



# Case Study:

## Team Helps Sixth Grader With Autism Improve Communication

SIG 16: School-Based Issues

### Summary

Hank is a sixth grade student with autism who recently moved back to the United States. He has difficulty communicating and feeding himself, and he is not toilet trained. A team of professionals at Hank's school created a plan focused on helping him improve his communication with others over the course of the school year. After 1 year, Hank is speaking and interacting more fully in the classroom.

### Student Info



**HANK**  
6TH GRADER

**Current Diagnosis:**  
Autism

### Meet The Team



SLP



Occupational  
therapist (OT)



Board Certified  
Behavior Analyst  
(BCBA)



School nurse



Special  
education  
teacher



Paraprofessional



Student



Family

Continue for more 

## Background

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Hank is a sixth grade student in a public middle school. He was diagnosed with autism at age 5. Hank previously lived in another country and was cared for by his grandparents. Now that Hank has moved back to the United States, his mother is concerned that he cannot communicate effectively. Hank does not know how to drink from a cup, does not know how to use utensils, and is not toilet trained.

## How They Collaborated

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At their initial meeting, the team discussed Hank's case and concluded that they would assess Hank according to their specialties. The SLP would assess Hank's language and social language skills. In the meantime, the OT would evaluate his fine-motor skills, the BCBA would review his toilet training progress, and the special education teacher would assess Hank's pre-academic skills. The paraprofessional, who was assigned to Hank because of his intensive needs, will help build rapport with Hank, and the school nurse will provide any needed medical information.

After each team member assessed Hank, the team met again, this time to review their findings. During this meeting, the team members shared the following insights about Hank. The SLP found that Hank did not initiate communication, but he could use spoken language to express his wants and needs. Hank could follow one-step directions independently but needed assistance with more complex commands. The special education teacher found that Hank could not correctly identify colors, numbers, or letters, and he could only sit with a group of students for 2 minutes at a time. The BCBA created a toileting schedule in which Hank was to be led regularly to the bathroom.

In their work with Hank, the team decided to create one common goal—to improve his communication with others. With that main goal in mind, the team identified and coordinated objectives for each treatment area. (See "Case Rubric" section for detailed goals.) The team also trained the paraprofessional on how to help Hank work on his goals as well as how to collect and graph data.

The special education teacher, BCBA, and SLP put together a binder with specific targets that Hank and his various team members would strive to meet each day. The team also created a shared data sheet to document all of Hank's goals in one place. The team members then decided to meet biweekly to discuss Hank's progress and review the data binder. They would update specific targets as needed.

## Outcome

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After 1 year, Hank is speaking and interacting more fully in the classroom. He uses spoken language to describe his own experiences and answers wh- questions about stories and events. With prompts and cues, he participates in "clean-up" time and "center time" in the classroom. He has improved his motor skills, and he can drink from a cup and use a spoon independently. Also, he stays dry with toileting on a 60-minute schedule both at home and at school.

## Ongoing Collaboration

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The team follows up with one another twice each academic year regarding Hank's progress and, if necessary, modifies his goals.

# Case Rubric:

## Team Helps Sixth Grader With Autism Improve Communication

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### Patient Info



**HANK**  
**6TH GRADER**

**Current Diagnosis:**  
Autism

### Meet The Team



SLP



Occupational  
therapist (OT)



Board Certified  
Behavior Analyst  
(BCBA)



School  
nurse



Special education  
teacher



Paraprofessional



Student



Family

Continue for more

### History and Concerns

(Share key information gathered from team)

**Hank** is a sixth-grade student in a public middle school. He previously lived in another country and was cared for by his grandparents. He moved back to the United States and lives with his mother and sister. He was diagnosed with autism at age five. His mother is concerned that he cannot effectively communicate with others. **Hank's** mother is also concerned that **Hank** does not know how to drink from a cup, does not know how to use utensils, and is not toilet trained.

### Assessment Plan

(Determine roles/responsibilities for evaluation)

The IPP educational team consists of a speech-language pathologist (SLP) who facilitates Hank's care with the team, an occupational therapist (OT), a board-certified behavior analyst (BCBA), a school nurse, a special education teacher, the parent, and a paraprofessional. **The team meets to discuss Hank's case and reaches consensus that they will assess the following areas:**



**SLP** – Assess Hank's receptive/expressive language and social language skills.



**OT** – Assess Hank's fine-motor skills and activities of daily living (ADL) skills.



**Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA)** – Assess Hank's toilet training skills



**School nurse** – Provide information to the team on Hank's current medical status.



**Special education teacher** – Assess Hank's pre-academic skills.



**Parent** – Provide input on how Hank functions in both home and community environments.



**Paraprofessional** – Assigned to Hank because of his intensive needs. The "para" does not directly help with assessment but will work on building a rapport with Hank.

### Assessment Results

(Summarize key diagnostic results)

#### The team evaluation found the following:



**SLP** – Hank does not initiate communication but uses spoken language to indicate wants/needs. He follows one-step directions independently but, with moderate multimodal cuing follows two-step commands.



**BCBA** – The BCBA creates a toileting schedule in which Hank is to be led regularly to the bathroom until such time as he **(a)** develops the communication skills necessary to indicate urgency and **(b)** hones the fine-motor skills needed for self-care. A 1-hour-per day schedule will be used for Hank to work on toilet training both at school and at home.



**School nurse** – The school nurse has no medical concerns for Hank at this time.



**Special education teacher** – The teacher determines that Hank is able to **(a)** imitate two gross-motor movements when given a model and **(b)** sit with a group for a total of 2 minutes before standing up to get out of his seat. She also determines that he does not **(a)** correctly match identical items or **(b)** correctly identify colors, numbers, or letters. He sits and attends to a book that is read to him for approximately 2 minutes.

### IPP Treatment Plan

(Discuss, reflect, and modify recommendations to develop a coordinated plan)

The team discusses the information above at a team evaluation meeting. The team will meet regularly, tentatively every 2 weeks, to discuss progress in planning. The entire team has access to (and regularly updates) a shared file, which includes information about scheduled sessions and outcomes.

The team agrees to share a common main goal for Hank—improving his communication to others beyond basic needs (see “Shared Goal” below). Team members then set goals for Hank to address this school year. His goals focus on several key areas (see “Measurable Objectives” below).

### IPP Treatment Plan

(Discuss, reflect, and modify recommendations to develop a coordinated plan)

#### Shared Goal

The client will communicate basic needs effectively.

#### Measurable Objectives

**Objective # 1:** When presented photos of his own experiences in a book format, the client will engage in joint attention to the media for at least 3 minutes in at least 2 of 3 opportunities per day, each day of the week, for 3 consecutive weeks.

**Objective # 2:** Within natural contexts during the school day, and with prompts from a communicative partner, the client will utilize at least 5 communicative intents per day, each day of the week, for 3 consecutive weeks.

**Objective # 3:** When prompted by an adult, the client will correctly answer a wh- question using at least one content vocabulary word in his response in 3 of 5 opportunities, each day, for 3 consecutive weeks.

**Objective # 4:** The client will accurately imitate gross motor movements at least 3 consecutive times each day, for 3 consecutive weeks.

**Objective # 5:** When provided with a model, the client will copy basic shapes (circle, square, triangle) once daily with 100% accuracy for 4 consecutive days, for 3 consecutive weeks.

**Objective # 6:** With peer modeling and verbal prompts, the client will complete "clean up" tasks involving two or more items, at least 1 time per day, each day of the week, for 3 consecutive weeks.

**Objective # 7:** Given three choices, the client will choose a preferred leisure activity in at least 2 of 3 opportunities per day, each day of the week, for 3 consecutive weeks.

**Objective # 8:** Given a model, physical cues, and/or verbal prompts, the client will participate in a chosen leisure activity for

**IPP Treatment Plan**

(Discuss, reflect, and modify recommendations to develop a coordinated plan)

at least 5 minutes in at least 2 of 3 opportunities per day, each day of the week, for 3 consecutive weeks.

**Objective # 9:** Given a cup with a drink, the client will hold a cup with two handles and no lid, the client will drink at least 75% of his beverage without spilling, at breakfast and lunch, each day of the week, for 3 consecutive weeks.

**Objective # 10:** Given utensils and verbal prompts, the client will scoop food and feed himself at least 50% of his meal at breakfast and lunch, each day of the week, for 3 consecutive weeks.

**Objective # 11:** The client will use the toilet independently after a verbal prompt, at least 3 times per day, each day of the week, for 3 consecutive weeks.

The special education teacher, BCBA, and SLP put together a data binder with the above programs, with specific targets to be addressed daily. The team creates a shared data sheet to document all of Hank's goals in one place. The team also trains the paraprofessional regarding how to help Hank implement work on his goals as well as how to take and graph data. The team members review the data binder biweekly and update specific targets as needed. The educational team meets biweekly to discuss Hank's progress.

**Treatment Outcomes**

(Discuss results of treatment)

After 1 IEP year, Hank begins to utilize spoken language for a variety of communicative intents, and begins to interact more fully in the classroom. **He has also progressed in the following areas:**

- Uses spoken language to describe his own experiences
- Utilizes at least 5 communicative intents, including requesting, commenting, rejecting, and greeting
- Answers wh- questions about stories and events
- After a clinician model, imitates six gross-motor actions.
- Copies three basic shapes

<p><b>Treatment Outcomes</b> (Discuss results of treatment)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• With prompts and cues, participates in “clean up” time and “center time” in the classroom</li><li>• Engages in three new independent leisure activities.</li><li>• Drinks from a cup independently.</li><li>• Uses a spoon independently.</li><li>• Stays dry with toileting on a 60-minute schedule both at home and at school.</li></ul>
<p><b>Team Follow-Up</b> (Determine meetings &amp; communication plan)</p>	<p>The team follows up with Hank’s progress and modifies his goals twice each academic year.</p>

### Acknowledgement

ASHA extends its gratitude to the subject matter expert(s) who were involved in the development of the original version of this IPP case:

Rosemarie Griffin, CCC/SLP, BCBA  
SIG 16: School-Based Issues

### Citations

American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. (n.d.). Team helps sixth grader with autism improve communication. <https://www.asha.org/practice/ipe-ipp/case-studies/case-study-9/>

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