



Sample Strategies Letter

John James

Strategies for Enhancing Learning and Inclusion

July 2016

The following are strategies that have worked in previous classroom settings to assist John to learn and be included. We thought this would be a helpful addendum to the ILP.

A Positive Relationship With the Teacher Is Very Important

John responds very well when he has a good relationship with a person. We have noticed with the various people that have worked with John that he responds best to those people who, at the beginning of their time with him, spend time on developing a positive relationship with him. This is fairly easy to do since John is very social and enjoys getting to know people.

Identifying a shared interest is a great way to connect with John. For example, John is a Swans and Giants fan, he plays soccer and loves Nerf wars. John has an Xbox. He is a downhill skier.

Clear and Simple Language Is Needed

John can follow rules, but needs to have them clearly outlined. You don't need to change the tone of your voice or the speed. Instead, simply explain or demonstrate what you are asking of him. Very simple and succinct directions work well.

If John doesn't do as you ask the most likely reason is that he hasn't understood the request. We have found when John is confronted with a lot of words, he will 'tune out' and go on to do his own thing.



John doesn't have high self-esteem, this can often cause anxiety resulting in John not doing what he is asked. We find it helps if you let him know that you believe in him. Starting with a smaller request is a great way to engage John.

Provide Opportunities for Imitation

John learns mostly from imitation at first, and then the behaviour becomes his own.

He will most often first look to see what other students are doing (models) even when the instructions are clear and simple. So it's helpful for him to have opportunities to imitate his classmates.

Cooperative learning also works well with John, but we've found that in order for this to be successful, both John and the other(s) in the group will need support. For example, we've found that we often have to get an activity going when John is with his friends and after a little while we can leave, but we have to go back periodically to make sure they are all relating well to one another and including John in a positive way.

If John takes himself away from the group, finding a role that you are confident John can undertake and contribute will be the best way for John to re-enter and engage. If he does start modelling negative behaviour, please quietly help him to understand what is expected.

Foster Responsibility

John loves occupying roles where he can help. Any jobs or responsibilities you can offer John that are highly valued by the students will help John to experience contribution and feel good in return.

In fact, having a job to do often entices him to participate in most activities. For example, you could ask John to help set up for a science experiment, demonstrate a sport circuit etc. Such jobs help John to find a sense of belonging and provide an incentive to get involved.



Understand What His Behaviour Is Communicating

We have found that there is generally an understandable reason behind most behaviour that interferes with teaching John, such as not focusing or avoiding.

The key to turning this around is to enquire whether something may have just happened that might have contributed to the behaviour. For example, having feelings of hurt or having to move from one activity before he feels he is finished or not understanding direction. When John 'misbehaves', nine times out of ten, when we think about it we can identify factors in the environment, which preceded the behaviour.

John will be motivated to comply with requests and directions if he has a good relationship with those working with him or if peers are asked. John will not respond well if people try to control him, force or threaten him. We have found by offering John clear choices and leaving him to make the decision without continuously talking further about options works well. John almost always makes a good choice.

John will respond to clear expectations especially when they become routine. However, at times it may take him a little while to respond and sometimes it takes him several occasions to learn the rule.

Take Into Account Physical Issues

We have found that it really helps John's learning if he can get up periodically and move around. Sitting for long periods of time is physically hard for John due to his global low muscle tone.

John's participation in sport needs to be encouraged. John is involved in many sports outside of school and we would like him to fully participate in all sports classes. John may need a break for a quick drink periodically.



Need To Make Things Concrete

Abstraction is difficult for John, so the more concrete you can make something the better. For example, allow John to look at the globe to identify a continent rather than just talking about it, looking at pictures of things rather than just hearing about them, etc.

Adapt Curriculum

John needs to do the same work/subject as the peers in his class, but it must be adapted for him. This is sometimes tricky to figure out but we've found that it is also fun to work on creating a truly inclusive classroom and indeed it seems that all of the students benefit from such an environment.

As we have been taking John through a reading program at home for 2 ½ years, we would love to be involved in a conversation when you are setting the expectations for John's learning.

Work With His Family

Working together as a team with John's parents works well. As John's parents say 'this is where the magic happens'. That way, what is taught in school can be reinforced at home.

John is not always able to tell us what is going on in school, so we often need to communicate with the teachers by notes, email or phone.

The Role of the Teacher's Aide

Much research has been done in inclusive settings around the role of the Teachers Aide. It has been found that the best role of the Teacher's Aide is to be thought of as an assistant for the teacher and the whole class (all students), with a special eye for the child that may require refocusing, diverting or have information framed in a different manner.

It has been found that when the Teacher's Aide is referred to as "John's aide" or just sticks to the student with a disability then the other students will make the assumption that there is something very different about that student because he/she always has an adult nearby. This then discourages the other students from interacting with the student and/or helping him/her learn. This also



creates learned dependency.

The best use for a Teacher's Aide is to develop independence in learning, moving around the room supporting all the students and working alongside the teacher to meet the needs of the class.

Assist with Social Dynamics

Anything you can do to help John blend in with the other kids in typical age appropriate ways is important.

For example, the Teacher's Aide should be presented to the class and seen as an Aide for everyone, not just John.

The students will follow the lead of the teacher. If the teacher is very natural in including, listening and valuing John as a contributing member of the class, the students will follow.

If students have questions about John, we have found that the best thing to do is try to answer them with a focus on the similarities between John and the other students. For example, 'why does John seem like he is in a bad mood all the time?' The response could be: 'We all feel frustrated sometimes, but sometimes John finds it hard to express his frustration with words, so it may look like he is in a bad mood, but he is just finding it hard to be heard. Maybe you could help?'

It is certainly important to forthrightly answer questions. There is no need to deny or hide the fact that John does have difficulty with some things, but we would like his classmates to be left with the overall impression that John is much more *like* them than different from them.

We have seen John blossom when he has a chance to give to others, so anything you can do to help him make valuable contributions to the class and to the learning of others would be great for his self esteem and confidence. Being grouped with other students for learning projects is very helpful. John's teachers have often noted that including him has been a positive experience not only for him, but for the other students as well. We have found that, as with any students, John adds a lot to a classroom community.



Greeting John

We prefer that teachers and other adults in the school **do not** greet John with high fives. John prefers for people to simply just say hello and engage in a conversation. High fiving places John in the **eternal child role** and he would prefer to be treated as a teenager.

We are very pleased with John's progress and are looking forward to watching him continue to learn, grow and develop as he progresses through school.

Many thanks,

{signatures go here}

[Parents' names]

[Parents' email addresses - indicate primary address]

[Parents' phone numbers]

