



AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER: TIPS FOR FACULTY

WHAT IS AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER?

Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) is lifelong neurological developmental disorder that affects the way an individual communicates, interacts with other people, and how they experience the world around them. ASD is a spectrum condition, which means that it affects people in different ways. The word 'spectrum' describes the range of difficulties that individuals on the spectrum may experience and the degree to which they might be impacted. The following areas of difficulty might have an impact on the individual.

- **Communication**

Differences in understanding and using communication and language, with skills ranging from individuals who are highly articulate to others who may be non-verbal

- **Social Interactions**

Differences in understanding social behavior and the feelings of others, which informs the development of friendships and relationships

- **Behavior**

Differences in how information is processed can lead to rigidity, repetitive movements, and a strict adherence to routines and rules and/or difficulties in planning

- **Sensory interests and sensitivities**

Differences in the way sensory information is processed, often resulting in over and/or under sensitivities, can lead to extreme levels of stress and anxiety, particularly in unfamiliar or over-stimulating environments

WHAT YOU MIGHT NOTICE IN A CLASSROOM

- Oddities in vocal pitch, intonation, and volume
- May come across as argumentative, rude, or monopolizing
- May appear inattentive or bored
- May misunderstand tone of voice, jokes, facial expressions, sarcasm, and other subtle messages
- Trouble staying on topic and maintaining conversation
- Displays literal and concrete thinking patterns and literal interpretation of words
- Strong, narrow interests
- May be easily distracted
- Difficulty with changes in classroom, seating, and syllabi
- May appear to be inattentive or bored
- May exhibit awkward eye contact, posture, and/or gestures
- May observe ritualistic or repetitive strategies such as rocking, tapping, or pacing
- May become easily overwhelmed
- Sensory sensitivity (lights, sounds, touch, smells)
- May have difficulty working in groups

STRENGTHS AND CHALLENGES

The following strengths and challenges are generally shared by students across the spectrum, although each individual student experiences unique strengths and challenges.

STRENGTHS

- Above average to superior intellect
- “Out of the box” thinkers
- Excellent long term and short term memory
- Task oriented and diligent with routine work
- Excellent visual-spatial skills
- Exceptional talents in one specific area and highly motivated by interests
- Strong pursuit of knowledge within areas of interest
- Passionate commitment to ideas
- Strong attention to details
- Ability to maintain prolonged, intense focus on subjects of interests
- Original ways of solving problems

CHALLENGES

- Social interactions and understanding social rules
- Abstract concepts and seeing the “big picture”
- Seeing others points of views
- Setting boundaries
- Working in groups
- Initiating, planning, organizing, and carrying out tasks
- Reading social cues, facial expressions learning and body language
- Multi-tasking
- Asking for clarification or assistance
- Assessing priorities
- Regulating sensory needs

STRATEGIES

The following strategies identify ways to better assist students to have a successful experience both in and out of the classroom.

- Break large assignments into smaller units to be turned in separately
- Provide direct feedback and set clear boundaries
- Provide ample response time for questions
- Provide a predictable routine
- Consider allowing use of technology or laptop for in-class work and note taking
- Allow for extra transition time
- Help with organizational supports (color coded binders and folders)
- Reminders of assignments
- Avoid use of idioms, metaphors, sarcasm, and jokes
- Consider assigning group roles
- Supplement oral instructions with visual (written instructions paired with graphics)



Illinois Center for Specialized Professional Support,
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