Strategies to Help Students with Asperger Syndrome & High Functioning Autism Thrive in Secondary Classrooms

Diann Grimm, M.A. CCC-SLP, Ed.S.
Speech-Language Pathologist/Education Specialist

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Strategies to Help Students with Asperger Syndrome & High Functioning Autism Thrive in Secondary Classrooms

Autism Spectrum Disorders: A group of life-long developmental and neurological disorders characterized by varying degrees of impairment in communication skills, social interactions and restricted, repetitive & stereotyped patterns of behavior (NCBDDD-CDC)

Spectrum: Some children have intellectual disabilities in addition to autism; others are higher functioning with average or above intellectual abilities

Characteristics: Asperger Syndrome & High Functioning Autism

- Average intellectual abilities
- Age appropriate language skills (except social language)
- Significant impairments in social interaction
- Difficulty understanding social customs and rules (“hidden social curriculum”)
- Difficulty interpreting nonliteral language (i.e., idioms, slang, jokes, sarcasm, multiple-meaning words, metaphors, similes)
- Limited ability to “read” nonverbal communication
- Insistence on sameness and rigidity; sensitive to changes
- Difficulty taking the perspective of others
- Restrictive and repetitive patterns of behaviors, interests, &/or activities
- Executive function deficits in planning, organization, initiating a response, sustaining effort, inhibiting impulses, shifting sets, monitoring self, using working memory
- Fine motor difficulties that can affect handwriting and written expression
- Gross motor difficulties that can affect motor activity and performance in PE
- Difficulty with emotional regulation; can become emotionally overwhelmed
- Anxious and/or depressed
- Emotional vulnerability; confusion about own and other’s emotions
- Sensory sensitivities
- Academic difficulties can include; poor concentration and attention, limited work completion, problems with test-taking and homework
- Behavioral challenges are typically related to all the characteristics listed above

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Difference between an Asperger Syndrome and High Functioning Autism</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Asperger Syndrome</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Normal language development</td>
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<td>Restricted interest(s)</td>
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Etiology

- Cause of autism continues to be elusive.
- Current research is focused on genetic factors, environmental concerns & child development (before, during or after birth).

Additional

- Current prevalence of autism is 1 in 100 children (CDC, 2011).
- Autism is diagnosed 4/5 times more frequently in boys than girls.
# Strategies to Help Students with Asperger Syndrome & High Functioning Autism Thrive in Secondary Classrooms

## Students with ASD need Predictability

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<th>Strategies</th>
<th>This strategy is important because:</th>
<th>Suggestions for the Secondary Classroom/School</th>
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| **Utilize agendas**         | Students with ASD may: • Have an atypical sense of time  
• Be anxious about change  
• Need to know about changes in schedules ahead of time  
• Struggle with transitions | **Daily agenda:**  
• Display it so it is large enough for ALL to see & read  
• Preview agenda at beginning of the class  
  o Highlight activities & any changes from routine  
  o Students can ask questions about changes  
**Weekly schedule:**  
• Clarifies what is happening in the future  
• Shows the “big things” that happen during week (quizzes, tests, projects, etc.) |
| **Develop clear rules**     | Students with ASD may: • Need a “roadmap” to help navigate the school day  
• Rely on a visual “check” of rules rather than their memory  
• Need to calm anxiety about what to do in certain situations  
• Try to enforce a rule on peers | **Provide simple classroom rules written in the positive (Speak at appropriate times, Raise your hand, etc.)**  
• Collaboratively write rules with students at the beginning of the year  
• Explain clearly why each rule is significant to them  
• Define more abstract rules (i.e., Be Responsible, Be Respectful, Be Safe)  
• Post prominently to allow frequent review  
• Acknowledge when student follows a difficult rule |
| **Clarify transitions**     | Students with ASD may: • Struggle with “shifting” to different activities due to cognitive rigidity  
• Become overwhelmed with sensory stimulation during busy transitions (chairs moving, students talking, papers & books rustling, students bumping into each other) | **Point to agenda & draw student’s attention to the next activity**  
• When giving oral instructions for transitions, don’t walk and talk at the same time (stay in one place to talk)  
• Give transition warnings  
  o Provide “Get ready time” with 5 minute warning  
  o Write # of minutes left on board  
  o Direct students to clock or timer  
• Give student a job during the transition (pass out books, collect papers) |
| **Develop consistent classroom Procedures** | Students with ASD may: • Forget what to do & then anxiety increases  
• Do better with clear routines  
• Become anxious with varying routines from class to class | **Clearly define procedures & routines in the classroom**  
• Examples: bathroom break, sharpening pencils, beginning and end of class period, getting a drink  
• Fill out a *Procedure for Each Class* (See page 8) |
| **Control sensory environment** | Students with ASD may: • Struggle with unfamiliar, unpredictable or loud sounds  
• Lose concentration when over stimulated by visuals  
• Need opportunities for movement  
• Be sensitive to smells | **Seat away from fan, air conditioner, pencil sharpener**  
• Place busiest wall of visuals behind student  
• Rely on natural lighting when possible  
• Allow student to stand at counter for writing or reading  
• Send students on errands to allow for movement  
• Try to avoid seating student in the middle of the classroom surrounded by desks/students  
• Avoid strong smells in classroom (food, scents) |
**Students with ASD need Social Opportunities**

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<td>Identify student strengths</td>
<td>Students with ASD may:</td>
<td>• Give student a classroom job that highlights his/her area of strength (math helper, spelling expert)</td>
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<td>• Have significant strengths in academic areas, memory, problem-solving, etc.</td>
<td>• Promote acceptance &amp; belonging by stretching the definition of &quot;normal social behavior&quot;</td>
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<td>Increase peer interactions in the classroom</td>
<td>Students with ASD may:</td>
<td>• Consider who would be good partners for the student with ASD (i.e., more patient, tolerant of a different learning &amp; social style)</td>
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<td>• Be unwilling to work with partners or in groups</td>
<td>• Explicitly teach the skills of how to work with a partner &amp; implement partner activities when appropriate</td>
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<td>• Not understand the “hidden rules” about groupwork</td>
<td>• Explicitly teach students how to work in a group (i.e., leader, notetaker, timekeeper, spokesperson, etc.)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Unable to read subtle nonverbal cues from partners or members of a group</td>
<td>• Consider what might be the best job for the student with ASD (for example, a student who struggles with handwriting would not make a good notetaker)</td>
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<td>• Be rigid about the assigned task</td>
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<td>• Dominate discussion because of limited awareness of others</td>
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<td>Support during lunch</td>
<td>Students with ASD may:</td>
<td>• Allow student to eat in another room</td>
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<td>• Prefer the company of adults &amp; not peers</td>
<td>• Identify a trusted adult that is present at lunch the student can go to if problems arise</td>
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<td>• Not know how to join in conversation/play with peers</td>
<td>• Set up a job for student right after finishing lunch</td>
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<td>• Become overwhelmed with cafeteria noise, smells &amp; activity</td>
<td>• Set up a Lunch Club - Students eat together, then talk about areas of interest; requires some planning &amp; adult supervision</td>
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<td>Support during passing time and before/after school</td>
<td>Students with ASD may:</td>
<td>• Provide additional time to change classes</td>
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<td>• Feel overwhelmed with congestion in hallways</td>
<td>• Allow student to leave class early so hallways are less crowded</td>
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<td>• Not have the skills to join &amp; engage with peers</td>
<td>• Consider if student needs to go to a specific room upon arrival to school (i.e. assign a task in the office or library)</td>
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<td>• Be inflexible &amp; cannot “go with the flow” of social interaction</td>
<td>• Identify peers for support before/during/after school</td>
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<td>Encourage student to pursue interests in appropriate ways</td>
<td>Students with ASD may:</td>
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<td>• Talk obsessively about his/her special interest</td>
<td>• Set up specific times of the day the student can focus on his/her special interest (i.e., play a favorite video game in a quiet place during break time, read special book after completing a specified amount of work)</td>
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<td>• Struggle with social interactions</td>
<td>• “Stretch” work assignments so they link to student’s special interest (i.e., If the unit is on the British Empire and the student’s interest is trains, he researches the trains in the colonies)</td>
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<td>• Have difficulty with the rules and complexities of social interaction and friendship</td>
<td>• Encourage student to join clubs involving their interests</td>
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<td>• If a club doesn’t exist, be willing to sponsor a new club &amp; student can be the assistant (Chess Club, Video Game Club, Japanese Anime Club, etc).</td>
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<td>• Support student in joining clubs that help develop their social skills (Drama Club, Language Societies, etc.)</td>
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#### Students with ASD need Emotional/Behavioral Support

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<td><strong>Support self-esteem</strong></td>
<td>Students with ASD may:</td>
<td>• Focus on student’s strengths and find ways to let peers see these areas of strength (i.e., student who is excellent in math becomes the math helper/expert)</td>
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<td>• Be left out of social interactions because of unusual behaviors</td>
<td>• Catch student in positive moments (4 positive statements are needed to overcome 1 negative one!)</td>
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<td>• Unaware of how students “see” him/her</td>
<td>• Use specific words to define the behavior that was positive (“You really listened to those directions.”)</td>
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<td><strong>Support compliance</strong></td>
<td>Students with ASD may:</td>
<td>• Use language that explains the “why” of the situation (i.e., “I know you don’t like working in groups, but if you work together you can all figure out these difficult concepts.” vs “You can’t work by yourself.”)</td>
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<td>• Appear rude or disrespectful, but may not understand</td>
<td>• Use your classroom rules to redirect</td>
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<td>• Need explicit instruction on what to do in certain situations</td>
<td>• Always think Prevention (remove student from difficult situations, get support from your classroom routine &amp; visuals, redirect the student, give a sensory break)</td>
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<td>• Need reminders about how the rules apply to them</td>
<td>• Allow student to work toward a desired activity (“IF you complete this assignment, THEN you can read your book about WWII airplanes.”)</td>
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<td>• Struggle with transitions</td>
<td>• Don’t get into power struggles (You will lose!)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Have a limited awareness of his/her own actions/behaviors</td>
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<td><strong>Cope with rigidity</strong></td>
<td>Students with ASD may:</td>
<td>• Implement a “Question Rule”; set a clear rule about how many questions a student can ask in a given period of time; keep track on a “Question Rule” chart</td>
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<td>• Ask same question over &amp; over</td>
<td>• Use the classroom agenda to get student back on track</td>
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<td>• Get “stuck” &amp; be unable to move beyond issue</td>
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<td><strong>Cope with emotions</strong></td>
<td>Students with ASD may:</td>
<td>• Model &amp; teach calming strategies (i.e., take deep breaths, squeeze fists to count of 10, think of a peaceful place, recite a word quietly)</td>
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<td>• Have a limited ability to regulate his/her emotions</td>
<td>• Provide a Home Base (counselor’s, principal’s office or RSP room) a student can go to when overwhelmed</td>
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<td>• Become anxious when things don’t as they expect</td>
<td>• Determine how many times students can use Home Base in a day/week or month</td>
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<td>• Dwell on past experiences &amp; struggle to let go of past “wrongs”</td>
<td>• Identify a “trusted adult” a student can go to when overwhelmed or anxious</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Acknowledge upsetting emotions, “I can see you are frustrated with this. Take some deep breaths.”</td>
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<td><strong>Cope with difficult behavior</strong></td>
<td>Students with ASD may:</td>
<td>• Meltdowns can be cumulative result of t factors (change + teasing + difficult assignment = Meltdown)</td>
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<td>(outbursts, speaking out of turn, not following procedures)</td>
<td>• Seem to meltdown for no apparent reason</td>
<td>• Inhibit your natural response to talk; if you need to communicate something, write it down (e.g., <em>Let’s go the back of the room.</em>)</td>
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<td>• Be unable to explain why s/he had a meltdown, especially in the moment</td>
<td>• If you do need to talk, use slow speech &amp; limit eye contact, don’t ask questions</td>
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<td>• Struggle to understand the perspective of others</td>
<td>• Later, discuss what do next time; write out a simple plan on a card (<em>When I get frustrated, I can sit by the window.</em>); give the card to him before he melts down</td>
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<td>• Act impulsively without thinking</td>
<td>• You may need to compromise, it’s not about winning.</td>
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Students with ASD need Academic Support

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| Monitor instructional discourse | Students with ASD may:  
- Struggle to understand nonliteral language  
- Not read nonverbal communication cues accurately  
- Have limited working memory affecting response to oral directions/instructions | - When nonliteral language occurs in text or within instruction, explain what it means  
- Avoid sarcasm; students will be confused & frustrated  
- Use statements, not questions (i.e., “Everyone should have their math book out.” not “Does everyone have their math book out?” (Student might say no!)  
- Monitor whether you send mixed messages (i.e., verbal message is different than nonverbal message)  
- When giving oral instructions; slow down rate of speech, pause, repeat & keep them clear and unambiguous  
- Write directions on whiteboard or on a post-it note at student’s desk  
- Check for comprehension after giving directions  
- Allow for Think Time (research shows that when students have 4 or more seconds to respond to questions, the result is a more complete answer) |
| Support on-task behavior     | Students with ASD may:  
- Be easily distracted by inner thoughts or sensory sensitivities  
- Be overloaded with sensory stimulation  
- Be stressed & withdraw into inner world  
- Lack organizational skills  
- Overfocus on details & be unable to “see” the whole of the task | - Seat student with ASD near on-task peers  
- Allow student to ask peers for help  
- Watch for signs of student “losing it” by showing:  
  o Increased movements (wiggling, fidgeting)  
  o Facial expressions (grimaces, frowning)  
  o Vocalizations (sighing, talking/singing)  
- Redirect off-task behavior before it escalates  
  o Take a note to office  
  o Clean whiteboard  
  o Redirect student back to task  
- Use the Praise-Prompt-Leave strategy:  
  o Praise: Tell student what he did correctly  
  o Prompt: Instruct student what to do next  
  o Leave: Turn & leave; return to check in several minutes; verbally reinforce student for trying  
- Use TimeTimer (or other timers) to keep on-task |
| Support work completion        | Students with ASD may:  
- Get “stuck” due to cognitive rigidity  
- Show little interest in “pleasing people” (teachers, parents) for good grades  
- Be bored with grade-level academic work  
- Be unable to organize self to get work done  
- Struggle with “whole” & over-focus on the details | - Determine from case manager what is manageable work & modify as needed.  
- Catch student when s/he is on-task; don’t wait until s/he is not working to interact  
- Consider whether handwriting demands are interfering with completion; allow word processing  
- Provide organization supports, such as graphic organizers & checklists  
- Model calendar keeping & list making  
- Consider technology such as laptop, smart phone, IPad  
- Remind student to use online technology to access class notes, teachers’ Power Points, etc. |
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<td><strong>Support note-taking</strong></td>
<td>Students with ASD may:</td>
<td>• Provide an outline with key concepts or vocabulary prior to lesson so student can follow along</td>
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<td>• Be unable keep up with note taking due to poor handwriting</td>
<td>• Provide skeleton notes so student just needs to fill in blanks</td>
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<td>• Be distracted by inner thoughts</td>
<td>• Allow student to copy peer notes</td>
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<td>• Become anxious if pace is too fast &amp; they get behind</td>
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<td><strong>Support test-taking</strong></td>
<td>Students with ASD may:</td>
<td>• Be sure to give prior notice for tests; never give a student with ASD a pop quiz!</td>
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<td>• Become anxious with tests</td>
<td>• Indicate on the weekly schedule when quizzes/tests will occur so student will not be surprised</td>
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<td>• Be impulsive in responses</td>
<td>• Assist student in using his/her planner to prepare for tests</td>
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<td>• Have poor handwriting that slows down test completion</td>
<td>• If the test is especially difficult, allow student to take test in study carrel, RSP room, library, or another quiet, less stressful place</td>
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<td>• Over focus on details and get stuck on questions</td>
<td>• Break test into several parts for student to take at different times</td>
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<td>• Determine beforehand how many clarification questions the student can ask; keep track (on paper) of how many so there is so room for disagreement</td>
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<td>• Determine if student may be able to answer fewer questions (enough to determine whether or not s/he knows the material)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Watch for confusing or nonliteral language on tests</td>
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<td>• Think about what type of questions could be especially difficult:</td>
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<td></td>
<td>o True-False questions can cause problems; students can get stuck on words like some and many</td>
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<td>o Fill-in-Blank questions: Provide a word blank to assist with memory</td>
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<td>o Essay questions; Slow &amp; laborious handwriting can interfere with responses</td>
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Procedures for Each Class

Class:__________________ Teacher:__________________________

Beginning of class:
- ☐ Seating:________________________________________
- ☐ Check agenda:____________________________________
- ☐ Homework:_______________________________________
- ☐ Get started on Warm-Up:___________________________

Classroom Procedures:
- ☐ Going to bathroom:________________________________
- ☐ Getting a drink:___________________________________
- ☐ Going to my locker:________________________________
- ☐ Going to the office:_______________________________
- ☐ Sharpening pencil:___________________________
- ☐ Asking questions:________________________________

What to do if . . .
- ☐ I don’t have class materials: ________________________
- ☐ I need to leave the room or I can’t cope: ______________
- ☐ I forgot my homework: ____________________________

End of class:
- ☐ Write homework assignment:________________________
- ☐ Dismissal procedure: _______________________________
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Resources
(Most of these books can be purchased online through Amazon, Barnes/Noble, Borders)

General Books about ASD


Books about Self-Awareness


Adolescents and School


Strategies to Help Students with Asperger Syndrome & High Functioning Autism Thrive in Secondary Classrooms

Behavior/Emotions


Social


Websites


- Autism Society of America. Promotes lifelong access and opportunities for persons within the autism spectrum and their families, to be fully included, participating members of their communities through advocacy, public awareness, education, and research related to autism. http://www.autism-society.org