

Autism Goes to School



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Agenda

- Important info for:
 - Educators
 - Parents
 - Students



Autism at School: What Educators Need to Know

- Autism is a neurodevelopmental condition
- Sensory experiences are unusual and extreme
- Behaviors are often linked to sensory issues
- Stress is a major consideration

General Considerations

- Each child is unique
- Relationships are key
- Teamwork is essential
- Strengths
 - Every child has strengths- the challenge is to find a way to use them to compensate for areas of relative weakness



Autism: A Neurodevelopmental Condition

- Brain-based
 - Structure
 - function
- Impacts the way information is processed, filtered, organized

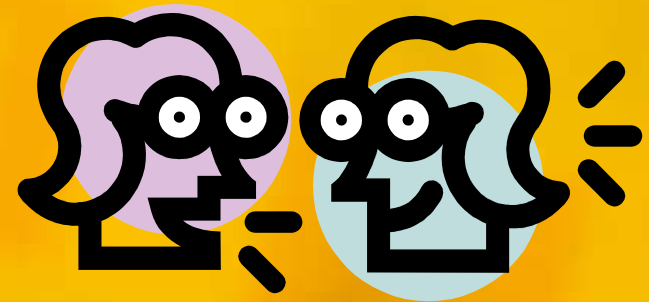


Familiar Faces -vs- Strangers

While NT subjects use medial frontal and parietal regions to process familiar faces, the autistic subjects only show activity in medial parietal regions (Courchesne, 2005).

Autism impacts Sensory Experience

- Students may over or under react to sensory stimuli
 - Taste
 - Sound
 - Smell
 - Touch
 - Visual
- If you have behavioral concerns, look here first!!!!



Behavioral Concerns

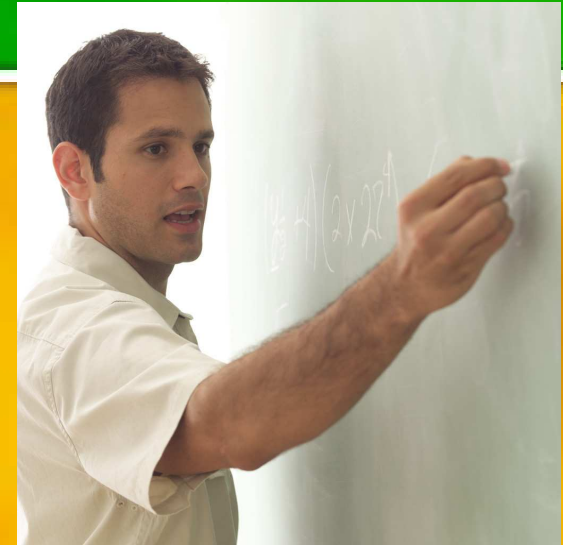
- Behaviors of those with autism are often misunderstood
 - Sensory
 - Stress
 - Soothing/Coping
- Changing behaviors should not be attempted **unless** they are:
 - Is dangerous
 - Immoral/ Illegal
 - Greatly impedes learning or socialization

Stress

- Sensory
- Thinking styles
 - Change and transition
 - Consistency
 - Rule/procedure bound
 - Details
- Adhering to the misconception that those with autism must think the same way as “neurotypicals” causes great stress.

The Flip Side: Preventing Behavior Problems

- Provide Structure
- Follow Through
- Be clear and explicit
- Provide External Reminders
- Provide a safe place
- Explain when there will be a change in plans (and why)



Instructional Considerations

Identify Strengths

- Does the student prefer visual or verbal instruction?
- Specific interests?
- Skills?
- Memory?
- Communication?
- Adaptive skills?



Transitions and Change

- Structure
- Advance prep
- Schedules
- Visual or verbal cues
- Modeling
- Pre-teaching
- Working with the team

Sensory

- Check with student/parents
- Observe and notice patterns
- Avoid over-stimulating environments
- Never force a child
- Notice behaviors that may relate to sensations

Social and Language

- Literal language
- Model correct speech
- Explain rules
- Provide practice with guided support
- Key words to cue behaviors
- Prompts
- Be explicit and clear

Social Interaction

- Explain social conventions
- Assist social interactions
- Teach rules for specific situations
- Provide tangible rewards
- Prepare
- Teach the why of human behavior

Repetitive behaviors

- Judge these by:
 - Does it hurt anyone?
 - Is it disruptive to learning?
 - Can it be managed with cues?
 - When does it happen?

Interest Areas

- Provide appropriate times/ outlets
–and explain
- Relate instruction when possible
- Celebrate competencies
- Change?????
– Only if absolutely necessary

Attention

- Minimize distractions
- Remove “executive” demands
- Ensure understanding
- Assist with planning

Autism at School: What Parents Need to Know

- Most schools and educators intend to provide the best environment for students
- Support and teamwork is key
- Parents can help the team to understand your child's behaviors
- Sensory and Transitional Issues

Working with Schools

- Notice the things that go well
- Try to focus on the good things, as well as address the challenges
- Understand that many are not educationally prepared for a child with autism
- Ask- "how can I help?"

What Students need to know

- They are important
- They matter
- They are cared for
- They have strengths, which are appreciated
- That autism is only one part of them
- There are many other students who are like them



Reflection

- Individuals with autism bring diverse thinking styles to the world. Their ways of perceiving things are often very different than NTs, yet offer unique perspectives that others may not have considered.
- It is our job to:
 - Understand the fundamental difference
 - To help those with ASDs understand those differences.

Questions

