STAR® CURRICULUM

Strategies for Teaching Based on Autism Research® (STAR) is an educational curriculum developed specifically for students on the autism spectrum. It is used by school districts across the country, including many Autism Support Classrooms in the School District of Philadelphia.

Ages of intervention: Preschool-Elementary School

Delivery: Schools, Special education teachers

Description: STAR is a research based, comprehensive curriculum based on the principles of Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA). It is a manualized system. Children are assessed before the program is implemented, lesson plans are selected, data is gathered, and the individual student’s progress is measured. Strategies used in STAR have been independently researched and shown to be effective for teaching children on the autism spectrum.

STAR incorporates developmentally sequenced learning programs across 6 content areas:

1. Functional routines
2. Spontaneous language
3. Receptive language
4. Expressive language
5. Pre-academic concepts
6. Play and social skills

Skills are taught through 3 instructional methods: Discrete Trial Training (DTT), Pivotal Response Training® (PRT), and teaching functional routines. These teaching techniques are all designed to help children learn new skills, increase communication, and advance independence and adaptive (or self-help) skills. During DTT, component skills are systematically taught and reinforced using a
token board system. During PRT, skills are developed in context, and skills are naturally reinforced. During functional routines training, practical skills are rehearsed.

Through STAR, learning builds on itself and is naturally reinforced through the classroom routines. For example, a student learns the sequence for snack time. He counts out the napkins and cups for those present that day (a skill learned during DTT), and then asks each classmate what he would like for snack (using social awareness, a skill taught during PRT). Visual supports are often used, including visual schedules and choice boards.

The 3-tiered curriculum can be adapted to the child’s level:

- Level 1 teaches children how to label and make requests, how to follow simple routines, and beginning play skills. It is for children with little language and for those who have difficulty following directions. These children do not typically interact with other children.
- Level 2 helps children expand language, make multi-word verbal requests, answer “wh” questions, and learn simple functional classroom routines. It is for children who are able to follow one-step directions and have at least one word. Level 2 builds on the progress children made from level 1. These children may prefer to play alone, but they can sit with other children, can share materials, and are beginning to take turns under the direction of a teacher.
- Level 3 builds on previously learned skills. These children are ready to expand their vocabulary and learn concepts such as the use of pronouns (he, she, me, etc.) and prepositions (on top of, in front of, next to). These children learn beginning addition and subtraction and are able to generalize their knowledge of routines by applying these functional activities at different locations, at different times. Level 3 is for children who request with more than one word, can read some sight words, and can follow directions and carry out routines with supports from a visual schedule.

Related Articles:

- [Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA)](#)
- [Autism Support in Philadelphia Elementary Schools](#)
- Functional Skills
- Speech, Language, and Communication
- Discrete Trial Training
- Pivotal Response Treatment® (PRT)
- The Importance of Data in Measuring Progress
- Autism Support in Philadelphia Elementary Schools

Additional Resources:

- STAR Curriculum, Instructional Plans, Teaching Materials, and Training Information

The Center for Autism Research and The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia do not endorse or recommend any specific person or organization or form of treatment. The information included within the CAR Autism Roadmap & trade; and CAR Resource Directory & trade; should not be considered medical advice and should serve only as a guide to resources publicly and privately available. Choosing a treatment, course of action, and/or a resource is a personal decision, which should take into account each individual's and family's particular circumstances.