

Awareness of Chronic Health Conditions: Asperger's Syndrome, What the Teacher Should Know

This list gives classroom strategies for teachers.

1. Meet with parents, the student and professionals in the community to determine individual needs of the student. Listen to the parents. They know the strategies that work best at home. Use them in the classroom.
2. Develop an Individual Education Plan (IEP) specific to the student's needs.
3. Prepare the student for all changes in routine and/or environment. Carefully organize daily situations.
4. Teach the student the habit of moving from one step to the next. The student will have a lot of trouble with organizational skills, regardless of their apparent intelligence and/or age.
5. Use verbal cues, clear visual demonstrations and physical cues. The student will have problems with abstract thinking and concepts. Avoid abstract ideas where possible. When abstract ideas are necessary, use visual cues as an aid.
6. An increase in unusual or difficult behaviors probably indicates an increase in stress, which sometimes can feel like a loss of control in a specific situation. Try saying, "Do you have something to tell me?" The individual may need to go to a "safe place" and/or "safe person." Don't take misbehavior personally. Allow the child to withdraw for a time to collect him or herself.
7. Most children with Asperger's Syndrome use and interpret speech quite literally. Until you know the word processing capabilities of the student from personal experience, avoid "cute" names such as Pal, Buddy, Wise Guy, etc.; idioms such as "save your breath," "jump the gun," "second thoughts," etc.; double meanings; sarcasm; and teasing.
8. Be as concrete as possible. Avoid using vague questions like, "Why did you do that?" Avoid essay-type questions. They rarely know when they have said enough or if they are properly addressing the core of the question.
9. If the student doesn't seem to be learning the task or concept, break it down into smaller steps or present it in more than one way - visually, verbally and physically.
10. Avoid verbal overload. Be clear. Remember that although they don't have a hearing problem, and they may be paying total attention to what you are saying, they may also have difficulty understanding what you feel is important in what you are telling them.
11. Behavior management works, but if incorrectly used, or used without keeping the student's level of ability in mind, it can feed into robot-like behavior or be ineffective. Use with creativity.

12. Consistent treatment and expectations from everyone is vital.
13. Be aware that auditory and visual input can be extremes of too much or too little, depending on the individual.
14. Do not rely on the student to relay messages to home about school events, assignments, school rules, etc., unless you are certain that the student is capable of relaying the message. A phone call home works best until this skill can be developed.
15. Ask the parents what techniques work best at home and use them in the classroom. The child will function better in a structure common to home and school.
16. If the student uses repetitive verbal arguments, and /or repetitive verbal questions, try requesting that s/he write down the question or argumentative statement. Then write down your reply. Or try writing their repetitive argument and/or statement yourself, and then ask the student to write down a logical reply. If your student does not read or write, try role playing the question and/or argument with you taking the child's part and the student answering you in a way they think would be logical.
17. Train and work with an integration specialist, that is, a person assigned to the student to help the student integrate into class activities and to help the other students interact with the student with Asperger's Syndrome. To the students the integration specialist's role is transparent. The integration work is not conspicuous and does not "out" the student as being different or having special needs. But the integration work is vital to the main teacher's responsibility for the educational outcomes of the class. The Integration Specialist should not be asked to "take over" for the main teacher. The I.S. has only one role to play; that role is integration.