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Supporting pupils with Asperger's in the classroom

A short guide on supporting students with Asperger's in the classroom

Asperger's is a form of autism, often seen as a "milder" and "High functioning" form of autism, we should not assume that the child's condition affects them less than a child with autism.

Children with Asperger's experience some similar symptoms to other children with autism. such as difficulties with communication, however they differ in that children with Asperger's will have an IQ that is on par with their peers and in some cases superior to others of their age. Therefore, Asperger's can often go undetected in small children and it is not until a child starts school that it becomes more evident.

As a teacher if you offer the right support there is no reason why a child with Asperger's cannot thrive in school, university and beyond.

As a teacher you are probably juggling a million and one things before the bell has rang. Take a deep breath and as you approach the class try to keep this golden rule for teaching children with Asperger's- Calm, positive, patient teaching. This will not only benefit your students with ASD.

- **Keep routines in the classroom clear and consistent.**

Useful tools:

- Produce and display a weekly timetable of the class lessons/ activities, including when it is break and lunch time.
- Produce and display a daily plan for lessons and activities. Support students to get involved in adding the activities for the day and crossing them off/ removing them when they are over. Talk through the activities for the day at the beginning of the day. Remind children at break and after lunch what the next lesson/ activity is.
- Help show children when activities/ lessons start and end. Print out a picture to represent the activity/ lesson (matching the one used for the daily plan) place this beside a cardboard clock model (Click here for a template), set times for the start and end of activities. The clock and activity card should be placed beside a real working wall clock so the children can compare. Ensure children are given 10- and 5-minute warnings of the approach of the end of the activity/ lesson.
- Ensure parents/ carers have a copy of the weekly plan and daily plan of activities as they can further support communication of this at home and prepare their child for participating in the activities.

- **When unstructured time or changes are necessary** give children with Asperger's prior warning and guidance. Use pictures, visual aids and symbols to help the child understand what you are communicating. When there is unstructured time or change, check in with the child at the soonest opportunity to see how they are feeling. You could use a feelings chart or visual aids. This will enable you to address any anxiety or anger issues as early as possible and facilitate a strategy if required. If you can let the child's parents/ carers know when these will occur so they can prepare their child at home and therefore ease the transition for the child.

- **Children with Asperger's often find it easier to concentrate** when not making eye contact so do not assume, they are not listening if they are not looking at you. Never force a child with Asperger's to look at you as this may create anxiety and break their concentration.

- **If you are setting homework**, working alongside the child and their family/ carer develop a written/ visual schedule. Use your knowledge of how the child likes to communicate to present it in an accessible way for them. While the child may have no difficulty in doing the homework, they may struggle with organisation so recording when homework is required, what the child needs to do for homework (again, provide the child with a note communicated in a way they will understand) and ensure the homework is in the child's bag to take home. Do not ask the child to write down what the homework is as this may be misinterpreted.

- **Be clear, specific and direct** when giving directions or communicating feelings with a child with Asperger's. Children with Asperger's can find abstract language and concepts difficult. Use concrete language rather than analogies, idioms, metaphors,

jokes, sarcasm. Be explicit and direct when explaining your own thoughts and feelings such as "Stand next to the door" instead of "Line up over there please"

- **Support your class to have an understanding** that all children are different with different likes/ dislikes, are good at different things and find different things challenging. Children with Asperger's can often feel socially isolated and as a result many experience bullying. Breaking the barriers to difference in your class will promote acceptance, understanding and inclusion. Click here for activities you can use at the beginning of the school year.

Why not introduce a buddy system so no child is left alone at play time and lunch time? When you want children to work in groups or pairs for activities, to avoid children with Asperger's being left out assign children to pairs or groups.

- **To support children with Asperger's to make informed choices**, try to present two choices only. Use visual aids to promote their understanding of the choice. Using social stories and role playing can also promote their understanding and development of decision making and social skills.
- **Establish a safe space where the child can go** to calm down if she/he becomes overstimulated. If over stimulated, a child with Asperger's can find it difficult to manage their behaviour. Give them access to a safe space during this time and wait until they are calmer before trying to talk about it.
- **Children with Asperger's often have more advanced language** skills than comprehension so they may be able to talk fluently about a subject but not necessarily understand it. Remember to take time to check the child's comprehension. Try not to raise your voice or point out that they are repeating as this could raise their stress levels.
- **Children with Asperger's will have intense preoccupations**, interests and strengths, creatively incorporate these into the teaching curriculum. These interests can also be used as positive reinforcements for displays of appropriate behaviour.
- **Be understanding** if a child with AS says something hurtful or offensive. Chances are that the comment was made because of a lack of comprehension of social norms.
- **Try not to alienate your student with Asperger's**. If you are creating a resource, information or rule ensure this is incorporated for the whole class. Avoid singling out the student with AS. Instead of stating an explicit command to that single student, it is preferred that you state the command in the form of a general rule for all to follow.
- **Support children with Asperger's to practice understanding** other's perspectives by using role playing, social stories, published joke books and comic strips.
- **Some students with Asperger's may experience poor motor skills** so sports can prove challenging. Working alongside their parents/ carers to identify opportunities for the student to practice their motor skills will benefit them both in school and at home, not only in improving their skills but also confidence and self-esteem.

For more information and resources for teachers, visit: <https://www.autism.org.uk/professionals/teachers.aspx>

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