

A Shadow Teacher Helps a Child to...

- stay focused;
- participate appropriately in class;
- notify the teacher/aide if he does not understand the material;
- function in an environment where there is a lot of sensory input;
- be positive in his approach to new tasks; and helping him to gain self control.
- improve communication by maintaining eye contact;
- encouraging him to ask for help from his teachers;
- having him share his special interests with the children;
- prompting him to initiate discussions with his peers;
- helping him to respond appropriately to his peers in social situations;
- seeing that he compliments his peers when appropriate;
- asking him to accept the success of his peers;
- and encouraging him to learn the interests of his peers.

These are some of the techniques used by a Shadow Teacher, but every child is unique and the therapy differs with each child.

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Mumbai: Anuj Mathur (name changed) is the envy of all his classmates. While all his friends have to share their teacher, the eight-year-old has a special one who sits with him throughout school.

Thanks to inclusive education, children like Anuj, who has borderline autism, are able to find place in mainstream schools. Since his teachers are not trained to handle his special needs, Anuj's school Gundecha Education Academy (GEA) in Kandivili introduced the method of shadow teaching.

"Shadow teaching is a concept where a special educator sits with the child and helps him achieve skills necessary to function independently in the classroom. Since autism hampers social and communication skills, we advised Anuj's parents to employ a shadow teacher who could sit in class with him and help him," said Seema Buch, principal, GEA.

Anuj's shadow teacher is Meenaxi Mehta, a special educator. She attends all his classes with him. "My job is to make him independent. Since his attention span is short, I help him focus. I explain the concepts he finds difficult and even spend playtime with him," she said.

Also, since Anuj's social skills are not developed, he emulates Mehta's mannerism. "After observing me, he behaves in an acceptable manner and doesn't get over-excited. Earlier, he used to shake hands with even strangers on the road but not now."

According to Mehta, such methods can be very helpful for children with special needs.

"But only some schools give permissions to teachers from outside to sit with a child in class. Even parents are unaware about the concept," she said.

"It is necessary to address the child's development issue at an early stage. Since the appointment of the shadow teacher, the child has shown remarkable improvement in his studies and behaviour," said Nandita Shivkumar, supervisor of primary section at GEA.

The school has another student who is in need of a shadow teacher. "However, his parents cannot afford to hire one. We are looking for volunteers who will help the child," said Buch. (source-www.dnaindia.com)