

Support offer
Equipping professionals



Guidance and support for students with autism

(Autism Spectrum Disorder/ASD)

Tips for education
professionals

ECIO

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zonder belemmering

Autism is a form of neurodivergence in which information is processed differently. Students with autism may experience challenges in social communication, information processing and sensory processing, but often possess strong analytical skills, attention to detail, perseverance and special interests.

Autism is a spectrum, so its characteristics and needs can vary from person to person. How a student with autism learns and develops is influenced by factors such as upbringing, learning style, cognitive abilities and environmental influences. Education and support should therefore be tailored to the student's individual needs.

Responding to both strengths and challenges of students with autism can create an inclusive and stimulating learning environment in which they can achieve their full potential.





Challenges

Organisational

May have difficulty with planning, estimating time and switching between tasks. Crowded spaces and bright lights can lead to overstimulation.

Learning

May have difficulty with processing information, distinguishing between main and secondary issues, and processing multiple stimuli at once. Unexpected and unclear situations and tasks can cause confusion and stress.

Social/emotional

May have difficulty with teamwork, social relationships and participating in conversations. Non-verbal cues, figurative language and implicit rules require extra effort. Overstimulation, stress and anxiety occur frequently and make regulating emotions extra difficult.





Positive characteristics

- Strong analytical skills.
- Precision and attention to detail.
- High level of perseverance.
- Authenticity and honesty.
- Loyal and reliable.
- Strong visual thinking.
- Deep focus and dedication to specific topics.
- Original thinking and creative problem-solving.
- Strong sense of justice.
- Structured and methodical approach to work.



Challenging characteristics

- Difficulty distinguishing main and secondary issues.
- Problems with planning, organization, and time management.
- Difficulty with social interactions.
- Challenges with figurative language and non-verbal communication.
- Hypersensitivity to noise, light, crowds.
- Difficulty with change, shifting between tasks and unpredictability.
- Increased susceptibility to stress and anxiety.
- Difficulty processing and managing emotions.
- Fear of stigma or unequal treatment when disclosing the diagnosis.
- Fatigue due to social effort, sensory overload or camouflaging (masking).



Structure and consistency

Students with autism often benefit from structure, clarity and predictability. But autism manifests differently in each individual: what works for one may be stressful for another. That's why it's important to talk with the student: what helps, what hinders, and which adjustments make a difference?

Practical tips for supporting students with autism:

Contact hours (lectures/classes, group work/tutorials, etc.)

Structure & predictability

- Use a consistent lesson structure.
- Share course materials in advance.
- Provide clear instructions and keep them accessible.
- Inform students about assignments on time.
- Report (schedule) changes on time.
- Explain why you are asking or doing something.
- Discuss class agreements and expectations.

Information & instruction

- Use visual aids (slides, diagrams).
- Ensure clear formatting and language.
- Offer information in written, spoken, and visual forms.
- Link theory to practice.
- Avoid figurative language or explain it when needed.

Flexibility & freedom of choice

- Allow students to choose the form of an assignment (e.g. written, visual)
- Offer - if possible - physical or online participation.
- Allow students to leave the room for a while.
- Allow time for processing and silence.
- Avoid unexpected speaking turns/'on-the-spot' tasks.
- Provide video recordings with subtitles..

Social support

- Encourage peer support and autism study groups.
- Be clear about group formation and task expectations..
- Allow individual work when group work becomes too demanding.

Physical environment

- Be mindful of lighting, noise, and movement in the space.
 - Provide a low-stimulus area within the room.
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Testing and examination

Structure & predictability

- Specify the exam format and assessment criteria.
- Provide a clear schedule with location and required materials.
- Give an overview of the curriculum.
- Share sample questions and formats.
- Show examples of good work for illustration.
- Provide information about available accommodations..
- Formulate exam questions clearly and unambiguously.
- Give concrete and constructive feedback.

Flexibility & freedom of choice

- Where possible, offer a choice of exam format.
- Allow oral or written explanations.
- Provide extra time where needed.
- Enable flexible deadlines and exam times.

Physical environment

- Offer low-stimulus exam rooms.
- Allow earplugs or noise-cancelling headphones.
- Schedule breaks during exams.

*Share
successful
approaches with
colleagues to help
create an inclusive
culture.*



Independent study tasks

Structure & overview

- Provide one central location for all study materials.
- Give examples or templates for assignments.
- Provide checklists or step-by-step guides.
- Break large assignments into smaller steps.
- Be clear about requirements and expectations.
- Support students in narrowing down topics.

Communication & guidance

- Schedule regular check-in moments (in person or online).
- Provide written feedback as well.
- Keep instructions short and clear.
- Encourage both written and oral communication.
- Ask regularly what is or isn't working.
- Encourage working with a study buddy.
- Help students find suitable study methods.
- Share information about available resources.

Planning & organisation

- Help create a realistic study plan.
- Give time estimates for each part of an assignment.
- Use interim deadlines or fixed feedback moments.
- Monitor progress and offer additional support when needed.

Internship and graduation

In advance

- Announce the internship or graduation period well in advance.
- Support the student in finding a suitable placement.
- Discuss any necessary workplace accommodations.
- Draw up a guidance plan.
- Discuss preferences regarding guidance.
- Make expectations, goals, and roles concrete.
- Explain the assessment criteria.
- Share good examples of assignments or report structures.

During

- Appoint a fixed point of contact.
- Allow - if possible - a flexible work rhythm.
- Encourage clear communication in the workplace.
- Provide support in social situations.
- Spread workload across the week.
- Formulate tasks concretely and clearly.
- Break down complex tasks into manageable steps.
- Help prioritise and plan.
- Use visual aids (weekly schedules, checklist).
- Schedule interim deadlines and feedback moments.
- Monitor progress regularly.

Afterwards

- Evaluate the internship or thesis process together.
- Discuss which practices and agreements worked well.
- Give concrete, positive feedback on growth and qualities.

*Avoid making
generalising statements, as
they can be hurtful and
diminish someone's identity and
lived experience.*

Other tips

Inclusive language

- Respect how someone chooses to describe themselves. Some people prefer “autistic person,” others prefer “person with autism,” or use another term. Ask the student about their own preference and follow their lead.
- Avoid generalising statements such as “everyone is a bit autistic” or “you’re more than your autism,” as these can be hurtful and diminish someone’s identity and lived experience.

Individual differences

- Autism manifests itself differently in everyone.
- In girls and women, autism often presents differently than in boys and men, especially in communication and social strategies. Women tend to camouflage more, which can make signs less visible. Be mindful of this.

Neurodiversity

- Educate yourself about neurodiversity.
- Include the lived experiences and preferences of neurodivergent students to ensure truly inclusive support.
- Share successful approaches with colleagues to help create an inclusive culture.



Inclusive education

Eight elements



Education system



Learning environment & culture



Curriculum & assessment



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Transition to and from education



National & regional cooperation



Monitoring & data use

Students with autism benefit from an education system that is flexible and inclusive. Diverse assessment formats, flexible deadlines and accessible guidance are essential to meet their specific needs.

It is important that teachers have the right skills for effective support. Collaboration between teaching teams is necessary so that students do not have to keep asking for the same accommodations.

Regular monitoring of progress ensures ongoing and improved support. This enhances the motivation and acceptance of students with autism.



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Want to know more?

ECIO helps educational institutions shape inclusive education, improve mental wellbeing, and ease the transition from education to work. Want to know more? Contact us or check out our websites. We would love to help you!

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