

Empowering People with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities to Teach Others

A guide for day programs, occupational therapists, schools, families, extracurricular activity groups, and more



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Why is this important?

People with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) have so much to offer and share with their peers and the community, but often, their abilities are overlooked. They are frequently being taught various skills- educational, vocational, hobbies, etc.; they are typically the “students”. When do they get to be the teacher?

I created this booklet because I believe everyone has talents, ideas, and skills to share with others. People with IDD simply need the opportunity and the appropriate supports in place to do so.

My dream for this booklet is that day programs, therapists, families, schools, extracurricular activity groups such as sports teams or music groups, and others will use my booklet to become educated on how to enable individuals with IDD to teach skills to others. Through this enablement, I hope people with IDD will feel empowered to share their talents and personalities and become more independent in their everyday lives. If you are a person with IDD, please know that you have gifts to share with the world. If you know someone with IDD or are employed in a field that works with individuals with IDD, please get a copy of my booklet. I hope you will use it as a resource and learn more from your own experiences.

This book represents occupational therapy (OT) because OT is all about helping people of all abilities engage in meaningful activities and empowering them to live to their fullest potential.

When can I implement this as a staff member, coach, or family member?

There are many opportunities in which having a person with IDD teach would be appropriate. At a day program, the teaching activity can be incorporated into their weekly schedule. In an occupational therapy practice setting, the individual can teach something they have learned in therapy to a family member or friend as part of the therapy session. At home, an individual can show a family member or roommate how to cook a certain meal. As you can see, the times in which a person with IDD can teach others is endless.



Preparing an individual for teaching: Choosing an activity

The first step in preparing an individual for teaching is identifying that individual's strengths, talents, and interests and then selecting the activity together. This can occur through several methods. The person with IDD can tell you ideas of what they would like to teach. If you know the individual well, you may know some skills the individual enjoys and can make suggestions based off that.

Other points to consider:

- Should the individual do an activity for the group to complete together, like a cheer, or individually, like a craft?
 - In a group activity, the individual can address the group at once but may feel overwhelmed
 - In an individualized activity, the individual may need to be prepared help peers one-on-one
- Be aware of the abilities of the group compared to the individual's abilities
 - If the activity appears to be too difficult for the group, you may need to have modifications prepared so everyone can participate.
- It may be more appropriate for the teaching individual to teach one person instead of a group

Note: For the purposes of this booklet, those in the learning role will be referred to as "group", even though it can be an individual.

Preparing an individual for teaching: Teaching strategies

Identify the best teaching strategy for the person to use. Choosing the most appropriate strategy may vary based on the individual's personality, the abilities of the group, the nature and difficulty of the activity, and other contributing factors.

Possible teaching strategies include:

- One-on-one
- Partner teaching
- Group instruction
- Group directions with individual assistance throughout the activity
- Filming the individual giving instructions prior to the activity and playing the video at the activity session
 - This may be appropriate for individuals who are shy in front of others or who become flustered in a group



Preparing an individual for teaching: Practicing & Modifications

Prior to the teaching session, you should walk through the activity with the individual. This will allow you to give guidance and suggestions, as well as give him or her the opportunity to practice teaching the activity. Give feedback but let them make decisions. It may be beneficial to give choices to the individual. Does he or she need written reminders? Walking through teaching the activity prior to teaching it to the group will give you insight into what types of supports the individual may need.

Depending on the individual's teaching abilities and/or the group's abilities, you may need to work together with the teaching individual to prepare modifications. Does the dance chosen have too many steps to remember? Is there a "student" who has poor fine motor skills when the activity is jewelry-making? The teaching individual or a staff member must be prepared to assist "students" who may need extra help. If the activity is too difficult for the group, the individual may need to choose a different or adapted activity.



Teaching time! Setting up the environment



Prior to starting the activity, set up the environment to provide support to both the teaching individual and the group. Be aware of the background noise, visual distractions, and space.

- What changes can be made to decrease sensory distractions?
- If it is an active activity, is there enough room for movement?
- Do you have all the materials you need?
- Is the environment safe?

Teaching time!

Supporting the teaching individual

What type of support does the individual need? Does he or she need verbal cues, written reminders, or staff assistance? The individual's needs may range from complete independence to requiring ongoing feedback. The amount of assistance one may need does not detract from the experience as people have varying levels of independence. It is important to remember to let the individual lead. The activity may or may not turn out the way you were expecting or hoping, but that is not the purpose. The purpose of the teaching activity is to empower the person with IDD to share their skills with others and become more confident in their own abilities. Mistakes make room for growth. If mistakes are made or if the group is not understanding instructions, give space for the individual to try to fix it before intervening.



Teaching time! Supporting the group

You may be able to predict some of the needs of the group and can prepare for them (of course, you won't be able to predict everything that could happen). If it is a large group or a group that typically needs a lot of assistance, make sure there is enough staff or family members to help.



Give the individual who is teaching the opportunity to help group members, and you can assist the teaching individual in this task. For example, if a group member is having difficulties with a craft, approach the group member together and give the teaching individual tips for assisting the group member.

After teaching: Reflection and Celebration

Offer congratulations and praise to the individual for their accomplishment! Seek feedback from the individual. Some useful questions may include:

- What did you like about teaching?
- What did you dislike about teaching?
- Is there anything you would do differently next time?
- Would you like to teach again?
 - This opens the conversation for future teaching opportunities

Take time for self-reflection or staff reflection as well. Beneficial questions may include:

- What went well and did not go well from your perspective?
- What did you learn (about the individual, the group, supports, etc.)?
- How can you make changes for improvement?

Recognize the uniqueness of individuals- what works for one person may not work for another!

Working with other staff



If you are an employee of the organization, you probably know the strengths of the individual who is teaching and the group dynamics. This is beneficial for supporting and empowering the individuals. If the concept of helping people with IDD teach others is a new concept for the organization, be sure to educate other staff members on the purpose and importance of the project in addition to how they can best support the individuals. Remind them to help the individuals be as independent as possible.

If you are not a regular employee of the organization, utilize the knowledge of the staff members. They likely know their individuals well; they can give suggestions on what the individuals may want to teach and useful supports. It is important to educate the staff on the purpose and significance of the activities and ideas for support. However, be mindful that they know the individuals best and that you are not overstepping their relationships with them.

Activities

Below is a list of possible activities for people to teach. It by no means covers every idea out there!

- Music (singing or instruments)
- Jewelry making
- Sports
- Cheers
- Cooking and baking
- Photography and videography
- Dancing
- Academic subjects
- Design
- Hair and beauty
- Languages
- Homemaking skills
- Money management
- Mechanical skills
- Computer skills
- Writing



