

## **www.autismhelp.info**

### **Classroom interaction**

#### **Points to note**

- In the classroom, a child with autism will have difficulty reading the intentions of the teacher and understanding why things happen the way they do.
- The child may find the social dimension of shared learning to be confusing, which is why many children learn a great deal from educational computer programs. Computer programs present information in a predictable, logical and sequential format, perfectly suited to the unique learning style of the child with autism.
- The child with autism may not understand that he is part of a group and may ignore instructions given to the class as a whole.
- The child will need to be taught how to pay attention, and especially what he needs to pay attention to.
- A child with autism may have sensory issues that make him feel threatened by the close proximity of other students. Group work may cause anxiety and the child may insist on working alone. When sitting on the floor, sensory difficulties may cause problems, ie. he dislikes the feel of the carpet or floor covering.
- The child may have difficulty with turn taking and waiting his turn. He may ask a lot of irrelevant questions and constantly interrupt the teacher or other students.
- The child may seem to 'switch-off' at times and seem incapable of tuning into classroom activity.
- Be aware that a child who seems quiet and well-behaved may be most at risk in the classroom. Problem issues that are unseen may well go unaddressed until intense frustration results in verbal and/or physical outbursts.

#### **What you can do**

- The child will respond best in a classroom environment that is ordered and quiet, with an atmosphere that is encouraging, not critical.
- It is important the classroom teacher has a positive and supportive approach toward the child with autism; the other children will pick up on this and also adopt a welcoming attitude.
- Written instructions, or a combination of text and pictures should be used to support verbal instructions wherever possible.
- Be explicit when giving verbal instructions – don't assume that the context in which it is given will make the meaning clear.
- Make sure the child understands the daily routine with a written timetable reinforced with images. See [Visual Schedules](#) for more information.
- Watch out for peers who may obviously or subtly annoy the child and ensure they do not sit

together. Some peers may feed off or feedback inappropriate behaviours to the child - perhaps the child with autism likes these peers but the relationship is not necessarily desirable.

- Consider taking the child out of the classroom to a quiet area for short periods to teach new concepts in a setting free from distraction.
- Avoid doing things for the child that he can do himself.
- Take advantage of the number of quality educational computer programs available – if the child has a particular interest in computers he could be rewarded for good behaviour with extra time on the computer. A child who has difficulty with written tasks should be encouraged to type and print his work.
- Don't automatically assume misbehaviour if the child is not responding to an instruction. He needs to understand that he is part of the group. Say his name to get his attention before giving instructions, even when you are giving group instructions.
- Don't assume that the child will read your intentions from your behaviour.
- Don't assume that the child will understand the meaning of any task or activity unless very explicit instructions have been given.
- The child may not focus on what you consider to be the obvious focus of attention. Again, be explicit. You might need to say, "Look at what I'm holding." Not simply, "Look over here."
- Sit the child in the most appropriate place in the classroom, where he is unlikely to be disturbed by the movement and close proximity of others. See also [Physical setup of the classroom](#).
- If the child has difficulty sitting on the floor at group time, mark a special spot for him. If he has sensory processing difficulties (ie. cannot tolerate the feel of the carpet) it may be necessary to provide a cushion or piece of fabric (fluffy fabric, something soft) for him to sit on. A stress ball for him to squeeze may also be effective.
- If the child resists working in small groups, have him work with an integration aide or classroom assistant, if one is available. Then progress to working with one other child, before attempting group work.
- Allow for periods of solitude. The social demands of the classroom can be demanding and frustrating for a child with autism.