

AUTISM

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a neurological and developmental disorder that affects how people interact with others, communicate, learn, and behave. ASD is a medical diagnosis often further described as level 1-3. Educational autism identifies a student who exhibits behaviors characteristic of autism that impact his/her learning.

CHARACTERISTICS



- **Sensory sensitivities:** light, sound, textures, smells, etc.
- **Communication deficits:** late talker, low verbal output or overtalker, use gestalts (scripted language such as lines from movies/YouTube), prosody differences (intonation/inflection of voice)
- Difficulty with **social skills:** difficulty with abstract language (humor, double meaning, figurative language), oversharing, difficulty with conversation shifts
- Difficulty with **transitions:** changes in schedule and environment may be dysregulating, need more time to change activities
- **Repetitive behaviors** (aka: stimming): rocking, flapping, spinning, touching/rubbing an object, noises/vocal stims
- Difficulty **coping/differing emotions:** emotions do not match situation (too “big” or too “small”); cry/rage more easily than expected, display flat affect
- **Special interests:** intense, focused fascinations; common ones: transportation, characters, video games/computers, mechanical objects

SET THE RECORD STRAIGHT



- Autism is better understood as a nebulous cloud than a linear spectrum.
- It is not defined as high-functioning or low-functioning, but rather by level 1, 2, or 3, which indicate the level of support needed. Understanding the behaviors, skills, and needs of a student with autism takes more personal understanding and nuance.
- Asperger's Syndrome is no longer a diagnosis or term used (previously identified as "high functioning" autism). Now, ASD-Level 1 is the medical diagnosis, and educational autism is the Department of Education (DESE) identification given, and students' strengths and weaknesses are further detailed individually.
- ASD (DSM-V: autism spectrum disorder) is diagnosed by a team of medical professionals. Educational Autism is an educational identification assigned to students under IDEA by an LEA evaluation team.
- Stimming is a purposeful behavior (usually calming) that should not be restricted. If a stimming behavior is harmful (picking/hitting self) or especially disruptive, it should be modified, but never punished.

POSSIBLE SUPPORTS



- sensory breaks
- speech therapy and occupational therapy
- direct social skills teaching
- peer buddies
- modeling
- allow use of headphones, hats, weighted vests or other sensory helpers
- visual schedule
- allow handwriting modifications
- explicit explanation of anticipated changes
- allow processing time (6 second rule)
- regulation activities
- incorporate special interests
- alternate forms of assessment
- environmental changes such as
 - “soundless applause” for assemblies
 - softened lighting
 - sound dampening
 - flexible seating
- autism awareness activities for the school community



MORE RESOURCES

[Google Sheet](#) with tabs for articles, podcasts, and videos
<https://bit.ly/4lXxD3v>

