

Strategies to Help Students with Asperger Syndrome & High Functioning Autism Thrive in K-6 Classrooms

Students with ASD need Predictability

Strategies	This strategy is important because:	Suggestions for the Elementary Classroom/School
Utilize schedules	<p>Students with ASD may:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have an atypical sense of time • Be anxious about change • Need to know about changes in schedules ahead of time • Struggle with transitions 	<p>Classroom schedule:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Display it so it is large enough for ALL to see & read • Make it easily “changeable” • Preview schedule at beginning of the day <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Highlight activities & any changes from routine ○ Students can ask questions about changes ○ Student with ASD reads schedule to class • Refer to schedule throughout day at transitions or when asked questions such as, “When is recess?” <p>Weekly schedule:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clarifies what is happening in the future • Shows the “big things” that happen during week (field trip, pictures, assembly, etc.) <p>Individual schedule:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Daily schedule individualized for the student with ASD • Integrates differences in his/her schedule (i.e., Speech) • Clarifies confusion & sets expectations (See Appendix)
Develop clear rules	<p>Students with ASD may:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need a “roadmap” to help navigate the school day • Rely on a visual “check” of rules rather than their memory • Need to calm anxiety about what to do in certain situations • Try to enforce a rule on peers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide simple, short classroom rules written in the positive (Walk in the classroom, Raise your hand, etc.) • Collaboratively write rules with students at the beginning of the year • Explain clearly why each rule is significant to them • Post prominently to allow frequent review • Acknowledge when student follows a difficult rule • Use a T-chart to delineate abstract concepts (See Appendix)
Define transitions	<p>Students with ASD may:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Struggle with “shifting” to new activities due to cognitive rigidity • Become overwhelmed with sensory stimulation during busy transitions (chairs moving, students talking, papers & books rustling, students bumping into each other) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Point to schedule & draw students’ attention to the next activity • Give transition warnings <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Provide “Get ready time” with 5 minute warning ○ Write # of minutes left on board ○ Ask student to check the classroom schedule • Give student a job during the transition (pass out books) • Give student an object to carry (a ball to indicate recess) • Develop & post rules, for example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Put materials away quietly ○ Get what you need for next activity ○ Move quietly & quickly ○ Keep hands & feet to self • Make an individualized <i>Transition Card</i> (see Appendix)
Develop consistent classroom procedures	<p>Students with ASD may:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forget what to do & then anxiety increases • Do better with clear routines 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clearly define procedures & routines in the classroom • Examples; bathroom break, sharpening pencils, end of day, getting a drink, lining up, etc.

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Students with ASD need a Supportive Sensory Environment

Strategies	This strategy is important because:	Suggestions for the Elementary Classroom/School
Control visual stimulation	Students with ASD may: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lose concentration & attention when over-stimulated by visuals • Attend to the wrong thing • Dislike certain lighting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experiment with different lighting options (turn off front banks of lights, rely on natural lighting) • Place busiest wall of visuals behind student • Encourage student to use study carrel or <i>Private Office Space</i> (delineated space for any student to use when needed)
Control auditory stimulation	Students with ASD may: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be fearful of unfamiliar or unpredictable sounds • Attend to small noises • Avoid or try to escape loud or high-pitched sounds 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seat away from fan, air conditioner, pencil sharpener • Give a warning before fire drill (if possible) • Turn down volume on intercom (if possible) • Consider how noise in gym, multi-purpose room may affect student's ability to participate, concentrate, etc. • Play calming, soothing music at certain times of day
Control tactile (touch) stimulation	Students with ASD may: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • React negatively to "light" touch ("deep" touch is more easily tolerated) • Have a limited ability to monitor personal boundaries • Touch unknown or "off-limits" objects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be sure student is placed in a line that will help with his sensitivities (walk at end, next to teacher, along the side) • Monitor situations where "accidental" light touch could occur (hallways, moving around classroom, partnering) • Consider PE activities that involve touching (holding hands, sports with body contact, such as basketball) • Talk about personal boundaries as a class <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Keep an arm's length distance ○ Keep a "hula hoop" distance (place a hula hoop around students to define space) • Develop accommodations for floor sitting: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Carpet square, stadium chair, up against a desk or wall, holds a large pillow ○ Acknowledge need for personal space during rug/circle times • Write clear rules for what is ok to touch & what is not
Control vestibular (balance) stimulation	Students with ASD may: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be unwilling to try certain movement activities because of fear &/or anxiety • Seek intense sensory experiences (spinning, whirling, jumping) • Be uncomfortable in a chair 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Modify activities in PE to allow for balance issues • Allow &/or build in times that will address sensory needs (spinning on monkey bars, swinging, rolling on therapy ball, hanging from bars, go for a walk) • Use a chair with arms • Be sure that student can place feet flatly on floor in his/her desk chair
Control proprioceptive (subconscious awareness of body in space) stimulation	Students with ASD may: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have difficulty with motor activities • Be clumsy • Need deep pressure • Crave oral-motor stimulation & chew on shirt sleeve, pencil or other inappropriate items 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow student to have weighted pillow on lap • Give jobs to student to provide "deep pressure" on joints & muscles (move stacks of books, erase whiteboards, help PE teacher move mats, sharpen pencils in manual sharpener, stack chairs, theraband around chair legs to push against) • Do periodic wall push-ups or chair push-ups • For oral-motor needs, allow use of water bottle with sport top or Camelback bottle, chewy snacks

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Students with ASD need Social Opportunities

Strategies	This strategy is important because:	Suggestions for the Elementary Classroom/School
Identify student strengths	Students with ASD may: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have significant strengths in academic areas, memory, problem-solving, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give student a classroom job that highlights his/her area of strength (math helper, spelling expert) • Promote acceptance & belonging by <i>stretching</i> the definition of "normal social behavior"
Support during lunch	Students with ASD may: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prefer the company of adults & not peers • Not know how to join in conversation/play with peers • Become overwhelmed with lunchroom/cafeteria noise, smells & activity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sit at end of table so no one can bump him/her • Sit near door so s/he can easily leave if overwhelmed • Sit with a "pre-selected" buddy • Allow student to eat in another room with a peer(s) • Set up a job for student right after finishing lunch • Set up a <i>Lunch Bunch</i> - Students eat together, then play games, do art activities, talk about areas of interest; requires some planning & adult supervision
Support during recess or free time	Students with ASD may: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Find recess very stressful • Not have the skills to join & engage in play with peers • Be inflexible & cannot "go with the flow" of play • Get overwhelmed with the physical, social and emotional requirements of recess • Have peer gross motor skills & cannot play physical games well 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some students may need a break from socialization; allow "islands of solitude" • Review the recess rules right before students go out • Consider finding a job for the student during recess (pass out play equipment, help with younger children) • Develop recess clubs (Lego, games, Chess); student with ASD could be the assistant • Select several recess "buddies" who volunteer to help the student get started in a recess game (student volunteer does not have to play with him/her all recess) • Develop a <i>Recess Schedule</i> (See Appendix)
Increase peer interactions in the classroom	Students with ASD may: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be unwilling to work with partners or in groups • Not understand the "hidden rules" about groupwork • Unable to read subtle nonverbal cues from partners or members of a group • Be rigid about the assigned task • Dominate discussion because of limited awareness of others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explicitly teach the skills of how work with a partner & use pair activities (Think-Pair-Share, Turn to your Neighbor, Prediction Pairs, Round-the-Clock buddies) • Consider who would be a good partner for the student with ASD (i.e., patient tolerant of a different learning & social style) • Explicitly teach students how to work in a group; consider using the structure from Cooperative Learning (Kagan) where each student has a role (i.e., leader, notetaker, timekeeper, spokesperson, etc.) • Consider what might be the best job for the student with ASD (for example, a student who struggles with handwriting would not a good notetaker) • Some students with ASD interact more easily with younger children; consider a cross-age buddy for those students

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Students with ASD need Emotional/Behavioral Support

Strategies	This strategy is important because:	Suggestions for the Elementary Classroom/School
Support self-esteem	<p>Students with ASD may:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be left out of social interactions because of unusual behaviors • Unaware of how students "see" him/her 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on student's strengths and find ways to let peers recognize these areas of strength (i.e., student who is excellent) in math becomes the math helper/expert) • Catch student in positive moments (4 positive statements are needed to overcome 1 negative one!) • Use specific words to define the positive behavior ("You really listened to those directions.")
Support compliance	<p>Students with ASD may:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appear rude or disrespectful, but may not understand • Need explicit instruction on what to do in certain situations • Need reminders about how the rules apply to them • Struggle with transitions • Have a limited awareness of his/her own actions/behaviors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use language that explains the "why" of the situation (i.e., "I know the apron is uncomfortable, but it keeps your nice clothes clean." vs. "You can't paint without an apron.") • Tape a picture of the student engaging in the desired behavior on his/her desk (i.e., raising hand) • Use your classroom rules to redirect • Always think <i>Prevention</i> (remove student from difficult situations, get support from your classroom routine & visuals, redirect the student, take a sensory break) • Don't get into power struggles (You will lose!)
Cope with rigidity	<p>Students with ASD may:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask the same question over & over • Get "stuck" & be unable to move beyond issue 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement a "Question Rule"; set a clear rule about how many questions a student can ask in a given period of time; keep track on a "Question Rule" chart • Use the classroom (or the student's individual schedule) to get them back on track • Implement a <i>Flexibility Card</i> (See Appendix)
Cope with emotions	<p>Students with ASD may:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have very limited ability to regulate his/her emotions • Become very anxious when things don't as they expect • Dwell on past experiences & struggle to let go of past "wrongs" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Model & teach calming strategies (i.e., take deep breaths, squeeze fists to count of 10, squeeze fidget item, think of a peaceful place, recite a word quietly) • Prompt student to take a "time away" for calming (Not a punishment, but a chance to practice how to remove self from upsetting situations 7 use calming technique) • Acknowledge upsetting emotions, "I can see you are frustrated with this. Take your deep breaths."
Cope with difficult behavior (outbursts, tantrums)	<p>Students with ASD may:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seem to meltdown for no apparent reason • Be unable to explain why s/he had a meltdown, especially in the moment • Struggle to understand the perspective of others • Act impulsively without thinking • Engage in ritualistic, repeated or obsessive behaviors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meltdowns can be a result of the cumulative effect of different factors (change +sensory overload + teasing + difficult worksheet = Meltdown) • Inhibit your natural response to talk; if you want to communicate something, write it down (e.g., <i>Let's go the back of the room.</i>) • If you need to talk, use slow speech & limit eye contact • Be calm; monitor your tone of voice & body language • Talk with the student later, don't ask questions • Discuss what do next time; write out a simple plan (<i>When I get frustrated, I can go use my sensory tools at the back of the room for 5 minutes</i>); keep the card & give it to him if you think he might be headed for an outburst • You may need to compromise, it's not about winning.

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Students with ASD need Academic Support

Strategies	This strategy is important because:	Suggestions for the Elementary Classroom/School
Support work completion	<p>Students with ASD may:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Get “stuck” due to cognitive rigidity • Show little interest in “pleasing people” (teachers, parents) for good grades • Be bored with grade-level academic work • Be unable to organize self to get work done • Struggle with “whole” & over-focuses on the details 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Catch student when s/he is on-task; don’t wait until s/he is not working to interact • Develop a work completion chart to check off tasks as they are completed (See Appendix) • Negotiate order of completion; use Task Completion Card (See Appendix) • Consider whether handwriting demands are interfering with completion; allow word processing. • Provide organization supports, such as graphic organizers, checklists, outlines, skeleton notes • Model calendar keeping & list making • Consider technology such as laptop, smart phone, iPad
Support on-task behavior	<p>Students with ASD may:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be easily distracted by inner thoughts or sensory sensitivities • Be overloaded with sensory stimulation • Be stressed & withdraw into inner world • Lack organizational skills • Overfocus on details & be unable to “see” the whole of the task 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seat student with ASD near on-task peers • Allow student to use buddies for help • Watch for signs of student “losing it” <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Increased movements (wiggling, fidgeting) ○ Facial expressions (grimaces, frowning) ○ Vocalizations (sighing, talking/singing) • Redirect off-task behavior before it escalates <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Take a note to office ○ Clean whiteboard ○ Redirect student back to task • Praise-Prompt-Leave <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Praise: Tell student what he did correctly ○ Prompt: Instruct student what to do next ○ Leave: Turn & leave; return to check in several minutes; verbally reinforce student for trying • Use TimeTimer (or other timers) to keep on-task • Use IF-THEN visual (see Appendix)
Support test-taking	<p>Students with ASD may:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Become anxious with tests • Be impulsive in responses • Have poor handwriting that slows down test completion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be sure to give prior notice for tests; write on weekly schedule so student will not be surprised • Allow student to take test in RSP room or elsewhere • Break test into several parts to take at different times • Watch for confusing or nonliteral language on tests
Monitor instructional discourse	<p>Students with ASD may:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Struggle to understand nonliteral language • Not read nonverbal communication cues accurately • Have limited working memory affecting response to oral directions/instructions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When nonliteral language occurs in text or in oral instruction/discussion, explain what it means • Avoid sarcasm; students will be confused & frustrated • Use statements, not questions (i.e., “Everyone should have their math book out.” not “Does everyone have their math book out?” (Student might say no!) • Monitor mixed messages (i.e., your verbal message is different than your nonverbal message) • Slow down rate of speech, chunk directions, pause between each instructional point, write on whiteboard • Write directions on post-it note at student’s desk

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Appendix

Individual Schedule

Tommy's Schedule, May 1, 2011

8:15-8:30	Opening, make my schedule
8:30-9:30	Reading (Mrs. Jones' room)
9:30-10:00	Writing Workshop (my room)
10:00-10:15	Recess (RSP room)
10:15-11:00	Math (my room)
11:00-11:35	PE (Mr. Peck)
11:35-12:15	Lunch (Lunch Bunch today!)
12:15-1:00	Social studies (Mrs. Jones' room)
1:00-1:30	Speech therapy (Ms. Brown's room)
1:30-2:00	Journal writing (my room)
2:00-2:15	Recess (watch video in RSP room for good behavior)
2:15	Go home!

T Chart

Shows Respect	
Looks like	Sounds Like
- Keep my hands & feet to self	-Use a nice tone of voice
- Use a nice facial expression	-Use an indoor voice
-Keep my materials in my space	-Ask for help when needed

Transition Card

- Going to the library**
1. When teacher says, get my library book from my backpack or desk
 2. Go back to my seat
 3. When teacher says, line up behind Sue
 4. Walk quietly to the library
 5. Hand my book to Mrs. Green
 6. Look for a new book
 7. When teacher says, line up behind Sue

Recess Card

- My Recess**
1. Go to the boy's bathroom.
 2. Get a drink of water.
 3. Wait my turn on the slide.
 4. Run around the play structure.
 5. FREEZE when the bell rings.
 6. Line up at end of line.

Flexibility Card

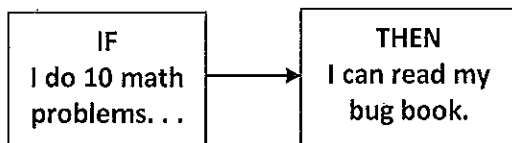
I can put my favorite book away when it is math time.

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday

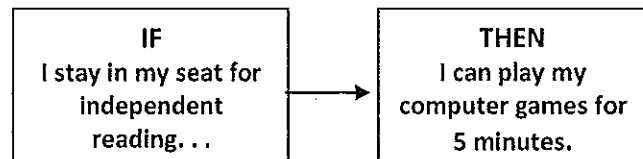
Task Completion Card

- I will:**
1. Write 6 spelling words.
 2. Do 10 math problems.
 3. Finish journal.
 4. Go to free choice.

IF-THEN



IF-THEN



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Resources

(Most of these books can be purchased online through Amazon, Barnes/Noble, Borders)

General Books about ASD

- *The Complete Guide to Asperger's Syndrome.* Attwood, T. (2006). Jessica Kingsley Publishers, www.jkp.com or www.amazon.com

Books for Teachers

- *Asperger Syndrome in the Inclusive Classroom: Advice and Strategies for Teachers.* Betts, D., Betts, S., Gerber-Ekard. (2007). Autism Asperger Publishing, www.asperger.net
- *Asperger Syndrome and the elementary school experience: Practical solutions for academic and social difficulties.* Moore, S. T. (2002). Autism Asperger Publishing Co. www.asperger.net
- *Simple strategies that work! Helpful hints for all educators of students with Asperger Syndrome, high-functioning autism, and related disabilities.* Myles, B. S., Adreon, D., Gitlitz, D. (2006). Autism Asperger Publishing, www.asperger.net
- *Ten things your student with Autism wishes you knew.* Notbohm, E. (2006). Future Horizons, Inc., www.FHautism.com
- "You're going to love this kid!" - *Teaching students with autism in the inclusive classroom.* Kluth, P. (2004). Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co., www.brookespublishing.com

Books about Self-Awareness

- *Asperger's what does it mean to me? A workbook explaining self-awareness and life lessons to the child or youth with high functioning Autism or Asperger's.* Faherty, C. (2000). Future Horizons, www.FHautism.com
- *Can I tell you about Asperger Syndrome? A guide for friends and family.* Welton, J. (2004). Jessica Kingsley Publishers, www.jkp.com
- *This is Asperger Syndrome.* Gagon, E., Myles, B.S. (1999) Autism Asperger Publishing Co. www.asperger.net

Behavior/Emotions

- *Asperger Syndrome and difficult moments: Practical solutions for tantrums, rage and meltdowns.* Myles, B., Southwick, J. (1999). Autism Asperger Publishing Co. www.asperger.net
- *My book full of feelings: How to control and react to the SIZE of your emotions-An interactive workbook for parents, professionals and children.* Jaffe, A., Gardner, L. (2006). Autism Asperger Publishing Co., www.asperger.net
- *The incredible 5-point scale.* Buron, K., Curtis, M. (2004). Autism Asperger Publishing Co., www.asperger.net

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Sensory

- *Asperger Syndrome and sensory issues: Practical solutions for making sense of the world.* Myles, B., et al. (2000). Autism Asperger Publishing Co., www.asperger.net
- *Answers to questions teachers ask about sensory integration.* Sensory Resources, Koomar, J., Kranowitz, C.S., Szklut, S. (2001). www.SensoryResources.com
- *My sensory book: Working together to explore sensory issues and the big feelings they cause: A workbook for parents, professionals and children.* Kerstein, L. (2008). Autism Asperger Publishing Co. www.asperger.net

Social Skills

- *The Autism social skills picture book: Teaching communication, play and education.* Baker, J. (2001). Future Horizons. www.fhautism.com
- *Navigating the social world: A curriculum for individuals with Asperger's Syndrome, high functioning autism and related disorders.* McAfee, J. (2002). Future Horizons, www.fhautism.com
- *The hidden curriculum: Practical solutions for understanding rules in social situations.* Myles, B.S., Trautman, M.L., Schelvan, R.L., (2004). Autism Asperger Publishing Company, www.asperger.net
- *Think social! A social thinking curriculum for school-age students.* Winner, M.G. (2005). San Jose, CA: Thinking Social Publishing. www.socialthinking.com

Books for Parents

- *Right address...wrong planet: Children with Asperger Syndrome becoming adults.* Barnhill, G. (2002). Autism Asperger Publishing, www.asperger.net
- *Embarrassed often, ashamed never.* Elliott, L. (2002). Autism Asperger Publishing Co., www.asperger.net
- *Elijah's Cup: A family's journey into the community and culture of high-functioning Autism and Asperger's Syndrome – Revised Edition.* Paradiz, V. (2005). Jessica Kingsley Publishers, www.jkp.com

Websites

- **Autism Speaks.** Dedicated to funding global biomedical research into causes, prevention, treatments and care for autism.
<http://www.autismspeaks.org>
- **OASIS (Online Asperger Syndrome Information and Support).** Parent-based web resources on Asperger and associated topics.
<http://www.aspergersyndrome.org>
- **Autism Society of America.** Promotes lifelong access and opportunities for persons within the autism spectrum and their families, to be fully included, participating members of their communities through advocacy, public awareness, education, and research related to autism.
<http://www.autism-society.org>