



# An Autism Friendly Classroom

## General Tips

1. Use Task Analysis –very specific, tasks in sequential order.
2. Always keep your language simple and concrete. Get your point across in as few words as possible. Typically, it's far more effective to say "Pencils down, close your journal and line up to go outside" than "It looks so nice outside. Let's do our science lesson now. As soon as you've finished your writing, close your books and line up at the door. We're going to study plants outdoors today".
3. Teach specific social rules/skills, such as turn-taking and social distance.
4. Give fewer choices. If a child is asked to pick a color, say red, only give him two to three choices to pick from. The more choices, the more confused student with ASD will become.
5. If you ask a question or give an instruction and are greeted with a blank stare, reword your sentence. Asking a student what you just said helps clarify that you've been understood.
6. Avoid using sarcasm. If a student accidentally knocks all your papers on the floor and you say "Great!" you will be taken

## Rules and Rewards

- Define classroom rules as early as possible. Boundaries should be clear and concise. Make sure that all rules are fair to everyone in the classroom and that any 'special' arrangements made for students with ASD are explained to mainstream students.
- Reinforce rules with pictures and words that are clearly visible to the students.
- Establish a reward system. Rewards could be visible for everyone, or only to individual students.
- Be consistent with rules and provide high levels of 'reward' during the initial few weeks of school. Levels of reward can be faded/made more difficult to achieve once an understanding and compliance of the rules have been established.

## Place in the Classroom

Students with Autism need to sit away from distractions as most of them find it difficult to 'tune-out' sensory stimulations.

- Seat ASD students away from the classroom doors as they may be distracted by people coming in and out of the class (more than your average student).
- Seat them away from windows – passers-by are distracting enough for others.

literally and this action might be repeated on a regular basis.

7. Avoid using idioms. "Put your thinking caps on", "Open your ears" and "Zipper your lips" will leave a student completely mystified and wondering how to do that.

8. Give very clear choices and try not to leave choices open ended. You're bound to get a better result by asking "Do you want to read or draw?" than by asking "What do you want to do now?"

9. Checking understanding after you have given instructions. Using short sentences to ensure clarity of instructions.

10. Providing a very clear structure and a set daily routine (including time for play/access to a reinforcing activity).

11. Teaching what "finished" means and helping the student to identify when something has finished and something different has started. Take a photo of what you want the finished product to look like and show the student. If you want the room cleaned up, take a picture of how you want it to look some time when it is clean. The students can use this for a reference.

12. Providing warning of any impending change of routine, or switch of activity.

- If your classroom has lots of colorful posters and displays (which could be very distracting to students with ASD), make sure you place students with ASD in a seat where they are not in front of any colorful displays.
- Make sure that they sit next to a good role model. Being seated next to a student who is hyperactive, talkative or just generally unpredictable can be very unsettling to students with ASD.
- Establish a permanent space or spot for where your students with ASD would sit everytime your class have Circle time and Carpet time. This aids predictability.

## Reduce Anxiety by.....

- Carefully consider classroom seating assignments
- Be aware of sensory concerns and provide sensory stimuli as needed. Build sensory breaks into daily schedule if needed, • Vigorously but respectfully maintain class rules and boundaries
- Provide a predictable structure and prepare the children in advance for transitions or changes in schedules.
- Use "priming" for social situations, changes, and test taking.
- Use of "red" cue to teach self-monitoring through stoplight or thermometer • Provide "safe haven" or quiet area • Monitor your own nonverbal and paraverbal communication.
- Don't argue – redirect

13. Addressing the student individually at all times (for example, the pupil may not realize that an instruction given to the whole class also includes him/her. Calling the pupil's name and saying "I need you to listen to this as this is something for you to do" can sometimes work; other times the pupil will need to be addressed individually).

14. Using various means of presentation – visual, physical guidance, peer modeling, etc.

15. Recognizing that some change in manner or behavior may reflect anxiety (which may be triggered by a [minor] change to routine).

16. Not taking apparently rude or aggressive behavior personally; and recognizing that the target for the student's anger may be unrelated to the source of that anger.

17. Avoid overstimulation. Minimizing/removal of distracters, or providing access to an individual work area or booth, when a task involving concentration is set. Colorful wall displays can be distracting for some students, others may find noise very difficult to cope with.

18. Seeking to link work to the pupil's particular interests.

19. Exploring word-processing, and computer-based learning for literacy.

- Don't assume they can read body language, facial expressions...Be direct! Explain feelings.
- Visuals (Visuals are processed better than words because they don't go away immediately!)
- Provide weekly/monthly agendas
- Clearly organize information on your board.
- Provide question cards (color coded).
- Provide instruction cards (cue cards).
- Provide "turn cards" for answering questions.
- Consistent system to signal an activity change.
- Collect assignments in a routine way.
- Post daily schedule (visual schedule).
- Avoid jokes and sarcasm.

## Use of Visuals

- Visual is a strength for most ASD students It is useful to have individual visual schedules for students with ASD as it helps them organize their day and it helps them predict what will happen next. Physically putting pictures on visual schedule at the start of every school day helps students prepare themselves for the day ahead.
- Make sure that any change in the students' or the class' routine is represented in their schedules. Make sure that such changes are explained.
- Non-verbal students may be helped by introducing [PECS, or Picture Exchange Communication System](#). In simple terms, PECS is communication

20. Protecting the pupil from teasing at free times, and providing peers with some awareness of his/her particular needs.

21. Allowing the student to avoid certain activities (such as sports and games) which s/he may not understand or like; and supporting the student in open-ended and group tasks.

22. Allowing some access to obsessive behavior as a reward for positive efforts.

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through pictures, i.e. students show their teachers a picture of what they want (e.g. the bathroom) and the teacher honors that request.

- Visual schedules can also be prepared to break down large tasks to make the task more manageable for the student.
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