

About Active Engagement: A Lens for Setting Priorities for Students with Autism



What is Active Engagement?

Step 1: Coming Together



The first step is becoming involved in the shared classroom agenda.

- 1 **Well Regulated** – The child feels generally content, their needs are met and they are available for learning and interaction. When upset, they get over it easily.
- 2 **Productive** – The child is actively participating in an activity, using materials in an appropriate way and including people in those experiences.
- 3 **Socially Connected** – The child notices others by turning or looking toward them, pays attention to the group agenda and participates in the interaction.

Step 2: Keeping Together



The second step is having successful interactions and sharing ideas.

- 4 **Responding to Bids for Interaction** – The child may not understand exactly what is being said, but understands that someone has asked for their attention or for them to do something.
- 5 **Communicating Directly to You** – The child uses gestures, sounds or words to send a message without explicitly being asked. The child uses verbal and nonverbal means to get wants and needs met.
- 6 **Being Flexible** – The child moves easily between actions, activities or materials rather than getting “stuck” on certain objects or ideas. The child accepts the ideas and opinions of others.

Step 3: Working Together



The third step is participating cooperatively and working independently.

- 7 **Generating Creative Ideas** – The child comes up with creative ideas to advocate for themselves, solve problems or share a different plan.
- 8 **Demonstrating Academic Independence** – The child is able to gather and use materials appropriately to work independently and move through each step of an activity on their own.

Why is active engagement so important?

Active engagement means a child is ready to interact and learn, be productive, communicate with those around them, and “hang in” when facing challenges or change. Research shows that children with autism who are actively engaged throughout the school environment have better outcomes relative to social interaction, communication and problem solving.

***Coming together is a beginning.
Keeping together is progress.
Working together is success.***

--- Henry Ford

Active engagement can be supported with the materials and activities already available in the classroom or home including academics, transitions, chores, meals and free time. Holding the bar high for children throughout the day, realizing what adults are doing for students that they can learn to do for themselves, and taking small steps to promote active engagement will have a lasting impact on the student’s social and academic success.

