

Top Ten Strategies for Supporting Students with Autism

Use visual support.

This could include pictures, photos, signs, symbols and gestures. This can aid understanding.

Use routine.

Let the child know what is happening and when. Use visual timetables, now/next cards, schedules, calendars, etc. This can also help with transitioning from one activity to the next.

Create opportunities for communication and learning.

These opportunities can be created throughout the day to allow for communication and learning to be embedded. For example, at snack time, give out a small amount of the snack to create the opportunity to ask for 'more'; have favoured toys out of reach, but in sight (or in a clear box) to create the opportunity to ask for the toy, etc. Provide choices to create opportunities to communicate, e.g. 'Do you want milk or juice?' This allows the student to hear the words they need and provides an opportunity for the student to communicate (in any way they can).

Use their interests.

For example, an interest in trains could be incorporated into a range of subjects - maths through adding train carriages, English through telling stories about trains, geography through planning trips using train lines, etc. There may need to be a set time given for the student to talk about their interests.

During play, use their interests again and follow the child's lead. Allow them to show you what they are interested in and how they want to play. This can be the basis for an interaction between you and the student.

Have fun and be fun.

Create engaging opportunities and activities. Creating a shared positive experience with the whole class can create opportunities for friendships and shared experience. This can be in any way, from an amazing sensory story to lying on the floor and reading a story. Small activities or changes can be as effective as a longer, more complicated activity. Take photographs throughout to create books of previous activities. These can then be used by the whole class to look through their shared experiences.

Keep any instructions short and specific.

Ensure you have the child's attention before giving any verbal information. Break down any long instructions into smaller chunks and allow time before repeating the instruction. For example, the instruction 'Get your bag and coat then wash your hands and sit on the carpet,' can be broken down to:

- 'Get your bag and coat';
- 'Wash your hands';
- 'Sit on the carpet'.

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This can also be supported by writing the instructions on a whiteboard (with pictures if available) and ticking them off as the students complete the instruction. Signs and natural gesture can be used to support understanding.

Try to avoid instructions using any figurative language or anything non-specific.

For example, this sentence can be misinterpreted: 'Soon we will go outside and you can hang out with your friends'. To limit misunderstanding, try: 'In three minutes, we will go outside and then you can play with your friends'.

Give time.

Time may be needed to process an instruction. Count to 10 or 15 before repeating an instruction. Repeating the instruction too soon can mean that the student has to start processing the information again. Use the same words when repeating the instruction. Time may also be needed to complete tasks in the classroom.

Celebrate the small steps.

Celebrate each small step that has been achieved. It may be a small thing to others but for you and the student, a small step represents a huge achievement.

Be prepared to change your plan.

Some things will be trial and error and what works for one student may not work for another student. Try and see how it goes. Remember, when trying a new strategy or way of working, to ensure you trial it for a long enough time, monitor progress and track changes before you try another way.

Two final things to remember!

Within a lesson or session, it may be that the student shows no interest in what you have planned.

It's fine to change your plan to adapt to a student's needs. This can be interpreted as the student expressing their preferences.

Be positive and keep going.

Remember: you are doing a great job!

Our top ten strategies to support students with autism.

These are intended to give ideas for teachers.

