

FACT SHEET

AUTISM AND THE CLASSROOM



Recent reports estimate that, on average, 1 in every 44 children in the United States has Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). ASD is considered to be a lifelong neurological development disorder for which there is no known cure. It affects individuals from all racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds. ASD is four times more common in boys. The first signs usually appear in early childhood but may not be recognized until later in life.

1 What is Autism Spectrum Disorder?



ASD impacts an individual's ability to communicate, socially interact, behave and learn. ASD is considered to be a spectrum disorder. That means ASD affects each person in different ways and can range from very mild to severe. Some children and adults with ASD are fully able to perform all activities of daily living while others require substantial support to perform basic activities. Every individual with ASD is unique in their abilities and challenges.

ASD is the fastest growing developmental disability. The number of people who are receiving a diagnosis of ASD is increasing. No single factor can explain why more individuals are being identified with ASD. It is not clear whether this is due to the creation of a broader definition of Autism Spectrum Disorders, better diagnosis or if there is a true increase.

2 What are the common characteristics of ASD?



Social	Communication	Repetitive Behavior & Interests
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Difficulty with facial expressions, maintaining eye contact, body language and forming or maintaining friendships• Unusual emotional reactions and expressions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Delayed speech• Atypical speech patterns and tone of voice• Scripting• Difficulty understanding WH questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Difficulty with changes in routine• Repeated actions or body movements• Has obsessive interests• Repeats words or phrases immediately or delayed after hearing it (echolalia)

Follow the six- step plan!

1. Educate yourself:

Have a working understanding of autism and its associated behaviors

2. Reach out to the parents:

They are your first and best resource of information about their child

3. Prepare the classroom:

Modify physical aspects and placement of child in the classroom

4. Educate peers and promote social goals:

Children with autism have the ability and desire to establish and maintain relationships

5. Collaborate on the implementation of an education program:

Create a plan based on the individuals academic skills and goals

6. Manage behavioral challenges:

Individuals with autism may act out when they are fearful. Acting out looks very different for each individual

How autism can make learning difficulty

1. Academic Skills: Difficulty with problem solving, comprehension, concentration, and organization of materials and due dates
2. Social Skills: Difficulty communicating/having conversations with others and relating to others
3. Generalization: Difficulty transferring previously learned skills to new people or situations
4. Sensory Sensitivity: Uncommon response to lights, sounds, smells, and/or touch
5. Transitions: Perform better with routine, set schedules, and expectations
6. Interests: Restricted and highly focused interests

What should inclusion look like?

Inclusion is all about the student belonging. They are welcoming and supportive to diverse academic, social, and emotional, communication needs of all students in the space. Behavior problems decrease and the learner is more socially included when teachers have a positive view of their relationships with students.

Here are some ways you can promote inclusion:

1. Provide extra academic support so the learner remains in the same class as their peers
2. Prompt peers to interact with their classmate with autism
3. Facilitate group work activities (role-playing, turn taking, partnered assignments)
4. Collaborate with home to make an effort to deliver the same interventions

What changes can be made to your classroom?

Most often, when changes are made to the environment or the instruction to support students with ASD, they actually help and support all learners in the classroom.

- Provide designated areas/spaces for each activity and learners' belongings to encourage smooth transitions
- Provide individual work stations, if possible. Teach each learner how to use/run the independent work station

Avoid sensory overload. Considering the following

- Lights: change brightness/color, add light filters, offer sunglasses or hats
- Sound: decrease classroom noise, offer headphones, use soft voices, and modify sound timers if needed
- Smell: consider food, lotions, and scents in the room
- Touch: Ask the learner or ask the parents if the student handles touch

Anticipate Problem Behavior

- Get to know the learner and become aware of triggers or stressors. Create a signal with the learner that they can use during class if they need a break
- Prompt appropriate interactions and appropriate behavior

Provide Visual Supports

- Provide a clear daily schedule
- Use graphic organizers, pictures, written words, maps, labels, and timelines to help the learner better conceptualize lessons

5 Essential Support Strategies

1. **Priming**- Exposes the learner to academic materials before the instruction. Reduces stress and allows more time to understand key concepts
2. **Academic Modifications**- Any adaptations or modifications made to the academic material or format to allow the learner to navigate the materials easier and to meet their needs
3. **Home Base**- Designated area for the learner to return to if needed to regain control/take a break during times of high stress or anxiety. A home base space gives the opportunity for the learner to privately cope without distracting others
4. **Visual Supports**- Materials that illustrate or represent information or messages in specific spaces. This provides the learner with extra support around the classroom and an opportunity to become more independent
5. **Reinforcement**- Providing reinforcement for desired and productive behavior to support the learner's personal growth and development