

Tips for teaching children with ASD (middle years)

Behaviour

- Challenging behaviour is nearly always an attempt to communicate – don't immediately assume misbehaviour. Try to identify the trigger for the behaviour.
- The student may have outbursts of aggression just like a much younger child due to delayed emotional development.
- Be consistent in everything you do. Discuss behavioural issues with others and make sure everyone agrees on the same approach.
- Adhere to well-defined and predictable routines so that the student knows what is expected of him and what *he* can expect each day.
- Always give advance warning of changes in routine.
- Tell the student what you expect of him rather than telling him what you don't want.
- Remember that common techniques for calming an anxious child may have the opposite effect on a child with ASD.
- Don't try to stop odd or repetitive behaviour unless it interferes with learning or threatens the wellbeing of others. It is better to modify the behaviour.
- Look at ways of using the student's obsession or preferred interest in classroom activities.
- Monitor the child's ability to cope in the school ground; he may need time to unwind after recess and lunch if this time stressful.

Communication

- Be sensitive to the student's efforts to communicate.
- Simplify your language. Be aware of language that is likely to be interpreted literally.
- Avoid overloading the student with verbal directions or requests.
- Say the student's name to gain his attention before giving instructions.
- Give one instruction at a time. Allow the student sufficient time to interpret then respond to an instruction. This may take longer in children with ASD.
- Encourage eye contact, but don't insist if this causes anxiety.
- Avoid sarcasm and irony. Metaphors may be confusing.
- Be aware that facial expressions and gestures may be misinterpreted.
- Use visual cues to support verbal communication, eg daily timetable.

Sensory

- Children with autism can be distracted by minor background noise that other people filter out.
- The student may experience sensory overload from visual stimuli, the close proximity of others or from physical contact.
- Take the time to try to understand the student's particular sensory issues.

Social interaction

- Help the student become aware that other people have thoughts and feelings that may be different to their own.
- Be explicit - the student may not focus on what you consider to be obvious.
- Accept that the student may need time out from the demands of social interaction – have a plan for these times.
- Understand the student's difficulty interpreting social cues. Practice appropriate social behaviour with role play.

General tips

- Predictability and routine are important but allow for some flexibility in the student's routine so that he learns to cope with minor changes in a supportive environment.
- Children with ASD need lots of opportunities to learn the same thing in various situations and contexts to encourage generalisation of skills.
- Provide extra support to the student to help organise class materials and books for each class or activity.
- Be persistent and consistent. Progress may be slow and results can be difficult to see at first.
- Try to stay calm and positive.
- Every child with ASD has individual abilities and needs – what works for one student may not work for another.
- Everyone can have a bad day. Don't feel at fault if things are not going well.
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