

Environmental Accommodations:

A Positive Approach to Supporting People on the Autism Spectrum

TRAINING SUMMARY:

Environmental Accommodations involve changes made to the physical and/or social environment to allow people with sensorimotor differences to participate in a fuller, more inclusive, and more comfortable way. They are part of an interlocking spectrum of supports that include self-regulatory and interactional accommodations. Accommodations are Positive Approaches because they ask us to work with, not on, the person who needs them, and to cultivate a respectful relationship. Rather than responding reactively and negatively to behavior that challenges us, designing successful accommodations requires us to be proactive and ask meaningful questions about a person's quality of life. When we design accommodations, we take an ecological perspective on human differences, recognizing that "behavior" is not "in" a person but emerges through interactions with various environments. By looking and listening respectfully, we can learn to change and improve those environments and dynamics. While there is no limit to the types of environmental accommodations that can be created, most are very inexpensive, low-tech, and easy to implement.

TRAINING GOAL:

Support staff, parents, teachers, and community members will explore the impact of the physical and social environment on a range of social, emotional, communicative, physiological, and health-related issues that may be experienced by people with autism. The process of making and testing observations, and of designing and matching appropriate environmental accommodations, will be investigated and examples shared.

TRAINING OBJECTIVES:

Participants will:

1. Understand the types of sensorimotor challenges frequently experienced by people on the autism spectrum, and how to identify them
2. Become aware of the range of neurologically-based nonvolitional (non-willed) behaviors and the role of accommodations in alleviating their effects
3. Consider the wide range of environmental accommodations, and the process of making collaborative, individualized choices
4. Understand the importance of relationships, typical experiences, and typical environments in designing successful accommodations
5. Investigate ways to support and enhance self-determination through accommodations, and appreciate how accommodations can be used to give individuals greater control and influence over their lives