

AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDERS: *Strategies for home and school*

Teacher Assistants and Strategies to Consider if you don't have an Assistant

Teacher assistants, school support officers, teacher aides or whatever they call you in your school – you are angels in disguise and we thank you for all your hard work with our ASD students. You are the person that the student with ASD may develop a great mentoring relationship with, so it is important that you start off on the 'right foot'.

8 Key Thoughts for Assistants

1. Students with ASD are usually visual learners. We need to show them what to do rather than just tell them. Use visuals to give instructions.
2. Students with ASD often can have difficulty with communication. Just because they can't talk doesn't mean they don't understand you. Be careful what you say in front of them.
3. Some students can talk but don't understand: they need visual strategies to support verbal information. You may need to minimise your speech so as to not overwhelm them.
4. There is always a reason for behaviour: social, sensory, anxiety, communication issues. Remember that behaviour is a second language.
5. Visual strategies are a key component of getting students to do work.
6. Establishing routines and consistency from day to day are also a key component.
7. You will need to develop a great relationship with the teacher so you can work together.
8. You may want to work with the other students so the teacher has time to work with the student with ASD.

11 Key Strategies for Teacher Assistants

An assistant should try to:

1. Work towards the student becoming independent. Try to allow the student to do things for himself at his own pace, even when he is falling behind a little.
 - a. Only start to help him when he is stressed and/or becoming overwhelmed by sensory issues in the classroom.
 - b. Doing things for the students promotes dependant behaviour and ever increasing reliance on you.
 - c. This independence will help to instil self-assurance and self-esteem in the student as he learns new concepts and is able to put them into practice by himself.
2. Teach the student coping strategies.

3. Encourage the student to respond to others in the classroom. (Prompt with correct peer group words and suggestions of how to respond).
4. Help the student understand the hidden agenda rules by discussing situations with the student, explaining what other people may be thinking.
5. Understand the difference between the day a student is able to do work and keep him on task and the days he can't.
6. Encourage the student to be flexible, social and cooperative by explaining the 'whys' and the 'how's' of each situation.
7. Catch opportunities where the special interest of the student can keep him motivated.
8. Fade direct support on occasions to allow the student to grow.
9. Teach the student how to learn.
10. Avoid being the one who rescues the student every time.
11. Avoid fostering helplessness (by doing everything for them).

Schools Please Note: Consistency in the aides who are working with the student is also important. Try to keep the same aide in each classroom or at least for each subject. It will make it easier for the student to generalise skills from one room to the next if he has the same person who is showing the differences and what is the same.

12 Top Tips to Keeping on Task

Ideas to Try: Use these 12 tips to support completion of tasks in the set time.

1. Take time to observe the student and environment to identify the barriers to completing tasks.
2. Adapt tasks before the activity.
3. Encourage responses (whether right or wrong, do not constantly correct).
4. Plan to have text books out, and examples to show them.
5. Organisation. For example: have pencil sharp and ready, page ruled up, book opened to correct page etc.
6. Give a preventative break during the task.
7. Limit choices.
8. Create a quiet area for them to work (collaborative tables have limitations).
9. Highlight the easy parts first, so they don't get stuck on "difficult parts" etc.
10. Review environmental factors.
11. Reduce frustration.
12. Ensure clear instructions.

Excerpts from Teacher Assistants Big Blue Book of Ideas and Teachers Assistants Big Red Book of Ideas.

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