

Students within the Autism Spectrum in Higher Education Settings

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What is Autism Spectrum Disorder?

A neuro-developmental disorder that impacts learning, communication and socialization. This includes social skill development, language, attention, perception and motor activity.

DSM-5 (May 2013)

Change	Comment
<p>New diagnostic category: Neurodevelopmental Disorders</p>	<p>Includes; Autism Spectrum Disorder ADHD</p>

DSM- 5

Change	Comment
<p data-bbox="48 739 875 779">New Disorder: Autism Spectrum Disorder</p>	<p data-bbox="975 589 1837 729">Disorder severity based on degree of social communication and restrictive or repetitive patterns of behavior.</p> <p data-bbox="975 791 1792 931">Encompasses previous disorders such as: Pervasive Developmental Disorder and Asperger's disorder</p>

The Autism Spectrum

Asperger's Syndrome

In own World

Social Interaction

Active but Inept

Nonverbal

Communication

Verbal but Inept

Stereotypical Behaviors

Restricted Interests/Repetitive Behaviors

Limited flexibility
Restricted interests
Rigid routines

High Sensitivity

Response to Sensory Experiences

Preferences in Response to anxiety

Hidden Curriculum

- Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder have difficulty with what is known as the “hidden curriculum”
 - These are the rules that we all seem to know without being told because we observe and model and learn.

Great Resource:

The Hidden Curriculum by Brenda Smith Myles

Socialization

- Difficulty with conversation: how to enter; turn-taking; topic choice; inappropriate responses
- Have a hard time interpreting social cues and body language
- Unaware of how their behaviors and/or comments affect others
- Do not ask others questions or their opinions
- Limited or inappropriate facial expressions and eye contact

Underlying Characteristics Communication

- Typical development of language is seen in the Asperger range of the spectrum. Delayed language development is common in the moderate range.
- In conversations: loud volume, monopolize, off-topic, advanced vocabulary, limited range of topics, lectures rather than converses, pedantic speech

Communication

- May be very literal
- Difficulty understanding that other people may have a different perspective (anger outbursts, tantrums, refusal, etc.)
- Difficulty understanding sarcasm, humor, figures of speech, metaphors
- Misinterpretation of teasing as intentional insults

Restricted Patterns of Behavior, Interests, and Activities

- Need for consistency and structure
- Routines are helpful and preferred
- Narrow area(s) of interest
- Repetitive motor behaviors

Sensory Differences

- Senses: Sensory sensitivity (clothing, lighting, heating/cooling, noise, smell, touching, etc.)
- Experience information to the senses in different ways
- Seek or avoid activities that provide input

Cognitive Differences

- Problem solving skills
 - experienced vs. novel situations
- Generalization
- Executive functioning
 - Remembering to check mailbox
- Special interests
- Average to above average intelligence, are often gifted
in their area of intense interest

Emotional Vulnerability

- Difficulty identifying and understanding feelings
- Trouble reading emotional situations
- Co-morbid mental health issues
 - Anxiety/depression
 - Low frustration tolerance
 - Need for bullying awareness and prevention
- Boundary issues related to interpersonal relationships

Strengths

- Punctual
- Attention to detail
- Comfort with repetitive tasks
- Honest
- Loyal
- Follow procedures consistently
- Do not like to break rules
- Rare absences
- Avoid gossip
- Creative
- Think outside the box
- Excellent memory
- Predictable
- Precise and Informative

Students on the Autism Spectrum at Wright State University

Students with ASD registered with ODS

- 2006 – Fewer than 30 Students
- 2010 – Approximately 60 Students
- 2015 – Approximately 100 Students

(WSU database, 2015)

Office of Disability Services at Wright State University

Services and support for students with ASD

- Psycho-educational Assessments
- Autism Spectrum Disorder Support Group
- RASE Transition Coach Program
- Outreach

Strategies

- Proactively educate the student on the rules and guidelines for specific encounters; meetings with faculty, classroom behavior (specifically asking questions and talking during class), roommate concerns.

Strategies

- Use scripting or behavior etiquette planning for class time or any time that there is an expectation of a certain type of behavior. It provides clarity and consistency for the student

Strategies

- Be aware that students with ASD may need more personal space than is typical
- Be sensitive to and aware of sensory environment (noises, odors, volume of audio, heating/cooling, etc.)

Strategies

- Employ strategies that emphasize these three areas of focus:
 - Be literal in communication and planning
 - Be logical to clarify the rationale for an expectation. This can positively impact student buy-in which is critical for success.
 - Use behavioral hands-on learning and modeling to teach and reinforce new skill sets.

Strategies

- Students with autism typically respond to and seek to know what the rules are for situations that they encounter.
- State communications verbally that might ordinarily be communicated non-verbally
- Make corrections in the moment in a clear and concise manner and directly refer to an established rule.

Strategies

- It will also be important to be very direct about how the current behavior is not acceptable; whether it is because it is disrupting the environment of the other individuals or is not indicated for a specific situation. This also provides the “why” which clarifies the situation and the logic associated with the expectation.
- It is okay to be direct, and this is preferred by students with autism, because ambiguity and extra words to soften things often cloud the picture and confuse the student.

Strategies

- Offer a suggestion to the student to quietly get up to excuse himself for a restroom/composure break when he is feeling frustrated. That way the other person will not need to redirect the student and potentially have the student behavior escalate.
- An important thing to keep in mind - the student needs to be actively involved in the process of creating a plan for his success to ensure that he will be compliant.
 - If he is not actively involved, he may initially agree, but later be non-compliant because he doesn't see the value in doing the activity. Student buy-in is critical for success.

Questions?

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