

What is autism?

Autism is a neurological disorder that impacts a child's abilities to:

- Engage in reciprocal social interactions with others
- Communicate with others in developmentally appropriate ways
- Participate in a range of activities and behaviors typical of the child's age and stage of development

Autism is a spectrum disorder, which means the symptoms can range from mild to severe. Common signs and symptoms include:

- Avoiding eye contact
- Dependency on routine
- Difficulty expressing their emotions



Repetitive behaviors
(hand flapping)



Inappropriate playing/
inability to relate with
others



Sensory sensitivity

How can autism make learning difficult?

- **Academic skills:** difficulty with problem solving, comprehension, writing skills, concentration and organization
- **Social skills:** difficulty relating to and having conversations with classmates
- **Generalization:** difficulty transferring previously learned skills to new contexts
- **Sensory sensitivity:** unusual response to lights, sounds, smells and/or touch
- **Transitions:** need for routine and set schedules
- **Interests:** restricted range of interests, limited to specific topics

Whom should I talk to?

- **The IEP team:** work together to tailor the IEP to the student's needs.
 - **Your student:** collaboration is important. Discuss with your student what they want to disclose and encourage self-advocacy.
 - **The parents:** no child with autism is the same. Parents can help you anticipate certain problems and make accommodations ahead of time.
- **Your administration:** administrative support plays a big role in the student's academic success.
- **Your class:** educate them about autism and explain why students with autism might receive extra attention. Encourage them to promote appropriate social behaviors.

What changes can I make?

Make your classroom autism-friendly








- Designate spaces for each activity and for students' belongings to make transitions easier.
- If possible, provide an individual work space for the student.
- Consider sensory sensitivity:
 - **Light:** change brightness/color, offer sunglasses and/or hats
 - **Sound:** move student away from noise, use soft voices, offer earplugs
 - **Smell:** consider food, art supplies, lotion and perfumes
 - **Touch:** ask how student responds to being touched

Anticipate problematic behavior

- Establish a break area or safe space for when the student feels overwhelmed.
- Prompt appropriate interactions if necessary.
- Know your student's triggers and signs of distress. Create a signal they can use with you during class.

Provide visual supports

- Have a clear visual daily schedule (see picture).
- Use technology aids for social and/or academic support, like videos and PowerPoints.
- Use concept maps, pictures, written words, maps, labels and timelines to help the student better conceptualize lessons.

| Daily schedule: | |
|---|--|
|  | music |
|  | story |
|  | gym now! |
|  | lunch next! |
|  | recess |
|  | computer |
|  | go home |

What does inclusion look like?

Studies show when teachers have a positive view of their relationships with students, behavioral problems decrease and the child is more socially included. Here are some ways you can promote inclusion:

- Provide extra academic support so the student can learn in the same class as their peers (visual aids, technology, individual instruction)
- Prompt peers to interact with their classmate with autism
- Facilitate group work activities (role-playing, storytelling)
- Make a concerted effort to deliver interventions at home and school by collaborating with one another.

Which practices and strategies work?

Building social skills:

- **Social Skills Training:** use direct instruction, role-playing, and immediate feedback to practice appropriate social behaviors.
- **Social Narratives:** use narratives and images to demonstrate appropriate social skills.
- **OAR's Kit for Kids program:** use an illustrated story to teach students in K-8 about their peers with autism, why they learn differently, and why they receive certain accommodations.

Developing communication skills:

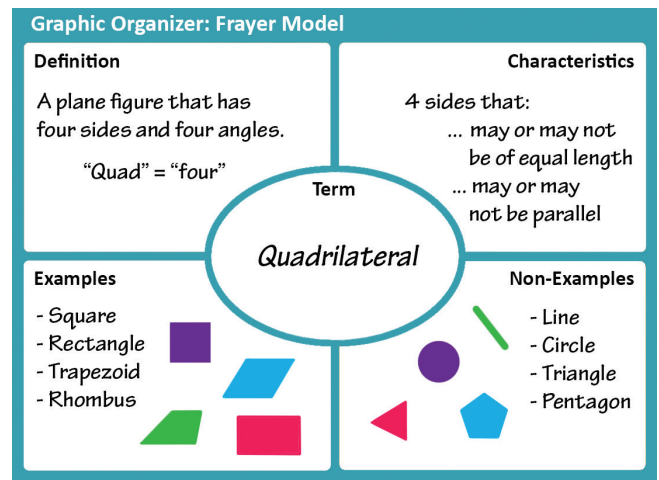
- **Naturalistic intervention:** prompt the student to elaborate verbally and increase their word utterances.
- **Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS):** use picture cards to communicate desires and needs.

Technology supports: use these to increase understanding and help the student reach their goals.

- **Computers:** instruction, feedback, peer role-playing
- **Video modeling:** visual models of target behaviors

Which interventions work best for which subjects?

- **Across all subjects:** explicit instruction, direct instruction (basic skills), text analysis (main ideas, relationships, sequence), mnemonics, study strategies
- **Reading/Writing:** picture-to-text matching, computer aids, vocabulary instruction, story maps, guided reading, SRSD model (see right)
- **Spelling:** technology aids, speech-generating devices
- **Math:** visuals, manipulatives, verbal cues, modeling think alouds, self-monitoring
- **Social Studies:** vocabulary instruction, concept maps, modified notes
- **Science:** vocabulary instruction, visuals, graphic organizers, repeated readings, cooperative learning, coached elaboration



Addressing behaviors: tackle behavioral goals one at a time.

- **Prompting:** gestural, verbal, or physical cues to encourage student towards target behavior.
- **Reinforcement:** give rewards for good behavior.
- **Trial training:** cue a specific behavior; help child respond appropriately, reinforce the behavior. Repeat as necessary.

Promoting independence: empower students to control their own behavior:

- **Self-management strategies:** have student assess their own performance and reward themselves for their success.
- **Self-regulated strategy development (SRSD):** help student develop writing skills and create more complete stories.
 1. Develop background knowledge
 2. Discuss strategy
 3. Model the strategy/self-instructions
 4. Memorize the strategy
 5. Support/collaborative practice
 6. Independent practice

Follow the six-step plan!

- 1. Educate yourself:** have a working understanding of autism and its associated behaviors.
- 2. Reach out to the parents:** they are your first and best source of information about the child.
- 3. Prepare the classroom:** modify physical aspects and placement of child in the classroom.

- 4. Educate peers and promote social goals:** children with autism have the ability to establish and maintain relationships.
- 5. Collaborate on the implementation of an education program:** create plan based on child's academic skills and goals.
- 6. Manage behavioral challenges:** children with autism may act out when they are fearful or confused about something.

Where can I learn more?

For more information and free resources, go to: bit.ly/EduAutism