

Accommodating Children With Autism Within an Inclusive Setting

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Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) usually demonstrate impairments in social interactions, have challenges with communication, and/or exhibit delays in cognitive skills. Often, these students require accommodations and modifications within an inclusive classroom setting. The entire educational team within the school (Speech-Language Pathologist, Occupational Therapist, Psychologist, Educator, and Parent) create a list of social and academic goals for the child. This team works together throughout the school year helping achieve as many of their goals as possible.



Regular classroom teachers juggle many tasks, especially when trying to modify activities and lessons for all students. ASD students in the mainstream classroom face a wealth of different challenges. These challenges impact students' abilities to learn in the mainstream setting. Here are some of the most difficult challenges of ASD students and suggestions for helping them cope with their deficits:

- **Difficulty with change.** Students with ASD benefit from a repetitive and routine schedule. Deviating from a routine can result in a change in behavior, mood, or academic performance. Teachers can help by providing a picture schedule of activities to complete throughout each day. Mount this on a large chart, so that all students benefit from it, or on a smaller desktop version. Always prepare the ASD child for any schedule changes in advance, regardless of how small or insignificant it may seem to you or others.
- **Difficulty with learning through experiences.** Simply hearing and seeing new information is not enough for ASD students. Students with ASD need direct instruction of academic and social skills—structured activities and lessons with an introduction, detailed explanation, and a summary. Integrating visual, auditory, and tactile stimuli also helps improve students' transfer and generalizing skills.
- **Difficulty coping.** If there is anything in the environment that is causing the student obvious stress, identify the distractions (e.g., noise, change in setting) and resolve them. If the student is demonstrating problems with regulating his/her emotions and behavior, provide time away from the group or class in a safe, private area for the student to compose him/herself. When the student's stress level decreases, encourage him/her to return to the group or class setting. Incorporating "stress relief breaks" for the entire class helps target this challenge for the ASD student inconspicuously. Consider including stretching, pushing and pulling activities, or games (e.g., moving desks around, carrying heavy books, fidgeting with small toys and balls, or Simon Says).
- **Difficulty with figurative language.** Students with ASD comprehend messages very literally. Using figurative language (e.g., humor, sarcasm, metaphors, and idioms) can cause the ASD student to misunderstand verbal messages. When giving directions, make sure they are clear and concise. Allow the student enough time to process the information and respond. Avoid using idioms and other figurative expressions during instruction. Introduce simple figurative language expressions outside of instructional time.

● **Difficulty with pragmatics (social communication).** Social communication is a struggle for students with ASD. In a mainstream setting, it is important for the student to continuously work on his/her pragmatics. Pair the student with a peer to help with social skills and activities in the classroom and in other settings (e.g., cafeteria, gym, playground, or library). Role playing in the classroom also gives the student opportunities to participate and observe acceptable social interactions.

● **Difficulty with behavior.** Inappropriate behaviors often accompany poor social skills, difficulty coping, or difficulty receiving information. Realize that these behaviors are usually the result of a misunderstood message or action by you or another student. Use these occurrences to teach the entire class how to react to inappropriate behaviors. Be firm but tactful in your method of correcting the ASD student or bringing attention to his/her behavior. Embarrassing the student or causing him/her to feel shame will not help the student to learn appropriate social behaviors.

● **Difficulty with responding to environmental sounds.** Be conscious of the noise level in the classroom setting. Students with ASD may be very sensitive to certain sounds even though the sounds may not be very loud or distracting to you or other students. Each child with ASD is unique and may find common and familiar sounds (e.g., clapping, high frequency toys, beeping, etc.) to be disturbing and even frightening. Identify sounds that may trigger a change in behavior. If the student has adverse reactions to any auditory stimulus, remove it immediately. Once again, give the student time and/or space to calm down if necessary.

Regular classroom teachers should educate themselves regarding the diagnosis and needs of their ASD students. Studying information about the broad spectrum of ASD is the greatest help for teachers. Having a teacher that is both knowledgeable and understanding gives ASD students the best chance for classroom and social success. If you are unsure how to approach or handle certain situations with an ASD student, always consult the student's educational team, especially when implementing interventions in the classroom. Ask the parents of the ASD student to help with reinforcing classroom strategies at home, and vice versa. Parents can offer valuable information to regular classroom teachers about their particular child's needs and challenges.

Also, some children with ASD require medication to help with concentration and/or response to environmental stimuli (e.g., sound, light, etc.). Follow all of the instructions from the physician or school nurse and ask any questions you may have regarding the characteristics of the student while he/she is taking this medication and be constantly aware of those characteristics.

