Title: Nurturing Connections: Engaging Sensory Social Routines for Preschoolers with Autism through ABA

Introduction:

Engaging in social routines and games is a vital aspect of fostering social development in preschoolers, particularly those with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Sensory social routines, characterized by face-to-face interaction, turn-taking, and communication through words, gestures, or facial expressions, play a crucial role in building connections and enhancing social skills. As an Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) professional working with autistic preschoolers, incorporating purposeful and enjoyable sensory social routines is key to promoting interaction and social engagement. This article explores the significance of sensory social routines, the challenges faced by preschoolers with autism, and provides examples of ABA-inspired sensory social routines that can be seamlessly integrated into therapeutic and educational settings.

Understanding Sensory Social Routines:

Sensory social routines are interactive activities that involve a child and an adult, such as a parent or therapeutic preschool teacher, engaging in face-to-face social interactions. These activities are designed to encourage communication, turn-taking, and shared enjoyment without the need for physical objects. Sensory social routines provide a structured and enjoyable way for children with autism to navigate social interactions, building foundational skills that contribute to their overall development.

Challenges Faced by Preschoolers with Autism:

Preschoolers with autism often encounter challenges in social communication, including difficulties in initiating interactions, interpreting social cues, and maintaining engagement in social activities. Sensory sensitivities and a preference for routine may further impact their ability to participate in typical social routines. ABA interventions aim to address these challenges by providing structured and supportive social experiences tailored to the unique needs of each child.

Examples of ABA-Inspired Sensory Social Routines:

1. **Mirror, Mirror:**
    - This routine involves sitting face-to-face with the child and mimicking their facial expressions, gestures, or movements. The adult takes turns being the "leader" and the "follower." This activity promotes reciprocal communication and social engagement as the child observes and imitates the adult, fostering a sense of connection.
2. **Body Rock and Roll:**
    - In this routine, the adult and child take turns rocking their bodies back and forth to the rhythm of a song or a simple chant. This rhythmic activity not only addresses sensory needs but also encourages shared engagement and coordination. The adult can gradually introduce variations in movement to keep the child's interest.
3. **Tickle Time:**
    - Tickle Time is a playful routine where the adult and child take turns tickling each other in a controlled and enjoyable manner. This activity incorporates physical touch,

laughter, and social interaction. The adult can use simple verbal cues like "your turn" to encourage the child to reciprocate.

4. **Emotion Charades:**
    - This routine involves the adult expressing different emotions through exaggerated facial expressions and body language, and the child guessing the emotion. The child can then take a turn acting out an emotion for the adult to guess. Emotion Charades not only enhances emotional recognition but also promotes social interaction and turn-taking.
5. **Dance Party:**
    - Turn on some lively music and engage in a Dance Party routine where the adult and child dance together. Use simple dance moves and encourage the child to lead the dance at times. This routine combines sensory input, physical activity, and social interaction in a fun and inclusive way.
6. **Imitation Play:**
    - Imitation Play involves the adult and child taking turns imitating each other's actions. This can include clapping hands, stomping feet, or making silly sounds. The routine encourages observational skills, turn-taking, and reciprocal interaction.
7. **Funny Faces:**
    - Sit face-to-face with the child and take turns making funny faces. Use exaggerated expressions, such as sticking out the tongue, raising eyebrows, or puffing out cheeks. The child can imitate the adult's expressions, creating a playful and interactive routine that promotes social engagement.
8. **Obstacle Course Adventure:**
    - Set up a simple obstacle course in the play area, and take turns guiding each other through the course. Use verbal prompts and gestures to direct the child, and allow them to guide the adult through the course as well. This routine combines sensory-motor activities with communication and cooperation.

Implementing ABA Principles in Sensory Social Routines:

When incorporating sensory social routines, ABA principles are seamlessly woven into the activities to maximize their effectiveness. These principles include:

1. **Individualized Planning:**
    - ABA recognizes the unique needs of each child. Sensory social routines are tailored to the individual preferences, sensitivities, and developmental level of the preschooler, ensuring a personalized and effective approach.
2. **Positive Reinforcement:**
    - Positive reinforcement is strategically used to encourage desired behaviors during sensory social routines. Verbal praise, smiles, and other forms of positive feedback reinforce the child's engagement and participation.

3. **Prompting and Shaping:**

    - ABA therapists utilize prompting and shaping techniques to guide the child's behavior during sensory social routines. This involves providing cues or prompts to initiate or respond to social interactions and gradually fading these prompts as the child becomes more independent.

4. **Data Collection:**

    - ABA emphasizes data collection to assess progress and make data-driven decisions. Observational data can be collected during sensory social routines to track the child's social engagement, communication skills, and any emerging patterns or challenges.

5. **Generalization and Maintenance:**

    - ABA interventions focus on promoting the generalization of skills across settings and maintaining progress over time. Sensory social routines are designed to be easily adaptable to different environments, ensuring that the child can apply and generalize their social skills beyond the therapeutic or educational setting.

Conclusion:

Sensory social routines serve as a valuable tool in the toolkit of ABA professionals working with preschoolers with autism. These routines offer structured, enjoyable, and interactive activities that address the unique challenges these children face in social communication. By incorporating ABA principles into sensory social routines, therapists and educators create a supportive and individualized approach that fosters connection, engagement, and the development of foundational social skills. Through the lens of ABA, sensory social routines become powerful vehicles for nurturing social competence and enhancing the overall well-being of preschoolers with autism.