

AUTISM

(Autism Spectrum Disorder - ASD)

“ASD students are like icebergs - 90% is hidden”
- *What are you doing? A film about Autism.*



THE 'WHAT' OF AUTISM

WHAT IS AUTISM?

ASD is a developmental condition which can cause difficulties with the way in which individuals think, feel, interact and communicate with others. These difficulties can often be misinterpreted as bad behaviour or lack of engagement. Instead, sometimes the smallest things we take for granted can cause major confusion to the individual, resulting in severe reactions.

Autism is usually diagnosed in childhood and is more often than not a lifelong disorder. When discussing ASD, you may come across the terms Autism/Autistic Disorder, Asperger's Syndrome and Pervasive Developmental Disorder - Not Otherwise Specified (PDD-NOS). You may also hear: “high functioning autism”, “classic autism”, “Kanner Autism” or “atypical autism”.

“Every child and young person with an Autism Spectrum Disorder has a unique set of strengths, interests and abilities.” (DEECD, 2014) Students diagnosed with ASD can have varying characteristics hence the word ‘Spectrum.’ However; according to The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (2013), all individuals do hold similarities in these two domains:

- Individuals have impaired communication and difficulty with social interaction including limited flexibility with thought
- Individuals also have restricted and repetitive patterns of behaviour, sensory interests or activities (Autism Victoria, 2016)

WHAT ARE THE CHARACTERISTICS OF AUTISTIC STUDENTS?

ASD students may present some characteristics such as:

* *Keeping in mind each student with ASD will be unique.*

Finds two-way conversations difficult



- May find it difficult to start, maintain, or end a conversation
- May find it hard to stay on topic

Needs help with communication



- May have delayed or limited speech
- Tends to interpret language literally
- Language difficulties; understanding or using language
- May have a large vocabulary but struggle with social use of language
- Trouble reading facial expressions

Needs help to interact with others



- May prefer to be alone
- May want to join in but not know how
- May find it difficult to form and maintain social relationships

Difficulty reading social cues or situations



- May find it hard to read body language, facial expressions, and tone of voice in others
- May need help to understand what behaviour is appropriate in different environments

Seems uninterested



- May not respond to name
- May appear to be in their own world
- Lack of eye contact
- Intellectual disability (around 50% of individuals with ASD also have an intellectual disability)

Restrictive interests



- May have an intense interest in one topic
- May have a topic of interest that is unusual
- May have an unusual level of interest in a topic (they think/ talk about it all the time)

“The thing about the autistic mind is it attends to details.” - Temple Grandin (2010)

Repetitive behaviours



- May repeat the same action over and over e.g. Lining up objects or watching the same movie repeatedly

Under- or over-responsive senses



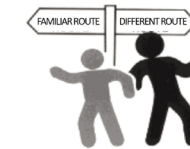
- Sensory sensitivity – they may be under- or over-sensitive to any of the five senses.

Repetitive body movements



- May display echolalia (repeating words or phrases)
- May display handflapping, spinning, rocking etc.
- Tantrums- this symbolises how anxious they are feeling in a situation
- Difficulties with fine and/or gross motor skills

Prefers structure and routine



- A need for sameness and have trouble adjusting to new surroundings
- May not like surprises or change
- Needs to be prepared and supported to try new things

WHAT IS YOUR STUDENT LIKE? GET TO KNOW THEM...

* *This is great for both personal use and for colleagues to reference*

- Student name
- Strengths
- Challenges
- Things that may trigger a meltdown
- Behaviours exhibited before meltdown
- Best way to approach student when meltdown occurs
- Important Sensory Notes (e.g. Highly sensitive to light touch, noise etc.)
- Students the child works well with in group or partner activities. (Larkey, 2015)

SOME COMMON STRENGTHS OF INDIVIDUALS WITH AUTISM?

- Strong rote memory
- Great at retaining information
- A visual learning and thinking style
- The ability to use visual information meaningfully
- Enjoy concrete and literal activities
- Understanding rules and using concrete information
- Ability to pay attention to small details and keep up attention, when motivated
- Ability to learn language in chunks (echolalia) by echoing or mimicking words or phrases (Children Network: Australia, 2016)

CATERING FOR ASD STUDENTS

How can you cater for ASD students in your classroom?

1. Establish an accurate student profile

- All ASD students are different, so in order to individualise their education program observations need to be “carried out across a range of environments” by “collecting information from many different sources, including parents and professionals.” (DEECD, 2014)
- Complete a ‘SENDIS Sensory Sensitivities Checklist’ or something similar in nature to gain your own insight to the student’s needs. This checklist covers a detailed list of sensory behaviours including: visual, auditory, hypo (under sensitive), hyper (over sensitive), touch, taste, smell, balance and position of their body in space. The conclusion from these results may help you arrange your classroom in a certain way, position the student in a specific seat. But most importantly it will help understand their behaviour as a whole. (Milton Keys Council, 2016)

2. Give the student time to respond.

- Give ASD students the time to respond, as in most cases they will not give an immediate response. Some need extra time!

3. Be specific about what you want the student to do

- Use simple, specific language. Do not use questions to give instruction, ASD students can be very literal.

Morning Routine		
6:15 am	Wake Up	✓
6:20 am	Feed & Water Dog	✓
6:25 am	Make Bed	✓
6:30 am	Brush Teeth/ Wash Face	○
6:35 am	Brush Hair	○
6:40 am	Get Dressed	○
7:00 am	Take Medication	○
7:10-7:20 am	Get on Bus	○

e.g. “John, go to your desk please” instead of “John are you ready to go to your desk now?”

- Be explicit in your instruction. Do not express more than one instruction at a time as it can get difficult to process. Wait until it is clear that the student is aware of the first instruction before moving to the next.

- Limit complex language and long sentences.

- Say instructions in the order that they will occur.

e.g. “First we will go to the canteen, then to the library” instead of “We are going to the library but first we are going to the canteen.”

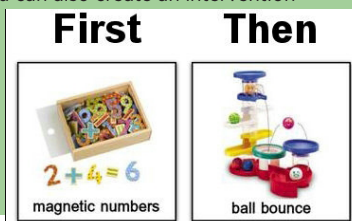
- Think about how you want them to orientate themselves.

e.g. “John, when we sit on the floor, I would like you to sit to the left of George” OR “John, when we work at our tables, this is your seat. You will always sit here.”

4. Set SMART Goals

- Creating a SMART Goal is an explicit way to document what you want the student to work on and how it will be achieved. This level of explicitness is needed for ASD students. SMART Goals are Specific, Measurable, Achievable (or Attainable), Relevant (or Realistic) Time-limited goals (or Time bound / Time based) goals. You can also create an intervention section for the student outlining how this will be achieved.

This is a great communication tool to have between yourself and the student, it is also something you can refer to and develop on. (Department of Education and Training QLD, 2014)



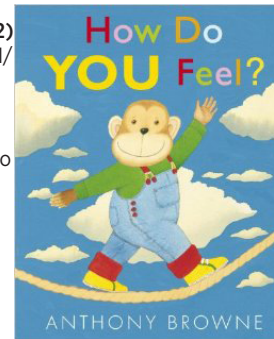
5. Provide visual representations and visual cues

- Use visual supports when communicating. e.g. Gestures, pointing, touching or printed visual supports.

RESOURCES

Communication & Social Abilities:

- How do you feel?** By Anthony Browne (2012) ASD students often struggle to show/control/express emotion. Anthony Browne draws on insight and humour to reassure children that the varied emotions they experience is perfectly normal and a part of life. This is also a great resource to initiate the conversation about emotions.



- Tobin Learns to Make Friends** by Diane Murrell (2001)

readers follow Tobin, a train, as he learns to make friends and engage in proper social activities. This book is suitable for teaching social skills to students with Autism, Asperger’s Syndrome and other developmental disorders.

- Monster Feelings-** Monster Feelings is a great resource from Scholastic. It

has a collection of monster images, that visually represent feelings. Each monster is drawn expressing their feelings with the name for that particular emotion written below. These can be photocopied so that students can create a book that expresses their emotions



whether it be for pleasure or as a comforting activity. Choosing a monster could also be a way for ASD students to communicate special messages.

Behaviour:

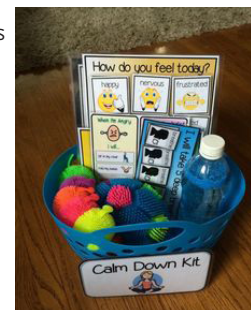
- Visual supports
- A personal and portable schedule
- Colour coding, whether it be on timetables, books (certain colours for certain books) or other items in the classroom.
- Timers
- Chiceworks App- a learning tool for helping children complete daily routines (morning, day, & night), understand & control their feelings and improve their waiting skills (taking turns and not interrupting).

Sensory Functioning

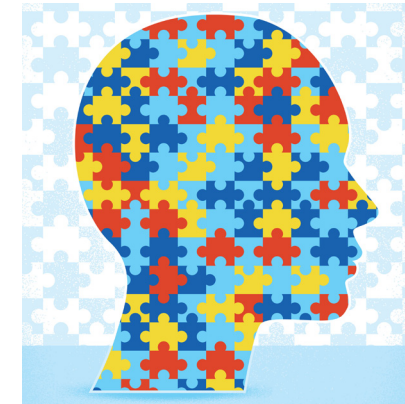
- A calming area for the student to go to
- Focus toys
- Scheduled breaks
- Stress ball

Websites

- Amaze - Autism Victoria.** <http://www.amaze.org.au/discover/about-autismspectrum-disorder/glossary/> this is local, relatable information that allows you to ‘discover’ all aspects of ASD.
- Sue Larkey** - <http://suelarkey.com.au> This website is an amazing teacher resource! It has an abundance of book suggestions, free resources, tips and inspiration for the classroom.



10 ESSENTIAL TIPS FOR UNDERSTANDING ASD



- Students with ASD don’t have to look at you all the time.

Reason: They find looking and listening at the same time hard to do.

- Give them time to answer any of your questions.

Reason: They have slower processing time. Sometimes it can take them up to a minute to formulate the answer in the correct sequence.

- If they feel pressured they will answer with stock standard answers.

Reason: They know it will get them out of trouble quickly. This may include: “I don’t know”, “yes”, “maybe” and often this isn’t their true answer!

- They often don’t “generalise” information between people and places.

Reason: Homework for teacher ‘x’ is in the yellow basket but for teacher ‘y’ it is to be placed in the green basket.

- They find organisation of their school equipment very difficult.

Reason: They are best with one folder with everything inside. Limit the number of pencils, pens etc.

- Limit their choices and be very specific with choices.

Reason: They find choices overwhelming and are often concerned with making wrong choice due to their difficulty with problem solving.

- Be as clear, concise and concrete as possible.

Reason: People with ASD have difficulty with abstract thinking.

- Avoid verbal overload.

Reason: They are visual learners and verbal information takes them longer to process and retain.

- Avoid verbal arguments by redirecting them to what they should be doing. E.g. “Start your work”.

Reason: They often enjoy verbal arguments.

- Simple changes in the environment can make a big difference to a child’s engagement and learning outcomes.

Reason: People with ASD have sensory processing difficulties and this can cause behaviour. (Larkey, 2015)