

Strategies to Use when Working with Students with Autism

Social and Communication

- Present information clearly and concisely: use short verbal phrases when making requests ("It's time to work") and a minimal number of spoken words when providing student with directives in class
- Allow plenty of wait time for processing verbal requests
- Create and teach student to utilize a written or picture schedule-review schedule with student at onset of day
- Be generous with feedback
- Provide direct feedback and celebrate the student's strengths
- Keep lines of communication from home frequent and open. Create as much consistency between home/school as possible.
- Set clear and concise expectations
- Maintain a calm demeanor
- Use social stories and practice social scripts and role-play. Use conversation starter cards
- Give choices when possible
- After a behavioral outburst or crisis, together with the student try to identify a trigger and interpret and explain what happened. Talk about how the response could look different the next time. Do not blame or lecture student.

Academics and Environment

- Provide opportunities for movement
- Practice academic concepts using games
- Shorten or reduce assignments
- Follow a non-preferred activity with a preferred activity
- Preferential seating based on student needs
- Use timers to keep the student focused and to alert the start/stop time for activities
- Color code materials for each subject/activity to teach organizational skills
- Mark areas with masking tape to clarify boundaries
- Utilize visuals and manipulatives
- Break assignments into segments of shorter tasks
- Embed student interests into lesson plans
- Model work for student whenever possible
- Provide personalized reinforcement based on the student's preferred intrinsic motivators. Collect a reinforcer inventory to collect information about favorite foods, toys, movies, TV shows, music/songs and people.
- Help keep student's work environment free from physical and visual clutter
- Eliminate down time; have extra activities that are academically appropriate available just in case you need them
- Address sensory needs if they impact academics; involve an occupational therapist to assess sensory needs.

Structure and Planning

- Maintain a consistent routine
- Provide all teachers/staff with a list of behavioral expectations and responses for the student to ensure consistency
- Do not insist on eye contact; focus on the student paying attention instead
- Practice transitioning skills-give student an object to focus on during transitions and drills
- Teach replacement behaviors
- Teach the student to use a self monitoring system
- Utilize video modeling - show the student doing what you want him/her to do instead of saying what you don't want.
- Avoid or prepare student for situations that you know are problem situations for the student
- Avoid sudden changes in schedule/activities unless the student has been given notification
- Create a "safe area" in the classroom for student to retreat to
- Develop and use a positive behavior plan (The entire team should know/understand the plan and use it consistently)
- Prepare substitute staff by providing them with all of the information that they need to work with the student; prepare the student for the substitute staff

Quick and Handy Strategies for Working with Students on the Autism Spectrum. Robin d. Brewer, ED.D., and Tracey G. Mueller, Ph.D.