



INFORMATION SHEET

FOCUS ON EDUCATION- TEACHING A STUDENT WITH ASD

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When teaching or working with a child with an ASD there are several things that need to be taken into consideration to ensure that the child's needs are being met and that their school experience is as comfortable as possible. The following information has been compiled to assist parents, teachers and teacher aides with their planning.

Some important considerations for all students with an Autism Spectrum Disorder

Anxiety

Many students with an autism spectrum disorder suffer from anxiety. This may not be evident in the ways we would normally expect to see a child express worry. The evidence of anxiety may be talking repetitively about the same topic, repeatedly asking the same question for reassurance, complaining about tummy pain, or trying to block out the world (either withdrawing, or making enough noise to drown other things out). These sorts of behaviours should be viewed as a sign of distress rather than misbehaviour. It is then advisable to simplify or help the student with tasks, or let the student have some quiet time.

Changes in routine

Students with an autism spectrum disorder often become distressed when there is a change in routine, due to their difficulties making sense of time. That is, they rely on things occurring the same way to make sense of a confusing world (Wing, 1995). If at all possible, prepare the student for changes to routine by telling them in advance, or showing them with a picture schedule. Simple modifications, such as allowing the student to sit in the same seat for small group activities, and having other classmates come to them may make things less confusing for them.

Language understanding

Students with an autism spectrum disorder have difficulty understanding language. The ideal is for instructions to be given one at a time, with pauses to allow time to process the information. Most students with autism learn better when presented with visual information, rather than auditory information. If one-step instructions with pauses are not possible, showing a picture would help greatly. Alternatively,

writing/drawing the instructions on the board when speaking to the group (or on a small notepad at the student's desk for individual instructions) may also be helpful.

Seeking help

Students with an autism spectrum disorder may not spontaneously ask for help in class, due to their difficulty with problem solving. They may not copy the other students by putting up their hand to request help. They may sit quietly when they are having trouble and worry to themselves about what to do. Alternatively they may revert to speaking about something they are knowledgeable about to hide the fact they are having trouble. If either of these behaviours is present, check to see whether the student has understood the task.

Break times

Recess is a difficult time for students with an autism spectrum disorder, due to the core difficulties of social interaction and sensory processing. Many students are unsure of how to interact with their peers, how to join a game or activity, and how to follow the rules of the games other students play. Such students also have trouble with all the chaos, noise and movement in the schoolyard. Some students with autism may not even know what activities they can do at recess (which is intuitive and commonsense to other students). This confusion can lead to anxiety. This means recess and lunchtimes are not as restful as they are for other students.

Structuring the use of break times can reduce the uncertainty/anxiety. Structure may be achieved by offering choices of activities, preferably in a visual form, such as a picture schedule, a social story, or a written plan or list for recess.

Ideally, break times should be made up of part supported social play, and part quiet rest to prepare for re-entering the classroom. If at all possible, the students should be helped to join in the games or activities of other students, and the other students encouraged to include them. It may be that the student is encouraged to teach younger students a game. A useful resource is **Taming the Recess Jungle: Socially simplifying recess for students with autism and related disorders** by Carol Gray (No. 1913, available from the Autism Victoria library).

For the 'rest time' component of a break, there are several options:

- The student could have a quiet spot to go to at recess if the noise and movement gets too much. This may be a quiet corner of the playground, the steps of his classroom, etc. The teacher could show the student where this spot is, and later when needed, the duty teacher could remind the student to go there when he is getting overwhelmed.
- The student could spend some time at break periods in the classroom, library or another space indoors. If staffing inside these places is an issue, perhaps the student could be given some errand or job where staff are present (eg. watering indoor plants, helping a class teacher put out materials for the next lesson, etc.)
- If none of the above suggestions are feasible, the student may be allowed to have 10-15 minutes quiet time on a beanbag or a quiet spot immediately after returning to class from breaks. Why not have relaxation for short periods across the day as part of the curriculum for all students? Stress management and relaxation are skills for all students for life.

Resources for primary level

No. 2086 - Western Autistic School, English Levels 1-4, Reading and Writing: Adapted for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

No. 2087 - Western Autistic School, English Levels 1-4, Speaking and Listening: Adapted for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

No. 2389 - Annette Joosten, Annette Joosten's Book of Cool Strategies: A Personal Social Script Workbook for Australian Primary-age Students.

No. 2591 - Sue Larkey, Making it a Success, Practical strategies and worksheets for teaching students with an autism spectrum disorder.

Resources for primary and secondary level

- No. 1586** - Janice Adams, Autism-PDD: Creative Ideas During the School Years.
- No. 2590** - Sally Hewitt, Specialist Support Approaches to Autism Spectrum Disorder Students in Mainstream Settings
- No. 2101** - Rita Jordan & Glenys Jones, Meeting the Needs of Children with Autistic Spectrum Disorders.
- No. 1721** - Leicester City/County Council, Asperger Syndrome - Practical Strategies for the Classroom.
- No. 2576** - B. Maines and G. Robinson, Children Can Learn with their Shoes Off.
- No. 1199** - National Autistic Society, Information on Autism and Asperger Syndrome for schools.
- No. 2151** - R. Moyes, Addressing the Challenging Behaviour of Children in the Classroom.
- No. 2546** - M. Hanbury, Educating pupils with Autism- A Practical Guide.
- No. 2323** - M. Winter, Asperger Syndrome: What teachers need to know.
- No. 1399** - K Quill, Teaching Children with Autism: Strategies to enhance Communication and Socialisation.
- No. 2541** - Autism Association of Western Australia, Autism in the classroom.

Secondary School Students in Mainstream Settings

Students with High-Functioning Autism and Asperger Syndrome may have specific difficulty with homework, studying, retaining information and approaching exams directly related to their diagnosis. These difficulties may include:

Planning and organising (executive functioning)

Homework Pitfalls:

- remembering to take books, homework diary or homework sheets home
- locating all the correct materials for homework or study
- setting up a designated clear place to study
- knowing how to 'find' the information they need by using indexes in books. The student may need to practice use of synonyms or categorizing information so as to use the index appropriately.

Difficulty 'Generalising' information learned

- Facts learned in one context may not be automatically accessed in another.
- Techniques for 'studying' material in one subject may not be automatically applied in another.
- The student may not generalise that the way to respond to questions in class is also the way to respond to them in exams. This seems obvious, but may need to be explicitly stated.

The student may not pick up intuitive things like beginning at the start of a text or at the first of the questions, reading all the information and approaching tasks one at a time in order. This may be due to difficulty with not 'reading between the lines' when instructions about homework or study preparation are given - the student may need every step of the process explicitly stated. Problems with generalisation may mean the student will need this explanation repeated for every subject and every type of task as it is encountered, until they have a good grasp of the 'how to complete homework' and 'how to study' routine.

Other difficulties

- Making a choice when more than one essay question is available
- Learning information by rote, and not being able to see which information learned goes with which question

- Perfectionistic nature which means not beginning for fear of not completing the work perfectly
- Sensory issues like noises in the classroom or exam setting

Study techniques and modifications that may be useful

Class Discussions:

- pre-studying information for use in class discussion
- role-play what the teacher may ask, and practice responses

Essays:

- use 'mind maps' to represent visually the major elements required in the essay
- help the student internalise a structure for writing tasks (intro, main characters, secondary characters, events, conclusion) – remember they learn by repetition
- suggest that the student tape record their ideas instead of writing to get the ideas down faster
- show the student how they can type ideas into a word processor, and use the 'cut' and 'paste' functions to organise these logically after getting them down

Study and Exam techniques:

- Planned studying - questioning self whilst reading about 'what questions might be asked about this in the exam'? As students with an autism spectrum disorder usually have difficulty trying to take another person's perspective, this will most likely need to be taught by an adult reading the questions and explaining how they broke the question down into concepts and came up with possible questions.
- Complete a practice exam and have the student verbalise if possible what is difficult for them, so that compensatory strategies can be taught, and appropriate modifications for the actual exam can be made.
- Practice identifying what *concept* the question is asking. For example, in biology a question about 'methods of regulating temperature' might be expecting students to answer giving information about 'exotherms and endotherms'. If a student can remember which concepts go with various broader headings, they can better know which information to give in an answer.
- Explaining common sense things like where to begin and end the exam
- Explaining the rough notes part of the exam booklet - and that this is not considered by the examiner/marker
- Provide separate scribble paper if the student really cannot bear to 'mess up' the exam by jotting down rough notes
- Seek permission for the student to answer the exam orally, or using a word processor/laptop if spelling or messy handwriting is a concern
- Only have one choice of essay to respond to, if choice is a problem
- If possible, have the student sit exam alone, without extraneous noise
- Use 'consideration of disadvantage' to the full (eg. additional time to think things over)

Resources relevant to secondary students

No. 2605 - Sue Larkey and Anna Tullemans, *The Essential Guide to Successful Secondary School*.

No. 2137 - B. Smith Myles and D. Adreon, *Asperger Syndrome and Adolescence:-Practical Strategies for School Success*.

No. 1262 - C. Skilbeck, *Help! We've got a student with Autism in our Secondary College*.

No. 2052 - M. Hesmondhalgh & C. Breakey, *Access and Inclusion for children with Autistic Spectrum Disorders, 'Let Me In'*.

Moving to tertiary study or work

One of the best resources is a series of booklets developed by the University of Melbourne for tertiary students with unique study requirements - **Towards Success in Tertiary Study**. The two volumes of

particular value are **Discovering your Learning Style** (No. 1665) and **Towards Success in Tertiary Study with Asperger Syndrome** (No. 1663). There are copies of the booklets in the Autism Victoria Library or you can order your own by contacting the Equity, Language and Learning Programs office on (03) 9344 0930 or email llsu-enquiries@unimelb.edu.au.

Other useful resources include:

No. 1756 - Birch, et. al. Making it Happen.

No. 1093 - M. Smith et al, A guide to successful Employment for Individuals with Autism.

No. 2138 – T. Bolick, Asperger Syndrome and Adolescence ; Helping Preteens get ready for the real world.

No. 2633 - Temple Grandin, Developing Talents: Careers for individuals with Asperger Syndrome and High Functioning Autism.

No. 2444 – G. Hawkins, How to find work that works for people with Asperger Syndrome.

Professional Consultancy Services to School

The following Autism Victoria Organisational Members provide educational consultancy and/or professional development services.

Irabina Early Childhood Services Consultancy Support and Advice in Schools (Bayswater)- 9720 1118

Western Autistic School (Niddrie) – contact the school on 9337 9175 for details.

Wantirna Heights School (Wantirna) – contact the schools for details -9720 7492.

Mansfield Autistic School Travelling Teacher Service – contact Mansfield on 5775 2876 for details of this support program designed specifically for rural families.

Contact the Autism Victoria Infoline, 1300 308 699, for contact details of other school consultancy services.

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