

KNOW YOUR STUDENT

FACT SHEETS TO GUIDE THE
LEARNING AND ASSESSMENT
OF STUDENTS WITH SPECIFIC NEEDS



Autism Spectrum Disorders

Definition

Autism is a developmental disability which affects the way a person communicates and relates to those around them. The term Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) includes the symptoms and characteristics of Autism in a variety of combinations from mild to severe. A diagnosis of Asperger's Syndrome (high functioning Autism) depends on the number and pattern of those characteristics specific to the disorder.

All people with ASD have impairments in social interaction, social communication and imagination. Repetitive behaviour patterns and a resistance to change in routine are also notable features.

Impact on training and assessment

Behavioural features of learners with ASD may differ across individuals. Learners with ASD may experience associated learning disabilities, low self-esteem and decreased motivation. Learners may experience difficulties with:

- time management;
- beginning tasks;
- organising training and assessment requirements;
- understanding body language and non-verbal cues;
- concentration;
- staying on task;
- interpreting directions;
- expressing thoughts and feelings;
- managing frustration.

Delivery and assessment strategies

The following strategies are suggestions. Each student with an ASD will have their own individual support and learning needs and it's recommended as a first step, that you ask them and/or their family or support network (if such a network is present and accessible) what the best ways to support their learning is.

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When liaising with anyone other than the student directly, ensure you maintain confidentiality, as per TAFE Queensland Privacy Policy.

Presenting and communicating information

- Provide clear, detailed information (oral and written) about the structure of programs, practical arrangements, assessment requirements and deadlines.
- Ensure the learner has a reliable and effective system to communicate with you and if necessary set aside a particular time each week to meet.
- Have a structured daily or weekly timetable; prepare learner adequately for changes to schedules; be consistent in approach and keep variations to a minimum.
- Plan for consistent strategies to deal with inappropriate behaviour, accepting that behaviour may relate to a need to communicate.
- Provide clear, explicit and concise directions to the learner; repeat if necessary.
- Check the learner's understanding.
- Present materials and instructions in a structured way using literal language.
- Use visual cues, dot points, graphic images, demonstrations or concrete examples when explaining new or abstract material.
- Be patient, encouraging and supportive. Guide the learner back on task if necessary.
- Provide glossaries or word lists if acronyms are used.

Utilising technology to maximize student engagement

- A reader/scribe can assist learners with reading and writing material.
- Learning materials and information can be converted into formats that are accessible for the learner e.g. audio files (such as MP3 format), Braille (a tactile reading and writing code, which is read using the fingers) or large print.
- Screen reading software such as Job Access With Speech (JAWS) reads electronic material aloud to the user. It provides audible access to electronic information, software applications and the internet.
- Electronic magnification devices are available in portable, transportable, desktop and laptop based forms. They magnify or scan print based materials and objects.
- Magnification software (e.g. Microsoft Magnifier, ZoomText) enlarges the whole computer screen including text and application buttons / navigation.
- Anti-glare screens and reducing the brightness or changing the contrast of computer screens can benefit.

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- Connect (also referred to as Desire2Learn) has numerous options to increase accessibility to information provided within Connect. Options such as screen readers, keyboard-only navigation, colour contrast accessibility features and zooming options are all available within Connect. Educators can access information about these options at <https://connect.tafeqld.edu.au/shared/help/student/content/en/Accessibility.html>.
- Audio recording of training delivery or note taking (a person or digital note taker such as the Neo Notetaker) to assist learners with handwriting difficulties and / or with mishearing and misquoting.
- A Disability Coach or Disability Support Worker can assist the learner with planning and organizing. The benefit to requesting a Disability Coach/Support Worker is that they may be able to look holistically at the support and learning needs of the student and provide some helpful ideas regarding software, or education strategies to help increase the student's understanding, participation and engagement.

All of the delivery strategies may be of assistance for assessment

- Arrange time extensions for written assessments and tests. Reinforce required timeframes.
- Plan for a separate assessment room, if required.
- Plan for alternative assessment / test formats e.g. oral report, demonstration or computer presentation.
- Encourage bullet points rather than long answer format where sequencing and structuring is difficult.
- Provide time to peruse instructions and structure of questions before an assessment so that any confusion can be addressed.

References

- Autism Help Education <http://www.autismhelp.info/adult-age/adult-age-tertiary-study>
- Tony Attwood <http://www.tonyattwood.com.au/>

Further Resources

- Australian Disability Clearing House on Education and Training <http://www.adcet.edu.au/>
- Autism Queensland <http://www.autismqld.com.au/>
- National Autistic Society www.nas.org.uk