

# Autism Spectrum Disorder: Intervention Strategies and Accommodations for Students with ASD

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# Why focus on ASD?

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When initially approaching this project, I thought about topics I would like to focus on. It was not a difficult decision to make to focus on Autism Spectrum Disorder, specifically effective strategies to use when it comes to the behavior of students with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

For the past four years of my teaching career, I have had at least one student with ASD in my classroom. At the beginning of last school year, a set of concerned parents emailed me asking me about my education, background, and experience related to working with children with ASD, as their son with ASD was about to begin the fourth grade in my classroom. I was able to say that I have experience with teaching students with ASD, but I was not able to say that I have truly had “formal” education about Autism Spectrum Disorder.

I work on a fourth grade team of three teachers. At the end of every school year, we sit down with the third grade teachers and group students accordingly for the upcoming school year based on which teacher would be the best fit for every individual student. Together the fourth grade team came to the conclusion that my personality and teaching style works best for students with ASD, and I became the “ASD Classroom” for fourth grade. To be more successful next year and every school year after that, and to increase my confidence when it comes to working with students with Autism Spectrum Disorder, I have decided to conduct a detailed inquiry about ASD and strategies to use with students that have ASD.

# It is important to become educated about ASD and effective strategies because...

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- Students with ASD oftentimes spend their days in general education classrooms with general education teachers
- “Autism prevalence figures are growing” and “Autism is the fastest-growing serious developmental disability in the U.S.” (Autism Speaks, 2013)
- As teachers, we always want the BEST for ALL students, this includes students with ASD!

# What is “Autism Spectrum Disorder?”

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- The medial definition of Autism:
  - Autism is a developmental disorder that is defined by behaviors including impaired social interaction, delayed and disordered language, and having isolated areas of interest (The Autism Research Foundation, 2013)
  - Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and autism are both general terms for a group of complex disorders of brain development (Autism Speaks, 2013)
  - disorders are characterized, in varying degrees, by difficulties in social interaction, verbal and nonverbal communication and repetitive behaviors (Autism Speaks, 2013)
  - include autistic disorder, Rett syndrome, childhood disintegrative disorder, pervasive developmental disorder-not otherwise specified (PDD-NOS) and Asperger syndrome (Autism Speaks, 2013)
  - ASD can be associated with intellectual disability, difficulties in motor coordination and attention and physical health issues such as sleep and gastrointestinal disturbances (Autism Speaks, 2013)

# Symptoms of Autism Spectrum Disorder

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## ● Social challenges

- Difficulty controlling emotions
- difficulty seeing things from another person's perspective
- Inability to predict or understand the actions of others
- disruptive and physically aggressive behavior
- self-injurious behaviors such as head banging, hair pulling or self-biting as a result of frustration
- “immature” behaviors
- Slight changes can be extremely stressful and lead to outbursts

## ● Communication difficulties

- difficulty combining words into meaningful sentences
- Delayed speech in children
- Sometimes considered nonverbal children
- Speaking single words
- Repeating same phrases
- Repeating what is heard verbatim
- Sometimes people with ASD develop very large vocabularies
- may not exhibit typical body language. Facial expressions, movements and gestures may not match what they are saying. Their tone of voice may fail to reflect their feelings.

## ● Repetitive behaviors

- Common repetitive behaviors include hand-flapping, rocking, jumping and twirling, arranging and rearranging objects, and repeating sounds, words, or phrases
- Self-stimulating behaviors
- Intense preoccupations and obsessions, can lead to great interest in specific topics or numbers, dates, and symbols

Source: Autism Speaks, 2013



# Facts, Statistics, Incidence

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- Autism now affects 1 in 88 children and 1 in 54 boys
- Autism costs a family \$60,000 a year on average
- Boys are nearly five times more likely than girls to have autism (Autism Speaks, 2013) / Autism is 4 times more prevalent in boys than girls (Autism Research Foundation, 2013)
- There is no medical detection or cure for autism
- 1 to 1.5 million people in the United States live with autism
- Each individual experiences the diagnosis differently
- Autism is the fastest growing developmental disability
- More kids will be diagnosed this year than pediatric AIDS, diabetes and cancer *combined*
  
- Sources: Autism Speaks (2013) and Autism Research Foundation (2013)

# Implications:

## Classroom and School Level

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- You will now be presented with four specific, effective intervention strategies and accommodations that can be used with students that have ASD
  - 1) Social Stories
  - 2) Providing Visual Schedules
  - 3) Communication Supports
  - 4) Sensory Breaks

# Social Stories

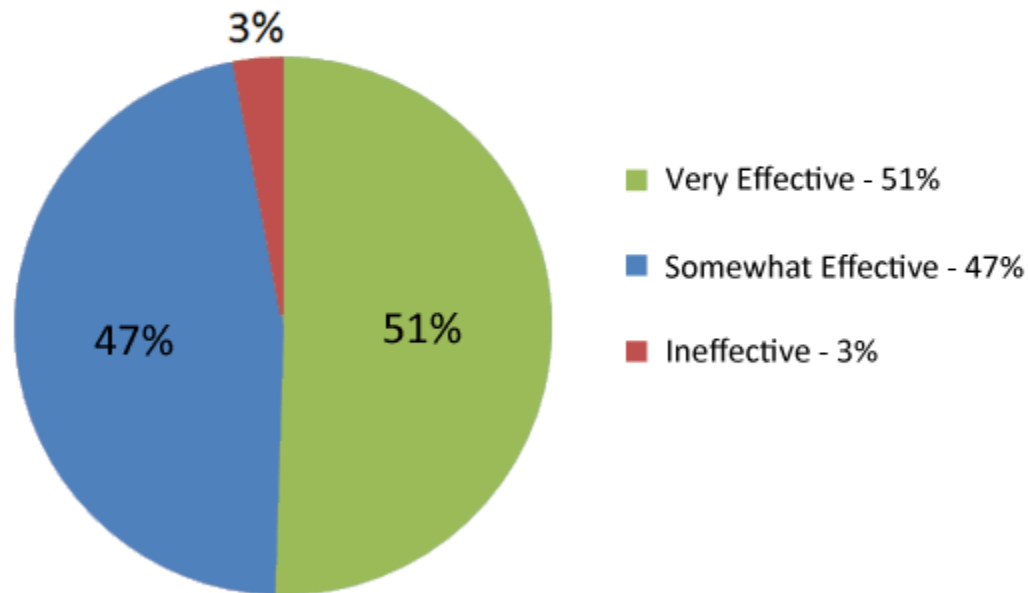
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- “A Social Story can be a written or visual guide describing various social interactions, situations, behaviours, skills or concepts and were introduced and described by Gray and Garand (1993)” (Educate Autism, 2013)
- According to Gray (2010) ‘a Social Story describes a situation, skill, or concept in terms of relevant social cues, perspectives, and common responses in a specifically defined style and format



# Effectiveness of Social Stories

**Teacher Rating's of Social Story Effectiveness  
from Reynhout and Carter (2009)**



# Social Stories continued: Writing Social Stories

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- Identify a specific situation or behavior to write a social story for
- Use 4 types of sentences: (Ali & Fredrickson, 2006)
  - **Descriptive sentences**- based on fact and truth, no opinions or assumptions
  - **Perspective sentences**- internal state, the person's thoughts, feelings, physical condition
  - **Directive sentences**- describe the desired behavior and responses in particular social situations
  - **Affirmative sentences**- state a commonly shared value or opinion in a culture
- Reynhout and Carter (2011) also describe two other sentences used for creating a Social Story:
  - **Cooperative Sentences**- identify "who" can assist the individual in a situation.
  - **Control Sentences**- use analogies to explain situations
- Source: Educate Autism, 2013

# Social Stories continued:

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- Tips from personal experience:
  - Have students read these at the beginning of every day to prevent behaviors
  - Use right before certain social situations throughout the day
  - Use as a reminder if the student is exhibiting a behavior addressed in a social story
  - Refer to the student reading the social story in third person
    - Example for a student named Connor: “When Connor burps in class, Connor should say, “Excuse me.” When Connor says “Excuse me” after burping in class he is being polite.”

# Social Stories continued:

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- Tips from personal experience:
  - Write social stories using “power cards”
  - A personal story:
    - I had a student with ASD in my classroom last year that read social stories every morning in a small binder we called his “brown book”
    - He became tired of his “brown book” since he used it since kindergarten and did not take it seriously any more
    - I made him “power cards” that had social stories on them, printed and laminated, and bound together with a metal ring
    - This student was particularly interested in Tiger’s baseball, so the cards featured star baseball players, and each card had a social story type reminder on it
    - Example: “Justin Verlander says that (student’s name here) should not blurt our answers in class. Verlander likes it when (student’s name here) raises his hand to answer a question in class. Verlander knows that (student’s name here) is ready for learning and he will raise his hand to answer Ms. Samborski’s questions!”

# Providing Visual Schedules

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- Provide structure and the comfort of a predictable environment by providing an outline of events
- Sometimes students with ASD have a difficult time organizing sequence of events (called sequential processing)
  - This can lead to anxiety or feeling overwhelmed, which can result in outbursts and problematic behaviors
  - To prevent problematic behaviors and ease these feelings, provide a visual schedule
  - Children with ASD oftentimes have great visual processing skills, so a visual schedule is an effective tool



# Creating Visual Schedules

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- What is the age and level of the child?
  - Use words and pictures or only pictures
  - Vertical or horizontal set up?
    - Usually vertical for nonreaders, horizontal for readers
- What are the transitions in this student's day?
  - Include ALL transitions, including breaks and free time
  - Include major and minor transitions and details
    - Details can include: times, amount of time spent, location of task/activity
- How will the child monitor and use the schedule?
  - Checking off? Crossing off? Peeling off?
- Teach the child how to use the schedule
- Think about where the best place for the child to keep the schedule will be
  - Should it be mobile?
- Decide on a way to show what is "now" and what is "next"
  - Labeled arrows that move?

# Providing a Visual Schedule: Ideas for Materials

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- Pocket charts
- Velcro strips
- Magnets
- Peel off stickers
- Envelopes
- Pictures
- Clip art
- Actual objects as representations (a science text book for science time)
- Cards
- Notebooks, journals
- Tape
- Hooks
- Folders, binders
- Brads
- Clothespins
- Colored paper
- Plastic overlay and dry-erase markers

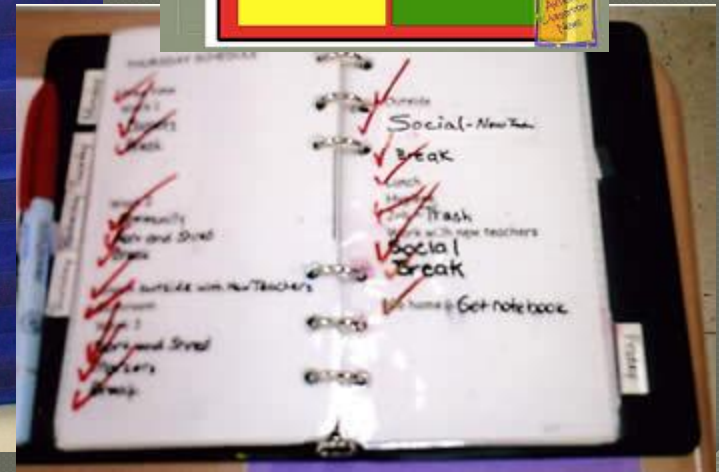
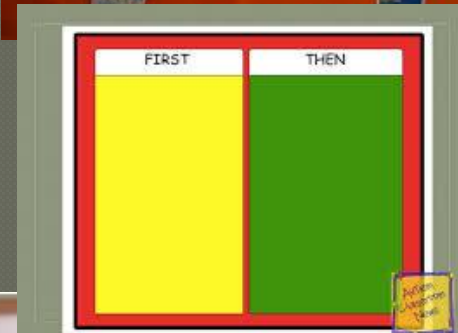
# Providing Visual Schedules: Examples of Different Types

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- Picture and photo schedules- Outline of events and activities created using pictures and/or photographs
- Object schedules- Uses objects lined up to represent the different activities for the day, a toy school bus may represent getting on the school bus to go home
- Pull off schedules
- Check off schedules
- Stationary vs. Mobile schedules
  - Stationary- posted in one spot in the classroom
  - Mobile- goes with the student, in a notebook or journal
    - Usually more practical for older students that visit several classrooms throughout the day
    - Even mobile schedules should have a designated spot in every location the student visits
      - Use a visual cue to help the student identify where the schedule goes in every classroom, a taped off section on their desk or perhaps a hook on a wall



# Providing Visual Schedules: Pictures of Examples



# Using Communication Supports

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- Children with ASD have difficulty communicating, they are oftentimes misunderstood, leading to frustration and oftentimes resulting in problem behaviors
- To help limit this miscommunication cycle, provide children with ASD support for communicating
- Some children with autism are considered nonverbal or nearly nonverbal



# Using Communication Supports: Helpful Items and Tools

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- Pictures
- Sign language
- Speech-generating devices
- Electronic word processors (this also helps with students that have motor skill issues, common with ASD)

# Supporting Communication

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- For the students that cannot express that something is bothering them, we must look for signs
- Common signs to look for and what they may mean:
  - Localized behavior may indicate pain in that spot
  - Being curled up in a ball may mean the child's stomach hurts
  - Crankiness may mean hunger
  - Pay careful attention to emotions they are showing

# Sensory Breaks

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- ① “Sensory breaks can help your child regroup and refocus” ([Helpguide.org](http://Helpguide.org))
- ① Too much sensory information is overwhelming for students with ASD, causing them to have outbursts

# Possible Sensory Breaks

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- Spinning
- Rocking
- Push ups against the wall
- Rubbing textures
- Wearing a weighted vest or blanket
- Listening to music
- Sucking through a straw
- Eating something crunchy
- Sitting in a quiet area
- Exercise
- Jumping on a trampoline
- Swinging on a swing
- “Brushing” the child

# Sensory Breaks

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- About every 2 hours is normal/average
  - Remember though, every child is different
- Choose appropriately considering the child's age, skills, fears, and needs



## Conclusion and Summary: Tying it all together and wrapping it up

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- ASD is the most common mental disorder in the United States, and it has a growing prevalence, so let's educate ourselves about it and learn how we can help students with ASD in our schools and classrooms
- Four effective intervention strategies/accomodations to use with students with ASD include:
  - Social stories
  - Visual schedules
  - Communication Supports
  - Sensory Breaks

# A personal note...

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## Terminology/labeling

- “Autistic student” or “ASD child” vs. “Student with ASD” or “Child with Autism”
- I have made a personal commitment to no longer refer to children with ASD as “Autistic” or “ASD”, but rather as “child with ASD, student with ASD, child with Autism, or student with Autism”
- Think about the difference... you should make this commitment, too!

# Remember:

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## **AUTISM**

***We are not here to fit into your box,  
we are here to help you realize that  
there is no box.***

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