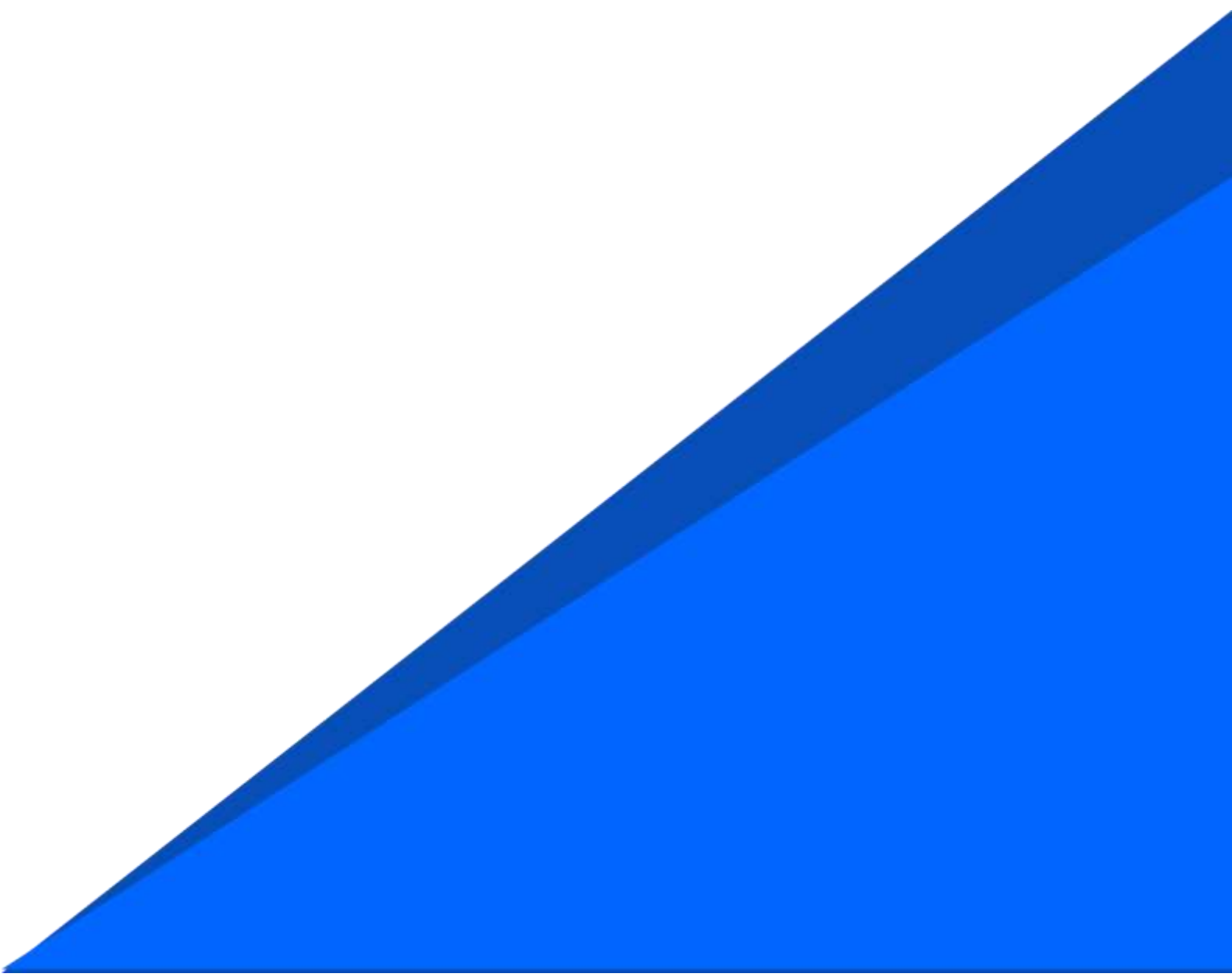


07

Structured Activities

Goal of this Chapter: To explain how to organize materials within a single task in a Work System.



Creating structured activities – Making every task "Self-Explanatory"

Activities need to be visually clear and meaningful to the child. If the child can't touch, see or hold the activity, he/she will likely not engage in the activity nor find it engaging enough for him/her to give attention. Visual instructions tell the child what he/she needs to do, visual organization involves providing the required materials needed to complete the task, neatly organized and stable. Finally, visual clarity helps the child on the autism spectrum know what he/she is doing because it is clear and it is not visually distracting, overwhelming, or confusing.

What is a structured activity?

While the Work System organizes a sequence of jobs, a structured activity organizes the materials within a single task. The goal is for the student to understand how to complete the activity simply by looking at the materials, without needing verbal instructions. This is critical because oftentimes teachers define structure solely as "visual aids," often missing this deeper layer of task design.

The Three Components of Visual Organization

While designing structured activities, we focus on three elements:

- **Visual Clarity:** Highlighting the most important part of the task (e.g., color-coding the slot where a coin should be dropped).
- **Visual Instructions:** Showing the student the sequence of the specific task through a sample or a picture-guide.
- **Visual Organization of Materials:** Limiting the materials to only what is necessary and using containers to stabilize them, reducing the fatigue often caused by cluttered spaces.

Creating shared activities

Autistic students have a great difficulty in learning social norms. In addition to the limited opportunities for peer interactions, creating structured shared activities can have a great impact to their social skills.

Creating group activities with clear roles and instructions help students interact, stay engaged and build positive social skills. Teaching social scripts and providing guided practice for initiating and maintaining conversations help students develop and maintain relationships and friendships.

Social Skills planning matrix

Life Stage	Core Social Target	Common Autism-Specific Barrier	Recommended Support Strategy
Early Years	Functional & Parallel Play	Sensory Overload in shared spaces	Visual Boundaries: Use mats or tape to define individual play zones.
Primary/Elementary	Turn-Taking & Rules	Cognitive Rigidity (Need to win/follow "my" rules)	Social Stories: Scripts explaining that "losing is part of the game."
Secondary/Middle	Navigating Nuance	Literal Thinking (Difficulty with sarcasm/slang)	Visual Cards: Direct instruction on common social expressions.
Transition/High School	Workplace Conduct	Difficulty with non-verbal feedback (Eye contact/Tone)	Video Self-Modeling: Recording the student to help them self-evaluate.
Young Adult	Professional Independence	Social Exhaustion / Sensory Sensitivity	Sensory Audits: Identifying "quiet zones" in the workplace or college.