

# Occupational Therapy Guide

*Towards inclusive schools for autistic students*



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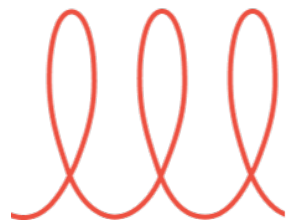
General information

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<https://communautesinclusives.com/projets/pour-des-ecoles-inclusives/>

## To access the tools to which we refer in this guide

[https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1pCf1OSm6T4Otj-D8m4nJqzk7q--P7S\\_8?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1pCf1OSm6T4Otj-D8m4nJqzk7q--P7S_8?usp=sharing)

\*\*\* Please note that most of the tools are in French only. If you would like to have access to certain tools in English, please let us know and we will see what is possible.

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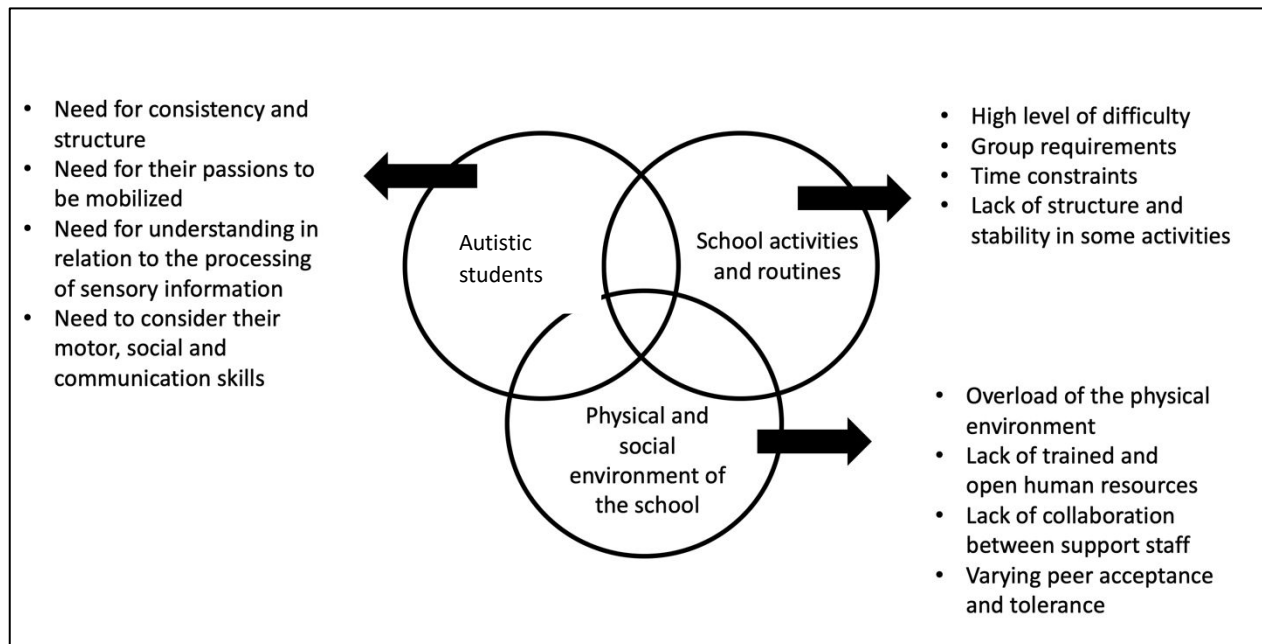
## Table of contents

Introduction .....	3
What is <i>Towards inclusive schools for autistic students</i> ? .....	6
What is necessary to implement <i>Towards inclusive schools for autistic students</i> ? .....	7
Needs analysis .....	9
Focus on inclusive activities and environments .....	12
Team coaching .....	17
Individual coaching .....	21
How can parents get involved in the implementation of <i>Towards inclusive schools for autistic students</i> ? .....	24
Conclusion .....	32
References .....	33

## Introduction

The Conseil supérieur de l'éducation recommends striving for **inclusive education**, to support a wide variety of learners upfront rather than providing case-by-case accommodations (2017). This instance also advocates for **universal prevention** to support the well-being of children (Conseil supérieur de l'éducation, 2020). However, the research team found that currently, schools do not seem to be adapted to the needs and strengths of autistic students. Focus groups with school personnel highlighted the **mismatch** between the common needs and strengths of autistic students, the physical and social environment of the school, and the school's routines and activities (Grandisson et al., 2020). This is illustrated in the figure below.

**Figure 1: Synthesis of the needs of autistic students and the characteristics of school environments and activities that impede student participation**



Adapted from Grandisson et al. (2020, p. 36).

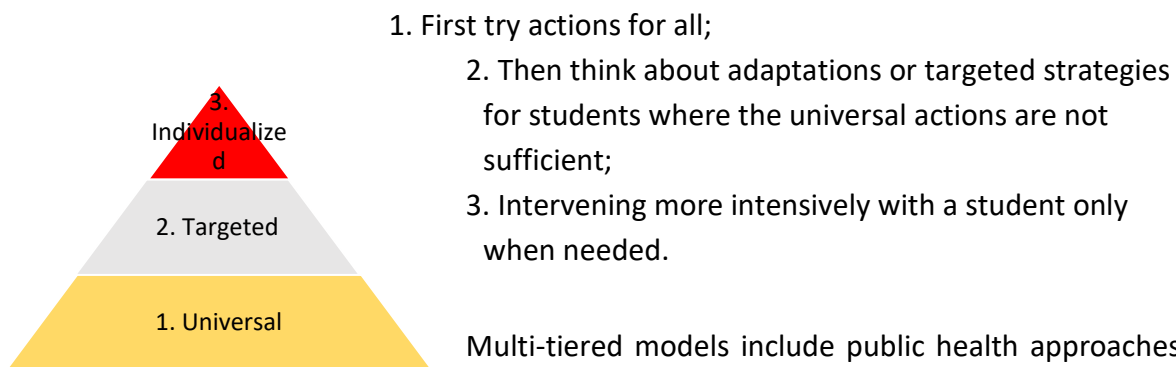
Since the school is not sufficiently designed for the needs of autistic students, it is not surprising that it is more difficult for them to participate in many of the activities that take place there (Grandisson et al., 2020) and that school personnel working with them are at greater risk of burnout and low self-efficacy (Cappe et al., 2016). In general, the concerns of the school personnel involved in the research project were related to **crises, independence, anxiety** and low **motivation** among some autistic students at school (Grandisson et al., 2020). The team found that the challenges of autistic students face are **as much in the classroom as they are outside of it**, i.e., during transitions, meals, recess, and at daycare. These challenges involve a **variety of**

**support staff** including, but not limited to, homeroom teachers, specialist teachers, early childhood educators, and special education technicians.

*For schools that include autistic students* was developed as part of a research project to propose a way for occupational therapists to support the participation of autistic students and their peers. This required several steps. Throughout the process, the team relied on existing scientific data and took into consideration the context of occupational therapy services offered to children with autism in Quebec (Grandisson et al., 2020; Rajotte et al., 2022; Rajotte et al., 2022, in progress).

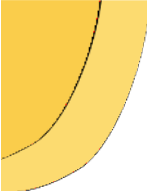
**The practice model developed is based on the following best practices:**

- 1) **Collective solutions** should be favoured to aim for an inclusive education. School should be adapted to the diversity of students attending them. By acting on the barriers to learning, schools promote the development of the full potential of each individual according to their aptitudes and areas of interest (Conseil supérieur de l'éducation, 2017).
- 2) **Multi-tiered intervention models** should be deployed in schools.



Multi-tiered models include public health approaches, especially when the focus is on the well-being of all students, like in the [Every moment counts](#) initiative (Bazyk et al., 2018). They also include response to intervention (RTI) which puts the focus on learning like in [Partnering for Change](#) (Camden et al., 2021; Missiuna et al., 2015; VanderKaay et al., 2021).

- 3) **Coaching approaches** should be used to build the skills of school support staff (Bazyk et al., 2018; Britton, 2013; Graham et al., 2020; Hui et al., 2016; Missiuna et al., 2012; Wilson and Harris, 2018). Coaching is “a strategy for adult learning in which the coach encourages the person being coached to reflect on his or her actions to determine their effectiveness and develop a plan to refine and use those actions in immediate or future situations” (Loose translation, Rush and Shelden, 2011, p. 8). The team relied on *Occupational performance coaching* (OPC; Graham et al., 2020).
- 4) **Best practices in autism** should be mobilized and adapted (National Autism Center, 2015). Practices known to be effective in autism were consulted and used to try to identify how



school environments and occupations can better support the participation of autistic students. They have been adapted to the context of a tiered intervention approach.

- 5) **The person-environment-occupation model supports the analysis of the characteristics of occupations and environments that support a person's performance of an activity** (Law et al., 1996). This model suggests analyzing the challenges related to a person's performance in an occupation in terms of the match between their characteristics and the characteristics of the occupation and the environment in which the occupation is performed.
- 6) **Criteria for effective teacher professional development activities** clarify how to foster changes in their practice (Desimone, 2009). These criteria include coherence, duration, active learning, collective participation and specific content.

#### **Goals of the Occupational Therapist Guide:**

- Facilitating the implementation of *Towards inclusive schools for autistic students*;
- Provide a collaborative approach for occupational therapists to work with the school team to support the participation of autistic students and their peers in all school life activities.

The guide describes the prerequisites for implementing *Towards inclusive schools for autistic students*, as well as its essential modalities. Examples are also provided for inspiration. This guide was developed by the *Towards inclusive schools for autistic students*' research team from the contributions of 23 occupational therapists who participated in training and community of practice meetings in 2021-2022. These occupational therapists have helped clarify how the practice model can be used in various contexts. Through individual reflections and subgroup discussions, occupational therapists shared key challenges encountered in implementing the practice model and solutions to address them. They also shared some of their successes. The research team synthesized the ideas that emerged and integrated them into this guide.

## What is *Towards inclusive schools for autistic students*?





It is a **practice model for occupational therapy** that proposes collaborative work with a variety of school support staff (ex.: homeroom or specialist teachers, early childhood educators, special education technicians).

### Aim of collaborative work in *Towards inclusive schools for autistic students*:

Collaboration to **co-create even more inclusive activities, routines, and environments** that better support the full participation and well-being of **autistic students and their peers** in all activities of school life.

### How does the occupational therapist intervene?

The following table summarizes the four modalities included in the practice model. The explanations of these modalities and their evaluation are available in the article by [Rajotte and collaborators \(2022\)](#).

Modalities	How is the modality implemented?
<b>Needs analysis</b> 	Starting with the school's priority needs <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Where are the greatest challenges for autistic students?</li><li>• Is it in structured educational activities, in transitions, in play and unstructured activities or in meals and snacks?</li></ul>
<b>Focus on inclusive activities and environments</b> 	Focus on creating more inclusive activities, routines and environments <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• How can activities and routines be adapted to support the functioning of everyone, including autistic students?</li><li>• How can environments be adapted?</li></ul>
<b>Team coaching</b> 	Coaching with a team of school support staff motivated to work together to overcome challenges <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What is the common goal of this diverse team of school personnel who are involved in the daily lives of one or more autistic students? What challenge do they want to overcome together?</li><li>• What strategies can they share?</li></ul>
<b>Individual coaching</b> 	Coaching tailored to the needs of each individual (meetings, observations in real contexts, jointly planned and facilitated activities, modelling) <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• How does this support staff want to be supported?</li><li>• How can they implement the desired changes?</li></ul>

## What is necessary to implement *Towards inclusive schools for autistic students*?

To be able to implement the 4 essential modalities of *Towards inclusive schools for autistic students*, occupational therapists **need** to rely on:

- **Committed administrators and school personnel who are motivated** to work together with the occupational therapist to adapt their schools to meet the needs of a greater diversity of students.
  - It is also important that school personnel spend **time** with the occupational therapist when the children are present, but occasionally when they are not.
  - **Schools with multiple autistic students**, whether in regular or specialized classrooms, and with administrators who are committed to supporting their participation and well-being in school, may be good places to implement this type of practice model.
- **Sustained presence in the school over an extended period of time**, for example, one or two days per week over an entire school year.
  - **Regular and predictable contact** with school support staff allows for the development of a trusting relationship and an understanding of the culture of the school attended by autistic students, whether they are in a regular class, a specialized class or a specialized school.
  - Sustained presence in the school promotes **frequent interactions** between school support staff and the occupational therapist to support the learning and implementation of new practices (Rajotte et al., 2022).
  - It is suggested that **formal** meetings be scheduled, while leaving room for spontaneity and also using **informal** meetings (ex.: brief but frequent meetings).

### Reported Challenge

A large portion of the occupational therapists coached in 2021-2022 reported not having enough time in each school to deploy the modalities effectively.

*I think it's not enough [...] once every three weeks, it doesn't work.*

Despite the reported challenge, occupational therapists shared several ideas to try to be more present and to have regular contact with support staff.



- **Solution 1: Advocating to try to increase the intensity of services.**
  - **Promote the role of occupational therapists** to educational services staff, school administrators, teachers and professionals... and encourage them to advocate with you.
    - **Tool:** See the **article by Camden et al., 2021** in the [Reading notes document](#)
  - **Inform parents** of what is being done in the classrooms so they can contribute to advocating for the role of the occupational therapist.
  - **Do an annual review:** Record overtime and consultations in a logbook and review it with the administrators to show them what has been done and what other needs have been identified, when planning resources for the following year.
  - **Ask for help from allies** such as teachers you have worked with or parents.
- **Solution 2: Prioritize instead of spreading yourself too thin.**
  - **Target needs at the beginning of the year** and prioritize areas of greater **concern in the school's routine**; group teachers with similar needs together.
  - **Prioritize** certain schools or cycles to have a greater impact when planning for the year.
  - Plan **flexible blocks** in the year for each grade level to reach as many students as possible and allow occupational therapists to be seen in classrooms.
- **Solution 3: Plan, while remaining flexible.**
  - Plan at least one fixed time slot with support staff per day cycle (free slot to be planned as you go along for the consulting and coaching role).
  - **Offer availability** for teachers if possible at the end of classes and lunch; use recess or teachers' free periods; in preschool, use nap time or the end of a day that ends earlier.
  - **Save some free time** for short, more spontaneous meetings.
- **Solution 4: Use technology to interact, even asynchronously.**
  - Use **Teams** with support staff when it is not possible to be on site.
  - Send **video clips** or **emails**.
  - Use Booking to **make appointments** (post available time slots).
- **Solution 5: Be part of the school's activities.**
  - Participate in **social activities** and have lunch with the school team.
  - See students and support staff in **settings other** than the classroom (special activities, recess, lunch, supervision) to identify needs.
  - **Circulate regularly throughout the school** to create connections with teachers who are less spontaneous in requesting services.

## Needs analysis



### What is it?

The purpose of the needs analysis is to **identify priorities** related to the **challenges of participation for autistic students and their peers**; it allows school support staff to share their needs in order to establish a **common goal**, in accordance with their respective values and knowledge. Then, it makes it possible to **personalize this goal** to the reality of each support staff, to specify their goal with the group of students they are working with.

### Why is it important?

Needs analysis is linked to the criteria of effective professional development activities related to the consistency of content, goals and activities with the aspirations, knowledge and beliefs of support staff (Desimone, 2009). It allows working with school support staff on what matters most to them, on what can make a difference in their daily lives with autistic students. In this sense, it allows us to understand:

- Priority needs of the school to improve participation of autistic students;
- School support staffs' concerns and their individualized needs;
- The current situation and the desired situation.

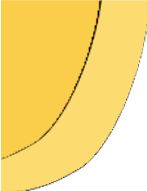
**What to consider?** To target the type of activity that will be **prioritized** at first, support staff are asked to consider:

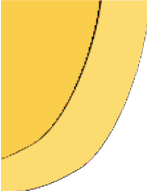
- 1) the **importance of the challenges** experienced by autistic students and their peers.
- 2) **the impacts** these have on their daily lives and those of their students.

### What are the ways to facilitate the implementation of the needs analysis?

The needs analysis is carried out in a **dynamic and continuous way** by combining actions with support staff and with a team of support staff. The following steps can be taken. Tools are provided to guide you, as well as examples shared by the occupational therapists coached in 2021-2022. This modality, like the others, can be achieved in different ways. Here are some ideas.

- 1- **Based on the four types of activities:** As a first step, it is suggested to seek the perspective of school support staff on the types of activities in which autistic students and their peers appear to experience challenges in terms of participation. School life activities have been grouped into **four types of activities** that can be challenging for students. These groups were created to promote teamwork among a variety of support staff.

- 
- **Structured educational activities:** tasks performed alone or in a group, in response to the adult's instructions and expectations. Structured educational activities can take place in a variety of settings such as the classroom, gym or daycare. Here is an explanatory video for this type of activity: [Structured educational activities](#).
  - **Play and unstructured activities:** playing alone or with peers during free periods in the schoolyard, classroom or daycare. These activities are an integral part of school life and are a great time for children to socialize, use their energy, take a break and play. Here is an explanatory video for this type of activity: [Play and unstructured activities](#).
  - **Transitions and hygiene:** switching from one activity to another, moving in the hallway, dressing, toileting, etc. Transitions are present in everyday school life. They require the ability to follow instructions, respect rules and maintain appropriate behaviour. Hygiene activities are part of the transitions and they allow better collective cohabitation, since being clean can be a facilitator in maintaining social relationships with other children. Here is an explanatory video for this type of activity: [Transitions and hygiene](#).
  - **Meals and snacks:** eating, interacting with others, managing personal belongings, in the cafeteria or in the classroom. This includes managing the lunchbox and snacks, eating the food, maintaining appropriate appearance and social behaviour while eating, socializing with peers. Here is an explanatory video for this type of activity: [Meals and snacks](#).
- 2- **Introducing the project:** This can be done through a formal meeting or informal exchanges, sharing information with a video clip or with a document introducing *Towards inclusive schools for autistic students*.
- You can use the [project presentation document](#).
  - You can record a video to introduce yourself as an occupational therapist and to present the inclusive school model. Incorporate reflective questions to get school support staff to start on a path related to their needs. For example: "In what activities do autistic students encounter the most challenges? Is it comparable with the challenges of their peers?"
- 3- **Getting school support staff to reflect, individually, on the participation of autistic students and their peers:** This is to identify everyone's priorities and concerns before the group meeting.
- You can complete p. 4 to 12 of the [School personnel handbook](#) or the [Google sheet questionnaire for support staff](#).
  - You can also create a short online questionnaire to collect each support staff's perception of: 1) the most difficult activities for autistic students; 2) the most



difficult activities for their peers; 3) their priorities; 4) the strategies they are already using.

- If time permits, it is possible to go more in-depth in the support staffs' reflections with a [more comprehensive questionnaire about their perceptions of student participation](#).

**4- Organizing an initial team coaching meeting with a group of motivated support staff:**

This allows targeting a common goal, conducting a collaborative analysis of student participation around that goal, and establishing an action plan.

- You can use the [Team coaching model](#) to do the needs analysis. This tool suggests how to get support staff to share the activities they have prioritized. It also allows you to invite each of them to explain why they chose to prioritize a particular type of activity.
- You can use flexible formats for the meeting (time, duration, physical or virtual location).
- You can start with smaller teams as needed, including support staff around one or two classes for example.

**5- Organizing an initial individual coaching meeting:** This is to clarify how the activity prioritized in the team coaching applies to the specific context of each school support staff. This meeting also provides an opportunity to establish an action plan for each individual.

- You can use the [Individual coaching model](#) to do the needs analysis.

**6- By observing school support staff in real-life contexts:** This will enhance your understanding of the current situation and the elements that may promote or impede student engagement.

- You can use the [Observation and interview chart](#) to guide you through this step.

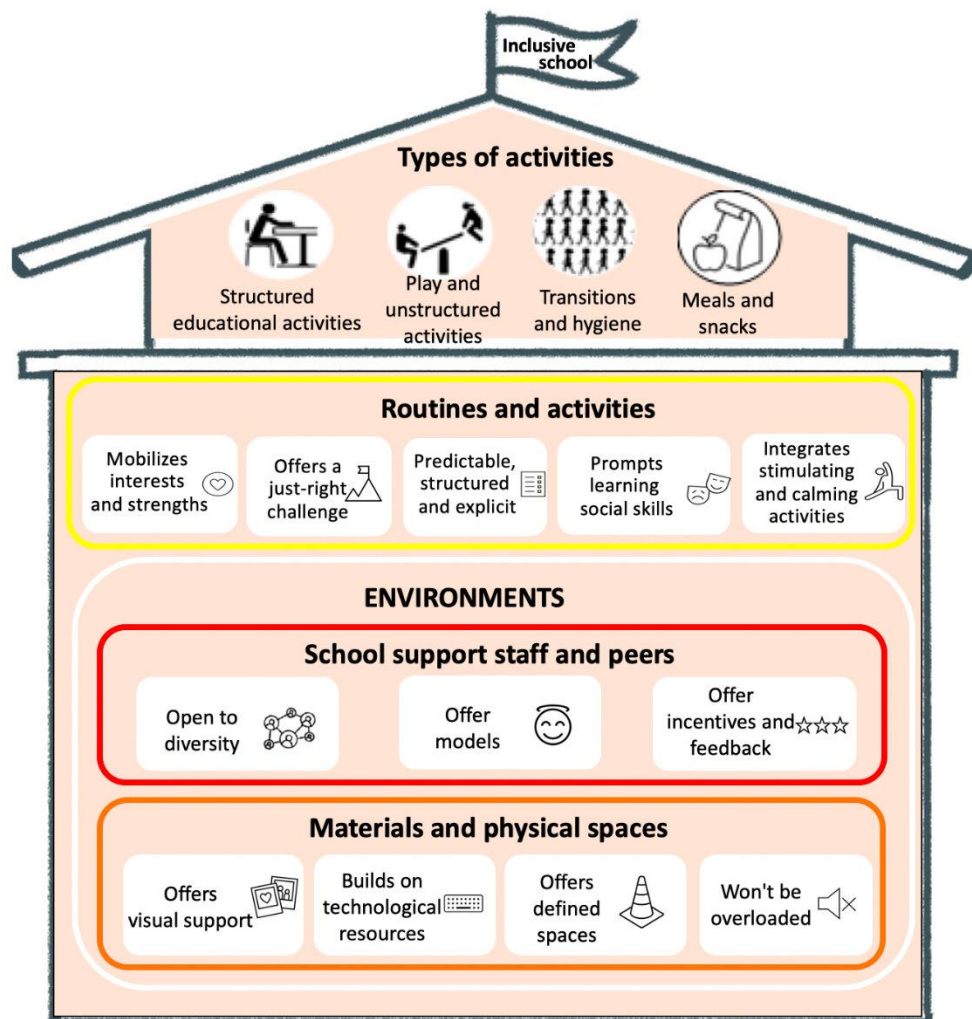
## Focus on inclusive activities and environments



### What is it?

This modality identifies the specific contribution of the occupational therapist in supporting the participation and well-being of autistic students and their peers at school. The inclusive school model was developed by the team to clarify the characteristics of environments, activities and routines that can support the participation and well-being of autistic students and their peers (Rajotte et al., 2023, in progress). The model emphasizes the need for a better match between the needs of autistic students, the characteristics of the occupations performed, and the physical and social environments in which they take place.

Figure 2 : Inclusive school model



Adapted from Rajotte et al. (2023, in progress): translated into French. *\*This model is currently under review.*  
*An updated version of this document will be available later when this model is published.*

The model specifies the focus of occupational therapy interventions. It suggests focusing on **modifying activities, routines and environments** rather than trying to get the student to adapt or conform to them. In this regard, occupational therapists mentioned:

*It is maybe a little more involved for the support staff to start working on themselves, rather than on their physical environment. So it may be preferable to start with the physical environment and routines.*

*I'm really trying to reframe by using the terms "inclusive classroom," "inclusive environment" [...] Often the request is focused on one student, but I ask myself: "How is it going with the other students? How could the classroom be more inclusive?"*

*As I observed, I was amazed to see how much the student with autism and their peers were told what to do and had bad behavior highlighted. Although it is obvious, few interactions were devoted to highlighting their*

## Why is it important?

### Why focus on inclusive activities and environments?

- This modality responds to the need to have specific content for the professional development of teachers (Desimone, 2009).
- The Conseil supérieur de l'éducation (2017) recommends striving for inclusive education, that is supportive of a wide variety of learners rather than providing case-by-case accommodations.
- They also recommend **universal prevention** to promote the well-being of children (Conseil supérieur de l'éducation, 2020).
- Currently, there is a **mismatch** between the needs of autistic students, the characteristics of school-based occupations, as well as the physical and social environments (Grandisson et al., 2020).
- Occupational therapists are well equipped to support school personnel in promoting student participation in important daily activities by optimizing the match between the strengths and challenges of students, the characteristics of the occupations and the environment in which they take place.

## How is it possible to create inclusive activities and environments?

The occupational therapist should seek to collaborate with a team of school personnel to create inclusive environments and activities that support the full participation of autistic students and their peers. The occupational therapist can **support** school personnel in their **analysis of the elements of school environments, as well as routines and activities** that support or impede the participation and well-being of autistic students and their peers.

The focus on inclusive activities and environments **CONTINUES THROUGHOUT** the implementation of *Towards inclusive schools for autistic students*. This modality is integrated into all stages of the clinical approach. It can be carried out by:

1. **Presenting the project:** Here you specify that you will focus on modifications to activities and environments from a universal perspective to benefit the greatest number of students.
  - This step can be done using the [project presentation document](#).
  - You can also do it in a video clip or verbally during a meeting.
2. **Facilitating team coaching meetings:** With the support staff team, you can conduct a collaborative analysis of student participation by focusing on the characteristics of the environment and the activities and routines that may support or impede the participation of autistic students and their peers in the desired activity.
  - You can use the [Team coaching model](#).
3. **Doing individual coaching:** Here, you can guide the support staff to evaluate which features of the routines, activities, and environment are supportive and which could be improved to promote the participation of autistic students and their peers. You can find strategies with the support staff to act on the characteristics to be improved.
  - You can use p. 13 to 17 of the [School personnel handbook](#). It is a reflection tool, intended for school support staff, about the level of participation of the students they work with in the 4 types of activities.
  - You can use the [Individual coaching model](#).

### Inspiring example

An occupational therapist coaches a teacher who wants to **act on the physical and social environments** of her classroom to promote the participation of all students. The physical environment is very busy, so here are some examples of suggested strategies to address this challenge:

- Educate school support staff and students on the impact of noise on certain students;
- Integrate a noise scale into the environment;
- Arrange a quiet area in the classroom that is accessible to all students and ensure that the use of this quiet space is clarified with the support staff;
- Analyze circulation areas to strategically place students according to their needs;
- Reorganize desks into islands;
- Rotate the material.

4. **Observing students in real context:** These observations can be made in any environment such as the classroom, changeroom, playground and daycare.
- You can use the [Observation and interview chart](#) to help you focus on inclusive activities and environments.

### Inspiring example

Based on the observations made by an occupational therapist and a teacher in the changerooms, solutions emerged on how to **act on the physical environment** and make it better adapted to students with more needs:

- Place these students in a different area of the changeroom (differentiation);
- Allow them to get dressed first (in the classroom or on another floor);
- Establish a schedule for using the changerooms in smaller groups;
- Create a dressing area and a waiting area.

5. **Sharing clips on inclusive activities and environments:** These can be shared with school support staff, parents, students and administrators.
- You can use the video clips on [characteristics of routines and activities](#), [characteristics of the social environment](#) as well as the [characteristics of the physical environment](#).



6. **Creating educational initiatives:** The goal here is to educate students, school support staff, parents and administrators about the role that everyone has to play in making a school more inclusive.

- You can organize activities with groups of parents and groups of students.
- You can send messages, emails or informative video clips.

**Inspiring examples to act on the social environment**

- 1- As part of autism awareness month, an occupational therapist organized several initiatives at a school to work on inclusion with school support staff and peers of autistic students. In addition to creating a t-shirt, the following activities were held: a lunch meeting pairing teachers from the regular divisions with those who work with autistic students; a day when the mainstream students come to the special classes to educate them about the differences, a box to submit questions; photos of autistic students and their interests posted in the hallways to help students identify similarities.
- 2- An educational activity suggested by an occupational therapist is the "compliment chair". Over the course of the year, each student sits in the "compliment chair" once and other students will give them compliments.

7. **Providing training on the characteristics of inclusive activities and environments:** This can be given to school support staff, parents and administrators.
- You can use the [Training model \(PowerPoint presentation\)](#) and [Training model \(explanations in Word\)](#). You can adapt them to your needs.

## Team coaching



### What is it?

Team coaching focuses on the interactions between team members, a **dialogue** involving **reflection, learning and action** that takes place over time. Team coaching differs from group coaching in that it involves members pursuing a **common goal**, a common vision. Team coaching is based on discussion to support action; it is a reflective and collaborative process.

### What are the characteristics of team coaching? (Translated and adapted from Britton, 2013)

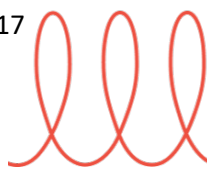
Is	Is not
Based on conversation	Only experiential
Focused on the goal related to the work context	Disconnected from everyday work
Focused on strengths	Focused on what's going wrong
Co-created and chosen by the team	Imposed on the team
Concerns the entire team	Concerns only one member

### What is the role of the occupational therapist in team coaching?

- Organizing and leading meetings;
- Asking questions, highlighting ideas from school support staff, what worked and what could be done;
- Supporting their reflections on needs and expectations and on the ideal situation;
- Directing towards solutions.

### Some strategies for team coaching (Britton, 2013)

- Providing the team with spaces for reflection;
- Providing a non-judgmental space for discussion;
- Listening;
- Promoting self-determination;
- Allowing time for support staff in the group to plan;
- Paying attention to the processes and dynamics of the group;
- Planning activities and questions to be addressed while being flexible;
- Using visual support.



## Why is it important?

Team coaching creates opportunities for collaboration among school support staff involved in the daily lives of autistic students by sharing effective strategies and finding solutions to challenges. It meets the criteria for effective collective participation (Desimone, 2009).

## What are the ways to facilitate the implementation of team coaching?

1. **Reflecting on the diversity of people that should be included in the team coaching:** The goal is to get support staff to come together for a common objective. These support staff may include the homeroom teacher and specialist teachers, early childhood educators, special education technicians, and attendants for students with disabilities. They can be at different levels (ex: 1st, 2nd, 3rd grade) if their concerns and needs are similar. Team coaching can be done with up to 9 support staff if necessary.
  - You can use existing support staff groups to meet with all teachers at the same time (preschool team, classroom team, sector team, school team, multi-meeting, clinical meetings with teams). This allows concerns to be heard, needs to be expressed and common concerns to be identified.
  - In the case of small schools, it is possible to do team coaching with support staff from different schools who have similar concerns and realities if needed. To facilitate sharing, invite at least 2 people from the same school for coaching. It is preferable to do these sessions virtually.

### Inspiring example

In one school, the first-grade teachers ask for a lot of help from the occupational therapist for participation difficulties that they associate with sensory issues. Several interventions had been put in place at the preschool level, but there was no transfer. Doing team coaching related to the use of sensory strategies to promote participation with preschool and first-grade teachers, as well as special education technicians involved in the class allows for a transfer from the end of the year to the beginning of the year to support them in the integration of these strategies.

2. **Scheduling team coaching meetings in advance:** The goal is to plan meetings in advance in everyone's agenda, while remaining flexible.
  - Be realistic in the frequency and duration of meetings to avoid overburdening school support staff.
  - Start small, such as an hour at lunch or 30 minutes after school. You can also take advantage of meeting opportunities that are already scheduled.

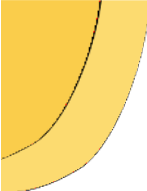
- If needed, you can use Teams to meet the needs of multiple schools at the same time and to adjust goals and expectations.
  - Involve school administrators to free up school personnel for short, more frequent team meetings. Follow up with the school administrators in between team coaching sessions.
3. **Facilitating the initial team coaching meeting:** It will begin by prioritizing, as a group, the type of activity in which autistic students and their peers are experiencing challenges and which activities the team wants to make changes in. Next, a collaborative analysis will take place to explore current and desired student participation, barriers and levers to participation, and the needs of the support staff. Finally, the coaching participants will establish an action plan (planning individual coaching sessions, planning training activities, actions to be taken).
- You can use the [Team coaching model](#). This model is based on the *Occupational Performance Coaching* approach (OPC; Graham et al., 2020).
  - You can co-develop a visual memory aid as a team so that everyone remembers what was discussed during team coaching (ex.: challenges encountered and strategies identified). No pressure here, the memory aid doesn't have to be pretty.

#### Inspiring example

CO-OP, an intervention approach that focuses on the person and the task, has been used, in an adapted way, with a group of students in a classroom. The students and their teacher were involved in finding solutions to a challenge experienced during their routine (ex.: challenge with the routine at the end of the day). The following steps were taken:

1. Explaining CO-OP to the children;
2. Discussing the challenge experienced during the routine (chaotic, lots of noise, bickering);
3. Establishing a goal for the routine;
4. Establishing a plan with the students' and teacher's ideas;
5. Implementing the plan
6. Evaluating whether the plan worked and whether adjustments are needed with the students and teacher

\* A visual memory aid that illustrates the identified strategies can be developed with students and the class team and reused as a visual reminder on a daily basis.

- 
4. **Facilitating follow-up meetings:** Here, participants will revalidate the goal set at the first meeting and evaluate the actions taken. Together they will analyze whether further modifications are needed and explore how the strategies can be generalized to other contexts.
    - You can use the [Team coaching model](#). This model is based on the *Occupational Performance Coaching* approach (OPC; Graham et al., 2020).
  5. **Planning for broader sharing moments:** The goal is to share with other sub-teams and other support staff in the school, formally or informally, to see if there are other needs among other support staff.

#### Inspiring example

During the pilot project, the occupational therapist participated in a 5 to 7 with the school team where the support staff were able to share their concerns with their school colleagues, as well as their ideas for making their school more inclusive.

6. **Motivating the team to participate in team coaching:** The occupational therapists coached in 2021-2022 reported that a team of support staff motivated to make changes in their school greatly facilitates the sharing of strategies and solutions in a team coaching setting.
  - You can present the project as a small pilot project with only a few support staff. Offer to do a trial while including the possibility of adapting, remain humble.
  - Promote the added value of team coaching to the administrators and support staff. For example, promote support staff sharing expertise and strengths, the creation of a space for sharing around common issues, the use of the same strategies within the team, the benefits of investing time to improve daily life, and the contribution of team coaching in creating concrete and sustainable changes in the school.
  - Start with the expectations and experiences of the support staff, let them choose the topics to be discussed.
  - Introduce team coaching before the end of the school year so that support staff can reflect on their needs for the following year.

## Individual coaching



### What is it?

Individual coaching is coaching offered to the school support staff by the occupational therapist. This coaching allows the support staff to reflect on their context in order to identify the key elements that promote or impede the participation of the students they work with. It also allows them to develop an action plan and strategies, consistent with their needs and concerns, to meet the challenges they have targeted. Individual coaching can include:

- ⇒ discussions;
- ⇒ participant observations to anchor coaching in concrete needs and context;
- ⇒ planning and experimenting with strategies in pairs (co-intervention);
- ⇒ modelling.

A short interactive interview is scheduled during each meeting to follow up on the action plan related to the characteristics of the inclusive school.

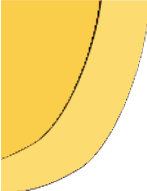
### Why is it important?

Individual coaching promotes the active learning of school support staff as they work with the occupational therapist to find solutions to a concrete challenge in their daily lives. It meets Desimone's criteria of coherence and active learning (2009). It encourages school support staff to be committed to researching, testing and evaluating practices that are more conducive to student engagement. It can also give them confidence and motivation to experiment with new practices while feeling supported.

### What are the ways to facilitate the implementation of individual coaching?

During individual coaching sessions, it is important to validate and personalize the goal by collaboratively analyzing the support staff's contextual participation and producing a detailed action plan.

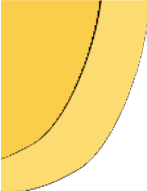
1. **Scheduling individual coaching meetings in advance:** The goal is to plan the meetings in advance in the support staff's agenda, while remaining flexible.
  - You can use a Doodle survey to schedule individual appointments. Set a scheduled reminder for meetings via email.
  - Plan using a "day/cycle" schedule rather than a "day/week" schedule to help organizing individual meetings.

- 
2. **Coaching in different ways that meet the needs of the support staff:** This can be done through individual meetings, discussions, participant observation (formal or informal), planning and experimentation of strategies in pairs or modelling.
- You can use the [Individual coaching model](#) inspired by the *Occupational performance coaching* (OPC; Graham et al., 2020).
  - You can observe the school support staff with the help of the [Observation and interview chart](#) or the [Interview model integrating the Canadian Occupational Performance Measure \(CORM; Law et al., 2005\)](#) and the [Goal attainment scaling \(GAS; Kiresuk et al., 1994\)](#)
  - Support the support staff's analysis by focusing on an activity from the inclusive school model, but do not do it for them.

#### **Inspiring Example**

The teacher requests the assistance of the occupational therapist in organizing the morning routine of a student with autism. She is overwhelmed by what is happening and while observing, the occupational therapist realizes that this is a difficult task for the whole group. She offers support to the teacher and models some strategies such as using a stop sign to get students to listen or playing soft music to calm the group. This gives the teacher a chance to observe the students and take a breather. Then the occupational therapist asks the teacher what she would like to modify.

3. **Building connections with school support staff:** The occupational therapists coached in 2021-2022 mentioned the importance of developing connections with support staff in order to work well with them.
- You can get involved with them, in interventions, in the living environment, sometimes by supervising a class and offering assistance.
  - Take the time to understand the person, to adjust to their personality to promote effective collaboration. For example, if a teacher is uncomfortable with the occupational therapist not taking an expert position, return to that position a bit to gain their confidence, then offer a gradual change.
4. **Documenting the trial of strategies and following up:** With the support staff, you revalidate the goal and evaluate the actions that have been implemented and the progression of student participation in order to adjust the action plan as needed.
- You can use the [Individual coaching model](#) inspired by *Occupational performance coaching* (OPC; Graham et al., 2020).

- 
- You can use the logbook (p. 20 of the [School personnel handbook](#)) or the [Evolving notes model](#).
  - You can create an occupational therapy duotang for the teacher to gather all relevant information and to facilitate monitoring progress.



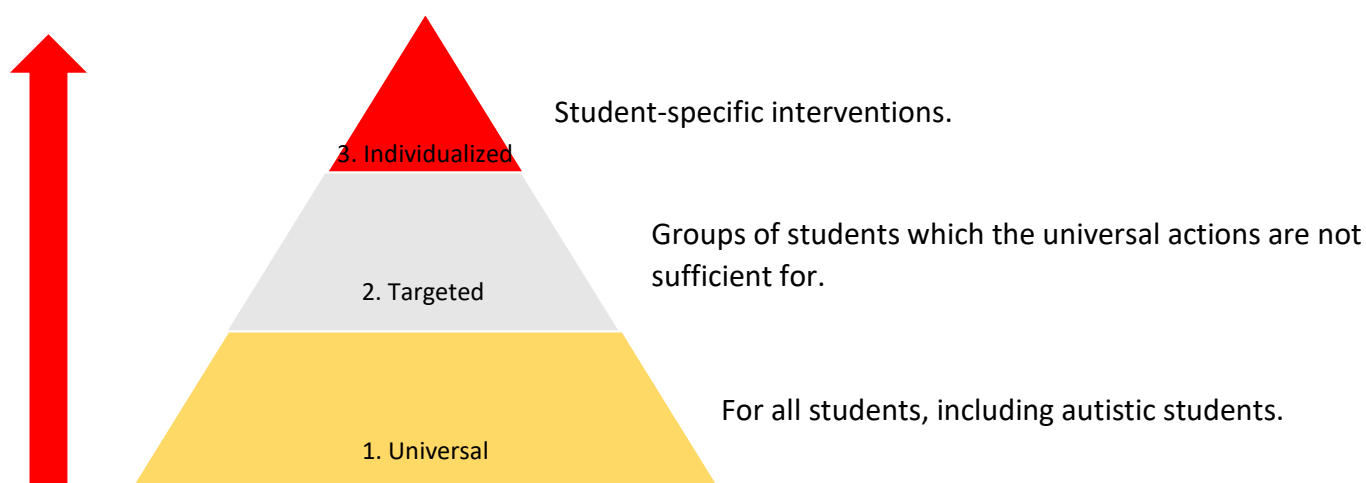
## How can parents get involved in the implementation of *Towards inclusive schools for autistic students*?

Parent involvement in their child's school life is essential to their inclusion (Azad et al., 2021; Kennedy et al., 2022). However, it is important to **ensure that they are not overburdened** and that their needs are appropriately targeted. In order to make the school more inclusive, the parent's role includes **contributing to educating their child about differences**. To do this, they must first be educated about the fact that their child's school includes students with different backgrounds, all with their own strengths and challenges. It is also important that the parent be **informed of the successful strategies** implemented in the school to promote the participation of all students. Here are some ideas for involving parents:

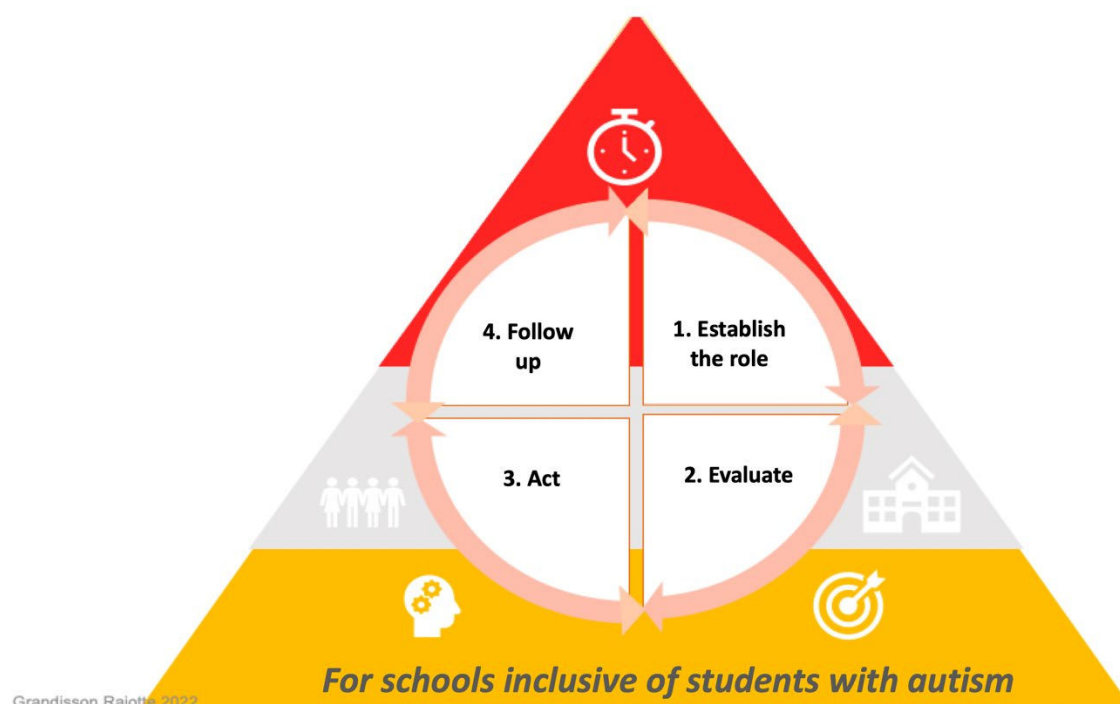
- At the beginning of the year:
  - Communicate the role of the occupational therapist to all parents via email;
  - Tour parents-teachers meetings to introduce the role of the occupational therapist and the practice model;
  - Explain the practice model and the tiered approach in a short video clip.
- At level 1 (universal):
  - Offer training to all parents related to a targeted need in the school, such as independent dressing for outside and changeroom organization;
  - Record a short information clip (e.g., on self-managed lunchboxes) and send it to parents;
  - Send a newsletter to parents with successful strategies to promote homework routines, for example.
  - Informing parents via email when universal interventions are made in their child's classroom.
- At level 2 (targeted):
  - Offer a short virtual training or coaching session to a group of parents who face the same participation challenge with their children.
- At level 3 (individualized):
  - Conduct one or more coaching meetings with the parent and teacher together to address a specific difficulty experienced both at school and at home;
  - Suggest some strategies to integrate at home to work on a specific goal, such as organization on a blank page.

## Updating the clinical approach

When updating the model in the clinical approach, the interventions are first universal: the focus is on inclusive activities and environments for all students. Then, depending on the needs, the interventions will be more and more targeted, always focusing on the modification of environments and activities.



The following diagram and explanations show how to integrate the modalities presented in this guide in four main steps (Grandisson et al. 2020; Grandisson and Rajotte, 2022).



Adapted from Grandisson et al. (2020, p.38); Grandisson and Rajotte (2022)




**1. Establish the role:** An occupational therapist using a tiered model to support the creation of more inclusive activities and environments in order to promote the participation and well-being of all students, including autistic students (Grandisson et al. 2020; Grandisson and Rajotte, 2022).

**Who do I establish my role with?**

- ⇒ School **administrators**
- ⇒ **School personnel**
- ⇒ Students
- ⇒ Parents

**How can I achieve this?**

- ⇒ Giving concrete examples of interventions that I can do in my role (Grandisson et al, 2020);
- ⇒ Giving a proposal for services to offer, then having discussions/exchanges to decide on my mandate and on the way to operate;
- ⇒ Sending emails;
-  ⇒ Through training open to everyone and video clips available to everyone.











Several of the occupational therapists coached in 2021-2022 mentioned that this step was more realistic to do at the beginning of the year while mandates are being discussed and established in each school.

**Tools that can guide you through this step:**

Name of the tool and web link	Description
<a href="#">Presentation document</a>	This tool is a brief description of <i>For schools that include autistic students</i> . You can present it to administrators, school support staff and families.
<a href="#">Reading files index</a>	This tool is an index of summaries of scientific articles related to school-based occupational therapy for autistic students It may be useful in promoting the role of the school-based occupational therapist or a more optimal intensity of service.

2. **Evaluate:** What are the common and priority needs of support staff in the 4 types of activities? What is the current status of participation of autistic students and their peers? What is the desired situation? (Grandisson et al. 2020; Grandisson et Rajotte, 2022)

**How can I achieve this?**

-  ⇒ Sending a **needs analysis** questionnaire to participants in the upcoming team coaching to get them started on reflecting on the participation of students with and without autism (ex: [School personnel handbook](#) p.4 to 12).
-   ⇒ Conducting a **team coaching** session to establish the type of activity that will be prioritized by support staff to best support the participation of autistic students and their peers and to establish an action plan. This session will be **focused on inclusive activities and environments**.
-   ⇒ Doing **individual coaching, focused on inclusive activities and environments**, in order to personalize the goal for each of the support staff. This can take the form of:
  -  • Formal or informal discussions
  -  • Participatory observations to anchor coaching in concrete needs and contexts
  -  • Experimenting with two-person strategies (co-intervention)
  - Co-leading activities
  - Modelling













**Tools that can guide you through this step:**

Name of the tool and web link	Description
<a href="#">School personnel handbook</a> <a href="#">School personnel handbook - fillable PDF</a>	This tool, intended for school support staff, aims to conduct a <b>needs analysis</b> by identifying common challenges faced by their students, exploring the characteristics of an inclusive school and initiating reflection on the school's strengths and areas for improvement related to <b>inclusive activities and environments</b> . The tool is also available as a fillable PDF.
Clips of the 4 main types of activities: <a href="#">Structured educational activities</a> <a href="#">Play and unstructured activities</a> <a href="#">Transitions and hygiene</a> <a href="#">Meals and snacks</a>	These videos clips present the 4 main types of activities in which autistic students and their peers may encounter challenges during the school day. These clips support the <b>needs analysis</b> .

<a href="#">Interview model integrating the Canadian Occupational Performance Measure (CORM; Law et al., 2005) and the Goal attainment scaling (GAS; Kiresuk et al., 1994)</a>	This tool makes it possible to conduct a <b>needs analysis</b> for the support staff by having them identify the main challenges encountered in the classroom related to student participation. The tool also makes it possible to form intervention goals related to these challenges by focusing on <b>inclusive activities and environments</b> .
<a href="#">Observation and interview chart</a>	This tool provides the occupational therapist with a model for observations in the school setting that focuses <b>on inclusive activities and environments</b> . This tool contributes to the support staffs' <b>needs analysis</b> .
<a href="#">Questionnaire for school personnel</a>	This tool is a questionnaire, focused on <b>inclusive activities and environments</b> , that can be filled out by the school support staff themselves to see their perception of their students' level of participation in each of the 4 types of activities. This questionnaire can contribute to the <b>needs analysis</b> .
<a href="#">Google sheet questionnaire for school personnel</a>	This Google sheet, intended for support staff, allows them to identify the strengths and challenges of their students with and without autism in the 4 types of activities. It also makes it possible to prioritize the activities that need intervention. This questionnaire refines the <b>needs analysis</b> by focusing on <b>inclusive activities and environments</b> .
<a href="#">Team coaching model</a> (see first meeting section)	This tool allows you to organize your <b>team coaching</b> meetings by focusing on <b>inclusive activities and environments</b> .
<a href="#">Individual coaching model</a> (see first meeting section)	This tool allows you to organize your <b>individual coaching</b> meetings by focusing on <b>inclusive activities and environments</b> .
<a href="#">Progress notes model</a>	This tool will help you write your evolving notes with sections to check off and sections to write the analysis and the plan.

3. **Act:** With key players in the school to make activities and environments more inclusive. We must focus on developing their skills (Grandisson et al. 2020; Grandisson and Rajotte, 2022).

**How can I achieve this?**

-  ○ Using online clips to present the **types of activities and essential components of an inclusive school** OR providing **training** to school personnel on the characteristics of an inclusive school. 
-   ○ Conducting a **team coaching** session to develop an action plan to better support the participation of a greater diversity of students. This session will be **focused on inclusive activities and environments**.
-   ○ Doing **individual coaching**, focused on **inclusive activities and environments**, with the support staff that are concerned by the targeted problem to guide them in experimenting with new concrete strategies, that are consistent with their context. This can take the form of:
  -  ■ Formal or informal discussions
  -  ■ Participatory observations to anchor coaching in concrete needs and contexts
  -  ■ Experimenting with two-person strategies (co-intervention)
  - Co-leading activities
  - Modelling
-  ○ Providing activities for groups of students or parents to **educate** them on autism and how to be an ally in creating a more inclusive school.
-  ○ Providing a tool/resource bank for school support staff and parents focused on **inclusive activities and environments**.
-  ○ Sending messages to parents and school support staff to **educate** them on the important role everyone has to play in making schools more inclusive.







It is important to act on a goal that is both realistic and measurable.

**Tools that can guide you through this step:**

Name of the tool and web link	Description
Clips on the essential components of inclusive schools: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <a href="#">Characteristics of routines and activities</a></li> <li>○ <a href="#">Characteristics of the social environment</a></li> <li>○ <a href="#">Characteristics of the physical environment</a></li> </ul>	These video clips present the essential components of an inclusive school. These clips can be shown to administrators, school personnel and parents.
<a href="#">Training model (PowerPoint presentation)</a> <a href="#">Training model (explanations in Word)</a>	These 2 documents allow the occupational therapist to provide training on the characteristics of <b>inclusive activities and environments</b> to school the support staff that are interested. It can be adapted to your needs.
<a href="#">Team coaching model</a>	This model allows you to establish an action plan by focusing on <b>inclusive activities and environments</b> during your <b>team coaching</b> meetings.
<a href="#">Individual coaching model</a>	This tool allows you to organize your <b>individual coaching</b> meetings by focusing on <b>inclusive activities and environments</b> .
<a href="#">Progress notes model</a>	This tool will help you write your progress notes with sections to check off and sections to write the analysis and the plan.

4. **Follow up:** To see if the strategies put in place are working, evaluate their impact and make adjustments if necessary. This step also allows support staff to generalize successful strategies to other contexts (Grandisson et al. 2020; Grandisson et Rajotte, 2022).

**How can I achieve this?**

-   Conducting a team **coaching session** to evaluate the action plan and discuss necessary adjustments, if any, related to **inclusive activities and environments**
-   Doing **individual coaching** with the concerned support staff to update the adjustments that have been discussed related **to inclusive activities and environments**.

**Tools that can guide you through this step:**

Name of the tool and web link	Description
<a href="#">Team coaching model</a> (see follow-up meetings section)	This tool allows you to organize your <b>team coaching</b> meetings by focusing on <b>inclusive activities and environments</b> .
<a href="#">Individual coaching model</a> (see follow-up meetings section)	This tool allows you to organize your <b>individual coaching</b> meetings by focusing on <b>inclusive activities and environments</b> .
<a href="#">Progress notes model</a>	This tool will help you write your evolving notes with sections to check off and sections to write the analysis and the plan.
<a href="#">School personnel handbook</a> - p. 5, 7, 9 and 11: Student Participation Scale <a href="#">School personnel handbook - fillable PDF</a>	On the pages mentioned, you will find a scale from 1 to 10 rating the participation of students with and without autism in the 4 types of activities. This scale allows you to track the progress of student participation and assess the efficiency of the strategies implemented.
<a href="#">School personnel handbook</a> – p. 20: School support staff logbook <a href="#">School personnel handbook - fillable PDF</a>	On page 20 of this tool, you will find a logbook for school support staff. It will allow you to document the trial of the strategies discussed during the <b>individual coaching</b> .



You can also reinvest the [Interview model integrating the Canadian Occupational Performance Measure \(COPM; Law et al., 2005\)](#) and the [Goal attainment scaling \(GAS; Kiresuk et al., 1994\)](#) in your follow-up meetings if it was completed in Step 2 (evaluate). This will allow us to measure the impact of the new strategies in place.





## Conclusion

The occupational therapist can support the participation of autistic students at school by:

- Supporting school support staff in creating inclusive environments and activities that support the participation of autistic students and their peers;
- Using a school-based approach integrating collaborative work with a variety of school personnel;
- Using individual and team coaching activities.

This promising model is now in your hands to promote the inclusion and participation of autistic students and their peers by co-creating, with school teams, activities, routines and environments that are even more inclusive. We also encourage you to promote your role and contribution as an occupational therapist to implement concrete and sustainable changes.

Now, it's your turn!

### For more information

Visit the Laboratoire Communautés inclusives website to learn more about this and other ongoing projects:

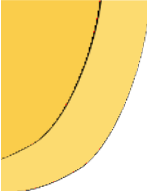
<https://communautesinclusives.com/projets/pour-des-ecoles-inclusives/>

Contact: [marie.grandisson@fmed.ulaval.ca](mailto:marie.grandisson@fmed.ulaval.ca)

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