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Aspergers: Teacher Packet



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Understanding the Student With Aspergers Syndrome: Guidelines for Teachers

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Children diagnosed with Asperger syndrome present a special challenge in the educational milieu. This article provides teachers with descriptions of seven defining characteristics of Asperger syndrome, in addition to suggestions and strategies for addressing these symptoms in the classroom. Behavioral and academic interventions based on the author's teaching experiences with children with Asperger syndrome are offered.

Children diagnosed with Asperger syndrome (AS; see Note) present a special challenge in the educational milieu. Typically viewed as eccentric and peculiar by classmates, their inept social skills often cause them to be made victims of scapegoating. Clumsiness and an obsessive interest in obscure subjects add to their "odd" presentation. Children with AS lack understanding of human relationships and the rules of social convention; they are naive and conspicuously lacking in common sense. Their inflexibility and inability to cope with change causes these individuals to be easily stressed and emotionally vulnerable. At the same time, children with AS (the majority of whom are boys) are often of average to above-average intelligence and have superior rote memories. Their single-minded pursuit of their interests can lead to great achievements later in life.

Asperger syndrome is considered a disorder at the higher end of the autistic continuum. Comparing individuals within this continuum, Van Krevelen (cited in Wing, 1991) noted that the low-functioning child with autism "lives in a world of his own," whereas the higher functioning child with autism "lives in our world but in his own way" (p.99).

Naturally, not all children with AS are alike. Just as each child with AS has his or her own unique personality, "typical" AS symptoms are manifested in ways specific to each individual. As a result, there is no exact recipe for classroom approaches that can be provided for every youngster with AS, just as no one educational method fits the needs of all children not afflicted with AS.

Following are descriptions of seven defining characteristics of Asperger syndrome, followed by suggestions and classroom strategies for addressing these symptoms. (Classroom interventions are illustrated with examples from my own teaching experiences at the University of Michigan Medical Center Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Hospital School.) These suggestions are offered only in the broadest sense and should be tailored to the unique needs of the individual student with AS.

Insistence on Sameness

Children with AS are easily overwhelmed by minimal change, are highly sensitive to environmental stressors, and sometimes engage in rituals. They are anxious and tend to worry obsessively when they do not know what to expect; stress, fatigue and sensory overload easily throw them off balance.

Programming Suggestions

- Provide a predictable and safe environment;
 - Minimize transitions;
 - Offer consistent daily routine: The child with AS must understand each day's routine and know what to expect in order to be able to concentrate on the task at hand;
 - Avoid surprises: Prepare the child thoroughly and in advance for special activities, altered schedules, or any other change in routine, regardless of how minimal;
 - Allay fears of the unknown by exposing the child to the new activity, teacher, class, school, camp and so forth beforehand, and as soon as possible after he or she is informed of the change, to prevent obsessive worrying. (For instance, when the child with AS must change schools, he or she should meet the new teacher, tour the new school and be apprised of his or her routine in advance of actual attendance. School assignments from the old school might be provided the first few days so that the routine is familiar to the child in the new environment. The receiving teacher might find out the child's special areas of interest and have related books or activities available on the child's first day.)
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Impairment in Social Interaction

Children with AS show an inability to understand complex rules of social interaction; are naive; are extremely egocentric; may not like physical contact; talk at people instead of to them; do not understand jokes, irony or metaphors; use monotone or stilted, unnatural tone of voice; use inappropriate gaze and body language; are insensitive and lack tact; misinterpret social cues; cannot judge "social distance;" exhibit poor ability to initiate and sustain conversation; have well-developed speech but poor communication; are sometimes labeled "little professor" because speaking style is so adult-like and pedantic; are easily taken advantage of (do not perceive that others sometimes lie or trick them); and usually have a desire to be part of the social world.

Programming Suggestions

- Protect the child from bullying and teasing;
- In the higher age groups, attempt to educate peers about the child with AS when social ineptness is severe by describing his or her social problems as a true disability. Praise classmates when they treat him or her with compassion. This task may prevent scapegoating, while promoting empathy and tolerance in the other children;
- Emphasize the proficient academic skills of the child with AS by creating cooperative learning situations in which his or her reading skills, vocabulary, memory and so forth will be viewed as an asset by peers, thereby engendering acceptance;
- Most children with AS want friends but simply do not know how to interact. They should be taught how to react to social cues and be given repertoires of responses to use in various social situations. Teach the children what to say and how to say it. Model two-way interactions and let them role-play. These children's social judgment improves only after they have been taught rules that others pick up intuitively. One adult with AS noted that he had learned to "ape human behavior." A college professor with AS remarked that her quest to understand human interactions made her "feel like an anthropologist from Mars" (Sacks, 1993, p.112);
- Although they lack personal understanding of the emotions of others, children with AS can learn the correct way to respond. When they have been unintentionally insulting, tactless or insensitive, it must be explained to them why the response was inappropriate and what response would have been correct. Individuals with AS must learn social skills intellectually: They lack social instinct and intuition;

- Older students with AS might benefit from a "buddy system." The teacher can educate a sensitive nondisabled classmate about the situation of the child with AS and seat them next to each other. The classmate could look out for the child with AS on the bus, during recess, in the hallways and so forth, and attempt to include him or her in school activities.
 - Children with AS tend to be reclusive; thus the teacher must foster involvement with others. Encourage active socialization and limit time spent in isolated pursuit of interests. For instance, a teacher's aide seated at the lunch table could actively encourage the child with AS to participate in the conversation of his or her peers not only by soliciting his or her opinions and asking him questions, but also by subtly reinforcing other children who do the same.
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Restricted Range of Interests

Children with AS have eccentric preoccupations or odd, intense fixations (sometimes obsessively collecting unusual things). They tend to relentlessly "lecture" on areas of interest; ask repetitive questions about interests; have trouble letting go of ideas; follow own inclinations regardless of external demands; and sometimes refuse to learn about anything outside their limited field of interest.

Programming Suggestions

- Do not allow the child with AS to perseveratively discuss or ask questions about isolated interests. Limit this behavior by designating a specific time during the day when the child can talk about this. For example: A child with AS who was fixated on animals and had innumerable questions about a class pet turtle knew that he was allowed to ask these questions only during recesses. This was part of his daily routine and he quickly learned to stop himself when he began asking these kinds of questions at other times of the day;
- Use of positive reinforcement selectively directed to shape a desired behavior is the critical strategy for helping the child with AS (Dewey, 1991). These children respond to compliments (e.g., in the case of a relentless question-asker, the teacher might consistently praise him as soon as he pauses and congratulate him for allowing others to speak). These children should also be praised for simple, expected social behavior that is taken for granted in other children;
- Some children with AS will not want to do assignments outside their area of interest. Firm expectations must be set for completion of classwork. It must be made very clear to the child with AS that he is not in control and that he must follow specific rules. At the same time, however, meet the children halfway by giving them opportunities to pursue their own interests;
- For particularly recalcitrant children, it may be necessary to initially individualize all assignments around their interest area (e.g., if the interest is dinosaurs, then offer grammar sentences, math word problems and reading and spelling tasks about dinosaurs). Gradually introduce other topics into assignments;
- Students can be given assignments that link their interest to the subject being studied. For example, during a social studies unit about a specific country, a child obsessed with trains might be assigned to research the modes of transportation used by people in that country;
- Use the child's fixation as a way to broaden his or her repertoire of interests. For instance, during a unit on rain forests, the student with AS who was obsessed with animals was led to not only study rain forest animals but to also study the forest itself, as this was the animals' home. He was then motivated to learn about the local people who were forced to chop down the animals' forest habitat in order to survive.

Poor Concentration

Children with AS are often off task, distracted by internal stimuli; are very disorganized; have difficulty sustaining focus on classroom activities (often it is not that the attention is poor but, rather, that the focus is "odd" ; the individual with AS cannot figure out what is relevant [Happe, 1991], so attention is focused on irrelevant stimuli); tend to withdrawal into complex inner worlds in a manner much more intense than is typical of daydreaming and have difficulty learning in a group situation.

Programming Suggestions

- A tremendous amount of regimented external structure must be provided if the child with AS is to be productive in the classroom. Assignments should be broken down into small units, and frequent teacher feedback and redirection should be offered;
- Children with severe concentration problems benefit from timed work sessions. This helps them organize themselves. Classwork that is not completed within the time limit (or that is done carelessly) within the time limit must be made up during the child's own time (i.e., during recess or during the time used for pursuit of special interests). Children with AS can sometimes be stubborn; they need firm expectations and a structured program that teaches them that compliance with rules leads to positive reinforcement (this kind of program motivates the child with AS to be productive, thus enhancing self-esteem and lowering stress levels, because the child sees himself as competent);
- In the case of mainstreamed students with AS, poor concentration, slow clerical speed and severe disorganization may make it necessary to lessen his or her homework/classwork load and/or provide time in a resource room where a special education teacher can provide the additional structure the child needs to complete classwork and homework (some children with AS are so unable to concentrate that it places undue stress on parents to expect that they spend hours each night trying to get through homework with their child);
- Seat the child with AS at the front of the class and direct frequent questions to him or her to help him or her attend to the lesson;
- Work out a nonverbal signal with the child (e.g., a gentle pat on the shoulder) for times when he or she is not attending;
- If a buddy system is used, sit the child's buddy next to him or her so the buddy can remind the child with AS to return to task or listen to the lesson;
- The teacher must actively encourage the child with AS to leave his or her inner thoughts/fantasies behind and refocus on the real world. This is a constant battle, as the comfort of that inner world is believed to be much more attractive than anything in real life. For young children, even free play needs to be structured, because they can become so immersed in solitary, ritualized fantasy play that they lose touch with reality. Encouraging a child with AS to play a board game with one or two others under close supervision not only structures play but offers an opportunity to practice social skills.

Poor Motor Coordination

Children with AS are physically clumsy and awkward; have stiff, awkward gaits; are unsuccessful in games involving motor skills; and experience fine-motor deficits that can cause penmanship problems, slow clerical speed and affect their ability to draw.

Programming Suggestions

- Refer the child with AS for adaptive physical education program if gross motor problems are severe;
 - Involve the child with AS in a health/fitness curriculum in physical education, rather than in a competitive sports program;
 - Do not push the child to participate in competitive sports, as his or her poor motor coordination may only invite frustration and the teasing of team members. The child with AS lacks the social understanding of coordinating one's own actions with those of others on a team;
 - Children with AS may require a highly individualized cursive program that entails tracing and copying on paper, coupled with motor patterning on the blackboard. The teacher guides the child's hand repeatedly through the formation of letters and letter connections and also uses a verbal script. Once the child commits the script to memory, he or she can talk himself or herself through letter formations independently;
 - Younger children with AS benefit from guidelines drawn on paper that help them control the size and uniformity of the letters they write. This also forces them to take the time to write carefully;
 - When assigning timed units of work, make sure the child's slower writing speed is taken into account;
 - Individuals with AS may need more than their peers to complete exams (taking exams in the resource room not only offer more time but would also provide the added structure and teacher redirection these children need to focus on the task at hand).
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Academic Difficulties

Children with AS usually have average to above-average intelligence (especially in the verbal sphere) but lack high level thinking and comprehension skills. They tend to be very literal: Their images are concrete, and abstraction is poor. Their pedantic speaking style and impressive vocabularies give the false impression that they understand what they are talking about, when in reality they are merely parroting what they have heard or read. The child with AS frequently has an excellent rote memory, but it is mechanical in nature; that is, the child may respond like a video that plays in set sequence. Problem-solving skills are poor.

Programming Suggestions

- Provide a highly individualized academic program engineered to offer consistent successes. The child with AS needs great motivation to not follow his or her own impulses. Learning must be rewarding and not anxiety-provoking;
- Do not assume that children with AS understand something just because they parrot back what they have heard;
- Offer added explanation and try to simplify when lesson concepts are abstract;
- Capitalize on these individuals' exceptional memory: Retaining factual information is frequently their forte;
- Emotional nuances, multiple levels of meaning, and relationship issues as presented in novels will often not be understood;
- The writing assignments of individuals with AS are often repetitious, flit from one subject to the next, and contain incorrect word connotations. These children frequently do not know the

difference between general knowledge and personal ideas and therefore assume the teacher will understand their sometimes abstruse expressions;

- Children with AS often have excellent reading recognition skills, but language comprehension is weak. Do not assume they understand what they so fluently read;
 - Academic work may be of poor quality because the child with AS is not motivated to exert effort in areas in which he or she is not interested. Very firm expectations must be set for the quality of work produced. Work executed within timed periods must be not only complete but done carefully. The child with AS should be expected to correct poorly executed classwork during recess or during the time he or she usually pursues his or her own interests.
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Emotional Vulnerability

Children with Asperger Syndrome have the intelligence to compete in regular education but they often do not have the emotional resources to cope with the demands of the classroom. These children are easily stressed due to their inflexibility. Self-esteem is low, and they are often very self-critical and unable to tolerate making mistakes. Individuals with AS, especially adolescents, may be prone to depression (a high percentage of depression in adults with AS has been documented). Rage reactions/temper outbursts are common in response to stress/frustration. Children with AS rarely seem relaxed and are easily overwhelmed when things are not as their rigid views dictate they should be. Interacting with people and coping with the ordinary demands of everyday life take continual Herculean effort.

Programming Suggestions

- Prevent outbursts by offering a high level of consistency. Prepare these children for changes in daily routine, to lower stress (see "Resistance to Change" section). Children with AS frequently become fearful, angry, and upset in the face of forced or unexpected changes;
- Teach the children how to cope when stress overwhelms him or her, to prevent outbursts. Help the child write a list of very concrete steps that can be followed when he or she becomes upset (e.g., 1-Breathe deeply three times; 2-Count the fingers on your right hand slowly three times; 3-Ask to see the special education teacher, etc.). Include a ritualized behavior that the child finds comforting on the list. Write these steps on a card that is placed in the child's pocket so that they are always readily available;
- Affect as reflected in the teacher's voice should be kept to a minimum. Be calm, predictable, and matter-of-fact in interactions with the child with AS, while clearly indicating compassion and patience. Hans Asperger (1991), the psychiatrist for whom this syndrome is named, remarked that "the teacher who does not understand that it is necessary to teach children [with AS] seemingly obvious things will feel impatient and irritated" (p.57); Do not expect the child with AS to acknowledge that he or she is sad/ depressed. In the same way that they cannot perceive the feelings of others, these children can also be unaware of their own feelings. They often cover up their depression and deny its symptoms;
- Teachers must be alert to changes in behavior that may indicate depression, such as even greater levels of disorganization, inattentiveness, and isolation; decreased stress threshold; chronic fatigue; crying; suicidal remarks; and so on. Do not accept the child's assessment in these cases that he or she is "OK"
- Report symptoms to the child's therapist or make a mental health referral so that the child can be evaluated for depression and receive treatment if this is needed. Because these children are often unable to assess their own emotions and cannot seek comfort from others, it is critical that depression be diagnosed quickly;

- Be aware that adolescents with AS are especially prone to depression. Social skills are highly valued in adolescence and the student with AS realizes he or she is different and has difficulty forming normal relationships. Academic work often becomes more abstract, and the adolescent with AS finds assignments more difficult and complex. In one case, teachers noted that an adolescent with AS was no longer crying over math assignments and therefore believed that he was coping much better. In reality, his subsequent decreased organization and productivity in math was believed to be function of his escaping further into his inner world to avoid the math, and thus he was not coping well at all;
- It is critical that adolescents with AS who are mainstreamed have an identified support staff member with whom they can check in at least once daily. This person can assess how well he or she is coping by meeting with him or her daily and gathering observations from other teachers;
- Children with AS must receive academic assistance as soon as difficulties in a particular area are noted. These children are quickly overwhelmed and react much more severely to failure than do other children;
- Children with AS who are very fragile emotionally may need placement in a highly structured special education classroom that can offer individualized academic program. These children require a learning environment in which they see themselves as competent and productive. Accordingly, keeping them in the mainstream, where they cannot grasp concepts or complete assignments, serves only to lower their self-concept, increase their withdrawal, and set the stage for a depressive disorder. (In some situations, a personal aide can be assigned to the child with AS rather than special education placement. The aide offers affective support, structure and consistent feedback.)

Children with Aspergers syndrome are so easily overwhelmed by environmental stressors, and have such profound impairment in the ability to form interpersonal relationships, that it is no wonder they give the impression of "fragile vulnerability and a pathetic childishness" (Wing, 1981, p. 117). Everard (1976) wrote that when these youngsters are compared with their nondisabled peers, "one is instantly aware of how different they are and the enormous effort they have to make to live in a world where no concessions are made and where they are expected to conform" (p.2).

Teachers can play a vital role in helping children with AS learn to negotiate the world around them. Because children with AS are frequently unable to express their fears and anxieties, it is up to significant adults to make it worthwhile for them to leave their safe inner fantasy lives for the uncertainties of the external world. Professionals who work with these youngsters in schools must provide the external structure, organization, and stability that they lack. Using creative teaching strategies with individuals suffering from Asperger syndrome is critical, not only to facilitate academic success, but also to help them feel less alienated from other human beings and less overwhelmed by the ordinary demands of everyday life.

Note

See the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (4th ed.;p.77) for diagnostic criteria.

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Tips for Teaching High-Functioning People with Autism

People with autism have trouble with organizational skills, regardless of their intelligence and/or age. Even a "straight A" student with autism who has a photographic memory can be incapable of remembering to bring a pencil to class or of remembering a deadline for an assignment. In such cases, aid should be provided in the least restrictive way possible. Strategies could include having a student put a picture of a pencil on the cover of his notebook or reminders at the end of the day of assignments to be completed at home. Always praise the student when he remembers something he has previously forgotten. Never denigrate or "harp" at him when he fails. A lecture on the subject will not only NOT help, it will often make the problem worse. He may begin to believe he can't remember to do or bring these things.

These students seem to have either the neatest or the messiest desks or lockers in the school. The one with the neatest desk or locker is probably very insistent on sameness and will be very upset if someone disturbs the order he has created. The one with the messiest desk will need your help in frequent cleanups of the desk or locker so that he may find things. Simply remember that he is probably not making a conscious choice to be messy, he is most likely incapable of this organizational task without specific training. Train him in organizational skills using small, specific steps.

1. People with autism have problems with abstract and conceptual thinking. Some may eventually acquire a few abstract skills, but others never will. Avoid abstract ideas when possible. When abstract concepts must be used, use visual cues, such as gestures, or written words to augment the abstract idea.
2. An increase in unusual or difficult behaviors probably indicates an increase in stress. Sometimes stress is caused by feeling a loss of control. When this occurs, the "safe place" or "safe person" may come in handy, because many times the stress will only be alleviated when the student physically removes himself from the stressful event or situation. If this occurs, a program should be set up to assist the student in re-entering and/or staying in the stressful situation.
3. Don't take misbehavior personally. The high-functioning person with autism is not a manipulative, scheming person who is trying to make life difficult. Usually misbehavior is the result of efforts to survive experiences which may be confusing, disorienting, or frightening. People with autism are, by virtue of their handicap, egocentric and have extreme difficulty reading the reactions of others. They are incapable of being manipulative.
4. Most high-functioning people with autism use and interpret speech literally. Until you know the capabilities of the individual, you should avoid:
 - Idioms (save your breath, jump the gun, second thoughts, etc.)
 - Double meanings (most jokes have double meanings)
 - Sarcasm, such as saying, "Great!" after he has just spilled a bottle of ketchup on the table.
 - Nicknames
 - "Cute" names, such as Pal, Buddy, Wise Guy, etc.
5. Be as concrete as possible in all your interactions with these students. Remember that facial expression and other social cues may not work. Avoid asking questions such as, "Why did you do that?" Instead, say, "I didn't like the way you slammed your book down on the desk when I said it was time for gym. Please put your book down on the desk quietly and get up to leave for gym."

In answering essay questions that require a synthesis of information, autistic individuals rarely know when they have said enough, or if they are properly addressing the core of the question.

6. If the student doesn't seem to be able to learn a task, break it down into smaller steps or present the task in several different ways (e.g., visually, verbally, physically).
7. Avoid verbal overload. Be clear. Use shorter sentences if you perceive that the student doesn't fully understand you. Although he probably has no hearing problem and may be paying attention, he may have a problem understanding your main point and identifying the important information.
8. Prepare the student for all environmental and/or routine changes, such as assembly, substitute teacher, rescheduling, etc. Use his written or visual schedule to prepare for change.
9. Behavior management works, but if incorrectly used, it can encourage robot-like behavior, provide only a short term behavior change, or result in more aggression. Use positive and chronologically age-appropriate behavior procedures.
10. Consistent treatment and expectations from everyone is vital.
11. Be aware that normal levels of auditory and visual input can be perceived by the student as too much or too little. For example, the hum of fluorescent lighting is extremely distracting for some people with autism. Consider environmental changes such as removing some of the "visual clutter" from the room or seating changes if the student seems distracted or upset by his classroom environment.
12. If your high-functioning student with autism uses repetitive verbal arguments and/or repetitive verbal questions, try requesting that he write down the question or argumentative statement. Then write down your reply. As the writing continues, the person with autism usually begins to calm down and stop the repetitive activity. If that doesn't work, write down his repetitive verbal question or argument, and then ask him to formulate and write down a logical reply or a reply he thinks you would make. This distracts him from the escalating verbal aspect of the argument or question and sometimes gives him a more socially acceptable way of expressing his frustration or anxiety.
13. If the student does not read or write, try role playing the repetitive verbal question or argument with you taking their part and them answering you. Continually responding in a logical manner or arguing back seldom stops this behavior. The subject of their argument or question is not always the subject which has upset them. The argument or question more often communicates a feeling of loss of control or uncertainty about someone or something in the environment.
14. Individuals with autism often have trouble "getting" your points. If the repetitive verbal argument or question persists, consider the possibility that he is very concerned about the topic and does not know how to rephrase the question or comment to get the information he needs.
15. Since these individuals experience various communication difficulties, don't rely on the student with autism to relay important messages to their parents about school events, assignments, school rules, etc. unless you try it on an experimental basis with follow-up, or unless you are already certain that the student has mastered this skill. Even sending home a note for his parent

may not work. The student may not remember to deliver the note or may lose it before reaching home. Phone calls to the parent work best until this skill can be developed. Frequent and accurate communication between the teacher and parent (or primary care-giver) is very important.

16. If your class involves pairing off or choosing partners, either draw numbers or use some other arbitrary means of pairing. Or ask an especially kind student if he or she would agree to choose the individual with autism as a partner. This should be arranged before the pairing is done. The student with autism is most often the individual left with no partners. This is unfortunate since these students could benefit most from having a partner.

BE POSITIVE! BE CREATIVE! BE FLEXIBLE!

Aspergers Syndrome Guide for Teachers

The following guide was prepared so that families could have a short description of AS and its behaviors to share with their children's teachers. Since all children are different please feel free to use those items which are appropriate for your child and/or make changes and additions as necessary. Cut and paste all or part, make it your own. The parents of AS children who put together this list hope that it will help teachers to better understand some of the characteristics of our children.

Written by the Members of the OASIS Asperger Syndrome Forum
Compiled and Edited by Elly Tucker

Hello, we are _____'s parents. Our child has been diagnosed with Aspergers Syndrome, which is a neurobiological disorder on the autistic spectrum. Children with AS may have difficulty using and understanding nonverbal behaviors and developing appropriate peer relationships ,in part, because their interactions often lack spontaneous exchange. While they often have keen interests and skills in certain subjects, they also may have a great deal of difficulty with organization. AS children may appear to lack in empathy, have difficulty with sensory issues and very often strongly rely on routine.

You will learn that our child has many strengths. However, listed below are some issues that may become apparent to you as you work with _____. Many of the behaviors you will see are NOT under his or her control and they are not a result of malice or willful misbehavior. At times our child simply does not innately know how to appropriately respond. No doubt, you will learn other strategies which will be helpful and we would appreciate your sharing with us. Please call us at any time if you have questions about our child or Asperger Syndrome. We can be reached at:

General Behaviors

- This syndrome is characterized by a sort of "swiss cheese" type of development: that is, some things are learned age-appropriately, while other things may lag behind or be absent. Furthermore, children may have skills years ahead of normal development (for example, a child may understand complex mathematics principles, yet not be able to remember to bring their homework home).
- It is important to remember that just because the child learns something in one situation this doesn't automatically mean that they remember or is able to generalize the learning to new situations.
- Our child reacts well to positive and patient styles of teaching.
- Generally speaking an adult speaking in a calm voice will reap many benefits
- At times, our child may experience "meltdowns" when nothing may help behavior. At times like this, please allow a "safe and quiet spot" where our child will be allowed to "cool off" Try to take note of what occurred before the meltdown (was it an unexpected change in routine, for example) and it's best to talk "after" the situation has calmed down.
- When it reaches a point that things in the classroom are going well, it means that we've gotten it RIGHT. It doesn't mean that our child is "cured", "never had a problem" or that "it's time to remove support". Increase demands gradually.

- Our child may have vocal outbursts or shriek. Be prepared for them, especially when having a difficult time. Also, please let the other children know that this is a way of dealing with stress or fear.
- When you see anger or other outbursts, our child is not being deliberately difficult. Instead, this is in a "fight/fright/flight" reaction. Think of this as an "electrical circuit overload" (Prevention can sometimes head off situations if you see the warning signs coming).
- Our child may need help with problem-solving situations. Please be willing to take the time to help with this.
- When dividing up assignments, please ASSIGN teams rather than have the other children "choose members", because this increases the chances that our child will be left out or teased.
- Note strengths often and visually. This will give our child the courage to keep on plugging.
- Foster a classroom atmosphere that supports the acceptance of differences and diversity.

Perseverations

- Our child may repeat the same thing over and over again, and you may find these increases as stress increases.
- It is more helpful if you avoid being pulled into this by answering the same thing over and over or raising your voice or pointing out that the question is being repeated. Instead, try to redirect our child's attention or find an alternative way so he/she can save face.
- Allowing our child to write down the question or thought and providing a response in writing may break the stresses/cycle.

Transitions

- Our child may have a great deal of difficulty with transitions. Having a picture or word schedule may be helpful.
- Please try to give as much advance notice as possible if there is going to be a change or disruption in the schedule.
- Giving one or two warnings before a change of activity or schedule may be helpful

Sensory Motor Skills/Auditory Processing

- Our child has difficulty understanding a string of directions or too many words at one time
- Breaking directions down into simple steps is quite helpful
- Using picture cues or directions may also help
- Speaking slower and in smaller phrases can help.
- Directions are more easily understood if they are repeated clearly, simply and in a variety of ways.
- Our child may act in a very clumsy way; she may also react very strongly to certain tastes, textures, smells and sounds.

Stimuli

- He may get over stimulated by loud noises, lights, strong tastes or textures, because of the heightened sensitivity to these things.
- With lots of other kids, chaos and noise, please try to help him find a quiet spot to which he can go for some "solace".

- Unstructured times (such as lunch, break and PE) may prove to be the most difficult for him. Please try to help provide some guidance and extra adults help during these more difficult times.
- Allow him to "move about" as sitting still for long periods of time can be very difficult (even a 5 minute walk around, with a friend or aide can help a lot).

Visual Cues

- Some AS children learn best with visual aids, such as picture schedules, written directions or drawings (other children may do better with verbal instruction)
- Hand signals may be helpful, especially to reinforce certain messages, such as "wait your turn", "stop talking" (out of turn), or "speak more slowly or softly".

Interruptions

- At times, it may take more than few seconds for my child to respond to questions. He needs to stop what he's thinking, put that somewhere, formulate an answer and then respond. Please wait patiently for the answer and encourage others to do the same. Otherwise, he will have to start over again.
- When someone tries to help by finishing his sentences or interrupting, he often has to go back and start over to get the train of thought back.

Eye Contact

- At times, it looks as if my child is not listening to you when he really is. Don't assume that because he is not looking at you that he is not hearing you.
- Unlike most of us, sometimes forcing eye contact BREAKS her concentration
- She may actually hear and understand you better if not forced to look directly at your eyes.

Social Skills and Friendships

- Herein lies one of the biggest challenges for AS children. They may want to make friends very badly, yet not have a clue as to how to go about it.
- Identifying 1 or 2 empathetic students who can serve as "buddies" will help the child feel as though the world is a friendlier place
- Talking with the other members of the class may help, if done in a positive way and with the permission of the family. For example, talking about the fact that many or most of us have challenges and that the AS child's challenge is that he cannot read social situations well, just as others may need glasses or hearing aids.
- Students with Aspergers Syndrome may be at greater risk for becoming "victims" of bullying behavior by other students. This is caused by a couple of factors:
 1. There is a great likelihood that the response or "rise" that the "bully" gets from the Asperger child reinforces this kind of behavior
 2. Asperger kids want to be included and/or liked so badly that they are reluctant to "tell" on the bully, fearing rejection from the perpetrator or other students.

Routine

- This is very important to most AS children, but can be very difficult to attain on a regular basis in our world.
- Please let our child know of any anticipated changes as soon as you know them, especially with picture or word schedules.
- Let him know, if possible, when there will be a substitute teacher or a field trip occurring during regular school hours.

Language

- Although his vocabulary and use of language may seem high, AS children may not know the meaning of what they are saying even though the words sound correct.
- Sarcasm and some forms of humor are often not understood by my child. Even explanations of what is meant may not clarify, because the perspectives of AS child can be unique and, at times, immovable.

Organizational Skills

- Our child lacks the ability of remember a lot of information or how to retrieve that information for its use.
- It may be helpful to develop schedules (picture or written) for him.
- Please post schedules and homework assignments on the board and make a copy for him. Please make sure that these assignments get put into his backpack because he can't always be counted on to get everything home without some help.
- If necessary allow her to copy the notes of other children or provide her with a copy Many AS children are also dysgraphic and they are unable to listen to you talk, read the board and take notes at the same time.

A Final Word

At times, some of my child's behaviors may be aggravating and annoying to you and to members of his class. Please know that this is normal and expected. Try not to let the difficult days color the fact that YOU are a wonderful teacher with a challenging situation and that nothing works all of the time (and some things don't even work most of the time). You will also be treated to a new and very unique view of the world that will entertain and fascinate you at times. Please feel free to share with us whatever you would like. We have heard it before. It will not shock us or make us think poorly of you.

Communication is the key and by working together as a team we can provide the best for our child.

Thank you very much.

Behaviors That May Be Personal Challenges For A Student With An Autism Spectrum Disorder

These forms were adapted from the *Technical Assistance Manual on Autism for Kentucky Schools* by Nancy Dalrymple and Lisa Ruble, which is an excellent resource for parents, teachers, and special education personnel. For information on how to receive a copy of this manual please contact:

Anne Moll
Kentucky Department of Education
17th Floor CPT
500 Mero Street
Frankfort, KY 40601
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The cost, which will be nominal in order to cover copying costs, has not yet been determined.

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Qualitative Impairments in Social Interaction:	Comments:
<input type="checkbox"/> wanting and needing to be left alone at times	
<input type="checkbox"/> trouble with back and forth social interactions	
<input type="checkbox"/> inability to respond to social cues	
<input type="checkbox"/> inability to understand how someone else might feel	
<input type="checkbox"/> inappropriate giggling or laughing	
<input type="checkbox"/> impaired imitation - not engaging in simple games of childhood	
<input type="checkbox"/> not accepting cuddling, hugging, touching unless self initiated	
<input type="checkbox"/> lack of socially directed smiles when young	
<input type="checkbox"/> little sense of other people's boundaries	
<input type="checkbox"/> engaging in stereotypic question asking as interaction pattern	
<input type="checkbox"/> inappropriately intrusive in social situations	
<input type="checkbox"/> mimicking actions from TV, but not in reciprocal manner	
<input type="checkbox"/> inappropriate use of eye contact, avoidance or extended staring	
<input type="checkbox"/> poor use of non-verbal gestures	
<input type="checkbox"/> trouble with competition, i.e., winning, losing, being first	

Restricted Repetitive & Stereotyped Patterns of Behavior, Interests & Activities:

- repeatedly watching videos or video segments
- lining up and/or ordering objects
- strong attachment to inanimate objects (strings, bottles)
- fascination with movement (spinning wheels, fans, door & drawers)
- pacing or running back and forth, round and round
- exploring environment through licking, smelling, touching
- very sensitive to sounds (may have acted as if deaf as baby)
- insistence on routines, resisting change
- negative reaction to change in environment
- perfectionist, problems with correction or "mistake"
- difficulty with unstructured time
- difficulty waiting
- impaired response to temperature or pain
- staring at patterns, lights, or shiny surfaces
- lack of fear of real danger
- excessive fearfulness of some harmless objects or situations
- defensive to touch that isn't self initiated

- ___ history of eating problems
- ___ history of sleeping problems

Qualitative Impairments in Communication:

- ___ problems with pronouns
- ___ problems getting the order of words in sentences correct
- ___ problems answering questions
- ___ problems responding to directions
- ___ problems understanding jokes
- ___ problems understanding multiple meaning of words
- ___ problems understanding sarcasm, idioms, and figurative speech
- ___ echoing what is said directly, later, or in a slightly changed way
- ___ low spontaneously initiated communication
- ___ difficulty understanding abstract concepts
- ___ difficulty with concepts that are time bound or lack concreteness
- ___ difficulty with long sentences
- ___ difficulty when verbalizations are too fast
- ___ problems with reciprocal conversations
- ___ problems using speed, tone, volume appropriately

Learning Characteristics:

- ___ uneven profile of skills
- ___ well developed long term memory
- ___ ability to manipulate items better than paper-pencil abilities
- ___ over and under generalization of learning
- ___ good visual skills
- ___ hyperactivity
- ___ short attention span to some activities and not to others
- ___ impulsivity
- ___ delayed response time
- ___ problems organizing
- ___ sequential learner
- ___ needs help to problem solve

Observable Problem Behaviors:

- ___ aggression - biting, hitting, kicking, pinching
- ___ self-injurious behaviors - biting, hitting, pinching, banging parts of body
- ___ temper tantrums
- ___ screaming, yelling
- ___ non-compliance and refusal to move, to do things
- ___ eating problems
- ___ sleeping problems
- ___ toileting problems
- ___ low motivation

Possible Motor Problems:

- ___ clumsiness
 - ___ balance
 - ___ stiffness
 - ___ motor planning - can't seem to make body do what it needs to do
 - ___ motor fatigue - tired easily
 - ___ strength
 - ___ perceptual motor, spacing, sequencing, printing, writing
 - ___ initiation - can't seem to be started in motor acts
-

Some Environmental Challenges that Lower A Student's Ability to Function Completely

Internal

- not being understood
- not understanding
- not having enough information
- not having adequate skills for job
- not having choices
- making a mistake
- being tired
- being sick
- being touched
- being hungry

Comments:

Major Changes

- alterations at school, work, home, community
- small schedule changes
- time changes
- activity location changes
- staff or teacher absent
- friend or buddy absent
- family member or friend is late or not coming
- anticipating an event or activity
- cancellation of an event or activity
- having to wait too long

Environmental Confusion

- crowds
- noise
- surrounded by too much movement
- surrounded by competing visual stimuli
- not having enough space
- being off the pace of others
- losing things of value

Relationships

- being corrected
- being denied
- being interrupted
- being late
- being ignored
- fear of losing people who are valuable
- being teased
- being left out
- being scolded

Possible Sensory Challenges: Risk Factors

Sound/Auditory

- has been diagnosed with hearing problem at some time
- reacts to unexpected sounds
- fears some noises
- distracted by certain sounds
- confused about direction of sounds
- making self-induced noises
- likes sounds that are constant and mask outside sounds
- Other _____

Comments:

Sight/Vision

- has been diagnosed with a visual problem
- is sensitive to light
- avoids eye contact
- is distracted by some or too much visual stimuli
- enjoys watching moving things/bright objects
- has difficulty tracking
- becomes excited when confronted with a variety of visual stimuli
- has trouble with stairs, heights
- enjoys patterns
- upset by things looking different
- makes decisions about food, clothing, objects by sight
- arranges environment in certain ways and can tell if out of order
- closely examines objects or hands
- likes TV, VCR
- Other _____

Smell/Olfactory

- sensitive to smells
- smells objects, food, people
- explores environment by smelling
- reacts strongly to some smells
- ignores strong odors
- Other _____

Touch/Tactile

- is defensive about being touched
- prefers deep touching rather than soft
- has to know someone is going to touch ahead of time
- initiates hugs, cuddling
- explores environment by touching
- becomes irritated if bumped or touched by peers
- dislikes the feel of certain clothing
- refuses to touch certain things
- is sensitive to certain clothing
- over or under dresses for temperature
- doesn't like showers
- likes to play in water
- mouths objects or clothing
- refuses to walk on certain surfaces
- appears to have depth perception problems
- dislikes having hair, face, or mouth touched
- upset by sticky, gooey hands
- Other _____

Taste

- has an eating problem
- dislikes certain foods/textures
- will only eat a small variety of foods
- tastes non-edibles
- explores environment by tasting
- Other _____

Movement/Vestibular

- seems fearful in space
- arches back when held or moved
- spins or whirls self around
- moves parts of body a great deal
- likes rocking, swinging, spinning
- walks on toes
- appears clumsy, bumping into things
- climbs a lot and doesn't fall
- avoids balancing activities
- Other _____

Perceptual/Perceptual Motor

- has trouble with paper/pencil activities
 - has difficulty with time perception
 - difficulty with body in space
 - relies on knowing location of furniture
 - problems with use of some tools
 - problems organizing materials and moving them appropriately
 - distracted by door, cupboards being open, holes, or motion
 - Other _____
-

Social Skills That May be Personal Challenges

Personal Management/Self Control

- waiting
- finishing work
- taking care of personal and school belongings
- being quiet when required
- talking when spoken to, especially if asked a question
- working independently without bothering others
- being prepared and organized for activities and lessons
- turning in assignments on time
- changing activities
- accepting correction
- accepting that mistakes can be fixed

Comments:

Reciprocal Interactions

- imitating
- sharing
- taking turns
- sitting and participating in group
- negotiating
- initiating social interactions
- gaining joint attention (point, look, talk)
- playing
- greeting
- complimenting
- offering help, comfort
- asking for help, seek comfort
- inviting others to join
- asking for feedback, recruit praise
- asking for a favor
- social chat
- getting attention in specific way, raising hand, waiting
- caring when someone is hurt or sick, not laughing
- letting someone know that you are hurt or sick
- asking someone to play or do an activity

Reciprocating Social Interactions Appropriately

- listening
- commenting on a topic
- answering questions
- giving a reliable yes/no
- accepting help
- accepting that some things aren't possible
- responding to teasing
- making a choice
- sharing other's enjoyment
- giving eye contact appropriately

Manner of Interaction

- being polite
- being kind
- being considerate
- not being a tattler
- being honest
- not hitting, kicking, saying bad words
- looking at person talking appropriately
- not walking away while someone is talking
- keep a specified distance from a person

Learning Situation Specific Behaviors

- with peers, no adults
- in church, school, home
- at a sports event
- in a store
- with strangers
- what and where are private
- with authority figures

Abstract Social Concepts

- being good
- timing
- fairness
- friendship
- politeness
- kindness
- doing one's best
- caring
- lying
- humor

Group Behaviors

- come when called to group
- stay in certain places
- participate with group
- follow group rules:
- talk one at a time
- pick up, clean up, straighten up
- put away
- get out
- walk, stand still, stay to right
- voting - majority rules
- winning and losing

Questions to Ask About INCREASING MOTIVATION

When these questions are answered, remember to address and analyze the student's entire day and week across all environments to assure these motivational strategies are addressed systematically.

- Are the activities useful and meaningful for the student?
- Are experiences shared rather than constantly instructed?
- Is information given so person understands; questioning developed & utilized?
- Are there cooperative experiences?
- Are likes, interests, and strengths; questions minimized?
- Is intrinsic motivation utilized?
- Are naturally occurring reinforcers used?
- Is natural initiation encouraged and invited?
- Are attempts towards goals and objectives reinforced?
- Are environmental and instructional cues utilized instead of relying on constant adult verbal and physical cues?
- Is feedback provided immediately so the connection between the reinforcer and event is clear?
- Are familiar, acquired activities kept in the program as new ones are added?
- Are the reinforcing stimuli varied, are there choices of reinforcers, and is the schedule of reinforcement varied?
- Are student preferences used and attempts made to update these and use reinforcers that the student REALLY likes?
- Are typical social reinforcers (smile, pat, praise) really motivating?
- Is choice making encouraged, invited, accepted and taught?
- Are the options for choice expanded through meaningful experiences and successes?
- Is reciprocal communications encouraged and is there ample opportunity?
- Are reciprocal social interactions reinforced and shared rather than corrected?

Personal Resources: Protective Factors

The likes and preferences as well as the interests of the student with an autism spectrum disorder must be discovered, known, and kept current. These need to be a part of the student's program plan, used to create interest, and to motivate the student. Analyze the student's day to see when and how many of the preferences and interests are incorporated throughout the day. If the student is in situations that are constantly challenging without some reinforcing activities, learning will be threatened.

Likes/Preferences/Interests	Availiability	When?	and How	Often?	Choice?
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Personal Resources: Protective Factors

Equally as important are using the strengths of the student in all learning experiences. Build upon strengths, incorporate them and build self-esteem. Too often a student with autism spectrum disorder is taught through weakness.

Strengths	How and When Used
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Educating the Student with Asperger Syndrome

Educating the Student with Asperger Syndrome

From the Saskatchewan Education Special Education Unit

Persons with Asperger syndrome (AS) share some of the same characteristics as individuals with autism, and there is debate on whether AS is an independent diagnostic category or another dimension at the higher end of the autistic continuum (Szatmari, 1995). Although Asperger syndrome shares some characteristics with higher-functioning autism, there are some unique features, and a different developmental progression and prognosis (Myles & Simpson, 1998) for individuals with AS.

According to DSM-IV (1994) criteria, the child must meet the criteria for social impairment, repetitive activities and age of onset, but have normal cognitive and language development. AS involves fewer symptoms than autism.

Learning and Behavioral Characteristics of Students with Asperger Syndrome

1. Asperger syndrome is characterized by a qualitative impairment in social interaction. Individuals with AS may be keen to relate to others, but do not have the skills, and may approach others in peculiar ways (Klin & Volkmar, 1997). They frequently lack understanding of social customs and may appear socially awkward, have difficulty with empathy, and misinterpret social cues. Individuals with AS are poor incidental social learners and need explicit instruction in social skills.
2. Although children with AS usually speak fluently by five years of age, they often have problems with pragmatics (the use of language in social contexts), semantics (not being able to recognize multiple meanings) and prosody (the pitch, stress, and rhythm of speech) (Attwood, 1998).
 - Students with AS may have an advanced vocabulary and frequently talk incessantly about a favorite subject. The topic may be somewhat narrowly defined and the individual may have difficulty switching to another topic.
 - They may have difficulties with the rules of conversation. Students with AS may interrupt or talk over the speech of others, may make irrelevant comments and have difficulty initiating and terminating conversations.
 - Speech may be characterized by a lack of variation in pitch, stress and rhythm and, as the student reaches adolescence, speech may become pedantic (overly formal).
 - Social communication problems can include standing too close, staring, abnormal body posture and failure to understand gestures and facial expressions.
3. The student with AS is of average to above average intelligence and may appear quite capable. Many are relatively proficient in knowledge of facts, and may have extensive factual information about a subject that they are absorbed with. However, they demonstrate relative weaknesses in comprehension and abstract thought, as well as in social cognition. Consequently, they do experience some academic problems, particularly with reading comprehension, problem solving, organizational skills, concept development, and making inferences and judgments. In addition, they often have difficulty with cognitive flexibility. That is their thinking tends to be rigid. They often have difficulty adapting to change or failure and do not readily learn from their mistakes (Attwood, 1998).

4. It is estimated that 50%-90% of people with AS have problems with motor coordination (Attwood, 1998). The affected areas may include locomotion, ball skills, balance, manual dexterity, handwriting, rapid movements, lax joints, rhythm and imitation of movements. Individuals with AS share common characteristics with autism in terms of responses to sensory stimuli. They may be hypersensitive to some stimuli and may engage in unusual behaviors to obtain a specific sensory stimulation.
5. Individuals with AS share common characteristics with autism in terms of responses to sensory stimuli. They may be hypersensitive to some stimuli and may engage in unusual behaviors to obtain a specific sensory stimulation.
6. Individuals with AS may also be inattentive and easily distracted and many receive a diagnosis of ADHD at one point in their lives (Myles & Simpson, 1998).
7. Anxiety is also a characteristic associated with AS. It may be difficult for the student to understand and adapt to the social demands of school. Appropriate instruction and support can help to alleviate some of the stress.

Strategies for Teachers

Many of the strategies for teaching students with autism are applicable for students with AS. The professional literature often does not differentiate between high-functioning autism and Asperger syndrome when outlining recommended practices. However, it is important to give consideration to the unique learning characteristics, to provide support when needed, and to build on the student's many strengths. The following identifies the specific learning difficulty and suggests a number of possible classroom strategies:

Learning Difficulty Classroom Strategies

Difficulties with language

- tendency to make irrelevant comments
- tendency to interrupt
- tendency to talk on one topic and to talk over the speech of others
- difficulty understanding complex language, following directions, and understanding intent of words with multiple meanings
- Comic Strip Conversations (Gray, 1994) can be applied to a range of problems with conversation skills
- teach appropriate opening comments
- teach student to seek assistance when confused
- small group instruction for conversational skills

- teach rules and cues regarding turn-taking in conversation and when to reply, interrupt or change the topic
- use audio taped and videotaped conversations
- explain metaphors and words with double meanings
- encourage the student to ask for an instruction to be repeated, simplified or written down if he does not understand
- pause between instructions and check for understanding
- limit oral questions to a number the student can manage
- watch videos to identify nonverbal expressions and their meanings

Insistence on sameness

- wherever possible prepare the student for potential change
- use pictures, schedules and social stories to indicate impending changes

Impairment in social interaction

- difficulty understanding the rules of social interaction
- may be naïve
- interprets literally what is said
- difficulty reading the emotions of others
- lacks tact
- problems with social distance
- difficulty understanding "unwritten rules" and when they do learn them, may apply them rigidly
- provide clear expectations and rules for behavior
- explicitly teach rules of social conduct
- teach the student how to interact through social stories, modeling and role-playing
- educate peers about how to respond to the student's disability in social interaction
- use other children as cues to indicate what to do
- encourage cooperative games
- may need to provide supervision and support for the student at breaks and recess
- use a buddy system to assist the student during non-structured times
- teach the student how to start, maintain and end play
- teach flexibility, cooperation and sharing
- teach the students how to monitor their own behavior
- structured social skills groups can provide opportunity for direct instruction on specific skills and to practice actual events
- may need to develop relaxation techniques and have a quiet place to go to relax

Restricted range of interests

- limit perseverative discussions and questions
- set firm expectations for the classroom, but also provide opportunities for the student to pursue his own interests
- incorporate and expand on interest in activities and assignments

Poor concentration

- often off task
- distractible
- may be disorganized
- difficulty sustaining attention
- frequent teacher feedback and redirection
- break down assignments
- timed work sessions
- reduced homework assignments

- seating at the front
- use nonverbal cues to get attention

Poor organizational skills

- use schedules and calendars
- maintain lists of assignments
- help the student to use "to do" lists and checklists
- pictures on containers and locker
- picture cues in lockers

Poor motor coordination

- involve in fitness activities
- may prefer fitness activities to competitive sports
- take slower writing speed into account when giving assignments (length often needs to be reduced)
- provide extra time for tests
- consider the use of a computer for written assignments, as some students may be more skilled at using a keyboard than writing

Academic difficulties

- usually average to above average intelligence
- good recall of factual information
- areas of difficulty include poor problem solving, comprehension problems and difficulty with abstract concepts
- Often strong in word recognition and may learn to read very early, but difficulty with comprehension
- May do well at mathematical computations, but have difficulty with problem solving
- don't assume that the student has understood simply because he/she can re-state the information
- be as concrete as possible in presenting new concepts and abstract material
- use activity-based learning where possible
- use graphic organizers such as semantic maps
- break down tasks into smaller steps or present it another way
- provide direct instruction as well as modeling
- show examples of what is required
- use outlines to help student take notes and organize and categorize information
- avoid verbal overload
- capitalize on strengths, e.g., memory
- do not assume that they have understood what they have read. Check for comprehension, supplement instruction and use visual supports

Emotional vulnerability

- may have difficulties coping with the social and emotional demands of school
- easily stressed due to inflexibility
- often have low self-esteem
- may have difficulty tolerating making mistakes
- may be prone to depression
- may have rage reactions and temper outbursts
- provide positive praise and tell the student what she/he does right or well
- teach the student to ask for help
- teach techniques for coping with difficult situations and for dealing with stress
- use rehearsal strategies
- provide experiences in which the person can make choices

- help the student to understand his/her behaviors and reactions of others
- educate other students
- use peer supports such as buddy systems and peer support network

Sensory Sensitivities

- most common sensitivities involve sound and touch, but may also include taste, light intensity, colors and aromas
- types of noises that may be perceived as extremely intense are:
 - sudden, unexpected noises such as a telephone ringing, fire alarm
 - high-pitched continuous noise
 - confusing, complex or multiple sounds such as in shopping centers
- be aware that normal levels of auditory and visual input can be perceived by the student as too much or too little
- keep the level of stimulation within the student's ability to cope
- it may be necessary to avoid some sounds
- having the student listen to music can camouflage certain sounds
- minimize background noise
- use of ear plugs if very extreme
- teach and model relaxation strategies and diversions to reduce anxiety