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ECHO Session Date: 11/20/2025

Presenter Credential: LMSW

Thank you for presenting your student at ECHO Idaho – K12 Supporting Students with Autism session. Please keep in mind that your School District policies and Health Services procedures, medication administration protocols, process guidelines, remain the guiding principles to your practice.

After review of the case presentation and discussion of this student's case among the ECHO Community of Practice, the following suggestions have been made:

Student Grade Level: 4th grade

Summary:

This 4th-grade student with Autism Spectrum Disorder is friendly, hardworking, and progressing in academics, motor skills, and social play, with strengths in reading fundamentals, counting, structured participation, and a love of Pac-Man. He spends his day in a self-contained classroom with partial adult support and receives extensive IEP accommodations for instruction, communication, testing, and sensory needs. His primary challenges include self-injury, pica, OCD-like routines, difficulty with transitions and non-preferred tasks, high dependence on adults, and significant anxiety that leads to shutdowns. His mother is worried about future transitions, particularly to middle school. The school team seeks strategies to help him manage change, reduce anxiety, increase independence, and improve communication.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Transition Planning

- Ensure consistency with staff as students benefit from familiar adults across grades. In larger districts, this is harder, so consider creative solutions like printing pictures of future teachers and staff and introducing them early to reduce "stranger danger."
- Consider using the child's interest in Pac-Man to make transitions fun:
 - Lay out a Pac-Man strip on the floor
 - Play Pac-Man music during transitions
 - Provide a visual token system where the child collects points for completing transitions
- Overlap of trusted adults:
 - For major transitions (e.g., to junior high or high school), assign a familiar co-regulating adult to accompany the child initially.
 - Consider using the same aide as the child moves to higher grades (depending on staff availability and district resources)

Behavioral and Sensory Supports

- Due to self-injurious behaviors (scratching neck, cheeks, private parts), conduct a Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA) to collect data on triggers and identify replacement behaviors.



- As a part of the FBA and creation of the behavioral intervention plan, ensure that the person conducting the evaluation looks at possible interventions (Differential Reinforcement of Incompatible Behavior (DRI)) that would be incompatible with self-injurious behavior such as:
 - “Chewlery” that allows the student to bite on something that would be more socially appropriate
 - Sonic ice (soft nugget ice)
- Explore environmental adjustments to reduce sensory overload.
- As this child may have dyspraxia (condition where the brain has difficulty planning and coordinating physical movements), address possible motor planning challenges to reduce stress.

Communication Strategies

- During shutdowns, verbal output often disappears.
- To reduce demands and help repair communication breakdowns, provide low-tech communication boards with simple options:
 - “Not right now”
 - “I need something different”
 - Sensory choices or protest options
- Ensure visual schedules are used consistently at every transition and paired with least-to-most prompting hierarchy to teach independence.

Co-Regulation and Parent Support

- Co-regulation means modeling calm and helping the child regulate—not overprotecting.
- Show mom strategies to foster independence while maintaining emotional safety.
- Support the mom’s resilience by providing resources for respite care and self-care and normalizing that children with sensory needs may require longer co-regulation periods.

Stress Reduction and Nervous System Reset

- Identify environmental stressors and reduce sensory load.
- Use resetting techniques during dysregulation:
 - Bilateral hand movements (e.g., “windshield wipers”).
 - High-five games (non-demand, playful).
- Pair these with joyful engagement to maintain trust and regulation.

Health and Safety

- Address pica behavior and monitor the child for ingestion of harmful items (toxins, heavy metals, magnets, batteries)
- Pica is often a sensory-seeking activity so plan safe alternatives (e.g. consider offering Sonic ice)
- Consider medical consultation for pica as it can have serious health implications