
Autism Classroom Resources Podcast

Episode 4 Classroom Zoning Plans


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SUMMARY KEYWORDS

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SPEAKERS

Christine Reeve

 Christine Reeve 00:00

Welcome to the Autism Classroom Resources Podcast, the podcast for special educators who are looking for personal and professional development. I'm your host Dr. Christine Reeve. For more than 20 years, I've worn lots of hats in special education. But my real love is helping special educators like you. This podcast will give you tips and ways to implement research based practices in a practical way in your classroom to make your job easier and more effective.

 Christine Reeve 00:35

Welcome, we're in the midst of a five part series talking about building teaching teams. We've talked about getting to know your staff as people and building relationships with them, creating the classroom culture, and developing a classroom vision of values. Today, we're going to talk about setting the expectations in the classroom for the staff using staff zoning plans. Even though things seem obvious to you in the classroom, they aren't always so obvious to everyone, and they may not be obvious to paraprofessional... to your paraprofessionals. Part of your job as a teacher is to give direction, but we aren't always used to giving directions to other adults. So in this episode, I'm going to talk about why we need class owning plans, how they can help you and some tips to help you make them more successful.

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Christine Reeve 01:33

Today, we're on tip 4 in our building teaching team series. Tip 4 focuses on giving directions and organizing staff. So if you are a teacher, you went into teaching, probably in order to change the lives of students by teaching right? Did you go into it to manage adults? I don't know that I've ever met a teacher who said to me, I really want to do this because I want to manage seven adults in my classroom? Probably not.

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Christine Reeve 02:00

Did you realize that you were going to need to supervise and support other adults who aren't really your employees? Did you plan to spend so much of your time giving directions in working in classroom teams? Probably not.

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Christine Reeve 02:13

Yet, especially if you teach in special education situation. This is what you spend a good bit of your time doing. You're asked to guide, train and direct the paraprofessionals who work for you. You need to collaborate with them. But you also need to let them know what needs to be done from your plan for the classroom because that is your responsibility.

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Christine Reeve 02:34

But most of us in education aren't always used to giving directions to other people. We're used to giving directions to children. So we tend to ask, we suggest, and sometimes we just hope that they figure it out on their own. And really that doesn't work in the classroom very well, unless you're lucky enough to have a staff member who is like your right hand and can read your mind. But that's not going to be ever staff member. Hopefully you've been lucky enough to have that. But it's not going to be everybody.

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Christine Reeve 03:05

So how do you give directions effectively while you're building your teaching team? The first thing is to start with a zoning plan. Think of a zoning plan as a schedule for the staff that lets them know what the expectations are for each activity. We do that with our students. And doesn't everyone like to know what's expected? After all, invitations to parties come with dress codes, right? So that's an expectation.

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Christine Reeve 03:32

So what is a zoning plan? A zoning plan is like a schedule for staff. A zone is like a basketball zone where one person covers a certain area of the classroom or the court. So one person goes and gets the students from the bus and brings them to the classroom door. Then they return to the bus and the door-zone person gets the students checked in with their schedule, puts their stuff away, etc., and takes them to the first activity, which might be something that I call table tasks. The person in the table tasks zone then supervises the students in their zone, and the arrival zone person leaves the student there and goes back to the schedules.

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Christine Reeve 04:15

Zoning plans were actually developed in research by Kathryn LeLaurin and Todd Risley in the 1970s in daycare situations. And in that study, they found that the zoning system was more effective at keeping students engaged and reducing challenging behavior than using what they call the man to man defense, where the staff stayed with the students throughout the activities and transitioned with them.

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Christine Reeve 04:37

However, you don't need to use zones in the classroom in order to use a zoning plan. You can use a zone or a man-to-man defense; but either way, it provides a written detailed schedule of the responsibilities of the staff. And chances are good that you will be using both a zone and a man-to-man defense at different times of the school day, because different activities call for different types of things. The arrival routine that I talked about works perfectly as a zoning plan. But when I'm doing morning meeting, I might be doing more of a man-to-man approach.

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Christine Reeve 05:18

Now, let's talk a little bit about why putting the zoning plan in writing is so important, because I think a lot of us have the zoning plan in our heads. But we don't always realize that we need to write it down and make sure that we share it. Putting it in writing does a few things for you that I think are worth really thinking about because making a zoning plan definitely does take some time.

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Christine Reeve 05:42

But first, putting it in writing means that you don't have to direct the staff repeatedly through the day. And that allows all of the staff to be more engaged with the students. And that's always my first priority. Our research shows us, CEC's Leveraged Practices show us, that the best predictor of student progress is that they are engaged in instruction for the longest amount of the day. Putting it in writing also reduces your stress and your decision fatigue, because you're not constantly having to shift focus and make decisions on the fly while you're trying to teach at the same time.

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Christine Reeve 06:22

The second reason for putting it in writing is this means that you won't have four people cleaning the snack table, and only you with 10 or 12 students in a group. This is something that I've watched happen in classrooms more than once. And I get that the snack table needs to be clean. But it's not a four person job. And it's not that the staff was being obstructive or difficult. They just knew that the table would need to be clean for art after the group. And they didn't see the bigger picture of the teacher sitting in group with all 10 preschoolers. So having a zoning plan means that you've thought through how to deploy this staff across the room to make sure that all the students are supported. So you make sure that everyone is supervised and people know who they're responsible for working with and checking on. And it assigns who cleans up an activity, and who sets up the next activity; it can even designate who's going to work the timer to keep everyone on track, and who's going to run in from recess and reset the schedules before the students come back.

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Christine Reeve 07:30

The third reason for putting a zoning plan in writing, and probably the most relevant to our series on teaching teams, is that you... it means that you've given direction, that hopefully is clear; you've at least given it in writing. And if it's not clear, you're going to find out when someone isn't where they should be, and you can fix it.

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Christine Reeve 07:49

And it's really amazing to me how well this works sometimes, because I've walked into a large number of situations that I thought no one was going to do what they were supposed to do. There had been discipline problems and administrative issues and staff not getting along and things like that. And I wrote a zoning plan. And suddenly staff was

exactly where they were supposed to be when I gave it to them in written format. And I remember even saying to one person, you're here. She said, "Of course I'm here it's on my schedule." So they're really important because a lot of times, the other people in your classroom aren't doing what needs to be done because they don't recognize: A. maybe what needs to be done. B. they may not recognize how important it is to the flow of the classroom. So when we do zoning plans, I even zone in related service providers, I zone in outside people who come into the classroom to support us, because that way I can give it to them and they can see, "Oh, you're counting on me being there at that time of day, I need to be there at that time."

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Christine Reeve 09:00

Finally, the zoning plan helps assure that as a teacher, you've given that direction to the staff. And if you are a paraprofessional, it helps because it shows what you've been asked to do. And in the unfortunate situation where you need it, it gives you written documentation of that for both of you. And this makes it so much easier when there is an issue that needs to go to administration. It helps the administrator know what type of support and direction has been given the types of activities that were assigned. It just helps clarify a lot of the issues that can sometimes come up when people work together. And it's not surprising that these things come up when people work together, working together is not an easy thing to do. And our classrooms are not easy places to be. So that's a really important thing to remember, as well.

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Christine Reeve 09:55

I'll put a link to a post about zoning plans with examples in the show notes as well as in the podcast blog post. And I usually construct a draft of the zoning plan at the beginning of the year. And I take it to the staff and I get their input about what they think, whether it's... what activities they're running, who they're working with all those kinds of things. I really want to make sure that, just like with the vision and the other things that I've talked about in this series, that the staff is a part of the process as much as possible. So I want to make sure that they share what they need in terms of breaks, in terms of the activities that they're comfortable with, in terms of support that they need for supporting specific students. If you don't include them in the process, then it just becomes a schedule that you dictate. And all people are more willing to follow through with things when they have choices and input. We know that that's true in supporting our students. So why shouldn't it be the same when we're supporting adults. You want to make sure that your zoning plan is sound and clear.

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Christine Reeve 11:05

And I want to make one final note to build teaching teams, you also want to make sure that you have incorporated breaks for staff and herself, and that you're assuring training for the tasks that you asked them to do. And I'll do another podcast outside this series focusing on effective ways to train staff. Working in a classroom, and especially a special education classroom, is hard. It's demanding, it's exhausting, it requires you to be on every single second. Because you have to be supervising the students constantly to make sure that they're safe, that they're learning. Oh, and while you're doing that, you also have to instruct them. In order to achieve this level of awareness and attention, you have to take a break from the class, everybody needs that. I've had so many teachers over the years, when I do training, come up and tell me that they don't need a break, or their staff can't take a break or they don't have time to give their staff a break. And then I've had others that come up when they thought about it and come back to a future training and say they realized that by not taking a break, they were zoning out in the classroom. By not giving the paraprofessional a break, the para was zoning out in the classroom. And that's because your brain needs the break to disconnect, to walk out of the room to get a drink to just have a little bit of downtime, where you have 15 minutes where you're not in charge of anybody except yourself. So giving breaks, even when it's not required is really important to maintain everyone's attention when they're with the students. So you really want to make sure, again, even if it's 15 minutes, if your paras aren't allowed duty free lunch or duty free breaks because of their contract, give them a break to cut stuff out. It's a lot less stressful than working with the students. You will have to adjust your schedule of your classroom accordingly. But you will have a more productive engaged classroom in the long run. If you've done that, and if you've really laid this out and been thoughtful about when you can cover breaks and when you can't.

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Christine Reeve 13:23

I'll put links in the show notes and the blog post for this episode. And you can download a free zoning plan template on the blog post. Just go to autismclassroomresources.com/epside4.

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Christine Reeve 13:36

Do you want to learn more about how to create great zoning plans and build awesome classroom teams. If so, you can check out my Building Classroom Teams Classroom Manual. The manual includes templates that you can modify to meet your needs in Microsoft Word, they're completely customizable. It has a video to show you how I use

that template. And it also includes strategies for making decisions about all the different parts of building a successful zoning plan. Checklist can be used to make help make sure that you have everything you need in the plan. And there's a ton of other tips and tricks for working with staff, including templates and directions for creating your own classroom vision, suggestions about how to give feedback to staff and all other sorts of things. So I will make sure there's a link to that on AutismClassroomResources.com/episode4 as well as in the show notes.



Christine Reeve 14:31

So I'll be back next week with the last tip in this series, which is giving feedback about performance. We're going to tackle that one too. So I hope I'll see you then.



Christine Reeve 14:42

If you've enjoyed this podcast I would love if you would go to iTunes or to your platform of choice, and subscribe and possibly leave a review. Leave an honest review of what you liked or didn't like and I can make it what you need it to be. If you have ideas for future episodes to the podcast. I would love to hear those as well. jump over to our free Facebook group at specialeducators.connection.com asked to join and you can share your questions and your ideas about zoning plans.