



## Effective Teaching and Support Strategies for students with ASC

*"The most interesting people you'll find are ones that don't fit into your average cardboard box. They'll make what they need, they'll make their own boxes,"* Dr. Temple Grandin

*"Behaviour is communication. Change the environment and behaviours will change,"* Lana David

*"English is my 2nd language. Autism is my first,"* Dani Bowman

Whether it is an inability to process the verbal and non-verbal information given or an inability on the individual's part with an ASC to verbalise their needs or frustrations, both play an important part in the resulting challenging behaviour displayed: non-verbal, does not mean they are non-communicative –look at the function of that communication in environmental and social context. Parents, carers and professionals need to think and reflect on exactly what the challenges are or will be and then formulate little changes: life is full of small challenges and these small adaptations can be the source of success.

### **The key steps to success can be summarised as:**

1. Validate feelings – make the student feel listened to
2. Help to explain the situation – use a mind map, or scripted cartoon
3. Reassure that all will be well and talk about what will happen next: what do they need to do, which tool or strategy will they use?

### **Remember the 3 'R's:**

1. Reasons
2. Rules
3. Routines

### **Students with ASC are more likely to be successful at school if:**

- tasks are presented in a way that visually highlights and organises important information. For example, instructions for a test or sections of a book can be highlighted, or give a written reminder about the type of information to look for.
- tasks are geared towards interests. For example, when teaching division, calculate the speed of a plane that takes 5 hours to travel 1000 miles.
- students can have an assigned peer or mentor in less structured social situations; also serves as a role model in behaviour.
- students can have support in extracurricular activities related to their strengths and interests.
- students use the school planner effectively to facilitate communication between school and home.
- Computer skills are used.
- There are consistent written rules. When the rules are broken, you should remind the student to look at the rules, rather than telling them what to do. By referring back to the rules the direction seems less personal, as though the rules sheet is saying what to do, not the person. Another way to make the rules seem more palatable is to put them on school letterhead, referring to them as school policy, etc.

- Homework assignments are written in a way that gives more information than other students usually need. Along with the written assignment, the educator may also need to write a checklist of the materials the child will need.
- In times of meltdown, give a written note to go to a predetermined quiet area of the school. All verbal direction should stop as this tends to escalate the situation. If more directions are needed, write them down. At first the student may crumple up the paper, but usually if you leave the paper by them and walk away, they will eventually read it.
- If a student needs to communicate with others when they are upset they should be encouraged to write to you (or write on the computer) as their ability to communicate verbally is reduced when they are anxious.
- Use the TA to write notes, or key vocabulary, for verbal information.
- Students are encouraged to use visual schedules. By doing so, they will be able to function in a more organised and independent manner as adults. Schedules can be used to cross off each event as it occurs. This is also good for introducing unexpected changes that may occur during the day. Changes can be highlighted so that they can anticipate them without becoming upset.
- The role of the TA is clear: they should not serve as a shadow that steps in and helps whenever a problem arises. Instead, they can develop and implement the structure (e.g., schedules, modifying assignments, checklists, etc.) that will be useful in increasing the student's independence, and also ensure that these structures are implemented.
- Students understand what is going to happen next: they will then be less likely to become upset. The use of written task schedules, written instructions and routines will help them understand what is happening in the lesson.
- Students to be assessed for Exam Access arrangements and SEN; keyboard skills may need to be mastered as many students will then find it easier to complete homework assignments, take notes in class, and complete long-term projects.
- Students are encouraged to use notebooks and planners to organise their work and materials.
- Students are encouraged to develop pragmatic language skills. Speech therapists can be involved in creating scripts to help the student learn what to say in a variety of situations.
- Help to reduce impulsivity. They will need special preparation before entering new situations. This might require having someone "scout" the situation ahead of time to anticipate possible problems and then write out rules that the student can keep with him when he enters that situation.
- Understanding of behaviour: outbursts and impulsive behaviours can appear to be manipulative, purposeful and intentionally rude.
- Students are provided with checklists to help them keep organised. Giving checklists is particularly helpful when the student has to complete short series of related activities or when they need to organise a group of materials. For a chore at home, they might need a checklist for completing the steps necessary to clean their room. "Clean your room" would be an item on their schedule. Then a checklist could include all the things they need to do (e.g., sweep the floor, put your books on the shelf, put your clean clothes away, make your bed, etc). They would check off each item as they completed it so that they would know whether they have finished all of their tasks.
- Social skills will improve when students are provided with strategies that will improve their understanding of social situations and give them specific behaviours to use when they are interacting with others: Social Stories and Comic Strip Conversations, have been developed by Carol Gray of Jenison Public Schools in Michigan.
- Some students may benefit from 1:1 time. This makes use of ASC-friendly strategies, such as social stories, to help develop social skills. Other strategies include role-play, problem solving, such as making a list of who to talk to when someone teases you, or helping them to write and check their own schedules. Occasionally there are more emotional issues that need to be addressed, but every attempt should be made to relate these issues to concrete information that can be understood and to keep these discussions from being too open-ended. Frequently some sessions are more successful when they take place by writing back and forth to each other.
- Use of visual symbols and cues to reinforce learning and attention.

- Worksheets might need to be reorganised to help success. Students are more likely to finish all the problems and follow directions if there are fewer problems on each sheet of paper and if the place for the answers is large and prominent. For example, the class might have a homework assignment of 20 problems that are all written on the same page. The student with ASC might be more successful if their assignment contains the same 20 problems, but on 4 different pages. Each problem might be accompanied with a large numbered box that corresponds to the number of each problem so that they can clearly see where the answer belongs and also clearly see whether they have finished all of the problems on the page.
- Use of proformas and flow charts (e.g. Elklan) to organise their thoughts, opinions and learning and to direct their answers in a logical, structured way.
- When lessons are delivered, provide important “written” information to reinforce learning (e.g., How much am I expected to do? How will I know when I am finished? What am I expected to do? What will I do next?). By knowing this information, students will be more successful and independent in completing activities. Having a clear understanding of what is happening and what they are supposed to do will also decrease any anxiety they feel when they are unsure and unable to ask for clarification.

### **Secondary ASC Outreach Service**

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