

Autism Spectrum Disorders

Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) are neurodevelopmental disorders characterized by difficulties with social interaction and communication. Asperger’s Syndrome (AS) falls within this spectrum and is sometimes referred to as “high functioning autism.” The following list is designed as a general overview of the autism spectrum. An individual on the autism spectrum may exhibit some of the following characteristics:

What You Might Observe:

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| 1. May exhibit awkward eye contact, posture, and/or gestures | 5. May misunderstand tone of voice, jokes, facial expressions, sarcasm, and other subtle messages | 9. May come across as argumentative, rude, or monopolizing |
| 2. Difficulty with changes in classroom, seating, and syllabi | 6. Oddities in vocal pitch, volume, intonation | 10. Displays literal and concrete thinking patterns |
| 3. Sensory sensitivity (lights, sounds, touch, smells) | 7. May be easily distracted, particularly in long classes | 11. May use calming or focusing strategies such as rocking, tapping, or pacing |
| 4. May have delayed responses | 8. Strong, narrow interests | 12. May become easily overwhelmed |

The following strengths and struggles are generally shared by students across the spectrum, although each individual student experiences unique strengths and challenges. Consult the strategies column for ways to better assist students to have a successful experience both in and out of the classroom.

Strengths	Struggles	Strategies
1. Above average to superior intellect	1. Initiating/sustaining effort	1. Provide direct feedback, set clear boundaries
2. Passionate commitment to ideas	2. Setting boundaries	2. Allow breaks during class
3. Strong sense of equality and justice	3. Working in groups	3. Consider allowing laptop for note taking
4. Exceptional talents in one specific area	4. Initiating, planning, organizing, and carrying out tasks	4. Avoid cold-calling in class
5. Diligent with routine work and excellent memory	5. Seeing others points of views	5. Avoid idioms, metaphors, sarcasm
6. Strong pursuit of knowledge within areas of interest	6. Understanding social rules	6. Consider assigning group roles
7. Good visual and spatial learners	7. Assessing priorities and performance	7. Provide visual learning tools when possible (pictures, charts)
8. Original ways of solving Problems	8. Asking for clarification or assistance	8. Supplement oral instructions with written instructions
	9. Interpreting vague instructions	9. Explain purpose of assignment
	10. Abstract concepts and seeing the “big picture”	10. Utilize syllabus and note changes as soon as possible