

## Effectively working with students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

Autism is a disorder of brain function and a spectrum disorder. Symptoms can occur in many varieties and with varying degrees of intensity. ASD is a developmental disability, children with ASD develop differently than other children. Adaptations make learning easier for children with ASD. Suggestions:

1. Understand that behavior is communicating intent or distress. Make environmental changes and implement behavioral interventions to maximize learning for all students.
2. Use visuals to convey instructions, meanings, routines and schedules.
3. Build on areas of strengths/interests to facilitate social interactions and appropriate adaptive behaviors.
4. Do things **with** instead of **for** the students. Have high expectations. Encourage peer mentoring. Treat the students with ASD with the same respect you would their classmates. Empower the students to be active participants in all classroom and social activities.
5. Be aware of sensory needs when developing classroom activities. Do not request information when the students are upset, allow space for coping. Consider the physical placement of the students in the classroom and how this impacts unique responses to environmental stimuli.

Autism Spectrum Disorders are treatable. Early diagnosis/intervention are critical to the developing child. Appropriate treatment fosters progress for children with ASD and they can make progress academically and socially. ASD is not contagious. But it is the third most common developmental disability and on the rise. ASD effects more boys than girls and it is estimated that ASD effects 1 out of 161.

**Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is treatable:  
students with ASD respond well to a highly  
structured, specialized education program  
that meets their individual needs.**

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References:

**Autism Society of America**  
www.autism-society.org  
**Anne Arundel County Chapter of ASA**  
www.aaccasa.org

Some unique learning characteristics of students  
with ASD may be:

- Difficulties focusing and paying attention
- Difficulties with easily transferring information from one setting to the next
- Difficulties with organization/planning
- Difficulties making transitions and sequencing events/tasks/time

## HELPFUL HINTS FOR INTERACTING WITH STUDENTS WHO HAVE ASD

- Speak slowly and use simple language.
- Use concrete terms.
- Repeat simple questions.
- Allow time for responses.
- Give lots of praise.
- Do not attempt to physically block self-stimulating behavior; gentle redirection works better.

By educating yourself about ASD you  
will be able to make a positive impact on  
the lives of these students.

## Educating students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

ASD varies a great deal, some individuals are only mildly affected with slight delays in language and difficulties with social interactions. Severe cases may display self-injurious and/or aggressive behaviors, repetitive movements, extremely poor social and language skills. Children with ASD are all different. They may experience delays with learning to play, talk, read and write. Some have excellent rote memory abilities and above-average spatial abilities.

Individuals with ASD may:

- Be non-verbal
- Be non-responsive to verbal cues
- Communicate by sign language or picture symbols
- Be extremely determined and orderly
- Appear insensitive to pain
- Be hyposensitive and/or hypersensitive to light, sound, touch or smell
- Exhibit self-stimulatory behavior, rocking, hand flapping and/or engage in repetitive behaviors

- Appear anxious or nervous for no apparent reason and dart away from you unexpectedly

Students with ASD are easily overwhelmed by minimal changes, highly sensitive to environmental stressors, sometimes they engage with rituals. Anxiety and obsessive worry about what to expect causes stress, fatigue, sensory overload that throws them off balance.

Suggestions:

- Provide a predictable/safe environment. Provide environmental supports– visual and organizational supports, a “touch-base” person or “safe” place when overwhelmed or upset.
- Minimize transitions, offer opportunities for practice and a consistent daily routine, avoid surprises, prepare in advance for special activities. Program and assist in planning unstructured times. Allow for free-time to be used for special interest research or discussion time, or on an activity that allows the students to “relax”. Use timers/bells to assist with transitions from one activity to another.
- Protect the child from bullying and teasing, teach peers how to interact appropriately and understand ASD.
- Facilitate social relationships– program for

daily opportunities to interact and develop relationships. Provide social skills instruction on a consistent basis and use proactive modeling/role-playing. Act as an interpreter, or have a peer play that role. Find out what are the current social topics and slang and teach them.

- Set clear expectations and boundaries for all students and adhere to them. Post them on the wall. Students with ASD respond to structure. Provide instructions in verbal and written form as much as possible.
- Modify assignments and homework for length and quantity and the amount of written language involved. Provide homework checklists. Augment curriculum with enrichment activities and other high interest materials.
- Communicate with the family. Send a weekly update and ask the important questions at the start of the school year. Be proactive/collaborate to prevent melt-downs and promote success.

**AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER (ASD) IS TREATABLE: STUDENTS WITH ASD RESPOND WELL TO A HIGHLY STRUCTURED, SPECIALIZED EDUCATION PROGRAM THAT MEETS THEIR INDIVIDUAL NEEDS.**