



Inclusion Hub

The Power of Early Intervention - A Whole Team Approach

Supporting social communication, sensory and emotional regulation needs

The childcare setting in this case study is a day nursery in Richmond that cares for children aged 0-5.

This year, Tom, a 3 year old boy with significant needs, began attending our setting.

Tom was working at 8-16 months across the Early Years Foundation Stage, with the exception of physical skills, which were well developed. He had no language or ways of communicating with adults in the setting and showed no eye contact. On arrival in the nursery he would be very agitated and he was often overwhelmed in the large environment with other children. He did not sit down for any length of time and was not able to join in group activities such as meal time and music time. Tom's need to seek sensory stimulation meant that everything went in his mouth and he would try to calm himself by running and climbing. He particularly enjoyed the playground and would have tantrums if he could not go outside or had to come inside from the playground.

As a setting we were committed to ensuring we were able to meet Tom's needs, we put in place interventions and made adjustments, but it was evident that we needed to do more. We:

- accessed support from and worked with the relevant professionals, such as the speech and language therapist, occupational therapist and educational psychologist; and began implementing their recommendations at our setting;
- attended training, including a training course on staff using visuals;
- used the SCERTs approach, introduced by the educational psychologist during staff consultation, which included thinking about *how* adults are interacting with him to encourage communication and build up a trusting relationship and considering *why* he is behaving in certain ways; and
- continued to build our relationship with parents, so they felt able to trust the setting and accept the support offered for their child.

Being committed to supporting Tom develop and be ready to learn, we began to apply the interventions, suggested by the professionals, through a whole team approach.

We understood that the unpredictability of the setting was distressing for Tom and developed strategies to help soothe him. For example, to make the nursery more predictable, we developed a daily routine for him and started using visuals to help him predict what is coming next, showing him a photo before he moves to a different activity. To help reduce his distress, we let him have time to adjust at the beginning of the day by taking him to a quiet space, ensuring that a small cosy space is available for him to help him calm down.

We also now ensure that we are able to support Tom's sensory needs and to help him regulate his emotions, through various strategies such as allowing him access to a ball pond, using a large yoga ball to roll on and giving him big hugs. We have also included highly motivating sensory toys in his daily activities to help him engage with learning.

To support his communication we are using the 'what's in the bag' activity, to help develop his joint attention skills. We are also providing him with frequent opportunities to initiate interactions, for



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example, we provide him with a choice of two different foods and wait for him to communicate, by taking the adult's hand to the food he wants. We also stop activities and wait for him to indicate that he wants 'more' and then repeat the activity when communicates this, such as through reaching or vocalising. We have also learnt to adjust and reduce our language, and instead use the key words we would like him to say.

Our setting has become even more inclusive and we have grown in our understanding of how to help a child with additional needs to learn.

The result of these interventions have been extremely positive and we have seen Tom develop over time. He now looks for adult reaction and interaction, he gives eye contact and he seeks out adults to meet his needs. We learnt to celebrate the small steps of progress and we understand what 'big' steps they are for him. The impact of the steps we took were so wonderful, allowing us at the setting to develop the relationship with him and the family further, providing us with the opportunity to work deeper in partnership with them on their journey.

We have learnt and understood the importance of being willing to learn, seek advice, make adjustments and apply interventions. Doing this has not only supported his development, it has also helped us as a setting become more inclusive, which has meant that all of the children in our care have benefitted from the the steps we have taken.

**The child's name has been changed to maintain confidentiality.*

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