Virginia Autism Council

Skill Competencies for Professionals and Paraprofessionals in Virginia Supporting Individuals with Autism Across the Lifespan

Transcript

<Dawn Hendricks, Ph.D. Virginia Commonwealth University Autism Center for Excellence>

What is the Virginia Autism Council? Are you a service provider who teaches a person with autism spectrum disorder or works to build skills or promote independence? This is not an easy task! Autism spectrum disorder is complex. The person will have needs related to social skills, communication, performing basic self-help tasks, such as brushing teeth, and may exhibit a wide range of behaviors.

To help you as a service provider to be effective and to help the person with autism to learn and to grow, the Virginia Autism Council has developed the Skill Competencies for Professionals and Paraprofessionals in Virginia Supporting Individuals with Autism Across the Lifespan. The Skill Competencies are for professionals and paraprofessionals in all fields of service delivery. They outline the knowledge and skills critical to effectively serve individuals with an autism spectrum disorder. The Skill Competencies were developed by the Virginia Autism Council or what is commonly called VAC.

VAC is a council of experts in autism. The Virginia Autism Council members represent state agencies, education, advocacy groups, private providers, parents and community services that support individuals with a spectrum disorder. VAC works to advance the education and training of professionals working with individuals with autism spectrum disorder as well as provide information to family members.

<Amanda Armstrong, M.Ed., BCBA Autism Coordinator, Virginia Department of Education Region 5 T/TAC>

What are the Skill Competencies?

The Skill Competencies for Professionals and Paraprofessionals in Virginia Supporting Individuals with Autism Across the Lifespan are designed to guide best practice in supporting individuals with autism spectrum disorder across the Commonwealth of Virginia. They can be used for program planning and service delivery. The Skill Competencies were developed with input from state and national experts in autism. Decades of research have provided a number of supports and strategies effective for the education and support of individuals with autism in school and community-based settings. These Skill Competencies are based on evidence-based practices as well as promising practices that have been identified through research in the field of autism.

The Virginia Autism Council intends for the Skill Competencies to be used within a person-centered approach, keeping the individual at the center of all program planning and development.

There are 2 types of competencies found in the document. The knowledge based competencies indicate particular information the service provider should possess. The skill based competencies, which make up most of the competencies, indicate those specialized skills professionals and paraprofessionals need in practice.

The Skill Competencies are divided into 8 core areas. The eight competency areas are:

1. General Autism Competency Statements

2. Environmental Structure and Visual Supports Competency Statements

3. Comprehensive Instructional Programming Competency Statements

4. Communication Competency Statements

5. Social Skills Competency Statements

6. Behavior Competency Statements

7. Sensory Motor Development Competency Statements

8. Independence and Aptitude Competency Statements

A professional or paraprofessional who uses the Skill Competencies can reference any section they are interested in for specific programming information or preferably, can use all of the sections. It is important to note that no competency area is deemed more important than another area. It is imperative that the Skill Competencies be considered as a whole and that all competencies are given equal weight when serving a person with autism spectrum.

<Linda Oggel, M.A., CCC-SLP Co-Director, Virginia Department of Education Region I and VIII T/TAC>

Who should use the Skill Competencies? The Skill Competencies can virtually be used by any person who supports or loves a person with autism. However, given the number of professionals who work with this group and that not every person will need to have the same knowledge and skill, the Skill Competencies are provided for four different skill and experiential levels:

1. Paraprofessional/Direct Services Staff - This includes support staff under the supervision of a professional.

2. Professional/Direct Services Staff - This includes teachers, counselors, early intervention providers, job coaches or any other professional who directly works with a person on the spectrum.

3. Master Professional/Direct Services Staff - This refers to any person who is a direct service professional who has worked in the field for 3 or more years.

4. Advanced Degree/Program Developer/Specialist -This includes autism/behavior specialists, administrators, or others who develop programs or outline services.

The Skill Competencies can be used in many different ways. These include:

1. assist a service provider in understanding the knowledge and skills he or she needs to know to be an effective provider and to assist them in identifying areas of need for professional development;

2. guide development of a program that would strictly address the needs of people who plan on working with children and adults with autism;

3. guide the development of university-based courses and programs; and

4. assist professionals in determining the training and professional development for direct service staff who work with individuals with autism spectrum disorder.

In addition to the Skill Competencies, a supplementary document has been created.

The Skill Competencies Tracker is intended to be used to monitor the professional development of professionals and paraprofessionals working with individuals with autism. The purpose of the Tracker is to illustrate the evolving skills and abilities and movement towards proficiency in each of the competency areas.

The Skill Competencies Tracker can be used in three different ways: 1) it is designed to be used by an individual as a self-monitoring device; 2) it can be used by an outside observer or supervisor to document areas of professional development; and 3) it may be used by organizers of professional development activities to document training and development activities provided to professionals and paraprofessionals.

<Dawn Hendricks>

Thank you for viewing our informational video on the Virginia Skill Competencies. Please visit our website at www.autismtrainingva.org for additional details and information on the resources shared today. We look forward to interacting with you as we all work towards improving services and outcomes for Virginians with autism.