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Advocating and Educating the Role of Occupational Therapy for Adaptive Swim Lessons Among Children with Autism

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Advocating and Educating the Role of Occupational Therapy for Adaptive Swim Lessons Among Children with Autism

Charlotte Leonard, OTDS; Dr. Zeida Gutierrez, Ph.D., OTR/L and Dr. Jon Edenfield OTD, ORT/L

BACKGROUND

Drowning is the number cause of death for children ages 1-4 and the second leading cause of death for children ages 5-14 (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2022). Children with autism are 160x more likely to drown than their neurotypical peers (Autism Society of Florida, n.d.). Many parents and caregivers put protective layers in place such as locks, gates and fencing. However, children with autism are known to wander from safe spaces. According to the Autism Society of Florida (n.d.) children with autism are naturally drawn to water due to its ability to ease sensory needs. Brenner et al. (2009) states that swim lessons can reduce drownings by 88%.

PROBLEM

It is imperative for children diagnosed with autism to partake in swimming lessons to reduce the risk of drowning incidents. However, not all swim schools accept children with autism due to lack of experience.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this capstone project was to promote and educate individuals on adaptive swim programs from the perspective of occupational therapy. This was accomplished by creating a comprehensive resource to address enrollment, layered protection and financial burdens.

PROJECT OBJECTIVES

- Provide information and promote the concept of adaptive swim classes to the parents and staff of Great Strides Rehabilitation.
- Identify and visit current swim schools in NE Florida to learn about their adaptive swim program.
- Provide educational guidance to adaptive swim schools regarding interventions aimed at addressing sensory and behavioral issues.
- Explain the significance of occupational therapy in this setting.
- Reduce parents and caregiver burden by providing a reliable resource where parents can then enroll their child into adaptive swim lessons.

METHODS

This project reached out to adaptive swim schools in NE Florida. 3 swim schools chose to participate. It was important to address the swim program itself and ways to alleviate financial burdens.

Participants: Parents and staff from Great Strides Rehabilitation. The swim instructors and directors from the swim schools

Setting: Main setting was Great Strides Rehabilitation outpatient center in Jacksonville, Florida.

Swim Schools: Swimming Safari Swim School, YMCA Winston Location and St. Augustine Swim Academy

Needs Assessment: An informal survey was sent out via email from the marketing team at Great Strides Rehabilitation to parents and staff. The platform was SurveyPlanet and all answers were anonymous. Interviews were conducted with the swim school instructors and directors regarding their program.

PROJECT

Interventions

Swim schools: All waterproof

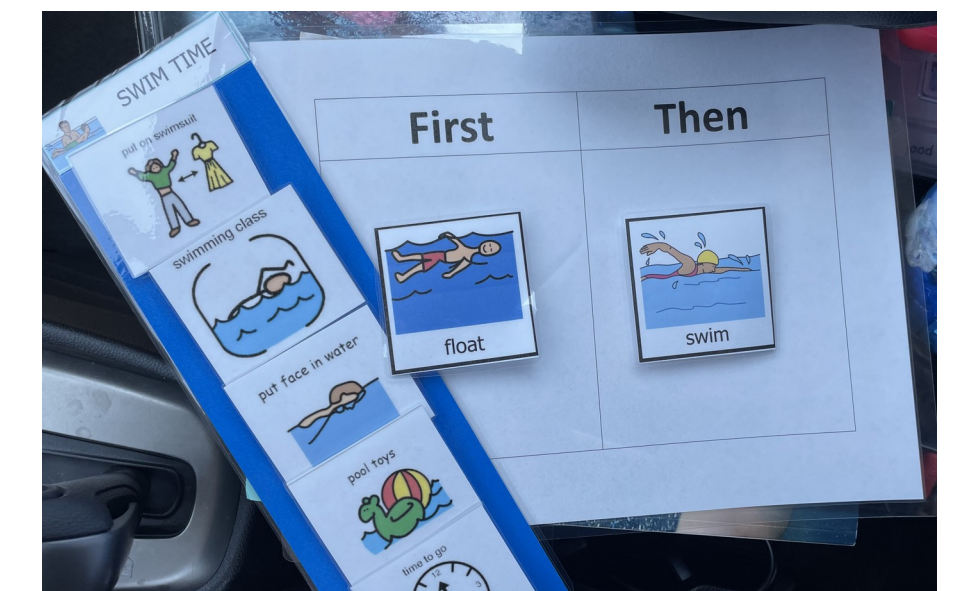
- Visual schedules
- Choice boards
- Sequencing Boards
- Water Safety Cue Cards
- Communication/Emotional Regulation boards

Great Strides Rehabilitation:

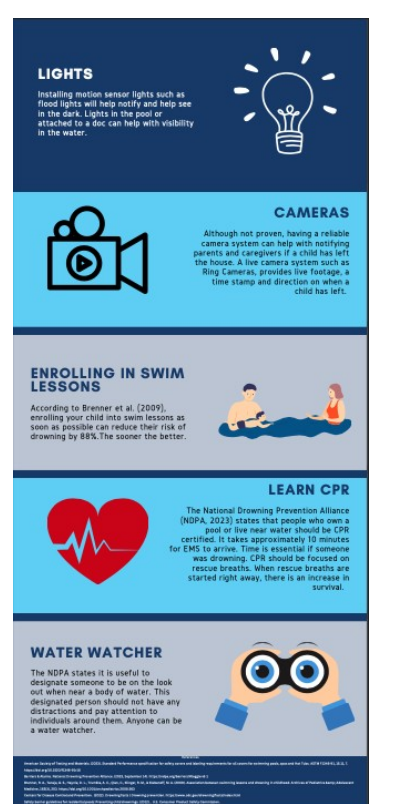
- Creation of the website (See QR Code)
- Infographic (Handout)
- Presentation that was recorded

Results

Due to technical difficulties the pre/post survey was not administered during the presentation to the staff and parents. Nevertheless, the audience verbally confirmed their understanding of adaptive swim lessons, the importance of how occupational therapy plays a role and expressed their appreciation for the resources. The presentation was recorded and will be displayed on their main website with the link to the website. The infographic and a poster size card with the QR code to the website will be added to Great Strides Rehabilitation drowning prevention kits. All material is readily available upon request. The swim instructors exhibited the utilization of the offered resources to display their proficiency.



Website QR Code



References

