Community Simulations



Going to the movies—simulated at school



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 **Inclusion in the Community**



Employees bring their strengths to work at a Florida car wash



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**Caregiver Collaboration**

- ★ Develop **partnerships** with families—understand and navigate barriers
- ★ Be respectful of **cultural differences**
- ★ Provide **training** and coaching to caregivers
- ★ Provide **supports** for home use



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**Free Home Supports!**



SCAN ME



[www.starautismsupport.com](http://www.starautismsupport.com)



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### Wrapping Up

- ★ Being an ally or advocate begins with **self-awareness** and a willingness to challenge biases.
- ★ We can be **advocates** by using respectful language, honoring communication as a right, and using an **assets-based** approach.
- ★ **Meaningful inclusion** requires purposeful skill-building, teamwork, and community involvement.



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### Thank you for joining us!



- ★ [www.starautismsupport.com](http://www.starautismsupport.com)
- ★ [information@starautismsupport.com](mailto:information@starautismsupport.com)



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