



INCLUDING LEARNERS WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER

In a mainstream setting

1 INTRODUCTION

Autism is known as a “spectrum” disorder because there is wide variation in the type and severity of symptoms people experience. ASD occurs in all ethnic, racial, and economic groups.

2 WHAT IS AUTISM?

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a developmental disorder that affects communication and behaviour. Although autism can be diagnosed at any age, it is said to be a “developmental disorder” because symptoms generally appear in the first two years of life.

AUTISM IS:

- a lifelong condition, misunderstood, manageable, treatable and needs a team response

AUTISM IS NOT:

- the fault of parents, punishment for sin, insanity, bad behaviour, contagious, or a danger to society and the community.

3 TREATMENTS AND THERAPIES

There is no single best treatment for ASD. A doctor may use medication to treat some symptoms or behavioural, psychological, and educational therapy could be used.

MAIN CHARACTERISTICS OF ASD

- Difficulty with communication and interaction with other people
- Restricted interests and repetitive behaviours
- Symptoms that interfere with the person’s ability to function properly in school and life

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF ASD

Social communication / interaction behaviours may include:

- Little or inconsistent eye contact and problems with conversation
- Talking at length about a favourite subject without noticing that others are not interested
- Having trouble understanding another person’s point of view

Restrictive / repetitive behaviours may include:

- Repeating words or phrases, called *echolalia*
- Intense interest in numbers, details, or facts
- Upset by slight changes in a routine, irritability

Children with ASD may also have strengths, including:

- Able to retain information for long
- Strong visual and auditory learners
- Excel in math, science, music, or art



“The most interesting people you’ll find are ones that don’t fit into your average cardboard box. They’ll make what they need, they’ll make their own boxes”

Dr. Temple Grandin

“What makes a child gifted and talented may not always be good grades in school, but a different way of looking at the world and learning”

Chuck Grassley

4 HOW DOES AUTISM IMPACT LEARNING?

DEVELOPMENT

Children with (ASD) develop at a different rate and don't necessarily develop skills in the same order as typically developing children.

ATTENTION AND INTERACTION

A child with ASD might not respond to his name, make eye contact, smile at caregivers, or wave goodbye without being told to.

UNDERSTANDING

They might have trouble understanding that other people can have different desires and behaviours and find it hard to predict other people's behaviour.

CONTROL AND REGULATION

Children with (ASD) can struggle with attention, transitions, organisation, memory, time management, emotional control and frustration. The child might know her facts well, but might not be able to come up with a solution because she can't put all the information together.

SEEING THE 'BIG PICTURE'

Children with (ASD) have difficulty seeing the 'big picture'. They can get lost in the details and lose track of the lesson.

5 SOME TEACHING STRATEGIES

- Give task instructions very specifically and in sequential order
- Simple, concrete language with as few words as possible
- Teach specific social skills such as turn taking and social distance
- Give limited choices
- Avoid sarcasm or jokey comments – they become confused!
- Avoid idioms such as "Open your ears" – they do not understand what is meant
- Provide a clear structure and daily routine which is reassuring and give warning of changes
- Use different means of representation such as visual, physical, peer modelling, graphic and link the work to their interests
- Do not take rude or aggressive behaviour personally. It may be unrelated to the source of the anger and is not targeted at you
- Avoid overstimulation, remove distracters and make individual work spaces available
- Protect the learner from teasing and educate peers
- Do not insist on the learner following every aspect of the school day, such as disliked sport or games

RESOURCES

▶ Autism Western Cape

Tel: 021 557 3573

Email: support@autismwesterncape.org.za

Website: www.autismwesterncape.org.za

▶ Raisingchildren.net.au

▶ Teaching.monster.com

▶ Autism South Africa

Tel: 011 484 9909

Email: director@autismsouthafrica.org

Website: www.aut2know.co.za

▶ NIMH www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/autism-spectrum-disorders



"The way we look at our children and their limitations is precisely the way they will feel about themselves. We set the examples, and they learn by taking our cue from us"

Amalia Starr

"Within every living child exists the most precious bud of self-identity. To search this out and foster it with loving care; that is the essence of educating an autistic child"

Dr. Kiyo Kitahara

Tips

- ▶ To learn fractions my teacher had a wooden apple that was cut up into four pieces and a wooden pear that was cut in half. From this I learned the concept of quarters and halves.
- ▶ To reduce frustration and help the child to enjoy writing, let him type on the computer. Typing is often much easier.
- ▶ A mother is your biggest ally. Have a heart-to-heart chat with the child's mother. Share your difficulties. Let her know that you want to help.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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For more information about the *Teaching and Learning for Inclusive Education* project: vvoib.be/southafrica

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