

## IWSA Teacher Advice and Suggestions

### Students with WAGR Syndrome: Practical Suggestions for the Classroom

Children with WAGR syndrome have a wide range of educational strengths and needs. The information presented here includes suggestions for overcoming challenges and helping your student with WAGR syndrome to be successful.

#### Speech, Language and Communication

Children with WAGR syndrome may have delayed speech, Auditory Processing Disorder, or oral motor difficulties.

- Provide short, concrete directions. Use short phrases and sentences with only the main point
- Use a signing system such as ASL or Makaton, for two-way, non-verbal communication and to reduce frustration. Always speak as you sign
- Use symbols such as Makaton, PECS or Communication in Print to enable non-verbal choosing or requesting
- Allow the student to use his preferred way of communicating
- Use a 'total communication' approach: verbal cues, text, symbols, pictures, signs, and models

Consultation with a **Speech Therapist** can be extremely helpful for assistance with ASL or Makaton.

#### Learning Difficulties or Intellectual Disability

Children with WAGR syndrome may have cognitive impairment that is mild, moderate, or profound. Some individuals do not have cognitive impairment.

- Give the student time to process verbal instructions, at least 10-20 seconds to respond
- Use visuals whenever possible or physically demonstrate (model) what you want
- Break tasks down into smaller parts and give each step sequentially
- DO NOT expect the student to multitask. Allow extra time to complete assignments, and let him finish. It is important to finish one task before going on to another
- Establish clear routines so the student can anticipate what is expected
- Provide short, achievable activities to hold the student's attention and give satisfaction of completion
- Give opportunities to apply, rehearse, over-learn and revise new skills until they are generalized
- Use a multi-sensory approach to assignments: show text, use pictures, 3D models, real objects, sounds, smells, textures, symbols, signs



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### Visual Impairment and Photophobia

Children with WAGR syndrome have a condition called Aniridia, a partial or complete absence of the iris (colored part) of the eye. Most have significant vision impairment as well as photophobia, an increased sensitivity to light--especially outdoor light--and glare.

Help **orient the student to the new environment** by providing an initial individual tour of the school and classroom. Verbally label each room or area as you travel through it, and continue to do this in future days, until you are sure the student knows the different locations. Take him to key items in each area. For example, say "Here are the cubbies/lockers. This one here is yours." "This is the hand washing area. Here are the paper towels and soap."

Students with WAGR syndrome may benefit from

- Being located near the front of the classroom or learning station for demonstrations and/or interactive teacher-led activities
- Having good contrast in all learning materials
- Large print documents
- Documents laminated with matte (non-glossy) pouches
- Steady, even lighting without glare
- Window blinds to control outdoor light and glare
- Materials presented at eye level on a slope
- Verbal explanations of things that are happening at a distance
- Calling the student's name before directing a question or instruction to him
- Wearing both a hat and sunglasses when outdoors

The student may need adults to assist him in accessing learning materials with **clear specific directions**. For example, say "the map is on the wall to the left of the door." In addition, pointing with care from the student's eyes to the object you want him/her to see will help the student find the place, object or person you would like him to look at.

It is useful to **hold items directly in the student's line of vision** until he catches it in his view (fixates); the student can then track and follow slow moving, good contrast items and objects. An initial sound cue may also help him to locate things.

The student **may not see facial gestures or body language**. Praise and reprimands should be spoken aloud.

Use of assistive devices or technology such as **magnifiers, canes, large print keyboards, Braille note taker, video magnifiers, or voice-over apps** should be encouraged whenever possible.

Consultation with the local state school for the blind or your local school district's **Teacher of the Visually Impaired (TVI) or Orientation and Mobility Specialist (O and M)** can be extremely helpful for orientation, mobility, daily living skills, assistive technology use, and occupational therapy.

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### Auditory Processing Disorder

Children with WAGR syndrome may have mild, moderate, or severe Auditory Processing Disorder.

- Stand close and have the student look at you when speaking
- Use simple, one-step directions
- Speak at a slightly slower rate and at a slightly higher volume
- Ask the student to repeat directions back to you and to make notes (if possible)
- The student should have written directions if assignment is to be completed at home
- Seat the student in the front of the classroom and away from distractions to help him focus
- Improve acoustics by closing doors and windows to minimize outside noise
- Use an amplification system, such as a wireless FM system, to reduce background noise and poor acoustics
- Use images and gestures to reinforce understanding and memory
- Provide a quiet room/space for taking tests
- Allow the student to wear noise canceling headphones when working on individual assignments to cut out background noise

### Motor Impairments

Children with WAGR syndrome may have muscle tone that is too low or too high, dyspraxia, proprioception or vestibular disorders.

#### Gross Motor Skills

- Incorporate activities that strengthen core muscles and provide resistance: swinging, jumping, climbing, trampolining, and swimming
- Allow the student to work in alternate positions: on his stomach on the floor, standing, high kneeling, or on a vertical surface such as the chalk/white board
- Encourage the student to walk on uneven ground, step over obstacles, walk up and down slopes, walk along a narrow beam or thick chalk line on the ground, stand on one leg, reach for objects, run, climb through tunnels and hoops, enjoy soft play, hop, and kick a ball

#### Fine Motor Skills

- Allow the student to use different writing grips that may be easier to hold, such as chunky, triangular, or pen grips
- Encourage the use of different writing implements: chalk, paintbrush, finger painting, crayons, pencils, felt tips
- Encourage writing on different surfaces and at different angles: such as a chalkboard, whiteboard, easel, writing slope, pavement
- Allow the student to use a tablet/keyboard for written work
- Enable the student to use easy grip loop scissors. Practice squeeze and release movement with peg or tongs games
- Play games with different materials and implements to improve hand strength and dexterity: play dough, sand, water, cooking, shaving foam, bubble wrap, foil, fabric, soil, sponges, bottles, jars, scoops, cutlery, beads, wind-up toys, peg board, fuzzy felt

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### Sensory Processing Disorder

Children with WAGR syndrome may have Sensory Processing Disorder, and may be over-responsive or under-responsive to their environment.

#### Over Responsive

- Let the student choose “time in” (rather than “time out”) by self-initiating going into a small space, sensory room, or tent to self-regulate
- Allow the student to wear noise cancelling headphones in loud/busy situations
- Encourage jumping, running or other movement interspersed before and after sitting/learning activities
- Increase organization in the classroom to provide a calm and structured learning environment
- To help regulate the student, encourage slow rocking, deep breathing, rolling up tightly in a blanket, sitting in a beanbag, using a weighted blanket or lap cloth
- Encourage messy play: mud pies, finger painting, play dough, cooking or playing with pudding or shaving cream on a tray

#### Under Responsive

- Use lights to stimulate moving “star” across ceiling
- Encourage jumping, running, movement interspersed before and after sitting activities or circle time
- Play loud, rhythmic music or incorporate push/pull activities
- Use light wind from window or fan
- Provide fidget toys with light touch
- To increase interest in fine motor: use tools such as glitter pens, smelly markers, and gel pens
- Allow the student to smell stimulating aromas such as mint or cinnamon on an aroma bracelet or tissue

#### Sensory Craving

- Have seating that allows the student to stand/move easily, such as a “wobble” seat cushion, ball chair or bean bag chair
- Do not take away the student’s playtime because his work is not done. This will only escalate behaviors
- Provide movement activities with “thinking activities.” Have the student take a brief walk at specified intervals
- Let the student use fidget objects to help control hands, feet or mouth
- Have the student do “heavy work”-- put chairs up on desks, push heavy box of balls out for outdoor play, carry library books
- When possible, provide smaller spaces
- Give the student jobs such as delivering messages to the office
- Encourage movement activities: sliding, swinging, jumping, climbing, trampolining, swimming or stop and go games

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### Hearing Impairment

Children with WAGR syndrome may have sensorineural hearing impairment in one or both ears.

#### Unilateral Hearing Impairment

- Sit/speak on the side of the student's good ear
- Ask speakers to keep their faces visible, uncovered by hands, hair or objects, and to look at the student when speaking
- Seat the student with his good ear directed towards the teacher and his ear with hearing loss facing away from the class, such as near a wall
- Check that the student has understood instructions, especially when you are changing topic or task
- Try to minimize background noise

#### Bilateral Hearing Impairment

- Allow only one person to talk at a time
- Ask speakers to keep their faces visible and uncovered by hands, hair or objects, and to look at the student when speaking
- Repeat what has been said by other speakers who may not be easily seen or heard
- If possible, ask speakers to identify themselves clearly by raising a hand or stating their name. Allow the deaf student enough time to locate speakers and look at them before speaking
- Allow the student to work in small groups
- Check the student's understanding regularly
- Allow extra processing time
- Provide a multi-sensory approach so the student is not solely relying on verbal teaching
- Remember that the student may become fatigued sooner than his peers due to extreme concentration and listening

### Behavior

Children with WAGR syndrome may have Autism, or autistic-like behaviors, or psychiatric disorders including Anxiety Disorder, Depression, or Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder.

- Create 'social stories' to present appropriate behaviors
- Use good behavior symbols--like listening, looking, sitting, hand-up, waiting--to remind the student of expected behavior
- Use a countdown timer or countdown symbol strip to assist with patience
- Reward good behavior and allow choices
- Analyze each problem behavior. **Every behavior is an attempt to communicate something.** To avoid frustration, give the student symbols or teach him signs to express feelings/needs
- Manage meltdowns by
  - anticipating & removing triggers
  - removing the student to a quiet area
  - prioritizing safety
  - keeping communication to a minimum
  - giving time and space, and afterwards by providing reassurance
- Encourage social skills by setting up opportunities for parallel play, turn-taking, sharing, working in pairs, and explaining the emotions of others

Consultation with a **School Counsellor** may be very helpful.