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Creating a home base

Points to note

- Students with autism benefit from having a home base room for a number of reasons:
- Students with autism may become stressed and disturbed in a classroom environment due to the amount of noise, movement and/or visual stimuli. If the student needs a break from the classroom, or his teacher requests him to leave due to disruptive behaviour, he needs a safe, calming environment to go to.
- Students with autism are vulnerable to being bullied and teased due to their unusual behaviour and lack of assertiveness. They are an easy target because they stand out.
- If the student has no friends, he may have no-one to talk to about his troubles or anxieties. A student with autism may not know whom to turn to when he needs help or is feeling anxious.
- The social environment at school is demanding and stressful for students with autism.
- The student may feel threatened by the close proximity of others. He may feel stressed in a large group. This is a sensory issue due to tactile defensiveness.
- When a student with autism is stressed, his ability to communicate may be significantly reduced; he may have trouble finding the words to say he needs some time away from the classroom.

What you can do

- A little forethought at the beginning of the year can have enormous benefits and will increase the student's ability to cope throughout the year.
- Where space permits, allocate a resource room as a home base for all students with autism and/or learning disorders, eg. a small classroom with couches, work space, computer access. This can be a place where integration aides or speech pathologists can work with students on a 1:1 basis, and a place for the student to go if he is exited from his class. This room can be a retreat for students before school and during breaks.
- **If it is not possible to set aside a home base...**
- Set up a comfortable corner in the classroom where the child can listen to his favorite music or story through headphones. Incorporate a period of computer time into each lesson – children with autism find learning from computers to be less stressful than group learning.
- Teach the student how to signal or verbally communicate his distress. For example, an agreed signal that means 'I need a break' or a laminated pass card that can be handed to the teacher when the student is feeling overloaded and needs to leave the classroom.
- If possible, arrange access to the library or computer room at recess and lunchtime. This can be a safe place for the child if he is being bullied or teased, or feeling anxious.
- Consider also the physical setup of the classroom and sit the child in a place that will

maximise his ability to learn. See [*Physical setup of the classroom.*](#)

- **If the student needs a break from school due to stress or he is not coping...**
- Send work home via email. If the student is interested in computers, he might be able to set up a web cam link to the classroom.
- The break should not be treated as a punishment.