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Physical setup of the classroom

“Josh loves to draw but suddenly refused to go to Art. The tall stools in the Art room were wobbly and he felt very unsafe when he sat on them.”

Points to note

- Children with autism are particularly vulnerable to distractions and have difficulty filtering out irrelevant information, such as background sounds and visual information.
- Children with autism may be distracted and disturbed by the free movement of other children in the classroom, ie. another child may bump his chair or table when moving about the classroom.
- A child with autism will have difficulty concentrating if he is seated in a position where he is distracted by bright sunlight, reflections or other visual information that could disturb him.

What you can do

- If it is practical, establish a work area in the classroom that is uncluttered, free from distractions and not subject to ‘traffic flow’ by other students. It is important not to exclude the child from the rest of the class, but to establish a work area that takes the child’s special needs into account.
- Organise all work materials that the child will need for an activity before commencing the work.
- Seat the child in a quiet corner of the room where there is little chance of him being distracted by light, reflections, the door opening or closing etc. Ensure there is good ventilation.
- The child may find it easier to focus and work at his desk if his work surface is raised to a 15 degree angle.
- Check for sensory issues concerning chair type, ie. soft or hard. At group time, consider the texture of the carpet. A mat, cushion or fabric square may be useful.
- It can be helpful to stick the child’s daily visual schedule in front of his work space.