



AUTISM AND LEARNING



Autism is a developmental disability caused by differences in the brain. It affects approximately 1 in 36 children and 2.21% of adults in the United States.

Autism occurs across a spectrum impacting everyone differently and to varying degrees.



EARLY SIGNS CAN INCLUDE:



- Delay in spoken language
- Repetitive movements
- Little or no eye contact
- Lack of interest in peers
- Motor skill deficits
- Difficulty with impulse control
- Unusual eating and/or sleeping habits
- Easily overstimulated
- Difficulty with social skills
- Sensory processing differences
- Difficulty understanding non-verbal cues

ISSUES THAT MAY AFFECT LEARNING

- Communication** (Icon: speech bubbles) Difficulty understanding or communicating thoughts and needs to others, as well as trouble understanding directions and body language.
- Social interaction** (Icon: hands) May exhibit behaviors that make it difficult to develop peer relationships and social connections.
- Sensory processing** (Icon: hand with light) Differences in sensory processing skills. They may have a lower threshold for some types of sensory input or a much higher threshold for certain types of sensory input. Many are overly sensitive to some sensations and under-sensitive to other sensations.
- Repetitive behavior** (Icon: circular arrows) Intense interests and repetitive behavior can be a source of enjoyment for autistic people and a way of coping with everyday life. But they may be obsessions and limit people's involvement in other activities and cause distress or anxiety.
- Information processing** (Icon: brain with gears) Children with autism experience the world this way because from early on they are wired to process information differently. Many take things very literally. They may need additional time to process information and respond.

STRATEGIES TO HELP LEARNING

Visual aids expand a child with autism's ability to interact with their surroundings, provide autonomy and the ability to make choices and express needs. Visuals also help children comprehend daily routines. Visual aids can open lines of communication between children with autism and their caretakers.

I NEED TO TAKE A BREAK.			
calming corner	fidget	hug a stuffed	read a book
deeps breaths	drink water	eat a snack	go for a walk

Consistency, routine, and repetition are all important fundamental aspects for children with autism. Having a predictable, daily routine can help children function more independently, as well as improve social and emotional health.

Recognize behavior as a form of communication. Give positive reinforcement often. Consider sensory needs before an activity. Watch for and respond to needs before acting out happens. Prevention is always best.



Limit distractions during learning times. Noise, smells, changes in lighting, and visually busy areas can make it more difficult to focus. Incorporate movement and exercise before in-seat tasks. Repeat key words if needed and break down instructions into smaller steps.



KEY ELEMENTS TO A SUCCESSFUL EDUCATION

Successfully supporting a child with autism involves understanding the uniqueness of the child and how they learn and grow. It is important to have a coordinated team approach with the family. Use evidence-based curriculum and teaching methods within a routine learning environment. Have a functional approach to problem behavior. Keep a positive attitude in the classroom with appropriate social supports. Be inclusive and encourage peer relationships. Give choices when you can. Remember that children with autism aren't difficult on purpose. They are simply doing what they have learned works best for them with the supports they have.

REACTIONS TO "NO"



'No!' is often used when someone is putting themselves or others in danger. If it's a safety issue, consider ways of explaining danger and safety. If you are saying 'no' because someone is behaving inappropriately, do not shout. A calm reaction and setting clear boundaries is best.

*Remember that how autistic people learn is as varied as the experience of autism itself. Everyone can learn and be included in some way. Be patient and keep trying to find the best ways to teach with the individual person.