Asperger Syndrome
Strategies for the Classroom Setting

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Comprehensive Intervention Approach

- Individualized Therapeutic Interventions
- Group Therapy Approaches
- CLASSROOM STRATEGIES (Today's focus)
- Family support and involvement
- Professional Development
- Consultation

Balancing Act

Modify our behavior and environment
Teach new skills and strategies
Best Practices

- Adherence to sound ethics and human rights philosophy
- Student Opportunities for Learning
- Individualized Assessment and Program Development
- Systematic Instruction and Evaluation
- Comprehensible/Structured Learning Environment

Best Practices (cont.)

- Specialized Curriculum Content
- Functional Approach to Problem Behavior
- Staff Development and Team Collaboration
- Family involvement
- Facilities and Resources: Environment of Care
- Improving Organization Performance

Educational Setting

No “IDEAL” educational placement/setting for ALL students with Asperger Syndrome.
- What is ideal for one student might not be ideal for another

IMPORTANT COMPONENTS

- Staff training (not just primary teachers)
- Individualized approach
- Availability of specialty therapists (e.g., SLP, OT, behavioral specialist, counselor) with training in AS
- Social skills groups/lunch bunch/best buddies
- Safe place: place for breaks
- Peer education
- Opportunities for community/vocational skills training
The Learning Environment

- Organized: labels, color coding
- Quiet, low distraction areas
- Separate work from free-time areas
- Accommodate sensory needs
- Clear display of schedule, rules and expectations

Know Your Student

- ESTABLISH RAPPORT
- Get to know areas of interest, strengths, values, needs
- Friendships
- Identify stressors and what the student finds relaxing/comforting
- How does student handle stress?
- Sensory needs
- EMBRACE YOUR STUDENT’S UNIQUENESS!

Be Flexible When Necessary

- Students with different way of learning and processing need different teaching approaches
- Ensure that expectations match student capabilities
Communicating with your Students with AS

- Use language appropriate to student's comprehension and processing abilities
- Be straightforward, specific, concrete and clear. Give ALL information needed.
- Never assume
- Teach meaning of more abstract statements
- Be brief -- Don't talk too much!
- Use visuals: writing, pictures, prompts, gestures
- Allow time for processing of verbal information
- Avoid verbal battles

Academic Modifications

- Outlines
- Pre-teaching
- Second set of books at home
- Sentence/paragraph starters
- Flexibility in topic selection
- Modified assignments (shorter, fewer items per page)
- Modified homework
- Use of computer / Alpha Smart
- Extra time for assignments, tests
- Alternative place to take tests
- Assistance with long term projects

Emphasizing the Strengths

(From Liane Holliday Willey, EdD reprinted in Autism Spectrum Quarterly, Winter 2005 issue)

- Objective (not insensitive)
- Engrossed (not obsessed)
- Tenacious (not obstinate)
- Rule governed (not rule bound)
- Stoical (not unfeeling)
- Precise (not inflexible)
- Diligent (not intrusive)
- Pragmatic (not dogmatic)
- Honest (not blunt)
- Finely tuned sensory system (not sensory dysfunction)
Common Strengths

• Often have average to above average intelligence
• Strong vocabulary
• Strong factual, rote memory
• Very knowledgeable about certain topics
• Unique and independent way of thinking
• Capacity for self-monitoring and awareness
• Can participate in goal-setting
• Special talents

Building on Strengths and Interests

• Provide opportunities for student to “shine” in front of peers
• Appeal to things they value (e.g., intellect)
• Give frequent positive feedback related to strengths
• Provide skill development opportunities when student is engaged in special interest
• Use special interests as part of reinforcement program
• Be flexible in work assignments, allowing student to utilize his strengths/interest areas

Race Car Reward Track

Move car to next space when you follow these rules in each class:

1. Raise your hand and wait to be called on to speak
2. Do your best on the work assignment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Start</th>
<th>Good start</th>
<th>You’re halfway there</th>
<th>Nearly home</th>
<th>Way to go</th>
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Start
Teaching Strategies

- Lectures/New Lessons
  - Give whole picture before and after a lesson
  - Use real life examples to explain new concepts
  - Provide opportunity for pre-teaching
  - Provide written outline or graphic chart

Ability to keep the BIG PICTURE in mind:
Helps us with organizational and time management skills

| How much do I have to do/ make outline of tasks |
|---|---|
| Allow enough time for unexpected interruptions |
| Make schedule of times I can work |
| Break project down into steps - create work schedule |
| How much time do I have to work on project? |
| How much do I have to do - make outline of tasks |

Inability to keep the BIG PICTURE in mind:
Leads to problems with organization and time management

MONDAY
- Project due in one week
  - Create a poster about the state of RI

THURSDAY
- Mom reminds child again to start working on project

THURSDAY NIGHT
- Child looks up RI on the internet
- Starts reading about Native American tribes that lived in RI

FRIDAY
- After school - child writes detailed description of Narragansett tribe and glues to poster board along with a couple of pictures of tribe, taking up half of the poster
Teaching Strategies

- Daily Structure
  - Keep class routines as structured/predictable as possible
  - Age appropriate planner/schedule
  - Prepare students for changes
  - Teach strategies to cope with change (more later)

Johnny's Schedule

1. Reading
2. Art
3. Writing
4. Lunch
5. Computer
6. History
7. Independent work
8. Home Wild Card

Morning Routine (mini schedule)

1. Put pack and lunch away
2. Go sit at desk
3. Take out journal
4. Take out pencil
5. Begin writing in journal
Teaching Strategies

• Use multi-modal teaching approach
  - visual, verbal, manipulatives, rehearsal
• Visual Supports
  - Use the board, write down assignments
  - Provide written as well as verbal instructions
  - Graphic organizers
  - schedules, written/picture cues,

More on Visual Supports

• Rules and Consequences
• Daily and mini-schedules, Calendars
• Choice boards; First-Then boards
• Instructions, Assignments
• Pictures to support text; Graphic organizers
• Color coded organizers/bins/notebooks
• Scripts
• Cue cards
• Visual timer
• Information sharing

Blue = Math
Green = Science
Red = History
Yellow = English
Semantic Map

Ford
Chevrolet
Mazda
Toyota
CARS

Cue Card Examples

Look toward the teacher

I need a break please

Write it down please

In the Hallway
1. Walk
2. Keep pack on back
3. Use quiet voice
4. Go straight to class

Voice Regulation

Voice Meter

very soft 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 VERY LOUD
Teaching Strategies for Skill Inconsistency
(Courtesy of Lorraine Christie, SLP)
- Avoid overestimating the student
- Avoid underestimating the student
- Remember to even out skills and bring up low areas, not just push high skills higher
- Let assets boost self-esteem while remaining realistic
- Keep activities functional—e.g., hyperlexic kindergartner can read a recipe to friends while cooking vs. memorizing 3rd grade spelling lists
- Educate others that child has gaps and is not just lazy
- Seek tutoring where appropriate, even if some skills in same subject area are accelerated (e.g., calculation vs. concepts, decoding vs. inferences)

Teaching Strategies for Misunderstandings, Inaccurate Perceptions, Inferences
(Courtesy of Lorraine Christie, SLP)
- Continually discuss assumptions, inferences, perceptions
- Ask for evidence, defend theories (How do you know that? Why do you think so?)
- Teach child to check with others in non-defensive way: Asking why instead of accusing, blaming or attacking
- Teach problem solving strategies (more than one solution for any given problem)

Script Based Strategies
- Cognitive Picture Rehearsal (Groden, Groden, LeVasseur)
- Social Stories, Comic Strip Conversations (Carol Gray)
- Step by step instructions
Picture Rehearsal

- Identify Stressors
- Design Script using
  - Antecedent (The Stressful situation)
  - Behavior (The coping strategy to replace maladaptive response)
  - Consequence (The POSITIVE consequence of using the coping strategy OR Imagined reinforcer)

“Someone Else Making a Mistake”

I’m sitting at the table working quietly.

I hear someone having a problem.

I take a deep breath and relax my whole body.

I pay attention to what I am doing and get back to work.
I feel good about myself for staying on task and hope that my friends can get back on task too.

Now I imagine being out at recess and having fun.

1. Sometimes someone asks me to do something that I do not want to do.
2. I STOP...take a DEEP BREATH...and RELAX my whole body.
3. I LISTEN to what the person wants me to do.
4. I say to myself, "I can be FLEXIBLE and do something I don't like to do...it won't take long!"
5. I take another DEEP BREATH and do what the person asked me to do!
6. I feel PROUD of myself for being FLEXIBLE.
7. Others feel proud of me too!!!!☺☺☺☺

Dealing with “NO”

1. Sometime I ask to be first in line and the teacher says, "not today".
2. I take a deep breath and relax my body.
3. I say to myself, "It's no big deal. I can be first another day".
4. My teacher is so proud of me for staying calm.
5. Now I imagine playing my favorite computer game.
Comic Strip Conversations  
(Carol Gray) 

• Person  
  Talk  
  Thought  

• Child’s interpretation  
  + That’s not right  
  • He’s so stupid  

• New interpretation-Actual  
  + That’s not right  
  • I want to help him

Joining Others in Play  
1. I see other children playing together. I want to play too.  

2. I walk closer to the children  

3. I walk over and say “Hi, can I play too?”  

4. I wait and listen to what the children say  

When someone is feeling bored  
1. Sometimes I am talking to someone and they are looking away, they sometimes roll their eyes, and they might have their head in their hands. I think they are feeling BORED.  

2. I say to the person, “Are you bored?”  

3. The person might say, “YES”.  

4. I stop talking and say, “What do you want to talk about?”  

5. I listen to the other person. I take some time to listen and talk about what they want to talk about.  

6. I am proud of myself for paying attention to see that the person was bored and for taking turns talking about different things.
Peer Involvement

• Education of Peers
• Best buddies
• Lunch bunch
• Peer tutoring

Self Control

• Involve the whole class
• Method to communicate stress level
• Identification of stressors
• Identification of calming strategies
• Classroom based relaxation
• Breaks
• Group Problem Solving

Stress Management

The Stress Meter
Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Relaxation Exercises

1. Do relaxation exercises in quiet, relaxing atmosphere. You can put some quiet soothing music on and put the lights down low.
2. Sit in relaxed position: sit in chair with feet flat on the floor, head resting in lap, back up against the chair, head squarely on shoulders, eyes closed.
3. Take two deep breaths - breath in through nose, out through mouth - very slowly.
4. For each of the following muscle groups, 1st tighten the muscle area (keep all other muscles relaxed), focus on the tense feeling (about 5 seconds), then SLOWLY relax the muscle area, focusing on the relaxed, nice feeling (about 10 seconds).
   a. forehead - raise eyebrows
   b. eyes - squeeze shut
   c. nose - scrunch
   d. mouth - press lips against gums
   e. jaw - clench teeth
   f. arms (on a time) - put straight out with clenched fist
   g. arms (on a time) - put straight out with arm toward ears
   h. legs (on a time) - put straight out with leg toward head
   i. stomach - squeeze stomach muscles (don't hold breath)
   j. back - put elbows together behind back and arch back.
5. Take two deep breaths - focus on any area that still feels tight and relax those muscles.
6. Imagine self in favorite relaxing place.

Breaks

- Provide opportunities for breaks for stress reduction - brief relief from overwhelming school day
- Build in to schedule, break cards
- Break activities
  - quite space to work
  - special interest
  - walk
  - exercise/sensory
  - relaxation, other stress management
  - talk to aide/counselor, ...
Problem Solving Worksheet

1. What is my problem? I don't know how to handle all the homework I get every night.

2. What do I want? What is my goal? To get my homework done without getting so frustrated and losing my temper.

3. BRAINSTORM!

Possible Solutions

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A. Take breaks every 20 minutes
B. Ask my teachers to give me less homework
C. Just don't do my homework
D. Have Mom do my homework
E. Do relaxation before I start

2. Write out the Pros and Cons, THEN, give each solution a rating (1-5)

PROS

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A. I can relax during breaks, I won't get so frustrated, I'll get it done
B. I'll have less to do
C. I won't have anything to get frustrated about
D. I won't have to do it and get frustrated
E. I'll feel calmer when I start, I won't get as frustrated, I'll think more clearly, I'll get it done

CONS

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A. It might take me longer to get it done
B. They might not agree, I might not learn as much
C. I'll get in trouble, I won't learn anything
D. She probably won't, I won't learn anything, I'll get in trouble if teacher finds out
E. none

4. What is my decision (which solutions will I use)? A and E.

5. Make a plan: How will you get your solution into action?

a. Who is responsible for putting the solution into action? [ME]

b. List the steps needed to get the solution into action: List them in order. Be very specific.
   1. Set up place to do relaxation with tape before homework
   2. Set timer in homework area
   3. Decide how long breaks will be
   4. Think of little things to do during breaks

6. When will the solution be completely done/checked? Monday

7. What was the outcome? How did it work? Worked OK, the first time. Got a little frustrated.

8. Will you continue to use this solution if the problem occurs again? Yes

9. If not, try again. Go through the steps from the beginning to come up with a better solution!

Natural Teaching Moments

- Opportunities for greeting: teach child to initiate (don't always greet first)
- Student watching other interacting → prompt how to join conversation
- Student having trouble maintaining conversation → verbal or visual prompts from behind
- Student is not paying attention to nonverbal cues → use visual/verbal prompt
- Call outs/interruptions → teach student to "think with eyes"—look to see where teacher is looking
Incorporating Social Skills Development in the Classroom

**Modeling**
- Have student watch staff or peers engaged in conversation, or other appropriate social interaction
- Point out specific social skills exhibited by others and the positive outcome of using those skills
- Video modeling

**Social Coaching**
- Teach skills, prompt, encourage, reinforce, give feedback...teach independence
- Choose appropriate situations - look for teaching opportunities
  - Lunch, recess, small group activities in class
- When to coach—When to allow alone time
  - Individualize
  - Balance
  - Consider stress level
Activities and Games

- Feelings Game: pass ball - person with ball answers question, “I feel happy when ________”
- Find a person in the class who feels _____
- Guess the Feeling
- Watch video and pause to point out facial expressions (point out all parts of face)
- Talk about feelings expressed in stories the class is reading
- Lunch Bunch

Teaching Positive School Behavior: Minimizing Challenging Behaviors

- FAQ: How do I know if the student’s behavior is “learned behavior” or part of the Asperger Syndrome?
- Short answer: You don’t…and it doesn’t matter—Teach positive behaviors using teaching approach that will work for your student

- Behavioral Assessment
  - Identify triggers and possible reinforcers of problem behavior (Need understanding of Asperger Syndrome to identify triggers)
  - Identify function of the behavior
Positive Behavior Support Plan

• Proactive strategies (everything we just talked about! 😊)
  - Schedules, prep for transitions and changes
  - Explicit rules (written) and response to following and breaking rules
  - Flexibility in application of rules
  - Modification of assignments
  - Monitoring system (self and teacher)

• Positive Reinforcement Strategies
  - Structured system based on reinforcer assessment (may not respond to typical rewards)
  - Utilize special interest areas

Use of Consequences

• The more proactive, the less need for consequences
• Loss of reinforcer can be effective consequence
• Avoid reinforcement of maladaptive behaviors
• Effective Consequences
  - Clear connection to broken rule
  - Predetermined – in writing
  - Natural/logical
  - Immediate
You Can Make a Difference

- Learn about Asperger's (thank you for being here!)
- Encourage sensitivity and learning among students, parents and colleagues
- Don't take things too personally
- Embrace the uniqueness of your students