



AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER SERIES

Strategies for Classroom Management

Introduction

No single classroom management approach is successful for all students. Students' needs change over time, make it necessary for teachers to try various approaches. This issue of the ***Autism Spectrum Disorder Series*** contains information about important areas of classroom management strategies that have proved successful for teachers working with students with ASD.

Provide a structured, predictable classroom environment

This is not to be confused with an authoritarian approach. The environment should be structured in order to provide consistency and clarity, so that students know where things belong and what is expected of them in a specific situation, and can anticipate what comes next.

Provide a customized visual daily schedule

The individualized schedule for a student with ASD should fit comfortably into the overall classroom schedule. Vary tasks to prevent boredom, and alternate activities to reduce anxiety and possibly prevent some inappropriate behaviors. For example, alternate familiar, successful experiences with less preferred activities. It may be helpful to alternate large group activities with opportunities for calming down in a quiet environment. In addition, incorporating physical activity and exercise at points throughout the day is helpful.

All planned activities can be charted in a visual form and posted at or near the desks of students with ASD so that they can understand changes in activities and know what to expect. The students can be helped to learn to use the schedule independently and staff can direct the student to the schedule when it is time to change activities to smooth transition times.

An inventory of the possible sensory factors can be used to help minimize the negative effect that sensory information may be having on students with ASD. Parents and others who have experience with the student will be a valuable source of information about sensory difficulties. Here are some questions to ask and other points to consider when developing an inventory:

Auditory:

- Are there fans, loudspeakers, fire alarms, several people talking at once, air conditioners, bells, dogs barking, or scraping?

- What is the general sound level and the predictability and repetitiveness of sounds?
- What can be done to minimize the negative effect these stimuli may have on the student with ASD in the class?
- Consider the individual's comprehension of verbal information and the time typically required to process auditory information and shift attention between auditory stimuli.

Visual:

- Are there distracters, such as light, movement, reflection, or background patterns, that affect the student's ability to attend to the learning activity?
- Consider the eye level of the student, the position of the teacher in relation to the student, and distracters that may interfere with attention.
- Also consider the time required to shift visual attention. Careful attention to aversive visual stimuli and attempts to reduce the effect of these stimuli will assist managing the student's behavior and help the student learn.

Tactile:

- Are there textures that seem to be aversive?
- Are temperatures appropriate to minimize negative effect on the student?
- Does the student demonstrate a need to explore through touch, and yet avoid being touched?
- What is the level of ability or defensiveness in the use of certain objects intended to support instruction?

Vestibular:

- Consider the student's need to move and exercise.
- What are the individual's reactions to movement?
- How can the student's program incorporate needed movement without unduly jeopardizing the attention and learning of other students in the class?

Gustatory and Olfactory:

- Consider the preferences in taste and smell of foods and other materials.
- Decisions about activities should include consideration of the student's responses to the smell of materials.
- Teaching the appropriate behavior for snack or mealtimes will be affected by these preferences.

Note aspects of the tasks and activities that create frustration

Examine the instructional plan and non-instructional activities for problem areas that may result in sensory overload or frustration for the student. Make available sensory experiences that are calming for the student to accompany potentially frustrating tasks. Whenever possible, adapt tasks and materials to promote successful participation. When feasible, decrease environmental distracters and reduce activities that confuse, disorient, or upset the student and interfere with learning.

Provide relaxation opportunities and areas

It may be necessary to have a calm, quiet, designated area where the student can go to relax. Relaxing for some students with ASD may mean engaging in repetitive behaviors that have a calming affect on them. In some cases, students who crave certain repetitive movement, such as rocking or other self-stimulating movements, can be provided with a time and space where this movement is permitted.

Provide opportunities for meaningful contact with peers who have appropriate social behavior

It will be necessary to teach appropriate social behavior and to provide the student with situation-specific expectations for behavior. More information on the development of social skills is provided in the “Strategies for developing social skills” section later in this chapter.

Opportunities for contact with peers may include:

- involving the student in shared learning arrangements pairing the student with buddies for walking down the hall, on the playground, and during other unstructured times varying peer buddies across time and activities, to prevent dependence on one child
- involving peers in providing individualized instruction
- arranging cross-age peer supports/buddies by assigning an older student to assist the student with ASD
- pairing students while attending special school events such as assemblies and clubs
- facilitating involvement in after-school or extracurricular activities

If your school has an arrangement in which a class of older students is paired with a younger class, ensure that the older student with ASD is also paired, and provide the necessary supports for success.

Plan for transitions and prepare the student for change

Students with ASD often find changes in activity, setting, or planned routine very stressful. Visual schedules can be used to help them understand and co-operate with necessary changes. Social stories with illustrations can also be used to prepare the student for new situations.

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