

Important Things for Teachers to Consider About Students with Asperger's Syndrome (AS)

1. The student with Asperger's has a developmental disorder that causes him or her to behave and respond in a different way from other students. Staff must carefully individualise their approach for each of these students; it will not work out to treat them just the same as other students.
2. Students with AS will show a surprising sensitivity to the personality of the teacher. Effective teaching will only occur by those who give them true understanding and affection, who show kindness towards them and humour. The teacher's underlying emotional attitude will influence the mood and behaviour of the child.
3. Classroom routines should be kept as consistent, structured and predictable as possible. Students with AS often don't like surprises. They should be prepared in advance, when possible, for changes and transitions, including things such as schedule breaks, vacation days, etc.
4. Rules should be applied carefully. Many students with AS can be fairly rigid about following "rules" quite literally. Rules and guidelines are better written down for the student, but they should be applied with some flexibility. The rules do not have to be exactly the same for the child with AS as for the rest of the students - their needs and abilities are different.
5. Take advantage of a student's areas of special interest when teaching. The student will learn best when an area of high personal interest is on the agenda and this will connect the student's interests to the teaching process. Use access to the special interests as a reward to the student for successful completion of other tasks or adherence to rules or behavioural expectations.
6. Most students with AS respond well to the use of visuals: schedules, charts, lists, pictures, etc. Their visual memory works more efficiently than their auditory memory. Too many verbal directions or explanations will be lost on the student with AS. Always clarify understanding after a verbal instruction. Tasks with several stages must be written down. The student needs to see a finished model of what the title page should look like, for example, otherwise they will create their own visual image which may or may not be correct.
7. Try to keep teaching fairly concrete. Avoid language that may be misunderstood, such as sarcasm, confusing figurative speech, idioms, etc. Work to break down and simplify more abstract language and concepts. Explicit, didactic teaching of strategies can be very helpful, to assist the student gain proficiency in areas such as organisation and study skills.
8. School staff outside of the classroom, such as physical education teachers, bus drivers, canteen monitors, librarians, etc., should be familiar with the student's style and needs and have been given adequate training in

management approaches. Less structured settings such as the playground, where the routines and expectations are less clear tend to be difficult for the student with AS. They may choose to be elsewhere e.g. the library.

9. Try to avoid escalating power struggles. Students with AS often do not understand rigid displays of authority or anger and will themselves become more rigid and stubborn if forcefully confronted. Their behaviour can then get rapidly out of control, and at that point it is often better to back off and let things cool down. It is always preferable, when possible, to anticipate such situations and take preventative action to avoid the confrontation through calmness, negotiation, presentation of choices or diversion of attention elsewhere.
10. A critical area is the promotion of more appropriate social interactions and helping the student fit in better socially. Formal social skills training can take place both in the classroom and in more individualised settings. Approaches that have been most successful utilise direct modelling and role playing at a concrete level. It is often useful to use a dyad approach where the student is paired with another to carry out such structured encounters. The use of a "buddy system" can be very useful, since these students relate best 1-1. Selection of a non-Asperger's peer buddy for the student can be a tool to help build social skills, encourage friendships and reduce stigmatisation.
11. Protect the student from teasing both in and out of the classroom since it is one of the greatest sources of anxiety for children with AS. Efforts should be made to help other students arrive at a better understanding of the child with AS, in a way that will promote tolerance and acceptance.
12. Teachers should be alert to the potential for mood problems such as anxiety or depression, particularly in the older student with AS. Some students with significant compulsive symptoms or ritualistic behaviours are assisted by prescribed medications.
13. Occasionally, medication may be needed to address more severe behaviour problems that have not responded to non-medical, behavioural interventions. In attempting to put a comprehensive teaching and management plan into place at school, it is helpful for staff and parents to work closely together, since parents often are most familiar with what has worked in the past for a given child. It is also wise to put as many details of the plan as possible into an Individual Educational Plan so that progress can be monitored and carried over from year to year.

Adapted from: Thoughts for Management in the School by Stephen Bauer, M.D., M.P.H

Source: <http://members.ozemail.com.au/~rbmitch/Asperger14.htm>