



# LEARNING SPACE

## Strategies for schools for students on the autism spectrum

Autism is a spectrum condition; it does not necessarily follow that if a person with ASD is 'high-functioning' or able to attend a mainstream school that they are less impacted by some of the debilitating effects of autism, such as sensory issues. All schools have a duty of care to make reasonable adjustments in delivering the least restrictive environment for all SEN students. In the light of this the following steps can significantly reduce the stress involved in getting through the school day for a child with autism.

- Offer a quiet space for unstructured times such as break and lunch. Break times are supposed to be a 'break' for children but for a child with ASD this is often the most stressful time of the day. Offering a room for vulnerable students with activities (games, computers, films, or a rota of activities) or just a quiet space to sit, that is discretely staffed, can be enormously powerful in enabling a child with autism to de-stress and manage their learning. The dinner hall or canteen can be a very stressful sensory environment so offering an alternative place to eat will be hugely beneficial.
- Offering a quiet table or separate desk to work at for some tasks is of proven benefit to autistic learners.
- Discrete sensory (fidget) tools or doodling can help keep a child's brain active. They are more likely to be listening to instructions than if they are concentrating on eye contact or tracking the teacher. Offering frequent movement breaks between tasks and/or lessons is helpful.
- Offering a separate room to get changed for PE can help reduce stress and anxiety. For some tasks or younger children offer for them to just change footwear.
- Tasks involving putting processes together can be difficult for even high achieving learners with autism, tasks such as comprehension. They may understand the text and the questions but their autism makes putting the tasks together very difficult. Allow a child to give their answers verbally. If a TA scribes, the child can then copy the answers. It will, therefore, be all their own work whilst removing the stress of putting processes together. This



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approach tends to yield more detail in story writing tasks or any tasks that involve the construction of ideas.

- Change can be very stressful for people with autism. Seating plan changes can therefore cause much anxiety. Think carefully about where to seat a child with autism and try to keep it constant.

## Do's and don't's for staff

- Do use students names when addressing them
- Do give clear simple instructions, preferably one at a time
- Don't use too much language
- Do use straightforward, unambiguous language
- Don't insist on eye contact (instead say, for example, "let me know you are listening")
- Do allow time to answer or respond
- Do check for understanding
- Do be aware of sensory issues, lighting, temperature, noise, smells etc
- Do allow to fidget or move if possible
- Do offer alternative task if imagination is required (i.e. a list instead of a story)  
It is common to have lack of detail in writing.
- Do make use of visual tasks (students with autism are usually more visual learners)
- Do give regular prompts to start and stop tasks
- Do be mindful of touch
- Do have high expectations but do appreciate and respect difference



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