



Top tips for working with autistic pupils

Produced in collaboration with the Autism Bases.

Processing time

I might need longer to process. Count to 10 in your head to give me time to think.

Warn me when I am due to answer a question to the class. I might need time to process the information and find an answer.

Focus on something else if you are waiting for me to do something. I might need time to work through what I have to do.

Name first then information

I might not know you are talking to me.

I might not realise whole class/school instructions include me.

Get my attention first and then give information.

You might need to include my name every time you address the class.

Keep language specific and functional

I can struggle to understand idioms, jokes and sarcasm.

I feel safer when you use simple, specific language.

Say what you mean and mean what you say.

Teach me what idioms and other jokes mean, so I can understand them if/when I hear them being used.

Write everything down

I process more information visually.

I can sometimes struggle to process what you have said. Rather than keep repeating yourself, write it down.

Write small pieces of information on the board as you are teaching, eg what page number, what questions.

Create strong routines and prepare for change in advance

I can struggle to make predictions about what a day/event/activity will look like.

I feel safe with routines and predictability.

Visual timetables and lessons help me know what is happening and when

Stick to the plan that is created.

Homework

I can struggle to complete schoolwork at home. This is because I identify home as a place for doing other things.

The expectation of homework can cause me significant anxiety.

Consider removing the demand of homework or provide a time in the school day when I can complete it.

Use pictures and concrete examples

I can struggle to visualise what you are describing to me. Help me understand what you are explaining by using videos, photographs and concrete objects.

Identify strengths and celebrate these

I might not be great at some things... but I am certainly great at something.

Spend time to find out what I am good at and celebrate this with me!

Do not insist on eye contact

I can struggle to process what you are saying. If I have to look at you, this can add further information to process and will not help communication.

I can also find eye contact difficult as it causes me significant social anxiety.

It is OK if I look away from you during a conversation and it is not a sign of disrespect.

Allow children to transition early

The noise and bustle of the corridors during transition times can be difficult to manage.

Let me transition a few minutes earlier than everyone else.

This means that I will be more regulated and pay more attention at my next lesson.

Introduce exit strategies

At times I might struggle to be in the classroom. I will benefit from a quiet, safe space I can go.

I might find it hard to tell you verbally I need to leave. An exit card can help me to share I need time to regulate.

Find suitable seating

I can struggle with sensory feedback. This means some seating can be uncomfortable and difficult for me.

Help me to find suitable seating. This might be a chair that rocks/bounces, or a Pilates ball.

I might move, fidget or rock during your lessons. This is OK and is something I need to do to help me listen.

Create a low arousal environment

I can be easily distracted and overwhelmed by visual "noise".

Remove any displays from around main teaching areas, such as a whiteboard.

I might need my own desk to help me concentrate. This might need to face the wall to reduce visual feedback.

Break learning down into steps/chunks

I can struggle with my executive functioning. This means I may not be able to remember what I have been asked to do or what resources I may need.

Break learning down into chunks presented visually. Include what resources I am going to need.

Time limited activities

I can find timers helpful, but I can also find them stressful.

Games or activities that are time limited can also cause me anxiety.

Monitor how well I respond to these strategies and remove them if they cause worry.

Explicitly teach emotions

I can feel all emotions just like everyone else.

I might not be able to label emotions or identify them in others.

Help me by teaching facial expressions and how to identify and label the emotions.

Limit the number of voices being used at a time

I can become overwhelmed very quickly. Reduce input by removing any excess noises or demands.

Ensure only one voice communicates to me during this time. This is to help me process what is being said and to avoid me becoming overwhelmed further.

Allow time for special interests

Many of us have repetitive behaviours or special interests. It is important I have time in my day with these. They help me feel calm and regulated.

Sometimes, I might be more interested in learning if you teach me through my special interest. For example, using characters from a comic on a worksheet.

Teach social skills and allow time to rehearse

I find reading body language and social situations difficult.

I will need you to help me learn social skills and have time to rehearse and practise.

Social Stories and Comic Strip conversations are a good way of teaching me these skills.

Breaktimes are unlikely to provide a break!

I can find social situations extremely draining and anxiety inducing. For some, break times are a break, for me it is a stressful and tiring time.

I will benefit from somewhere quiet for my break, which might include my special interests.

This time should not be seen as a reward.