

Handout 1—Creating a supportive classroom environment

Below are some tips to share with teachers, child care providers, and others that work with a child with an autism spectrum disorder (ASD).

Emphasize the importance of teamwork.

Emphasize that, although each student is an individual, every student is a member of the larger classroom team and needs to work together.

Structure the classroom in a simple, logical way.

Designate one section of the room for reading stories, one for doing math, another for science. It can help children with ASD to have consistent structure to their classroom.

Create a Quiet Corner

Create a quiet corner or space in the classroom for anyone who needs a break from an activity. A few chairs and/or a table placed away from the main hub of activity can provide all children, especially children with ASD, a quiet space to regroup if they become overwhelmed.

Create a Daily Schedule

Create a daily schedule to share with children about the day's activities. Children with ASD who have trouble transitioning between activities find a structured schedule helpful. Children with ASD tend to be more visual learners, so consider creating a visual or picture schedule.

Give advance notice

When a special event is planned, give as much advance notice as possible. Children with ASD tend to have difficulty with changes in routine and can be more successful when they have time to prepare.

Adjust sensory stimuli

Children with ASD are often sensitive to environmental stimuli like sights, sounds, tastes, and smells. Try keeping the lights low, playing soothing background music, or providing headphones as a way to minimize stress.

Handout 2—Frequently asked questions

These FAQs can be provided to teachers, child care providers, or other individuals who are unfamiliar with an autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and work with a child with ASD.

What are autism spectrum disorders?

Autism spectrum disorders (ASDs) are developmental disorders that affect a person's ability to communicate and interact with other people. This disorder affects different people in different ways. Some individuals can function well on their own, while others need more assistance. Some people with autism have good verbal skills; others do not speak at all. ASD is characterized by difficulties involving social relationships, communication, and an unusual attachment to objects or routines.

What are the characteristics of autism spectrum disorders?

There are three major groupings characteristics:

- *Problems with social interactions*, such as lack of eye contact and inability to maintain attention
- *Problems with communication*, such as infrequent use of language or odd language patterns
- *Problems with behaviors* (insisting that routines are always the same) or with repetitive behaviors (flapping arms or spinning around)

How are high-functioning autism (HFA) and Asperger syndrome different from autism?

Asperger syndrome is one of five developmental disorders (Pervasive Developmental Disorders) that represent the autism spectrum. HFA falls at the "high" end of the autism spectrum, where people with this diagnosis may be able to communicate better socially, have more language skills, and exhibit fewer behavior problems than people at the lower end of the spectrum. The main difference between Asperger syndrome and autism is in the language and cognitive areas. Typically, people with Asperger syndrome do not experience delayed language development and may have average to above-average intelligence.

What are characteristics of HFA and Asperger syndrome?

While everyone with HFA and Asperger syndrome is different, symptoms of people with HFA and Asperger syndrome involve problems in socialization, communication, cognition, and sensation. Examples of symptoms and characteristics include: repetitive behaviors or interests, difficulty with fine motor skills (such as writing), difficulty communicating or connecting with others, inability to understand social cues and rules, poor organizational skills, literal (not abstract) thinking, specific focus on a particular interest, and strict adherence to routines and rules.

How many people have ASD?

Current research indicates that an average of 1 in 110 people is diagnosed with an autism spectrum disorder.



Handout 3—Key points about autism spectrum disorders

These key points, from the Autism Classroom Connections videos, can be helpful to keep in mind as you or those you work with create supportive classrooms for children with an autism spectrum disorder (ASD).

- Children with ASD are, first and foremost, children; they are like other children in many ways.
- Children with ASD experience the world differently.
- Children with ASD need and want friends.
- Understanding ASD is the key to creating connections.
- Autism spectrum disorders are not contagious.
- No one should ever tease or make fun of someone with ASD.
- When a child with ASD feels included, everyone in the classroom can learn and grow!