



For Specific Members of the School Community

The sections that follow address common issues that relate to the specific needs of students with autism and the people who work with them within the school community.

It is important to reinforce the need for teamwork with the people within the school community who know an individual student best. Encourage and answer questions so each staff member feels supported and effective.

Every member of the school community should feel knowledgeable and empowered when they interact with all of a school's students. Communication is the key. While a bus driver rarely attends an IEP meeting, the needs of a child on the bus - and the strategies available to the bus driver - can still be part of the IEP planning process.

A bulleted, comprehensive list of ideas across settings, many of which are included here, can be found at [Strategies at Hand](#).

Each of the members of the school community listed below should be given a copy of the [Autism Basics](#) and [Asperger's Basics](#) handouts, an "About Me" introduction to the individual student and the information section that is specifically for them.

(Please note that the "About Me" document included in this kit will need to be filled out for the individual student, preferably by a family member of the student or someone designated by their family.)

- [Autism Basics Brochure](#)
- [Asperger's Basics Brochure](#)
- [About Me](#)
- [Information for Classmates](#)
- [Information for Bus Drivers / Transportation Supervisors](#)
- [Information for Custodial Staff](#)
- [Information for General Education & Special Area Teachers \(includes Physical Education, Music, Art & Library\)](#)
- [Information for Lunch Aides / Recess Aides](#)
- [Information for Office Staff](#)
- [Information for Paraprofessionals](#)
- [Enrolling Peers to Support Students with Autism](#)
- [Information for Peers](#)
- [Information for School Administrators, Principals, Interdisciplinary Team Members](#)
- [Information for School Nurses](#)
- [Information for School Security](#)



PEERS



Autism Speaks® 
FAMILY SERVICES
SCHOOL COMMUNITY TOOL KIT


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Helping Peers Support Students with Autism

Teaching Peers about Autism

Autism education or sensitivity training can occur in a generalized manner, in which students learn about acceptance and sensitivity not related to a particular student at school. It can also be much more specific to the needs of that student and his or her family.

It is very important to communicate with the parents or guardian of the child with autism before any sensitivity training is done. The teacher or school psychologist leading the class discussion should reach out to the parents or guardian of the child with autism to understand what they are comfortable with in terms of disclosure. Some families may be comfortable with general sensitivity training and acknowledgment of their child's strengths and challenges to the class, but not with sharing the autism diagnosis. Other families are more open about their child's diagnosis and are willing to be active participants in the education and sensitivity training. These are personal decisions that each family must make and schools should honor. These decisions can also change over time as the needs of the student with autism may change.

It is also important to keep in mind that some families may not have told their children about their diagnosis yet. Some children may know that they have autism but may not want to share their diagnosis with their classmates. Again, these are individual decisions. The other consideration to discuss in advance is if the student with autism will be present during the sensitivity training. Some families want their children be active participants in the training process, and others might prefer that it's done when the student is out of the classroom.

Many schools have found it helpful to have a parent, caregiver or school representative who knows the student well introduce the student at the beginning of the school year or during a new inclusion opportunity. If the family or team feels that protecting the student's privacy is important, the student may not even be mentioned by name and general sensitivity and acceptance may be all that is addressed. Out of respect for the student, a more specific introduction can also be done when he or she is not in the room. It is important to present the student as a person with unique abilities and similarities (a family, siblings, pets, love of music, favorite foods, video games, movies, etc.), while also sharing some of the challenges and differences the students might notice or need to be aware of, such as sensory needs.

Informing Peer Families

In addition to addressing peers, it is also important to reach out to their families. Many parents will not have had experience with autism, and may not understand or have the tools they need to appropriately support their children in fostering relationships with children who seem different. Involving the overall school community will build awareness and sensitivity and benefit everyone involved.





Families of peers can be informed through assemblies or Parent Teacher Organizations (sometimes called Home & School Organizations). In some cases, it may be necessary to inform the peers' families more directly within a classroom or grade level.

Some families may prefer to protect their child's privacy (which is their right), while others might be inclined to share information in a letter or meeting about their student's challenges and interests, finding that greater understanding and perspective within the community will reduce fear and improve acceptance.

Here is a list of resources broken down by age group...

Resources for Elementary School Children

General Sensitivity Training

These books are designed to teach general acceptance and appreciation of differences between individuals and their peers and classmates. Especially when a family wishes to maintain their privacy, sometimes general sensitivity training is enough to teach students to support and include their peers with autism.

Trevor, Trevor

by Diane Twachtman Cullen

The story of Trevor, a primary school aged child whose problems with social relationships suggest a form of autism. Unfortunately, like so many children with social interaction problems, it is not Trevor's strengths that his classmates notice, but rather his differences. Change comes through the efforts of a caring and sensitive teacher Metaphor, as it is explained in the preface, is a type of storytelling pioneered by Milton H Erickson that concentrates on indirect or symbolic communication in order to transfer the message or meaning of the story in a lasting and powerful manner. [Show More](#) [Show Less](#)

Wings of Epoh

by Gerda Weissman Klein

Wings of Epoh is a story that teaches acceptance, tolerance and empathy. What unfolds is the gift of friendship, and the joy in helping a person who is misunderstood or who just doesn't fit. The Wings of EPOH is available as both a book and a film.

Autism Specific Education

These books address autism specifically so that peers can learn what autism is and are better able to understand their classmate's strengths and challenges. They can be used when the family involved is comfortable with disclosing their child's diagnosis with his or her classmates.

The Autism Acceptance Book

by Ellen Sabin

The Autism Acceptance Book teaches children about autism, further develops their understanding for the people around them, and encourages them to embrace people's differences with respect, compassion and kindness. For ages 6 and up. There is also a teachers' guide that can be downloaded [here](#).





The Sixth Sense II

by Carol Gray

Provides a lesson plan for promoting understanding and supportive social climates for children with autism spectrum disorders. “Students (peers) will be better equipped to include a classmate with unique behaviors when provided with accurate social information. Using their five senses as a frame of reference, this lesson plan introduces students to their sixth (or social) sense via activities and discussions.”

My Friend with Autism: A Coloring Book for Peers and Siblings

by Beverly Bishop

Written for classmates of spectrum students and the classmates’ parents, this kid-friendly book explains in positive ways that children with autism are good at some things, not so good at others - just like everyone else! The narrator (a peer) notes that his friend’s senses work “really well” - he can hear sounds no one else can hear; his eyes work so well bright lights can hurt them. In all cases, the differences are described in a kind, understanding manner. There are charming illustrations for readers to color. “Notes for Adults” offer parents more detailed information about the “kid’s pages.”

Kids Booklet on Autism

presented by Autism New Jersey

A booklet for siblings and peers, with notes for parents and teachers, too! This resource provides children with lots of helpful information about kids and grown-ups who have autism and includes answers to frequently asked questions from children, explanations about autism, descriptions of feelings, ideas and actions plans.

How to Be a Friend to Someone with Autism

adapted, Peter Faustino, PhD

- **Take the Initiative to Include Him or Her** - Your friend may desperately want to be included and may not know how to ask. Be specific about what you want him to do.
- **Find Common Interests** - It will be much easier to talk about or share something you both like to do (movies, sports, music, books, TV shows, etc.).
- **Be Persistent and Patient** - Remember that your friend with autism may take more time to respond than other people. It doesn’t necessarily mean he or she isn’t interested.
- **Communicate Clearly** - Speak at a reasonable speed and volume. It might be helpful to use short sentences. Use gestures, pictures, and facial expressions to help communicate. Speak literally – do not use confusing figures of speech (He may truthfully tell you, “the sky” if you ask “What’s up?”)
- **Stand Up For Him or Her** - If you see someone teasing or bullying a friend with autism, take a stand and tell the person that it’s not cool.
- **Remember Sensory Sensitivity** - Your friend may be very uncomfortable in certain situations or places (crowds, noisy areas, etc.). Ask if he or she is OK. Sometimes your friend may need a break.
- **Give Feedback** - If your friend with autism is doing something inappropriate, it’s OK to tell him nicely. Just be sure to also tell him what the right thing to do is because he may not know.
- **Don’t Be Afraid** - Your friend is just a kid like you who needs a little help. Accept his or her differences and respect strengths just as you would for any friend.





Programs that Promote Inclusion and Support

Perfect Pals

Perfect Pals is a program started by the Autism Speaks Nantucket Resource Center in collaboration with the Nantucket School District to provide students with and without disabilities with to participate in after-school recreational activities.

Light It Up Blue

Autism Awareness Month (April) offers many opportunities for schools to focus on teaching about autism and its impact on students and their families. The Autism Speaks Light it Up Blue campaign provides ideas for preschools, elementary schools, middle schools, high schools, colleges and universities to Light It Up Blue!

Resources for Middle School and High School Students

Books and Resources

What's Up With Nick?

From the Organization for Autism Research

A story about Nick, a new kid in school with autism. This accordion booklet includes sections “Meeting a Kid with Autism”, “Hanging Out With Kids That Have Autism”, “Things to Remember About Autism” and more!

A Buffet of Sensory Interventions: Solutions for Middle and High School Students With Autism Spectrum Disorders

by Susan Culp

This book offers a smorgasbord of sensory-based interventions for use by educators, occupational therapists and parents. This practical and well-researched tool is unique by focusing on middle and high school students, whose sensory needs are often overlooked. In suggesting interventions for this age group, the author emphasizes the importance of fostering independence, self-advocacy and self-regulation as a way to for teens with autism spectrum disorders to take ownership of their sensory needs as they transition into adulthood.

How to Talk to an Autistic Kid

by Daniel Stefanski (an autistic kid)

Kids with autism have a hard time communicating, which can be frustrating for autistic kids and for their peers. In this intimate yet practical book, author Daniel Stefanski, a fourteen-year-old boy with autism, helps readers understand why autistic kids act the way they do and offers specific suggestions on how to get along with them. Written by an autistic kid for non-autistic kids, it provides personal stories, knowledgeable explanations, and supportive advice—all in Daniel’s unique and charming voice and accompanied by lively illustrations.

Social Skills Picture Book for High School and Beyond

by Jed Baker

Winner of an iParenting Media Award, this picture book appeals to the visual strengths of students on the autism spectrum, with color photos of students demonstrating various social skills in the correct (and sometimes incorrect) way. The skills depicted are meant to be read, role-played, corrected when necessary, role-played some more and, finally, to be practiced by the student in real-life social situations.





Preparing for Life: The Complete Guide for Transitioning to Adulthood for Those with Autism and Asperger's Syndrome

by Jed Baker

Award-winning author and counselor Dr. Jed Baker draws from his experience working with young adults on the spectrum to put together a thorough resource for students with ASD preparing for life after high school. This comprehensive handbook offers “life skills training” on subjects that young adults need to know about, such as nonverbal cues, body language, dealing with anger, frustration and anxiety, as well as building and maintaining friendships and intimate relationships.

The Social Success Workbook for Teens: Skill-Building Activities for Teens with Nonverbal Learning Disorder, Asperger's Disorder, and Other Social-Skill Problems

by Barbara Copper and Nancy Widdows

This workbook includes forty activities teens can do to recognize and use their unique strengths, understand the unspoken rules behind how people relate to each other, and improve their social skills. After completing the activities in this workbook, teens will discover that they can get along with others and build friendships despite the challenges they face. All they need is the confidence to be themselves while still keeping the feelings of others in mind.

Programs to Support Peer Relationships for Middle and High School

Circle of Friends

The Circle of Friends program consists of a trained group of peer mentors who serve as good social role models and interact with a specific student on a consistent basis. Activities can include teaching scripts and how to ‘chat’ (using topic lists or boxes), noncompetitive games, book clubs, extracurricular activities and more.

Student Clubs for Autism Speaks (SCAS)

Student Clubs for Autism Speaks create the opportunity for students to engage and actively participate in positively affecting the lives of people with autism. Through education, awareness, friendship and fundraising, SCAS includes students at the middle school, high school and college level.

Perfect Pals

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Best Buddies

Best Buddies® is a nonprofit organization dedicated to establishing a global volunteer movement that creates opportunities for one-to-one friendships, integrated employment and leadership development for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). Best Buddies’ eight formal programs – Best Buddies Middle Schools, High Schools, Colleges, Citizens, e-Buddies, Jobs, Ambassadors, and Promoters – positively impact nearly 700,000 individuals with and without disabilities worldwide.





Light It Up Blue

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The Peer Buddy Program

Peer buddy programs are designed to increase access to general education curricula and inclusion in school activities by students with disabilities. General education students provide social and academic support to their classmates with disabilities by (a) helping them acquire skills needed to succeed in the general education environment and (b) adapting the environment to be more welcoming and accommodating to individual differences and needs.

FRIEND Program

This inclusive social skills curriculum from SARRC (Southwest Autism Research and Resource Center) provides opportunities for students on the autism spectrum to improve social communication skills in a natural setting, supported by peers, parents, educators, and therapists. An easy-to-use manual describes how to develop and implement a FRIEND group for students in grades k-12 during lunch and recess. Innovative materials including the children's book *Wings of Epoch*, DVD's, an educator activity guide, and informational tips, can be used for peer sensitivity training to promote awareness of ASD and social differences and appropriate strategies for facilitating social interactions for school age students.





Bullying & Harassment of Children with Special Needs

Autism Speaks worked with the National Center for Learning Disabilities, PACER's National Bullying Center and Ability Path in partnership with the new documentary film BULLY to raise awareness about how bullying affects children with special needs. Together with our partners, we just released a Special Needs Anti-Bullying Toolkit, full of resources and information specifically tailored to parents, educators, and students dealing with bullying and children with special needs. Below are excerpts from the toolkit.

It has been suggested that children with autism spectrum disorders (ASDs) are especially vulnerable to bullying. The Interactive Autism Network (IAN) is now sharing initial results of a national survey on the bullying experiences of children on the autism spectrum. The findings show that children with ASD are bullied at a very high rate, and are also often intentionally "triggered" into meltdowns or aggressive outbursts by ill-intentioned peers.

The study found that a total of 63% of 1,167 children with ASD, ages 6 to 15, had been bullied at some point in their lives.

Unique Characteristics of Children with Special Needs

Children with special needs face unique challenges for dealing with bullying. They often stand out from their peers in ways that make them targets for bullying, and children who have difficulty with social interactions have an even higher risk of being bullied.

Bullying certainly isn't a new problem; it has existed for generations. Historically, many have seen it as a rite of passage, a type of de facto hazing. According to Dr. Peter Raffalli, a pediatric neurologist at the Children's Hospital in Boston, Mass., this attitude is, in many cases, more dangerous than the bullies themselves. "No matter how you look at it, bullying is a form of abuse victimization, plain and simple," said Dr. Raffalli. "It's a case of the strong - or at least the stronger - preying on the weak. It says volumes about where we are as a culture and race."

Bullying has negative effects on all its victims, but kids with special needs are especially vulnerable, according to Nancy A. Murphy, M.D., FAAP and chair of the [AAP Council](#) on Children with Disabilities Executive Committee. "Since these children already struggle with self-esteem issues," said Dr. Murphy, "bullying has a greater impact and they desire to fit in, and are less likely to stand up for themselves."

Learn more about the unique characteristics of children with special needs and why these children are so often the targets of bullying in [this article from our partners at AbilityPath](#).





Top Ten Facts Parents, Educators and Students need to know

1. The Facts - Students with disabilities are much more likely to be bullied than their nondisabled peers.

Bullying of children with disabilities is significant but there is very little research to document it. Only 10 U.S. studies have been conducted on the connection between bullying and developmental disabilities but all of these studies found that children with disabilities were two to three times more likely to be bullied than their nondisabled peers. One study shows that 60 percent of students with disabilities report being bullied regularly compared with 25 percent of all students.

2. Bullying affects a student's ability to learn.

Many students with disabilities are already addressing challenges in the academic environment. When they are bullied, it can directly impact their education.

Bullying is not a harmless rite of childhood that everyone experiences. Research shows that bullying can negatively impact a child's access to education and lead to:

- School avoidance and higher rates of absenteeism
- Decrease in grades
- Inability to concentrate
- Loss of interest in academic achievement
- Increase in dropout rates

Learn more about other common misperceptions about bullying

3. The Definition - bullying based on a student's disability may be considered harassment.

The Office for Civil Rights (OCR) and the Department of Justice (DOJ) have stated that bullying may also be considered harassment when it is based on a student's race, color, national origin, sex, disability, or religion

- Harassing behaviors may include:
 - Unwelcome conduct such as verbal abuse, name-calling, epithets, or slurs
 - Graphic or written statements
 - Threats
 - Physical assault
 - Other conduct that may be physically threatening, harmful, or humiliating

4. The Federal Laws - disability harassment is a civil rights issue.

Parents have legal rights when their child with a disability is the target of bullying or disability harassment. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (often referred to as 'Section 504') and Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (Title II) are the federal laws that apply if the harassment denies a student with a disability an equal opportunity to education. The Office for Civil Rights (OCR) enforces Section 504 and Title II of the ADA. Students with a 504 plan or an Individualized Education Program (IEP) would qualify for these protections.





According to a 2000 Dear Colleague letter from the Office for Civil Rights, “States and school districts also have a responsibility under Section 504, Title II, and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), which is enforced by OSERS [the Office for Special Education and Rehabilitative Services], to ensure that a free appropriate public education (FAPE) is made available to eligible students with disabilities. Disability harassment may result in a denial of FAPE under these statutes.”

The letter further outlines how bullying in the form of disability harassment may prevent a student with an IEP from receiving an appropriate education: “The IDEA was enacted to ensure that recipients of IDEA funds make available to students with disabilities the appropriate special education and related services that enable them to access and benefit from public education. The specific services to be provided a student with a disability are set forth in the student’s individualized education program (IEP), which is developed by a team that includes the student’s parents, teachers and, where appropriate, the student. Harassment of a student based on disability may decrease the student’s ability to benefit from his or her education and amount to a denial of FAPE.”

5. The State Laws - students with disabilities have legal rights when they are a target of bullying.

Most states have laws that address bullying. Some have information specific to students with disabilities. For a complete overview of state laws, visit Olweus.org.

Many school districts also have individual policies that address how to respond to bullying situations. Contact your local district to request a written copy of the district policy on bullying.

6. The adult response is important

Parents, educators, and other adults are the most important advocates that a student with disabilities can have. It is important that adults know the best way to talk with someone in a bullying situation.

Some children are able to talk with an adult about personal matters and may be willing to discuss bullying. Others may be reluctant to speak about the situation. There could be a number of reasons for this. The student bullying them may have told them not to tell or they might fear that if they do tell someone, the bullying won’t stop or may become worse.

When preparing to talk to children about bullying, adults (parents and educators) should consider how they will handle the child’s questions and emotions and what their own responses will be. Adults should be prepared to listen without judgment, providing the child with a safe place to work out their feelings and determine their next steps.

It is never the responsibility of the child to fix a bullying situation. If children could do that, they wouldn’t be seeking the help of an adult in the first place.

For more information, go to [Talking With Your Child About Bullying](#)

7. The Resources - students with disabilities have resources that are specifically designed for their situation.

IEP – Students with disabilities, who are eligible for special education under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), will have an Individualized Education Program (IEP).

The IEP can be a helpful tool in a bullying prevention plan. Remember, every child receiving special education is entitled to a free, appropriate public education (FAPE), and bullying can become an obstacle to that education.

For more information, go to our section on [Individualized Education Program \(IEP\) and Bullying](#)





Dear Colleague Letter – In 2000, a ‘Dear Colleague’ letter was sent to school districts nationwide from the U.S. Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights (OCR) and Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS) that defined the term “disability harassment.”

In 2010, another Dear Colleague letter from the Office for Civil Rights was issued that reminded school districts of their responsibilities under civil rights laws that prohibit discrimination and harassment on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, disability, and religion.

Template Letters – Parents should contact school staff each time their child informs them that he or she has been bullied. PACER has created these letters that parents may use as a guide for writing a letter to their child’s school. These letters contain standard language and “fill-in-the-blank” spaces so that the letter can be customized for each child’s situation.

These sample letter(s) can serve two purposes:

- First, the letter will alert school administration of the bullying and your desire for interventions.
- Second, the letter can serve as your written record when referring to events. The record (letter) should be factual and absent of opinions or emotional statements.

The two letters – “Student with an IEP, Notifying School About Bullying” and “Student with a 504, Notifying School About Bullying” – are for parents who have a child with an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) or Section 504. The bullying law of the individual state applies to all students as noted in the law. When bullying is based on the child’s disability, federal law can also apply under Section 504, Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA), and Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

8. The Power of Bystanders - more than 50% of bullying situations stop when a peer intervenes.

Most students don’t like to see bullying but they may not know what to do when it happens. Peer advocacy – students speaking out on behalf of others – is a unique approach that empowers students to protect those targeted by bullying.

Peer advocacy works for two reasons: First, students are more likely than adults to see what is happening with their peers and peer influence is powerful. Second, a student telling someone to stop bullying has much more impact than an adult giving the same advice.

[Learn more about peer advocacy](#)

9. The importance of self-advocacy

Self-advocacy means the student with a disability is responsible for telling people what they want and need in a straightforward way. Students need to be involved in the steps taken to address a bullying situation. Self-advocacy is knowing how to:

- Speak up for yourself
- Describe your strengths, disability, needs, and wishes
- Take responsibility for yourself
- Learn about your rights
- Obtain help, or know who to ask, if you have a question





The person who has been bullied should be involved in deciding how to respond to the bullying. This involvement can provide students with a sense of control over their situation, and help them realize that someone is willing to listen, take action, and reassure them that their opinions and ideas are important.

To learn more go to our section on [Student Self-Advocacy](#)

The **Student Action Plan** is a self-advocacy resource. It includes three simple steps to explore specific, tangible actions to address the situation:

1. Define the situation
2. Think about how the situation could be different
3. Write down the steps to take action

10. You are not alone

When students have been bullied, they often believe they are the only one this is happening to, and that no one else cares. In fact, they are not alone.

There are individuals, communities, and organizations that do care. **It is not up to one person to end the bullying** and it is never the responsibility of the child to change what is happening to them. **No one deserves to be bullied.** All people should be treated with dignity and respect, no matter what. Everyone has a responsibility – and a role to play – as schools, parents, students, and the community work together for positive change.

For Peers - Bullying Roles

Bullying can happen to anyone. Bullying is about someone's behavior. That behavior could be directed at the shy, quiet student, or the class tough guy. Girls bully, boys bully, preschool kids bully, and high school kids bully – there is no one characteristic or aspect that indicates who gets bullied. The one sure thing is that no one EVER deserves to be bullied, and if someone is being bullied, they have a RIGHT to be safe.

Learn more about the roles of bullying, and think about where you fit in the cycle of bullying. A person who bullies isn't always "the other kid." Sometimes, it might be... you! Before you say "No way!" think about it.

Have you ever heard yourself saying – or thinking – things like:

- Some people deserve to be hurt.
- Being mean to people doesn't hurt them.
- It is fun to hurt others.
- I'm so cool that kids and adults don't think I would do anything wrong.
- People push me around, so I'm going to do it to other people, too.
- I feel better about myself when I make other people feel worse.
- If kids are afraid of me, then I won't get picked on.
- I am just being funny. What's the big deal?
- I do what it takes to be part of the "cool" crowd.
- I don't want to be the only one getting picked on.
- Some kids deserve to be bullied because of what they do to me.





- I don't like them, so it's OK to be mean to them.
- Do you recognize any of the signs? Kids bully for a lot of reasons. It might be because of:
- Peer pressure
- Being manipulated into something
- Fear
- Insecurity
- Not understanding that their actions hurt someone
- Not having positive adult role models
- Being bullied themselves

If you think this might be you, talk with an adult. Seriously, they can help. If the first adult you talk with isn't helpful, talk to someone else until you find one who will listen. You have that right.

For more information for peers please [click here](#).

For Teachers and Administrators - Creating a Zero Tolerance Environment

Schools are just one part of the equation to combating the bullying epidemic. However, they play a key and vital role to setting the tone of tolerance. It is important for districts and individual schools to have their bullying policy available and accessible to all.

- Include a prominent link to the school's bullying policy on your website
- Review the highlights of the policy at back to school nights with families,
- Review the policy with students during the first week of school
- Keep the conversation going about the zero tolerance for bullying policy that the school/district follows throughout the year

Just as important as parents and students is sharing the policy with vendors, because they are technically an extension of the school. This includes bus drivers, specialists/therapists providing designated instructional services, substitute teachers and others. Before the contracts with these individuals or companies are signed, reviewing the bullying policy and outlining the process for internal review if a complaint is filed is imperative to extending the zero tolerance beyond the school yard.

Creating a safe environment is necessary for students to learn and thrive. Show your community bullying behavior is not welcomed and doesn't have a place in your community. Consider having students, teachers, administrators, families and vendors sign "contracts" or agreements that they've read the bullying policy and they pledge to adhere to this policy. Celebrate when students show acts of kindness, philanthropy or other social good. This isn't just about discipline and punishment; good anti-bullying practices include reward and recognition for doing the right thing!

For more information for educators, please [click here](#).

For information for parents, please [click here](#).



CLASSMATES



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Information for Classmates

Whether you already know a student with autism or are just getting to know one, you'll probably find this information helpful. If you make the effort to include, communicate, understand and respect, you'll both be sure to get something out of your friendship.

Include

- Take the initiative to include him - he may desperately want to be included and may not know how to ask. Be specific about what you want him to do.
- Find common interests - It will be much easier to talk about or share something you both like to do (movies, sports, music, books, TV shows, etc.).
- Encourage him to try new things because sometimes he may be afraid to try new stuff.
- Don't ignore him, even if you think he doesn't notice you.

Communicate

- Communicate clearly - Speak at a reasonable speed and volume. It might be helpful to use short sentences. Use gestures, pictures, and facial expressions to help communicate. Speak literally – do not use confusing figures of speech (He may truthfully tell you, “the sky” if you ask “What’s up?”)
- Give feedback - If your friend with autism is doing something inappropriate, it's OK to tell him nicely. Just be sure to also tell him what the right thing to do is because he may not know.
- Take time to say ‘hi’ whenever you see him. Even when you're in a hurry and pass him in the hall, just saying ‘hi’ is nice.
- Be persistent and patient - Remember that your friend with autism may take more time to respond than other people. It doesn't necessarily mean he isn't interested

Understand

- Remember sensory sensitivity - Your friend may be very uncomfortable in certain situations or places (crowds, noisy areas, etc.). Ask if he is OK. Sometimes he may need a break.
- Find out what his special interests or abilities are and then try to find ways to let him use them.
- Ask questions – Ask a teacher or aide if you're confused about something he is doing. There is a reason kids do things. If you figure it out, you might be able to help him.
- Ask someone at your school for the “[Autism Basics](#)” and the “[Asperger's Basics](#)” brochures from Autism Speaks.
- If your friend with autism is ‘freaking out,’ it's probably because he is trying to communicate something, not because he's just being weird. Something might really be bothering him or he might be afraid or frustrated and unable to communicate about it. Try to understand. Ask a teacher or another adult for help.





Respect

- Accept his or her differences and respect strengths just as you would for any friend.
- Don't be afraid - Your friend is just a kid like you who needs a little help.
- Stand up for him - If you see someone teasing or bullying a friend with autism, take a stand and tell the person that it's not cool. Don't tease. Sometimes he may not understand the teasing or sometimes he may think you are being friendly when you really are not. If other kids tease him, pull them aside and tell them to stop. If you are concerned he is being bullied, tell a teacher or an aide.
- Be helpful, but don't be too helpful. If you're too helpful, it may make him feel more different. Let him try to do it first by himself, then help out if he needs it. Ask him to do things with you, but don't just explain it to him; show him what to do so he can imitate you.
- Say something to him when he does good things. You can cheer, give 'high-fives' or just tell him 'great work.' He likes to be complimented, just like you do.
- It's OK to get frustrated with him sometimes or to want to play alone or with somebody else. If he won't leave you alone after you've asked him nicely, tell a teacher or another adult who can help you.
- Find something to like, a special skill to admire or a special interest he has. Some kids with autism are great with math, spelling, or computers or they have a great memory for the class schedule. Who knows? Maybe he will help you!

Information adapted from *How To Be a Friend to Someone With Autism*, by Peter Faustino and Ideas from the FRIEND Program about being a friend to a person with autism, by the Southwest Autism Research and Resource Center (SARRC)'s FRIEND Program.



BUS DRIVERS AND TRANSPORTATION SUPERVISORS





Bus Drivers / Transportation Supervisors

Many students with autism start and end their day on the bus. Their transportation circumstances can vary considerably. Routing issues are important, but accommodations for the child's sensory, behavioral, medical or organizational needs should also be considered. It may be necessary for a student with autism to be routed on a smaller bus and/or have an aide assigned to ride the bus with them. If the student is riding on a full bus, other supports may be necessary.

Understanding autism, as well as the strengths and needs of a specific student with autism, is important for the transportation department when they are planning for the child, as well as the drivers and aides who may transport him.

Please familiarize yourself with the Autism Basics and Asperger's Basics handouts provided in this kit. If you haven't received one, ask whether there is an "About Me" information sheet available for the student in question.

Things to think about:

- Be aware of the characteristics of autism as well as the student's specific needs. It can be helpful in avoiding or managing upsetting situations.
- Student's with autism may have impaired judgment, sensory issues or significant fears that might cause unexpected behaviors – for example, a lack of respect for traffic may cause him to dart into the street, or a dog on the sidewalk might cause him to refuse to get off of the bus - know what to do to avoid or manage particular needs.
- Be mindful that students with autism often have communication challenges; ask for guidelines for communication from his family or special education staff. It may be necessary to give him extra time to respond to a question or you may need to use an alternative communication device or strategy such as pictures to communicate.
- The student's need for routine may result in anxiety (and behavior) if changes are made to the bus route, there is a substitute driver, seat changes, etc. Reduce the student's anxiety by communicating with the with him in advance, using visuals wherever possible.
- For a child with medical issues such as seizures, it is important to develop a protocol for safety and management with the family and school nurse.
- Students with autism are not socially savvy; therefore, if a student is being bullied or tortured quietly, he is likely to react or respond – but may not do so in a way that seems appropriate or is easy to recognize. Consider the student's communication difficulties and make every attempt to fully understand the situation before reaching judgment regarding fault or behavior.
- Transitions are difficult for some students – this may result in trouble getting on or off the bus.
- Many students with autism like predictability and have good long-term memory – It's even possible that a student might be able to assist a new or substitute driver with the route.





Strategies for Success

- Adjust the route - shorten, or use preferential pickup/drop off situations (for example, consider picking up and dropping off at a calmer entrance side of the school, earlier or later than the rush of students, etc).
- Consider whether an aide is needed to support the student on the bus either on a temporary or ongoing basis.
- Be calm and positive. Model appropriate behavior for the student with autism as well as other students by greeting him, saying goodbye, etc.
- Reinforce the behaviors you wish to see with behavior-specific praise (e.g. “I like the way you went straight to your seat and buckled up!”)
- Use the “About Me” information about the student to get to know relevant facts about his likes, fears, needs, etc. Ask the school team for specific information regarding safety and impulsivity.
- Visual schedules can be helpful for helping the student establish a routine and managing his behavior. Following is a generic example, but a custom schedule can easily be made using a digital camera to take a picture of each step or action.
 1. Wait at the bus stop
 2. Get on the bus
 3. Sit down
 4. Buckle my seat belt
 5. Ride quietly to school
 6. Get off the bus
- Provide written rules or pictures of expectations of bus behavior for the student, the school staff, and parents so they can provide additional support (for example, if there is no eating on the bus, the student’s family needs to know not to send the child out the door with a bagel).
- Work with the school team to suggest social narratives or rule cards that might help a student understand a rule or expectation (for example, why sitting too close is annoying to another rider, why a bus may be late, or what traffic is). For a student who might have trouble understanding subtle social cues, help the school team provide ‘Unwritten rules for the bus’ and input on what the social conventions are on a particular route (for example, seniors sit in the back)
- Give positive directions; minimize the use of ‘don’t’ and ‘stop.’ ‘Please sit in your seat’ can be more effective than ‘Don’t stand up.’ This lets the student know exactly what you would like him to do.
- Allow a student who may be overwhelmed by noise on the bus to use earplugs or music or headphones.
- Allow the student to use hands on sensory items, such as a squeeze toy.
- Consider assigning peer buddies to support and shield a vulnerable student from bullying. School staff may be helpful in finding a way to pair students.
- For a student with particularly challenging behavior, work with the school team to develop a positive behavior support plan specific to behavior on the bus.



CUSTODIAL STAFF





Custodial Staff

Please familiarize yourself with the “Autism Basics” and “Asperger’s Basics” handouts provided in this kit. If you haven’t received them, ask whether there are “About Me” information sheets available for the students with autism in your school.

Things to think about

- Be aware of the characteristics of autism as well as the student’s specific needs. It can be helpful in avoiding or managing upsetting situations.
- Know who the students with special needs are.
- Be aware of the communication, social and behavioral challenges students with autism may have. Some children may have impaired judgment or be at risk of running away; alert school staff if you see something that makes you concerned.
- Be alert that the smell of cleaning supplies or the sound of a vacuum cleaner might cause a student with autism to be overwhelmed because he may process scents or noises differently from his peers. Ask the school team to help you know what to do to avoid or manage the needs of a particular student.
- Be aware of the social vulnerability of students with autism. They are frequently victims of bullying. Inform other staff if you observe situations that make you concerned.

Strategies for Success

- Be calm and positive. Model appropriate behavior for the student with autism as well as other students, by greeting him by name.
- Be aware of communication and social concerns that might make communicating with a student with autism difficult. Be prepared to wait for a response, whether it is an action or verbal answer.
- Give positive directions. Minimize the use of ‘don’t’ and ‘stop.’
- ‘Please stay on the sidewalk’ can be more effective than ‘don’t walk on the grass’ for a student who might not hear the ‘don’t’ or for one who isn’t sure where the acceptable place to walk may be. This lets the student know exactly what you would like him to do.
- Use the “About Me” information about the student to get to know relevant facts about his likes, fears, needs, etc. Ask the school team for specific information about safety and impulsivity.
- If you are having difficulties with behavior or interacting with a student with autism, ask the school team for help.



GENERAL EDUCATION AND SPECIAL AREA TEACHERS





General Education & Special Area Teachers (including Physical Education, Music, Art, Library)

The school team should support teachers in the general education setting to help them understand and provide effective supports and interventions for their students with autism. Communication among IEP team members, including the student's family, will help general education teachers recognize areas of strength and need and be prepared to support a student with autism in a way that benefits the student, as well as the remainder of the class. Inclusion and mainstreaming are not the same as dropping a child into a classroom like any other student - planning, coordination, collaboration and supports will be necessary to build a positive experience for all involved. It may be necessary to start with small but successful periods of inclusion, and build on these opportunities as the student with autism gains competence and confidence in varying settings.

Expect to be successful, but also understand that you may need to adjust your definition of success along the way. Celebrate small victories.

Knowing the characteristics of autism and the particular qualities of a student will allow for appropriate planning on his behalf. Be prepared to adjust your expectations - for example, in an art class, it might be appropriate to provide pre-cut samples for a project to a student with fine motor challenges, while also expecting that student who may happen to have a great memory and/or love of color to be the class advisor on color combinations.

Activities that are often challenging for students with autism include:

- Multi-step directions and activities
- Following verbal directions
- Organization skills and following the schedule
- For younger students, circle time, since it generally means sitting, listening to auditory information and verbal output
- For older students, classroom lectures that require sitting, listening to auditory information for long periods of time
- Centers time for younger students or independent work for older students, since this involves academic tasks, sometimes-unclear expectations, following directions
- Free play for younger students, because it involves social skills, co-operative play and verbal skills with very little structure
- Group instruction
- Assemblies, music and PE classes for students with sensory issues.





Strategies for Success:

- Be calm and positive. Model appropriate behavior for the student with autism, as well as for other students, by greeting him and engaging him in a respectful way.
- Be aware of the characteristics of autism and general strategies - for quick reference reminders use the “[Autism Basics](#)” and “[Asperger’s Basics](#)” handouts included in this kit.
- Use the “[About Me](#)” information sheet to get to know relevant facts about each particular student’s likes, fears, needs, etc. Ask specific questions regarding safety and impulsivity. If you haven’t received one, ask the school team whether there is an “[About Me](#)” information sheet available for each student with autism in your classroom.
- Promote a welcoming environment, and provide opportunities for your student (and others!) to develop social interaction skills and extended learning
- Teach understanding and acceptance—see the Resources section of this kit for suggested reading, including books and programs to use with the students,
 1. Pair the student with peers who are positive role models
 2. Allow times for students to work in pairs and/or small groups
 3. Be aware that students with autism can become isolated within the classroom (interaction only occurring between an aide and student) and be on the lookout to prevent it by working with the students and the paraprofessional to support social exchange among peers
- Students with autism are not socially savvy; therefore, if a student is being bullied or tortured quietly, he is likely to react or respond – but may not do so in a way that seems appropriate or is easy to recognize. Consider the student’s communication difficulties and make every attempt to fully understand the situation before reaching judgment regarding fault or behavior.
- Ensure that organization, communication and sensory issues are addressed (see [General Strategies](#) and [Classroom Checklist](#))
- Establish clear routines and habits to support regular activities and transitions. Alert the student to changes in routine, staffing, etc., in advance, whenever possible.
- Consider seating - situate the student for optimal attention to instruction or sensory needs
- Pay particular attention to the general strategies outlined for supporting communication and organization (simple directions, wait-time for processing verbal requests or directions, visual schedules, prompts and cues, etc.)
- Be tuned into sensory issues that may effect the student in your particular class (for example, echoing locker rooms and loud, fast activity can make P.E. over-stimulating and overwhelming)
- Provide written rules or pictures of expectations of behavior in the classroom, including ‘unwritten’ conventions if necessary. Work with the student’s team to incorporate social narratives to help a student understand a rule or expectation. Learners with autism often increase compliance if they understand why a rule exists (for example, It is important to remain quiet - no noise or talking - while the teacher is speaking. If it is noisy, the students will not be able to hear her.).





- Use descriptive praise to build desired behaviors (for example, ‘I like the way you put your trash in the trash can!’)
- Give positive directions; minimize the use of ‘don’t’ and ‘stop.’ ‘Please sit in your seat’ can be more effective than ‘Don’t stand up.’ This lets the student know exactly what you would like him to do.
- Consider needs/supports for class presentations (for example, cue cards, visual supports or a power point presentation for a child with impaired expressive language skills), field trips, etc.
- Utilize teacher training on multi-modal instruction! Find ways to teach and reinforce by expecting your student to learn not only by hearing, but also seeing (pictures, maps, diagrams, patterns), doing (movement and hands on activities), saying (repeat after me...) and even singing.
- Collaborate with the student’s special education staff to modify curriculum, supports such as visuals, communication access, organizational tools, and directly teach study skills (note taking, time management, etc.)
- Make sure that activities such as field trips, class presentations, assemblies, and plays are addressed ahead of time. Think about ways the student can be included and discuss and plan for them with the support team.
 1. Field Trips: use a social narrative to describe to the student where the trip is, who he will be with, what will occur and the schedule for the day. When possible include pictures (websites and Google Images are great resources)
 2. Assemblies/ Plays/Presentations: prepare the student ahead of time with materials and social narratives; be attuned to sensory issues; be creative such as offering the student an opportunity to be “producer” with a run down of the program and the ability to sit off to the side away from other students and out of the noise.

In addressing curricular issues and making academic modifications or accommodations, keep the following suggestions in mind. These might be adjustments made by the general education teacher or in collaboration with a student’s special education teacher or paraprofessional. For a student participating in an inclusive setting, the more he is able to follow along and participate in the activities of the classroom in real time, the better he can access the curriculum as well as the social objectives being targeted by inclusion.

- Define core curriculum objectives and concentrate on those—for some students this may be as simple as one or two basic components within a unit
- Concentrate on teaching less content, but teach to mastery and where appropriate, fluency
- Make sure the student and support staff have classroom materials ahead of time
- Pre-teach relevant new vocabulary and key concepts, concentrating on those that build and repeat throughout the curriculum
- Make the information presented by the teacher accessible to the student: know the amount of verbal information the student can process, consider ways to break the information into manageable parts, highlighting key points, providing outlines, study notes, etc.
- Use visuals wherever possible—to organize, improve comprehension and assess
- Review information
- Recognize that functional academic skills—note taking, test taking, true/false, organizing information, etc. may need to be taught and reinforced directly, separately from subject area content





- Consider homework - establish a method for recording assignments, present defined expectations, consider whether accommodations or more time is needed
- Consider long term projects - support managing a timeline for due dates, chunk the assignment into smaller parts with a completion schedule and checklists
- In assessing, reduce expectations of performance in areas of difficulty for the student - to test concept knowledge, replace essays with multiple choice or fill in the blank questions with word banks or replace paragraphs with webs that show relationships, etc,
- Teach and test regularly and in small chunks: check for comprehension
- Consider allowing more time or an alternate setting for testing
- Review, repeat and move on when the student demonstrates proficiency
- If the student has difficulty learning a concept or skill, re-think how material is being presented
- Supply study guides ahead of tests
- Pre warn the student and paraprofessional when you give a pop quiz

Reading

- Students are likely to have difficulty comprehending material, predicting events, and reading between the lines/infering from the text.
- Be aware of a high proportion of students with high functioning autism who are adept at encoding and word calling, but may have significant issues with comprehension. Some students may be diagnosed with hyperlexia.
- Provide summaries or pre-exposure to a new reading book prior to its initiation. Identify the story line, plot, main characters and setting - with visuals as possible.
- Provide specific structure to questions when expecting an answer for comprehension. Use multiple choice, cloze sentences (a portion of text with certain words removed) with a word bank, or starter responses. Whereas it might be very difficult to answer “John, how did the wolf find grandmother’s house?”, a student with autism might show comprehension when asked, “John, the wolf found grandmother’s house by crossing the river and _____”?
- When giving choices, know how many choices are appropriate. Some may be able to pick from four choices, some from only two. Reducing the number of choices is a simple way of making a task simpler for the student, while still expecting independence.

Writing

- Recognize that writing involves expressive language skills, word retrieval, organization of thoughts and fine motor skills, all of which are often challenges for students with autism. Strategies to support each of these areas of need may be needed.
- Use visuals to prompt language - pictures, word banks, etc.
- Begin with cloze sentences (a portion of text with certain words removed) or sentence starters.





- Actively teach brainstorming, developing descriptive vocabulary, etc.
- Use template organization tools for all writing assignments—webs, outlines, etc. The student will need specific instruction on how to use these tools, and consistent and repeated use of the same tools is likely to result in greater independence and success.
- Provide significant structure and direction for the assignment.
- Consider using keyboarding, dictation and computer graphic organizer programs to support your student. Consider an [AlphaSmart](#) or other traveling keyboard that can be used across settings.
- Look for content rather than length of a written piece, knowing that writing may need to be evaluated by alternate methods than those used for the class in general. For example, rather than expecting the three paragraphs assigned, consider whether the student responded to the questions and the content objectives of the assignment.

Social Studies

If a student with autism has an interest in this area, he might become the class's resident expert on a certain topic, such as Egypt or modes of transportation. This might be a chance to allow this student to shine, and provide a motivational opportunity by using his particular area of interest to motivate flexibility or learning new subject matter. Additional suggested strategies for those who might need assistance to grasp subject matter:

- Use timelines, maps and visuals to support concepts
- Use videos (check out YouTube) to bring to life past events
- Teach idioms and analogies
- Act or role play

Science

As in other subjects, if a student with autism has a particular interest he might become the class's expert on the solar system, dinosaurs or rocks. Build confidence and interest in learning by celebrating this strength, while stretching flexibility and interest in other areas. Strategies and considerations:

- Support hands on activities
- Be aware of impulsivity and safety concerns
- Define rules for lab work
- Whenever possible, point out relationships between science concepts and real life experiences

Math

Although some students with autism excel in mathematical ability, and others might have an affinity for the rote aspects of memorizing math facts and functions, the language of math and associated abstract concepts can be difficult for many students with autism. Recognizing that this area often represents great variability in skill levels means that instruction is likely to need great individualization—a student who can perform double digit





multiplication in his head may have great difficulty with the concepts of negative numbers or measurement. Word problems in particular are a notable area of struggle. Use the student's areas of strength to build his self-confidence and motivation to working on areas of challenge.

- Break math down into specific parts, using visuals and manipulatives.
- Use strategies such as **TOUCHMATH®** to support computation.
- Students with autism often learn the patterns involved in a skill, rather than the concepts, so beware of over-learning - a child who spends months learning how to add and months learning how to subtract, may then take months to learn to look for the sign on a mixed addition/subtraction page.
- For skills that require precise learning and execution, use errorless teaching strategies that ensure correct development of a skill from the start, as corrective teaching is generally less effective and unlearning bad habits can be very difficult for students with autism.

Physical Education

- Be aware of motor, timing, language and attention issues that might affect a student's performance and interest, and make appropriate accommodations.
- Echoing locker rooms, whistles, and students running and shouting might be overwhelming to your student with autism's senses.
- Recognize that while a student may not be able to keep up with the pace of learning and activity of the whole class, he still might be able to learn components of a sport or activity that will offer a valuable social outlet or exercise opportunity.
- Break tasks into small scaffolded components and celebrate successes - a student who learns how to shoot hoops has gained a valuable skill in turn-taking and an opportunity for social interaction with peers, even if he has not mastered the ability to participate in a 5 on 5 game
- Solicit the assistance of special education staff to provide training in appropriate locker room behavior, social conventions regarding privacy, etc. using social narratives, etc.

Music

Many people with autism have musical strengths, which can be celebrated, used to reinforce, motivate, and teach. A sense of rhythm and interest in music can be used to motivate a child to participate in an activity. Since music is processed in a different area of the brain than language, some individuals with limited language ability are able to sing, and song can be used to teach concepts or aid in memory development.

However, it is worth noting that the issues with timing, processing and motor planning often make choral responding - singing or reciting with a group - very difficult. It has been noted that if a student with autism initiates the choral (such as the Pledge of Allegiance) he can be successful, whereas the timing required for joining in can impede this ability.





Art

Strong visual skills, a heightened sense of visual perception or a unique perspective can often result in significant artistic ability in some people with autism. Others might take a special interest in color, and be the class expert on color combinations and the application of the principles of the color wheel.

Because of sensory/tactile issues, some students may have a difficult time with art class or certain art projects (e.g. clay on the hands, odors from materials, etc).



Computers and Technology

Even a very young child with autism can show great affinity for technology, being able to immediately find the 'on' button on any TV, computer or tablet he encounters. Visual acuity and varied ways of storing/accessing information and creating thought processes often make people with autism adept at computer utilization and programming, stereo operation, film making, etc. A student with autism may be a great asset in developing technological resources, but his communication challenges may prevent him from being able to explain how something works. Use a student's problem- solving and technical expertise to make other tasks easier (replace handwriting with typing, produce a video instead of writing a paper) or to motivate attention to other areas of learning being targeted.



LUNCH AND RECESS AIDES





Lunch/Recess Aides

Lunch is a critical time for a child with autism to have experienced staff support - particularly those who are trained in supporting social interactions and helping a child become more independent. Recess and lunch are typically the least structured times of a student's day, and therefore, the most difficult for a child with organization, communication and social challenges. The support required during these times ranges from the practice of negotiating cafeteria tables, busy lunch lines and ordering (fast, with 67 hungry kids just behind you!) and figuring out how to keep busy and have fun on an expansive playground with no set rules. In addition to the organizational and sensory issues, this is a time where deficits in communication and social ability become readily apparent and exceptionally painful.

- Familiarize yourself with the “[Autism Basics](#)” and “[Asperger’s Basics](#)” handouts provided in this kit.
- Be aware of the characteristics of autism as well as the student’s specific needs. It can be helpful in avoiding or managing upsetting situations. Some children may be at risk of wandering or running away. A door buzzer, fire alarm, certain odors or a school bell might represent a sensory assault - know what to do to avoid or manage particular needs.
- If you haven’t received one, ask whether there is an “About Me” information sheet available for the students with autism you will be supervising. It is important to understand the individual student’s likes, fears, needs and abilities.
- Be aware of communication, social and behavioral challenges students with autism may have. Ask his special education team for help with communication challenges.
- It may be necessary to wait for a response to a question, use an alternative communication device or a communication strategy such as picture exchange.
- Support the student’s need to develop daily living skills, and promote as much ability and independence as possible (for example, let him get his napkin, teach him to enter his meal code in the cafeteria computer, etc.).
- Explore opportunities for school staff to think creatively - recess can be a great time for a push-in intervention from the speech pathologist or occupational therapist, who could model strategies and set up games that daily staff (and peers) could continue on days when they do not provide direct therapy.
- Be tuned into the strategies modeled by the student’s trained support staff and ask for their help with areas of concern.
- Friendly greetings, acceptance and patience can help to make the child feel comfortable in the school and small responsibilities can help him to feel like a contributing member of the community - celebrate successes!
- Be calm and positive. Model appropriate behavior for the student with autism as well as other students by greeting him by name and engaging in appropriate conversation. Peers are more likely to engage students with autism if they know how the student communicates.
- Create a quiet spot, if necessary, for mellow activities or a less hectic lunchtime.





- Ask familiar staff to practice or help troubleshoot skills outside of the chaos of scheduled times - start the lunch line routine five minutes before others arrive, ask the OT to teach techniques for learning to swing independently, etc. – as the student becomes more successful, build skills toward independence.
- If necessary, use a visual menu for making choices in the cafeteria.
- Reduce the number of choices or make a choice and practice ordering (with necessary visual supports, etc) earlier in the day.
- Visual schedules can be helpful in establishing and perpetuating routines, ensuring compliance (such as putting the tray and silverware in the appropriate places) and managing behavior. Following is an example of a schedule that could be created with or without photos.
 1. Clearing My Lunch
 2. Put my plate, silverware and trash on my tray
 3. Walk carefully with the tray to cleanup area
 4. Toss trash (only!) into trashcan
 5. Put my silverware in the gray tub
 6. Place my plates on the counter
 7. Stack my tray in the cubby
 8. Give myself a sticker!
- Visual prompts and cues can be used to help a child make choices or know how to initiate or respond (for example, cue card ‘I would like pizza please’).
- Seek help in learning how to create structured settings - organizing a game of follow the leader, setting up Uno at a lunch table, etc. Use the child’s existing skills and interests to motivate him to participate, since the social demands are enough for him to work on.
- Set up and explain rules of playground games. If the playground is too much for a student, designate a quieter area for board games or cards with a peer.
- Use descriptive praise to build desired behaviors (e.g. “I like the way you put the ball back where it belongs”)
- Give positive directions. Minimize use of ‘don’t’ and ‘stop.’ For example, instead of ‘Don’t stand in the hallway’ try ‘Please sit at your lunch table’ for a student who might not hear the ‘don’t’ – or for one who isn’t sure where the acceptable place to sit might be. This lets the student know exactly what you would like him to do.
- Give peers the opportunity to be a lunch buddy (this often works better than assigning a buddy, as it selects students who are motivated to take on this role) to support and shield a vulnerable student - it may be helpful to have support from other members of the school team in finding a way to pair students in the absence of volunteers. Aim to engage more than one ‘lunch buddy’ to allow for absences.
- Be aware of the vulnerability of students with autism and the propensity for them to be victims of bullying behaviors.





- Students with autism are not socially savvy; therefore, if a student is being bullied or tortured quietly, he is likely to react or respond – but may not do so in a way that seems appropriate or is easy to recognize. Consider the student’s communication difficulties and make every attempt to fully understand the situation before reaching judgment regarding fault or behavior.
- Work with the school team to create social narratives to help a student understand a rule or expectation (for example, why sitting too close is annoying to another student, bathroom etiquette and hand washing, etc.).
- Work with the school team to provide written or visual supports for ‘Unwritten rules for the cafeteria or recess’ and input on social conventions.
- Help peers support the student with autism, in a respectful way, in adhering to social conventions by modeling and/or directly instructing them.

For a student with particularly challenging behavior, work with the school team to develop and employ an element of the positive behavior support plan specific to the needs at lunch/recess. Ask the team for help troubleshooting or implementing the plans.



OFFICE STAFF





Office Staff

A school's administrative staff often represents a consistent and welcoming community within the school. Administrative staff can provide an excellent opportunity for students with autism to practice social interactions and perform small tasks and jobs that make them feel like a valued member of the school community.

Please familiarize yourself with the **“Autism Basics”** and **“Asperger's Basics”** handouts provided in this kit. If you haven't received one, ask whether there are **“About Me”** information sheets available for the students with autism in your school.

- Be aware of the characteristics of autism as well as the student's specific needs. It can be helpful in avoiding or managing upsetting situations - know the communication, social and behavioral needs and abilities of each student.
- Be aware of communication challenges. Ask his special education staff for guidelines for communication, knowing that you may need to wait for a response to a question you ask the student or use an alternative communication device or strategy such as picture exchange.
- Take note of the strategies modeled by the student's trained support staff.
- Friendly greetings, acceptance and patience can help make the student feel comfortable in the school. Giving the student errands or small responsibilities in the office can help him feel like a contributing member of the community - celebrate successes!
- Once a routine has been broken down into steps and effectively taught, most students with autism will consistently and reliably perform - and then become a dependable assistant.

Strategies:

- Be calm and positive. Model appropriate behavior for the student with autism as well as other students by greeting him by name and engaging in appropriate conversation whenever possible.
- Use the **“About Me”** information sheet to get to know relevant facts about each particular student's likes, fears, needs, etc.
- Visual schedules can be helpful in establishing and perpetuating routines, ensuring compliance (such as putting the attendance records in the appropriate box) and managing behavior.
- The student's school team may be helpful in providing social narratives to help a student understand a rule or expectation (for example, “It is important to say good morning to Mrs. Smith. Saying hello is being friendly. It makes others happy when you are friendly.”)
- Visual prompts or cue cards can be used to help a child make choices, or know how to initiate or respond.
- Use descriptive praise to build desired behaviors (for example, “It was great that you put the attendance sheet in the mailbox!”)





- Give positive directions. Minimize the use of ‘don’t’ and ‘stop.’
- ‘Please walk’ can be more effective than ‘don’t run’ for a student who might not hear the ‘don’t’ or for one who may interpret the direction literally or as too abstract and isn’t sure whether they are meant to stand still or walk. This lets the student know exactly what you would like him to do.
- Remember to create strategies to include all students on all school correspondence. Many students who do not have a homeroom like the other classes miss school picture day, yearbooks, information on extracurricular activities, etc. because papers do not go home.
- Support school announcements over the intercom with written notes home for students who might have trouble processing - or recalling - information.
- Be aware of the social vulnerability of students with autism. They are frequently victims of bullying. Inform the school team if you observe situations that make you concerned.



PARAPROFESSIONALS



Autism Speaks® 
FAMILY SERVICES
SCHOOL COMMUNITY TOOL KIT


AUTISM SPEAKS™
It's time to listen.



ParaProfessionals

Whether they are assigned as a 1:1 aide or to a special needs classroom paraprofessionals are in a unique position to effect great changes in the lives and function of their students. They can help set the tone for the student's place in the school community.

It is likely that little training with respect to autism spectrum disorders has been given to prepare for this role. Since the primary responsibility of a paraprofessional is viewed as supporting the student, IEP meetings and other opportunities for learning about the abilities and needs of a student, and strategies that might be effective in supporting him, often occur without the paraprofessional's involvement.

Paraprofessionals should have knowledge of the characteristics of autism in general, and the assigned student in particular. Know his learning style, preferences, needs and strengths. The information contained in this kit for all of the specific school community members will be helpful for paraprofessionals, as they often accompany the student in his interactions throughout the school. If support is provided at lunch, then be aware of the sensory and communication needs—and strategies to employ—during lunch. Implementation of the behavior support plan and sensory strategies are likely to fall primarily in the paraprofessional's hands, as may academic modifications or supports.

Of all the individuals who support a student over the course of a school day, the student is likely to become most dependent on a 1:1. As independence is always the ultimate goal, a successful paraprofessional will maintain the mindset of trying to work himself out of a job; otherwise, there is the risk of developing the 'Velcro aide' syndrome (overly attached) and creating a prompt and personnel-dependent student. Remember to strive towards raising expectations and promoting independence in the student at whatever level he is capable of handling.

Strategies:

- Be calm, positive. Model appropriate behavior for the student with autism as well as other students by greeting him by name, saying goodbye, etc.
- Be proactive about learning about the student.
- Ask questions, request to take part in meetings and trainings, familiarize yourself with his IEP document and know the strategies to be used, etc.
- Become expert in understanding and supporting his communication challenges; solicit guidelines for communication from his special education staff, knowing that wait time for a response to a question, use of an alternative communication device or communication strategy such as picture exchange might be necessary
- Use “About Me” information about the students to get to know relevant facts about each particular student's likes, fears, needs, etc.
- Carve out a quiet spot in the school, if necessary, for when the student needs time to regroup.
- Be creative about finding opportunities to practice or troubleshoot skills outside of the chaos of scheduled times - bus loading, lunch line, locker room, etc. and work on building skills toward independence.
- Recognize that the paraprofessional's actions, attitude and responses can help - or hinder - the growth and behavior of the student
- As the student becomes more independent, the IEP team might decide to alter the level of intervention - such as replacing a 1:1 pairing with a classroom aide situation. To test and practice increasing a student's level of independence use the “Invisible Aide” strategy section that follows.





Invisible Aide Game

By Sonia Dickson-Bracks

OVERVIEW

PURPOSE: To assess specific areas/issues related to independence, organization, social confidence, and self advocacy; to initiate fading of one-to-one aide support

GUIDELINES: Initially, game should be implemented during one class period per day, starting with the easiest period. A Class Period = the moment the student steps out of previous class until he leaves the target class. The student and staff will de-brief on the game (review and discuss what occurred) during their individual daily session. Based on this evaluation, they will determine whether to repeat the same period the following day, or target a different period. Once all periods have been assessed, plan and determine next steps for further assessment or program development and implementation.

PLANNING THE GAME

Together the student and staff determine which period would be the best to pretend the student is alone (not accompanied by the aide). This is based on comfort in the specific setting (classroom, teacher, students and subject). The student and staff should also develop specific gestural cues in order to provide a “time out” from the game. (See Exceptions to the Rules)

Once plan and period are determined, the staff will notify the teacher (in advance) of this plan. As an option toward promoting self-advocacy, the student and staff can decide if the student should notify the teacher.

RULES OF THE GAME

Once the game begins, both student and staff will make every effort to act/pretend as if the staff is not present. That is, the student will not seek assistance from the aide, nor will the aide offer assistance. The student may rely on natural supports (peers, teacher) as appropriate to the setting. Neither will engage in conversation with one another. The staff try to stay out of the student’s line of sight (i.e., stay behind the student while walking and when seated in the classroom). Exceptions to “the rules of the game” should only occur when the pre-determined cues are used.

EXCEPTIONS TO THE RULES (“Time out” prompts & gestural cues)

- “I need help”: The student feels he needs help and wants a “time out” from the game (e.g., he makes eye contact with the staff and touches his own nose).
- “Are you okay? Do you need help?”: The staff is observing signs of stress that are of relatively significant concern (e.g., he touches the student on the shoulder and when student turns around, he rubs his forehead);
- “Are you sure you want help? Remember the game is on”: The student has initiated conversation or indicated he wants help but did NOT use the pre-determined cue. This may be because he forgot the game was on or just out of habit. The staff in turn will provide a “reminder” cue that means “are you sure you want help? Remember the game is on” (e.g., he rubs his hands together). At that point, the student should make a conscious decision to either use the “I need help cue” or acknowledge (nodding) that he forgot or doesn’t need help. However, if he doesn’t use the cue but appears distressed, the staff should provide assistance.

DOCUMENTATION

Staff will document observations throughout the game. The completed form will be used during debriefing at the end of each day. (See Invisible Aide - Observation Form).





Invisible Aide – Observation Form

DATE: _____ TARGET PERIOD/SUBJECT: _____

RATIONALE (Period Selection): _____

(Comfort: Classroom, teacher, students and subject).

REVIEWED "TIME OUT" CUES: _____ TEACHER NOTIFIED BY: _____

OBSERVATION START TIME: _____ END TIME: _____

TRANSITION FROM LAST TO TARGET PERIOD: _____

OBSERVATIONS DURING TARGET PERIOD: (Record on separate sheet)

OVERALL INDEPENDENCE RATING (1 – 3): _____

ORGANIZATION RATING (1 – 3): _____ Was student organized during class activity? Describe/Explain:

Did student record homework, other work to complete, etc., based on assignment from teacher?

Record assignments here:

SELF-ADVOCACY RATING (1 – 3): _____ Did student seek assistance from teacher or peers when needed?

Describe/Explain:

SOCIAL CONFIDENCE RATING (1 – 3): _____ Did student appear confident/comfortable during observation? Did student exhibit signs of discomfort? Describe/Explain:

GAME RULES:

ADHERENCE/EXCEPTIONS **If exceptions required, record circumstances:

Student Initiated (Describe): _____

Staff Initiated (Describe): _____

Were cues utilized? YES / NO Reason (Explain): _____

Outcome (Describe): _____

If rules changes or altered, record reasons for change or exceptions: _____





The Ten Commandments of Paraprofessional Support

1. Thou shalt know well both your students and the disabilities they manifest.
2. Thou shalt learn to take your students' perspectives, and realize that they have significant difficulty taking yours.
3. Thou shalt always look beyond your student's behaviors to determine the functions that those behaviors serve.
4. Thou shalt be neither blinded by your by your students' strengths, nor hold them to standards they cannot meet.
5. Thou shalt master the art of rendering the appropriate degree of support for your students' level of skill development and behavior.
6. Thou shalt exercise vigilance in fading back prompts and promoting competence and independence in your students.
7. Thou shalt be proactive both in seeking out information to help your students, and in preparing and implementing the support that they need to be successful.
8. Thou shalt neither usurp the teachers' role, nor be albatrosses around their necks.
9. Thou shalt leave your egos at the school house door!
10. Thou shalt perform your duties mindfully, responsibly and respectfully at all times.

Source: How to Be a Para Pro
by Diane Twachtman-Cullen

How to Be a Para Pro <http://www.starfishpress.com/products/parapro.html> offers further reinforcement of these specific areas, as well as vignettes and troubleshooting suggestions, or see other educational/social support options in Resources



ATHLETIC COACHES



Autism Speaks[®] 
FAMILY SERVICES
SCHOOL COMMUNITY TOOL KIT


AUTISM SPEAKS[®]
It's time to listen.



Athletic Team Coaches

Many students with autism are able to participate in school team sports and are a great asset to their teams. The amount of support required to make this happen will vary greatly from student to student. Some people with autism have great skills in learning rules and keeping track of statistics and may make great scorekeepers or coach's assistants. Some may be good at individual sports such as track, cross country, or swimming, as they do not require the student to keep track of a ball and other team members on the field while processing auditory and visual information from various sources at the same time. Others may be able to participate in team sports.

Consider the possibility of enrolling a student's family member to support the student if an aide is not provided. They are often thrilled to have their student involved and are eager to help. A fellow team member might be paired with the student to provide "buddy" support. A family member might be willing to "shadow" the student on the cross-country course or supervise the student during "down time" at a sporting event.

The support required during practices and sporting events will range from practicing organizing equipment and the steps involved in preparing for an event, and preparing for bus trips to unfamiliar places for away events. With planning, and the support of the student's family and school team, these challenges can be overcome.

Being part of an athletic team is a meaningful way for the student with autism to "belong." It might also be a time where deficits in communication and social ability become readily apparent and exceptionally painful. The team coach will set the tone for how peers treat the student athlete with autism.

- Familiarize yourself with the "Autism Basics" and "Asperger's Basics" handouts provided in this kit.
- Be aware of the characteristics of autism as well as the student's specific needs. It can be helpful in avoiding or managing upsetting situations.
- If you haven't received one, ask whether there is an "About Me" information sheet available for the students with autism you will be supervising. It is important to understand the individual student's likes, fears, needs and abilities.
- Be aware of communication, social and behavioral challenges students with autism may have. Ask his special education team for help with communication challenges.
- It may be necessary to wait for a response to a question, use an alternative communication device or a communication strategy such as picture exchange.
- Support the student's need to develop daily living skills, and promote as much ability and independence as possible (for example, let him get sports equipment, teach him the steps to warm up before an event and cool down afterward, etc.).
- Be tuned into the strategies modeled by the student's trained support staff and ask for their help with areas of concern.





- Be calm and positive. Model appropriate behavior for the athlete with autism as well as his teammates by greeting him by name and engaging in appropriate conversation. Peers are more likely to engage students with autism if they know how the student communicates.
- Create a quiet spot, if necessary, on the team bus, up front near adults for the student with autism.
- Friendly greetings, acceptance and patience can help to make the child feel comfortable on the team and small responsibilities can help him to feel like a contributing member of the team - celebrate successes!
- Ask familiar staff to practice or help troubleshoot skills outside of the chaos of practice times – he can start the getting ready for practice five minutes before others arrive, ask the OT to teach techniques for learning to kick a ball, throw, catch, take off from starting blocks, etc. – as the student becomes more successful, build skills toward independence.
- Visual schedules can be helpful in establishing and perpetuating routines, ensuring compliance and managing behavior. A paraprofessional or family member may be helpful in preparing visual schedules if necessary.
- Use descriptive praise to build desired behaviors (e.g. “I like the way you put the ball back where it belongs”)
- Be aware of the vulnerability of students with autism and the propensity for them to be victims of bullying behaviors, especially in areas with limited supervision.
- Students with autism are not socially savvy; therefore, if a student is being bullied or tortured quietly, he is likely to react or respond – but may not do so in a way that seems appropriate or is easy to recognize. Consider the athlete with autism’s communication difficulties and make every attempt to fully understand the situation before reaching judgment regarding fault or behavior.
- Work with the school team to provide written or visual supports for “Unwritten rules for the locker room, team bus or bleachers.” Enroll teammates to help.
- Help teammates support the student with autism, in a respectful way, in adhering to social conventions by modeling and/or directly instructing them.



SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION, PRINCIPALS, INTERDISCIPLINARY TEAM MEMBERS





School Administration, Principals, & Interdisciplinary Team Members

An inclusive-minded, informed administration sets the stage for a successful inclusive school. When school administrators and principals have a positive attitude about their students with special needs, their attitudes establish expectations and the tone for the entire school staff and students. This tone can have a profound effect on the potential outcome for the student and on the entire student body developing a lifelong consideration for people with special needs.

Knowing the benefits of inclusion, to the students with exceptional needs as well as the typical student population is helpful in developing this perspective. Keep this information in perspective, as the wishes of the family and the needs of the student might mean that inclusion might start with five minutes a day and build from there with increasing competence and confidence. Anticipate success, but know that your definition of what that looks like may change over time.

For inclusion to be successful, being informed and prepared is essential for a positive experience for everyone involved. Administrative staff will need to know the characteristics of autism, and the particulars of each specific student, in making decisions about classroom and staffing assignments, training and support for the team and programming for the student. Untrained or ineffective staff supports can aggravate a challenging situation or cause increased anxiety and difficulty for a student, impeding his success. Be informed about whether a student's needs are being met, and listen to the concerns of the family and other staff members, knowing that 'good teaching' for a typical student might be the wrong approach for a student with the complex needs of autism.

In many schools, the school psychologist or case manager will be the gatekeeper for referrals and special education services. This coordinator should be aware of the characteristics of autism, as well as the greater risk of co-morbid emotional and behavioral disorders in students with autism that might benefit from surveillance and targeted treatment. Students with autism may experience aggression, self-injury, depression, anxiety, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), and tics, but children and youth with autism often do not receive targeted treatments for these issues since parents and school personnel may not recognize them as separate or treatable disorders. Symptom overlaps, varying presentations and cognitive factors may make separating out diagnoses difficult. Presently there are no screening tools for these other disorders in individuals with autism.

Other educational challenges, such as dyslexia, vision problems, and auditory processing disorders can occur in students with autism, without the usual cues suggesting assessment (for example, a student with limited verbal ability is not likely to say "mommy, I can't see the blackboard.") Concerns raised by IEP team members should be considered in the context of this lack of cues. Effective assessments and accurate diagnoses will ensure appropriate intervention planning.

Since school administrators are often called in to challenging situations, it is important to be involved in and knowledgeable about a child's positive behavior support plan (PBS)([insert link here](#)) and the strategies in place for that student. Respecting the needs of the student and embracing the mindset that behavior is communication are essential at times when intervention is necessary.





Considerations related to staffing, planning and training

- Provide introductory and on-going staff training and awareness, ranging from raising the skill levels of special education staff, to supporting general education teachers, specials providers, bus drivers, lunch aides, etc. in their understanding and knowledge of autism and their students. The Appendix and sections from this tool kit will be helpful.
- Support the exchange of information and promote collaboration among departments and staff, to support each student across settings. When the team collaborates to share success and trouble shoot problems, everyone benefits.
- Include 1:1 or classroom paraprofessionals in trainings, IEP meetings, related therapies (speech, OT, etc.) sessions and positive behavior support planning and evaluation; they often spend more time with a student with autism, across settings, than any other staff in the school. They can provide valuable knowledge about the student and ensure effective implementation of programs.
- Promote opportunities for regular team meetings and open communication.
- Be proactive - support the IEP team in developing positive behavior plans with an emphasis on providing supports and interventions necessary to AVOID behaviors. See the Resources and Appendix sections of this kit for information on PBS.
- Encourage the school staff to think creatively - recess can be an ideal time for a push-in intervention from the speech pathologist or occupational therapist, who even once a week could model strategies and set up games staff (and peers) could continue over the rest of the week.
- Meet frequently with the student's IEP team to see if the PBSP is working and that it is being implemented across all environments. Support your staffs efforts in using Classroom Checklist, Reinforcement Strategies and Data Collection.

Considerations related to the individual student

- Prepare in advance for transitions. Invite the student to view a new classroom or school prior to the first day so that he has time to take in the new surroundings (and staff, if possible) without overwhelming sensory stimuli.
- Get personal. Friendly greetings and a sense of acceptance can help to make a student feel comfortable in the school. Encourage the use of the "About Me" information sheet in the Resources section of this kit so the student's family or someone who knows the student well can provide helpful information. Use it to get to know relevant facts about each particular student's likes, fears, needs, etc.
- Learn something about each student to form a personal connection, and celebrate successes with behavior specific praise (for example, "I like how you are walking in the hall so quietly!")
- Be mindful of a student's communication challenges; ask the student's special education staff to give you guidelines for communication. Understand that you may need to give the student additional time to respond to a question or he may need to use an alternative communication device or communication strategy such as picture exchange.





- Be cognizant of the student's need to develop living skills, and promote opportunities for inclusion in the school community and steps toward independence as possible.
- Allow opportunities for staff to practice skills outside of the chaos of certain situations so that the student can develop a skill without all the confounding sensory and social issues (for example, allow a child to go early to dress for P.E. in a quiet locker room or to practice using a tray or ordering lunch a few minutes before classmates arrive, with the goal of eventually being able to generalize these skills to the regular time schedule when possible).
- When planning fire drills, etc., know that they can be extremely anxiety provoking for a student with autism. Warning these students and staff in advance will go a long way in helping the students manage the noise and change in routine the fire drill triggers.

Considerations relating to students with autism and their typical peers

- Be aware of the vulnerability of students with autism and their propensity to be victims of bullying - proactively build a school culture where bullying is not acceptable through awareness building, peer sensitivity, strategies and procedures.
- Students with autism are not socially savvy; therefore, if a student is being bullied or tortured quietly, he is likely to react or respond – but may not do so in a way that seems appropriate or is easy to recognize. Consider the student's communication difficulties and make every attempt to fully understand the situation before reaching judgment regarding fault or behavior. Recognize that the stress of a difficult situation may make it even more difficult for the student with autism to express himself and that his desire for peer attention may make him reluctant to report or confirm bullying behavior.
- Ensure that students with autism are part of the school community and informed of school events and opportunities - this is often overlooked for students in specialized classrooms who might not participate in homeroom. For students with autism it would be helpful if emails or memos were sent home to the child's family if announcements are made during school regarding important school information; students with autism may not go home and let their family know of announcements that they have heard in school.
- Promote opportunities for social interaction and development - find ways to include students with autism in school productions, extra curricular activities and clubs.
- Consider peer groups for social skills trainings, and peer buddies to support and shield a vulnerable student.
- Provide peer supports and training.

Considerations relating to the student with autism's family

- Be considerate of the family's needs and expectations. Be sure to include them in all meetings and discussions involving the student.
- Be respectful to family members when meeting as a team. If everyone is using a formal title, such as Mrs. or Mr., do not refer to him or her as "the mom" or "the dad."





Considerations relating to behavior problems and incidents

- In many schools, when a student exhibits a maladaptive behavior that is seen as aggressive, dangerous or refractory to other interventions, the principal, case manager or another administrator is called in to the situation. In these instances, it is essential to remember that behavior is a means of communication, and not necessarily an overt desire to inflame or harm others. It is rare that an extreme behavior just occurs one day. More often an extreme behavior occurs when there is a pattern of inappropriate supports and interventions and the student builds up frustration over time. If called in to assist:
 - Be familiar with the details of the student's positive behavior support plan.
 - Remain calm.
 - Take care not to embarrass or reprimand the child immediately and in view of others.
 - When addressing the student, use limited verbal directions. Less can be more.
 - Excessive talking and agitated adults can escalate a situation and overwhelm the student and impede his ability to understand and comply with directions or communicate to his best ability. A few minutes of quiet followed by short, simple sentences can help everyone.
 - Use established guidelines for communication and be prepared to wait for a response.
 - Give choices to help engage the student and de-escalate his sense of being pushed around (for example, 'Do you want to talk about this in the nurse's office or in my office?').
 - Use written input/visual choices/cartooning/social narratives to investigate the student's perspective, feelings and interpretation and to teach why his actions were unacceptable.
 - Sending the message to the student that the team is working to understand his perspective and trying to figure out why he exhibited maladaptive behavior (and then following up by instituting appropriate supports and preventive measures) may be more helpful to changing the student's behavior than a consequence such as suspension. Remember that the goal is to halt the behavior and prevent it from occurring in the future.
 - Obtain the facts relating to the situation from a variety of sources, remembering to gather information on the behavior, as well as the events and conditions leading up to the behavior (especially sensory issues that are often not considered) and the consequences typically employed for similar behaviors that have occurred previously (responses or inadvertent rewards for maladaptive behaviors can increase, rather than reduce, them).
 - Recognize and consider that interventions and strategies currently in use, even if well-intentioned, may be contributing to the development of the behavior.
 - Take care in interacting with the student's family, who generally dread reports of behavior. Remember that this happened at school, and while the child is their responsibility, the conditions that led to the behavior were outside of their control. Be mindful of their perspective and insights in working as a team in understanding the underlying cause of the behavior and developing a plan for promoting effective replacement behavior.



SCHOOL NURSES





School Nurses

It is important to be aware of any medications or additional health issues that a student has - or may be inclined to have, such as those described in the Other Challenges section. Be aware of multiple medications and co-morbid conditions - physical or psychological.

In addition to traditional medical care, some families may follow the advice of physicians and alternative medicine providers who follow less conventional approaches to treat the underlying medical issues or symptoms of autism; these can range from dietary supplements or acupuncture to chelation of heavy metals. To better understand some of these approaches, visit the [Autism Research Institute website](#).

Many students with autism have other health needs, as well as the illnesses, bumps and bruises that all children experience. The nurse's office should be a safe and supportive place for students with special needs, but effective interaction will require some understanding of the individual student.

- Awareness of the characteristics of autism as well as the specifics of a student can be helpful in avoiding or managing upsetting situations; some children may be at risk of running away; a door buzzer, fire alarm or school bell might represent a sensory assault - know what to do to avoid or manage the needs of a particular student.
- Be mindful of a student's communication challenges; ask for guidelines for communication from his special education staff, knowing that wait time for a response to a question, use of an alternative communication device or strategy such as picture exchange might be necessary.
- Since a trip to the nurse's office may not be an everyday occurrence, it is often helpful to get to know the student prior to an emergency situation; spend time in his day, invite him to visit the nurse's office, etc. so that injury or illness is not aggravated by fear of the unknown.
- Understand the student's medical needs, and converse with the family and/or physician with respect to special interventions or medications
- Many children with autism are on medications or special diets; even if these are not taken during the school day, it might be helpful to know what those medications are and what side effects are possible; be aware that the medical team/family may wish to keep other caregivers (teachers, aides) blind to changes in medication in order to keep their observations of the effects of interventions unbiased.
- Consider using a questionnaire so that this information is available in the case of side effects or an emergency.
- Remember that behavior is communication - consider injury, pain, etc. if a child has a significant new behavior.





Strategies:

- Be calm and positive. Model appropriate behavior for the student with autism as well as other students by greeting him, etc.
- Use the “About Me” information about the student to get to know relevant facts about his likes, fears, needs, etc.
- Allow a student with autism the support of a familiar aide or caregiver while in the nurse’s care, as this should offer better access to communication, increased compliance and reduced anxiety (for example, the aide might ask the student to open his mouth - and then you can look in).
- Getting a child to take medication can be challenging - ask the student’s family about strategies they have used successfully at home; other strategies that have been used successfully are visual schedules, social stories, or reward systems to promote compliance with taking medication.
- Use a **visual pain scale** so that a student can give an accurate indication of the severity of the pain, and pictures so that he can point to where the pain is felt.
- Use visual supports and examples where possible (for example, “open your mouth” might be replaced with “do this” and appropriate modeling)



- Allow students a place where they can keep things like a change of clothes to independently manage situations that require medical intervention such as soiling.



SCHOOL SECURITY





School Security

All too often there are news reports about the misinterpretation of a person with autism's behavior resulting in the use of excessive force and physical harm. It is critical that security staff - and ideally the local first responders - are knowledgeable about who the individuals with autism in the community are, and are familiar with the characteristics of autism. A student with autism might not respond to his name, or to a specific command to do or stop doing something.

Understanding the issues with communication, anxiety, unreasonable fears, and sensory issues, as well as lack of appropriate fear and a tendency for some individuals with autism to wander or run away (elope) is critical to successful and safe support.

An information piece, [available here](#) was developed as a wallet card, specifically to inform first responders about an interaction with an individual with autism. Additional information, including training videos and materials in many languages, is available at [Dennis Debbaudt's Autism Risk & Safety Management](#).

Please also familiarize yourself with the ["Autism Basics"](#) and ["Asperger's Basics"](#) handouts provided in this kit. If you haven't received them, ask whether there are ["About Me"](#) information sheets available for each of the students with autism in your school. The ["About Me"](#) information sheets will include a photograph to help you identify the student and important information on the individual student's specific like, needs, fears, communication and or behavioral challenges. Ask the school team for specific information about safety and impulsivity.

- Be aware of the social vulnerability of students with autism. They are frequently victims of bullying. Inform the school team if you observe situations that make you concerned.
- Students with autism are not socially savvy. Therefore, if a student is being bullied or tortured quietly, he is likely to react or respond – but may not do so in a way that seems appropriate or is easy to recognize. Consider the student's communication difficulties and make every attempt to fully understand the situation before reaching judgment regarding fault or behavior.
- Model appropriate behavior for the student with autism, as well as his peers, by greeting him by name and engaging him in appropriate conversation when possible. Establishing a relationship with a student may make easier to help him and others in an emergency situation.
- Be aware of communication and social concerns that might make communicating with a student with autism difficult. Be prepared to wait for a response, whether it is an action or verbal answer and bear in mind that anxiety may further impede the student with autism's ability to communicate in a stressful situation.
- Give positive directions. Minimize the use of 'don't' and 'stop' when possible. 'Please stay on the sidewalk' can be more effective than 'don't walk on the grass' for a student who might not hear the 'don't' or for one who isn't sure where the acceptable place to walk may be. This lets the student know exactly what you would like him to do.
- If you are having difficulties with behavior or interacting with a student with autism, ask the school team for help.





From: Debbaudt Legacy Productions' On Scene Autism Information Card

The person you are interacting with:

Communication:

- May be non verbal or have limited verbal skills
- May not respond to your commands or questions
- May repeat your words or phrases; your body language and emotional reactions
- May have difficulty expressing needs

Behavior:

- May display tantrums or extreme distress for no apparent reason
- May laugh, giggle or ignore your presence
- May be extremely sensitive to lights, sounds or touch
- May display a lack of eye contact
- May have no fear of real danger
- May appear insensitive to pain
- May exhibit self-stimulating behavior: hand flapping, body rocking or attachment to objects

In Security Situations:

- May not understand rights or warnings
- May become anxious in new situations
- May not understand consequences of their actions
- If verbal, may produce false confession or misleading statements

Tips for Interactions with Persons with Autism:

- Display calming body language; give person extra personal space
- Use simple language
- Speak slowly; repeat and rephrase question
- Use concrete terms and ideas; avoid slang
- Allow extra time for response
- Give praise and encouragement
- Exercise caution
- Person may have seizure disorders and low muscle tone
- Given time and space, person may deescalate their behavior
- Seek advice from others on the scene who know the person with autism.

Debbaudt, D. and Legacy, D. On Scene Autism Information Card. Debbaudt Legacy Productions. Port Saint Lucie , Florida - Waterford , Michigan . 2004.

