

School and Classroom Strategies: Asperger Syndrome

This Quick Fact Sheet contains strategies designed to address potential symptoms of Asperger Syndrome and should be used in consultation and collaboration with your school's mental health personnel or as part of a larger intervention approach. These pages contain only a portion of many possible strategies available to address symptoms of Asperger Syndrome in the classroom. Strategies should always be individualized and implemented with careful consideration of the differences of each child and the context of their individual circumstances. Additionally, this information should never be used to formulate a diagnosis. Mental health diagnoses should be made only by a trained mental health professional after a thorough evaluation.

If you notice a significant change in mood in any child that lasts for more than a week or two, share your observations with the child's parent and/or guardian and with your school's mental health support team.

General Comments About Asperger Syndrome Intervention

Effective education of students with AS requires a comprehensive multi-faceted, multi-disciplinary approach. One key to success for students with AS is a partnership between families, physicians, professionals, and schools. Schools play an essential role in these partnerships. By providing safe and supportive school environments, effective and responsive academic instruction, behavioral intervention, and class accommodations, schools can increase the opportunity for students with AS to achieve academic success and overall, independent, life-long well being. Within the context of a consistent, comprehensive support plan, schools should maintain high expectations for students with AS and must be patient, creative, flexible, and willing to try new or alternative approaches. Below are some possible strategies to support students with AS at school.

School and/or Classroom Strategies for Language/Communication

- Teach conversational skills with peers, including initiation, the ability to expand and elaborate on a range of different topics, shifting and ending topics appropriately, and turn-taking
- Teach the student to monitor their own speech styles including volume, rhythm, naturalness, and when/how to adjust their speech
- Teach nonverbal communication skills, including how to read facial expressions, body language, and other social cues
- Develop the student's ability to follow multi-step directives
- Limit the number of oral instructions and questions
- Model responses and practice skills with role plays; practice individually and in small groups
- Teach complex language, including metaphors and words with double meaning
- Teach the student to seek assistance/ask for help
- Teach the student to ask for an instruction to be repeated, simplified, or written down when they don't understand
- Support communication with visual supports
- Limit using socially challenging language (figures of speech, irony, etc)

School and/or Classroom Strategies for Off Task Behavior/Disorganization

- Establish clear expectations for behaviors in and out of the classroom
- Use frameworks for note taking, organizing, and categorizing
- Teach the student to use a planner, to prioritize, to use "to do" lists and checklists, and break down complex lessons into components
- Provide frequent feedback, redirection, and check-ins
- Show examples of what they have to do
- Ask the student direct questions to have them attend and contribute to the lesson
- Work out a nonverbal signal to cue the student back on task
- Use visual supports including schedules and calendars

School and/or Classroom Strategies for Developing Social Skills

- Teach social skills in an explicit and rote fashion with direct modeling, role playing, practicing, and lots of repetition
- Teach perspective taking skills
- Educate students about the difference between peer joking and bullying
- Develop an awareness of emotions, help teach the link between specific frustrating experiences and negative feelings in a concrete, cause-effect fashion
- Teach awareness of the impact of the student's actions on other people's feelings
- Teach leisure skills for unstructured times, including lunch, recess, study hall, etc.
- Teach the student how to interpret other people's social behavior including the meaning of eye contact, gaze, tone of voice, facial and hand gestures, non-literal communications
- Vocational training in high school should include interviewing skills, social requirements, what to do during work breaks/lunch, and how to interact with co-workers
- Social Stories can be used to share accurate information about a particular social event or situation and should include descriptive, perspective, and directive sentences

School and/or Classroom Strategies for Academic Support

- Provide clear, concise instructions
- Individualize teaching strategies to the student; assess the student's current level; use strengths/interests to plan instruction
- Use repetition and practice to teach skills
- Use visual supports, including daily pictorial/written schedules, visual sequences of lessons, written instructions for assignments, check-lists, charts, etc.
- Use contingent reinforcement to reward work completion, appropriate behaviors, etc.; figure out what motivates the student; use behavior-specific praise (i.e. "nice job keeping your hands to yourself")
- Seat the student in a location of the room with the least extraneous stimuli and near positive peer models
- Make sure you have the student's attention before giving instructions
- Break down complex skills into individual parts so that the student can learn the steps to complete the skill
- Use concrete situations to teach skills; offer added explanation and try to simplify when lesson concepts are abstract
- Take fine motor difficulties/writing speed into account when determining assignments/exams
- Consider oral examinations or permitting dictation during exams; allow extra time
- Homework expectations should be discussed; consider limiting homework assignments and scheduling a time for homework completion at school.
- Auditory processing may be limited, may need support around processing auditory and visual information simultaneously

School and/or Classroom Strategies for Managing Behaviors

- Consistency is vital across all teachers, situations, and settings; develop a list of problematic behaviors and specific guidelines for consistent responses to behaviors
- Teach the student how to cope with stress; create a list of concrete steps that can be followed when they become upset; make a visual support of the steps.
- Teach the student how to identify challenging situations and provide and practice pre-planned, rehearsed steps that they can take
- Conduct schedules/routines in a way that you can introduce and handle unexpected changes; with large transitions, expose child to new teachers, schools, etc. beforehand
- Supervise unstructured time; provide information about what the student should do during unstructured time
- Remain calm during interactions; speak clearly with concise directives; limit verbalizations, especially during escalation
- Phrase statements in the positive (use "Do" statements instead of "Don't")
- Use positive reinforcement to shape a desired behavior; provide praise and tell the student what they did right or well
- Avoid answering the same thing over again or pointing out that the question is being repeated if the student engages in perseveration; instead try to redirect student's attention, ignore the questions, or have the student write down the question/thought so they can refer to it later
- Identify periods where students are permitted to explore their special interests; students could earn these periods for reinforcement