

Social Difficulties for Autistic Students: A Guide for Teachers

Jane Matto, MA, BA, The Boggs Center on Disability and Human Development
 Steve Gruzlovic, Advocacy, The Boggs Center on Disability and Human Development

Trouble With Social Cues

Sensory Experiences

Issues With Anxiety

Why a Positive Experience is Important

- In addition to the academic success a student is more likely to achieve with the proper support, being in school is an opportunity to learn to adjust to change, a task that is often a challenge for autistic individuals (Al Jaffal, 2022).

- --As school is an unpredictable and often-changing environment, which can be challenging for autistic individuals, becoming comfortable navigating such situations prepares students for similar settings in the future (Goodall, 2018)

Can Lead To.....

- A student failing to understand a teacher’s facial expression with their simultaneous tone of voice, misinterpreting meaning (Howe and Stagg, 2016)
- A student feeling as though they can better express themselves in ways other than verbal responses, such as written ones (Howe and Stagg, 2016).

Can Lead To.....

- Overstimulation due to noise, leading to difficulty concentrating on academics (Howe and Stagg, 2016).
- “Mutual misunderstandings” (Hummerstone and Parsons, 2022) between the teacher and the student can occur based on the tendency of autistic individuals to have different perceptions.

Can Lead To.....

- Struggles that are not easily detected by others, as anxiety is often internalized (Perihan et. al, 2021).
- “Negative school experiences” socially and academically, possibly due to attentional difficulties (Luxford et. al, 2016).

How To Help:

- Avoid using figurative language like irony and sarcasm when teaching, which some autistic students may not comprehend in the intended way (Kalandadze et. al, 2016)
- Help students to “recognize friendship” and address bullying (Cook and Ogden, 2020)

How To Help:

- Offering accommodations like break times, more specific instructions, or a space to go to in times of anxiety (Goodall, 2018)
- Encouraging and welcoming students to ask questions about the material or suggest ways for the teacher to help them.

How To Help:

- Recognize behaviors in autistic students that show their anxiety, such as difficulty concentrating.
- Use visuals to convey lessons as much as possible, over verbal cues (Perihan et. al, 2021).

References

- Al Jaffal, M. (2022). Barriers general education teachers face regarding the inclusion of students with autism. *Frontiers in psychology, 13*, 873248.
- Cook, A., & Ogden, J. (2022). Challenges, strategies and self-efficacy of teachers supporting autistic pupils in contrasting school settings: a qualitative study. *European journal of special needs education, 37*(3), 371-385.
- Goodall, C. (2018). ‘I felt closed in and like I couldn’t breathe’: A qualitative study exploring the mainstream educational experiences of autistic young people. *Autism & Developmental Language Impairments, 3*, 2396941518804407.
- Howe, F. E., & Stagg, S. D. (2016). How sensory experiences affect adolescents with an autistic spectrum condition within the classroom. *Journal of autism and developmental disorders, 46*, 1656-1668.
- Hummerstone, H., & Parsons, S. (2023). Co-designing methods with autistic students to facilitate discussions of sensory preferences with school staff: exploring the double empathy problem. *International journal of research & method in education, 46*(1), 70-82.
- Kalandadze, T., Norbury, C., Nærland, T., & Næss, K. A. B. (2018). Figurative language comprehension in individuals with autism spectrum disorder: A meta-analytic review. *Autism, 22*(2), 99-117.
- Luxford, S., Hadwin, J. A., & Kovshoff, H. (2017). Evaluating the effectiveness of a school-based cognitive behavioural therapy intervention for anxiety in adolescents diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 47*, 3896-3908.
- Perihan, C., Bicer, A., & Bocanegra, J. (2022). Assessment and treatment of anxiety in children with autism spectrum disorder in school settings: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *School mental health, 14*(1), 153-164.

The Golden Rule: Communication! Students know what’s best for them. (Hummerstone and Parsons, 2022)