

Teaching Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a group of developmental disorders that affect social communication and social interaction. Individuals with ASD tend to exhibit repetitive behaviors, sensory issues, and limited interests. Each individual with ASD may be affected by a varying and wide range of symptoms, strength of symptoms, and level of impairment. Other terms used to describe ASD include autistic disorder, Asperger's syndrome, and pervasive developmental disorder, not otherwise specified.

According to Siminoff, Pickles, Charman, Chandler, Loucas and Baird (2008), 70 percent of adults with autism have at least one additional disorder such as social anxiety and attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder and oppositional disorder. Obsessive-compulsive disorder, Tourette's syndrome, insomnia, and depression are commonly also found in people with autism (Attwood, 2007).

Common Presentations of ASD in the Classroom

Not all persons with ASD will exhibit the following behaviors but most will exhibit several to many:

- Repeat certain behaviors or have unusual behaviors
- Have overly focused interests, such as with moving objects or parts of objects
- Have a lasting, intense interest in certain topics, such as numbers, details, or facts
- Be upset by a slight change in a routine or being placed in a new or overstimulating setting
- Make little or inconsistent eye contact
- Tend to look and listen less to people in their environment
- Rarely seek to share their enjoyment of objects or activities by pointing or showing things to others
- Respond unusually when others show anger, distress, or affection



Supporting Students with ASD in Class

Some examples of possible accommodations that a student with ASD may require include (but are not limited to):

"Dear Professor Memos" verifying the need for accommodations

Priority/early course registration

Accommodated testing for in-class and online exams and quizzes

Note-taking services and/or the use of an audio recorder for class lectures

Allowance of laptops, tablets, or assistive technology in the classroom

Each student with ASD is unique, but many tend to think literally and require very specific instructions. The student is not helped by the common phrase: "Turn your papers in by the due date." They may not respond to a directive that they perceive to be somewhat vague and will

Establish rules as needed for the classroom. Communicate to the student calmly and in private when there have been violations in class etiquette.
Work with the Office of Disability Services if behavior modification is needed
Set clear guidelines for participation (e.g. 3 times per class) if the student is over contributing or under contributing
Be aware of sensory overload

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