



# Autism in the Classroom

*Autism is one of five disorders in a group known as autism spectrum disorders or pervasive development disorders. It is a "spectrum disorder" because its impact on development ranges from mild to severe. The areas of development autism affects most are social interaction, verbal and nonverbal communication, and behavior with others and with objects.*

A Topical Newsletter

November 2009

## Behavior

Impairments can include preoccupation with details or a specific interest, abnormal intensity or focus, inflexibility, repetitive motor movements, inappropriate social interactions.

## Difficulty with Change

Deviating from routine can result in a change in behavior, mood, or academic performance.



## Communication

Impairments can include delayed or lacking verbal language, difficulty starting or maintaining conversation, using repetitive or peculiar language, lacking variety or spontaneity.



## Sensory Stimuli

Sensitivity to loud and familiar sounds can be disturbing and frightening for students.

## Social

Impairments can include difficulties forming peer relationships, using nonverbal behaviors (eye-gaze, facial expressions, gestures), with reciprocal interactions.

## Support System

Advocate for your student. Educating your class on Autism will provide additional supports. Gaining an understanding of the disorder will help classmates come together in support for students with Autism.

## Accommodations Within an Inclusive Setting

*Goals and objectives for interventions are to improve social interaction, communication, and/or behavior for better functioning in daily activities at school, home, and in the community.*

The challenges children with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) face in the classroom impact students' abilities to learn in a mainstream setting. Here are some suggestions for helping them cope with difficult challenges and deficits.

**Difficulty with change.** Teachers can help by providing a picture schedule of activities to complete throughout each day. Always prepare the ASD child for any schedule changes in advance, regardless of how small or insignificant it may seem.

**Difficulty with learning through experiences.** Students with ASD need direct instruction of academic and social skills, hearing and seeing new information is not enough. Structured activities and lessons with an introduction, detailed explanation,

and a summary are helpful. 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 and resolve them. If the student demonstrates problems regulating emotions and behavior, provide time away from the group or class in a safe, private area for the student to compose him/herself. Encourage the student to return to the group or class setting when their stress level decreases. Incorporating "stress relief breaks" for the entire class helps target this challenge for the ASD student inconspicuously.

### Difficulty with figurative language.

Using figurative language 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.

**Difficulty with social communication.** Pair the student with a peer to help with social skills and activities in the classroom and in other settings. Role playing in the classroom also gives the student opportunities to participate and observe acceptable social interactions.

**Difficulty with behavior.** Inappropriate 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 the behavior. Embarrassing the student or causing him/her to feel shame will not help the student to learn appropriate social behaviors.

### Difficulty responding to environmental sounds.

Be conscious of the noise level in the classroom setting. 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.



**Autism affects individuals of all races and ethnicities, affecting boys three to four times more often than girls.**