

A DIRECT, POSITIVE MESSAGE THAT THESE STUDENTS BELONG IN THE FIELD IS THE MOST IMPORTANT FACTOR FOR LONG TERM SUCCESS

Keep in mind when designing the learning content for autistic young adults

Common Strategies for Learning Success with Autistic Students:

- ❖ Clear, concrete directions & information presentation
 - Eliminate ambiguity
 - Provide direct, straightforward feedback
 - Avoid idioms & metaphors
- ❖ Allow breaks & [stimming](#) (e.g. stim tools, fidget tools) for regulation & increased engagement
- ❖ Create a routine
 - Predictability of class time = less anxiety = more engagement
- ❖ Provide visual learning tools such as schedule, syllabus, pictures, charts, videos etc.
 - Providing as much information about *what to expect* will reduce anxiety & therefore free up energy to focus on classwork
 - Explaining *why* we are working on something helps engagement
 - Avoid cold-calling
 - Displaying a schedule reduces anxiety
 - Displaying the homework, class assignment, etc.
 - Supplement oral information with written information (e.g. lecture slides)
- ❖ Provide extra processing time
 - After presenting a question, allow a few more seconds before expecting an answer
 - Extra time on tests/quizzes if needed
- ❖ Allow laptop for notes
 - Alternatively, for increased engagement in-class time, *provide notes/guides notes*
→ eliminates difficulties with hearing, processing, holding information in head, converting to notes, writing, while paying attention to the next thing that is said
- ❖ Consider common sensory, cognitive, behavioral, emotional, and social strengths and difficulties in chart below when designing learning activities

*this list is not exhaustive, but rather a general list of common helpful strategies →

collaboration with students themselves about their needs and preferences will lead to greatest level of success

Autism Fast Facts

“If you meet one person with autism, you’ve met one person with autism”

Common Strengths	Common Difficulties
<p>Sensory strengths:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Heightened visual perception ● “tunnel” vision (intense focus) ● Greater intensity of colors ● Acute hearing ● Heightened smelling 	<p>Sensory difficulties:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Sensory overwhelm <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Breaks help minimize sensory overwhelm, which makes meltdowns & shutdowns less likely ● Visual field overwhelm ● Meltdowns ● Shutdowns ● Increased sensitivity to certain frequencies & volumes of sounds (hyperacusis)
<p>Cognitive strengths:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Lateral thinking → novel problem solving & thinking “outside the box” is heightened ● Pattern recognition abilities heightened → rational decision-making ● Giftedness more likely in autistics ● Savant syndrome (10-28.5% of autistics vs. 1% of neurotypicals) ● Strong memory system ● Encyclopedic knowledge ● Superior problem solving (can be up to 40% faster than neurotypicals) ● Hyperfocus ● Hyper-systemizing (if, and, then thinking) ● Strong attention to detail 	<p>Cognitive difficulties:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Low theory of mind → difficulties with attributing mental states of others → can lead to misinterpretation ● Rigid/inflexible thinking <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Literal thinking ● High prevalence of PTSD ● Alexithymia (difficulties identifying and expressing emotions) is common ● Identifying faces/forgetting faces ● Excessive daydreaming ● Easily excitable “resting network” of the brain ● Seeing the “big picture” ● Executive functioning difficulties <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Sustaining & directing attention ○ Planning ○ Organization ○ Initiating and sustaining tasks ○ Emotion regulation ○ Working memory ○ Verbal reasoning ○ Inhibitory control (self-control)
<p>Behavioral strengths:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Strong work ethic ● Commitment to honesty & integrity ● Strong sense of justice ● Intense passion for learning ● Completing work quickly when engaging in a special interest or 	<p>Behavioral difficulties:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Habitual (repetitive) behaviors → can lead to “getting stuck” on things <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Routine changes = anxiety → manifest in many behaviors

<p>hyperfocus</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Routine is highly preferred → autistics can excel with a strong routine 	
<p>Emotional strengths:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Can be “hyper” empathetic → perceptive of others’ emotional states ● “Energy” flow in body is a common way of interpreting autistic’s internal and external environments 	<p>Emotional difficulties:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Some autistics have trouble identifying & expressing their emotions (Alexithymia = ~40-65% of autistics vs. ~10% of neurotypicals) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Can show up as “lack” of facial expression, differing facial expression from allistic people ● Differing responses from allistic (non-autistic) people: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Reduced emotional expression (facial, etc.)
<p>Social strengths:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Deep, engaging, stimulating conversation about topics of interest ● Communication with other autistics & neurodivergent individuals is strong ● Once social rules are understood, autistics tend to follow them well and can excel in many familiar social situations ● Loyal 	<p>Social difficulties:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Communicating with non-autistics can lead to misunderstandings on both sides ● Masking = “acting neurotypical” leads to burnout ● Difficulties with social predictions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Opens autistic individuals up to vulnerabilities, social exclusion, etc. ● Working in groups ● Understanding novel social rules ● Perspective-taking ● Honesty + having different social cues than non-autistic people = bluntness

References & Resources:

<https://embrace-autism.com/>

<https://www.neurodiversityhub.org/resources-for-universities>

<https://neuroclastic.com/>

<https://autisticadvocacy.org/>

<https://www.news-medical.net/news/20210422/Youth-with-cognitive-disabilities-have-potential-to-pursue-a-career-in-STEM-shows-study.aspx>



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