



Integrating Therapies into the Classroom

A young child with special needs may require the services of one or more therapists who help them develop their language or bodies. Therapists who work with a child in your classroom may include a speech/language therapist, an occupational therapist, and a physical therapist.

- A speech/language therapist helps a child improve speech, language, and oral motor skills, such as feeding.
- An occupational therapist helps a child develop and improve fine motor skills such as holding a crayon, and self-help skills such as eating with a spoon.
- A physical therapist helps a child improve gross motor skills, such as crawling, walking, climbing.

What is Integrated Therapy?

For many years, these therapists have worked one-on-one with the children in a special therapy room or other settings away from the classroom. In recent years, however, teachers, family members, and even the children themselves have seen many benefits in having the therapy move right into the classroom! This approach is called integrated therapy.

Integrated therapy takes place when therapy services are provided in the classroom in the presence of or with other children. The therapist continues to work directly with the child, but also provides consultation to the classroom staff. Integrated therapy works best when parents, teachers, and therapists collaborate to develop goals and interventions that help the child enjoy the natural routines and activities of the classroom. This means that the goals they are working on with the child are truly *functional*. For example, rather than working with a child in the therapy room on snapping pants, the therapist shows the teacher how to assist the child to snap his pants as a part of the regular toileting routine.

Benefits of Integrated Therapy

Integrated therapy

- provides many opportunities for the child to practice new skills in naturally occurring activities or interactions.
- prevents disruptions in the child's daily routine.
- prevents times when the child is removed from the presence of his or her peers.
- allows teachers to observe therapists using techniques and to learn new approaches for developing and improving the child's skills throughout the day.
- allows therapists to observe the child during classroom routines which leads to developing goals that are useful and interesting to the child.
- encourages collaboration among parents, classroom staff, and therapists to develop useful goals to address the child's needs.
- provides opportunities for teachers to get new ideas for inclusive activities.

Suggestions

If you have a child in your classroom who receives speech/language, occupational, or physical therapy, you may want to consider these following suggestions.

If the child's therapy takes place outside the classroom

- Find out if there is anything the therapist would like you to do in the classroom to carry through with what is going on in therapy.
- Find out from the parents if the child has ever had therapy delivered while the child was in the classroom, or if they are interested in thinking about ways the therapy could occur without removing the child from the ongoing classroom activities. For example, if the child is usually taken to a separate room for therapy, talk with the family and therapist about whether one or two of the child's friends could go sometimes.

If the family or therapist is considering integrated therapy

- Find out if the therapist needs a special place in the room to conduct therapy.
- Find out what special equipment the therapist uses. Does he or she need to store some of it in or near the classroom?
- What happens if the other children approach the therapist while he or she is working with the child?
- Is there anything you can do to prepare for the therapy?
- Are there activities you can carry out within the classroom routine throughout the week to support the goals of therapy?
- Are there activities you can plan that the therapist can join? ■

Reference

Grabowski, K. (1992). *Best practices for therapy in preschool settings*. Unpublished manuscript.