AUTISM IN THE CLASSROOM

FOR

Casual Relief Teachers
You arrive at school and realise you have a student(s) with autism in your class.

**First Step: Don’t panic!**

**Second step:** Look for any documentation which describes the students learning styles and behavioural patterns.

**Third step:** Ask for advice from those who know the student:
- Teacher’s aid (ESO)
- Other teachers
- Student’s friends or buddies
Cutting some slack

Students with autism will behave differently from mainstream students – be careful not to misinterpret this – you may need to deal with it differently and “cut some slack” for these students.
WHAT IS AUTISM?
What is Autism?
Generally known as Autism Spectrum Disorder or (ASD) or “on the spectrum”

Comes from the Greek word “autos” meaning “self”.
• A neurodevelopmental disorder beginning before or shortly after birth.

Main characteristics are:
• Difficulty with the brain processing and making sense of sensory input.
• Inability of the brain to form a “central coherence” – a picture of the world which we share and use to communicate with others.
• Difficulty with social connectivity and communication (verbal and non-verbal).
• Restricted interests and repetitive behaviours – a reluctance to venture beyond what is already known.
Some well known people with autism: Einstein, Mozart, Isaac Newton, Thomas Jefferson, Michelangelo, Dan Akroyd.............
“If I can't picture it.
I can't understand it.”
- Albert Einstein
“No two students with autism are ever the same. If you have seen one child with Autism, you have seen ONE child with autism.”

Students are affected in different ways and may have other conditions such as:
- Intellectual Disability/Global Developmental Delay (IQ <70)
- ADHD
- Anxiety

*An intellectual disability may occur because the student’s learning has been delayed because of an inability to interact with the environment and with other people. Autism can affect IQ.
Temple Grandin video – You Tube, Red Chair, “What it feels like to be autistic” 2 min 10 secs.
Activity: Observing communication. Groups of three – one observer looks at communication methods of two other people sharing an experience. What are they using other than speech?
Video - Autism One Teacher’s Experience. YouTube 10 mins approx.
AUTISM AND CHALLENGING BEHAVIOURS
Difficult behaviours you may encounter:

- Engaging in sensory seeking behaviours – “stimming” (for example, spinning, repetitive hand movements).
- Phobic / fearful / avoidant behaviours.
- Retreating from the group and looking for a familiar toy, object or area of the playground which provides routine/familiarity.
- Becoming physically aggressive towards objects or people.
- Become distressed – “meltdowns”.
POSSIBLE CAUSES OF DIFFICULT BEHAVIOURS:

- Unexpected changes to normal routine.
- Communication impairments (understanding others and expressing themselves).
- Sensory processing challenges.
- Not understanding the PURPOSE of a task. (“Why are they asking me to do this?”).
- Sleep issues.
- Poor nutritional/food intake.
- Anxiety.
- Inappropriate solutions to relationship problems, (for example, a child stealing other children’s belongings to try to get their attention/play with them)
Rules regarding restraint/handling of students.

Regulation 15 of the Education and Training Reform Regulations 2007 provides that:

“a member of the staff of a government school may take any reasonable action that is immediately required to restrain a student of the school from acts or behaviour dangerous to the member of staff, the student or any other person.”

School staff owe a duty of care to all of the students under their care. Professional judgment is required to balance the care requirements of all students at any given time.

Although Regulation 15 authorises staff to take action to restrain a student from dangerous acts or behaviour, that action must be reasonable and immediately required to protect the safety of the student or others.

The decision about whether to use physical restraint or seclusion rests with the professional judgment of the staff member/s involved, who will need to take into account both their duty of care to their students, their right to protect themselves from harm and obligations under the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 (the Charter). In taking into account the Charter, staff should consider the “Guidance for Responding to Violent and Dangerous Student Behaviours of Concern”.

Changes which can produce stress/anxiety.
Any of the following changes in school life can cause anxiety:
• Change in teacher (e.g. CRT).
• Changes in timetable
• Change in rules
• Changes in the physical environment.

Strategies to reduce stress/anxiety
• Warn the student of changes
• Use visual timetables and visual cues to indicate changes.
• Use photographs to show new teachers, staff and students.
• Implement strategies to calm the student – e.g:
  * retiring to a quiet area.
  * head phones with familiar music.
  * favourite computer program or activity.
  * favourite toy, object or book.
Communicating an instruction.

Body positioning, tone of speech and language.

• Take up a position where you are in the student’s line of vision.
• Use the student’s name to get attention.
• Use concrete, literal and precise language. Avoid using excessive facial expressions and body language.
• Verbalise your instruction, minimising words, emotional content. If appropriate, support verbal instructions with key word sign (KWS) or picture symbols.
• Wait for at least 30 seconds for the student to absorb and process the instruction.
• Repeat if necessary.
• If possible use a support person to stand near the student and to physically and verbally encourage the student to follow the instruction.
TEACHING STRATEGIES FOR STUDENTS WITH AUTISM
Teaching Strategies

• Set an achievable workload with a definite beginning and end point.
• Work tasks should be structured in steps.
• Work tasks should be ordered using a visual schedule when appropriate (picture sequence).
• Use of a start and finish box so a student can see that they need to do a certain number of worksheets.
• An analogue clock or egg timer to indicate a definite start and finish time.
• Tap into an area of interest and strength.
• Balance the work tasks to include tasks of high, medium and low interest.
• Make tasks relevant to students daily lives.
• Use visual schedules to plan particular activities in unfamiliar and unstructured environments (e.g. in the playground or on excursions).
• Use of social scripts.
Excursions.

- Prepare the student for **change** from the normal daily routine.

- Assign one person to look after the student – preferably someone who knows the student well (parent, carer or aid).

- Ensure all staff are aware of the student’s behaviour plan.

- Check the venue for a quiet area where the student can be taken if upset.

- Bring a security object (toy, blanket etc) to settle the student in case of “melt down”.

- Prepare an explanation to members of the public who may find the behaviour of the student disturbing.

- Pay particular attention near water – children with autism are often attracted to water and often run into it.

- Particular care with road safety.
Augmentative And Alternative Communication (AAC)
Key Word Signs (KWS)

Based on Makaton and Auslan – Australian sign language.
• Provides visual information to accompany speech.
• Signs last longer than speech.
• Promotes and maintains attention and eye contact
• Signs often look like what they mean.
• Promotes good language models.

The speaker is able to slow the speech, highlight important words and simplify communication.

http://keywordsignvictoria.org/learn-to-sign
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Food</th>
<th>Apple</th>
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<td>Biscuit</td>
<td>Bread</td>
<td>Breakfast</td>
<td>Butter</td>
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<td>Carrot</td>
<td>Cheese</td>
<td>Chips</td>
<td>Corn</td>
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<td>Dessert</td>
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<td>Fruit</td>
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For examples of hand signing (AUSLAN) see dictionary at:
<table>
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<tr>
<th>blackberry</th>
<th>bubble wrap</th>
<th>cheesecake</th>
<th>Chicken Dance</th>
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Video – Special Ed. Class room set up – about 7 mins cut to 3.
Sport and Games

- Students with autism may have difficulty playing in team sports which are not strictly structured and predictable.
- They are more likely to successfully participate in sports which are individualistic in nature, such as athletics, bike riding, gymnastics, horse riding or swimming.
- Use concrete, literal and precise language when giving instructions.
- For a detailed guide to teaching physical education to students with autism, see:
  
  http://www.autismargyll.org.uk
Further advice and assistance.....

“Amaze” (formerly Autism Victoria), www.amaze.org.au, has a wealth of information on Autism with links to other relevant web sites. Look under AMAZE/knowledge, for information for teachers and other professionals.

“Aspect”– Autism Spectrum Australia, www.autismspectrum.org.au, educational services. They also provide skilled professionals to assist young people with autism to integrate into mainstream schools.

“Raising Children” raising children.net.au Note particularly the page on autism and issues dealing with schools.


Department of Education Victoria. www.education.vic.gov.au/autism Provides information on professional development and courses on autism for teachers in main stream schools including specialist coaches who are available to go out and work within schools.

MCRI (Murdoch Children’s Research Institute), based at Royal Children’s Hospital, www.mcric.edu.au, have articles on the general characteristics of autism.