



Autism Spectrum Disorder

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Introduction

Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) are neurodevelopmental disorders characterized by difficulties with social interaction and communication.

What You Might Notice

The following list is designed as a general overview of autism spectrum disorders while providing characteristics you MAY see with a student who has this diagnosis:

- Exhibit awkward eye contact, posture, and/or gestures
- Experience difficulty with changes in classroom, seating, and syllabi
- Experience sensory sensitivity (lights, sounds, touch, smells)
- Respond in a delayed fashion
- Misunderstand tone of voice, jokes, facial expressions, sarcasm, and other subtle messages
- Demonstrate differences in vocal pitch, volume, intonation
- Become easily distracted, particularly in long classes
- Hold strong, narrow interests
- Come across as argumentative, rude, or monopolizing
- Display literal and concrete thinking patterns
- Use calming or focusing strategies such as rocking, tapping, pacing, or using manipulatives
- Become easily overwhelmed

Strengths and Struggles

The following strengths and struggles are generally shared by students who have an autism spectrum diagnosis, although each individual student experiences unique strengths and challenges.

Strengths

- Above average to superior intellect
- Passionate commitment to ideas
- Strong sense of equality and justice
- Exceptional talents in one specific area
- Diligent with routine work and excellent memory
- Strong pursuit of knowledge within areas of interest
- Good visual and spatial learners
- Original ways of solving problems

Struggles

- Initiating/sustaining effort
- Setting boundaries
- Working in groups
- Organizing and completing tasks
- Seeing others' points of view
- Understanding social rules
- Assessing priorities and performance
- Asking for clarification or assistance
- Interpreting vague instructions
- Abstract concepts and seeing the "big picture"

Strategies

The following are recommended strategies for ways to better assist students with autism spectrum disorder to have a successful experience both in and out of the classroom:

- Provide direct feedback, set clear boundaries
- Allow breaks during class
- Allow a laptop for note taking
- Avoid calling on student in class without warning
- Avoid idioms, metaphors, and sarcasm
- Consider assigning group roles
- Provide visual learning tools when possible (pictures, charts)
- Supplement oral instructions with written instructions
- Explain the purpose of the assignment
- Utilize syllabus and note changes as soon as possible

Important Note

This information is available in alternate format upon request. Please call University Disability Services at 570-389-4491.