

## Creating a structured 'autism friendly' classroom environment

**We strive to overcome the potential 'barriers to learning' for our students with ASD.**

We can help our students engage and learn by considering the physical classroom environment.

- Make the purpose of the environment clear. The physical structure provides environmental organisation, using the arrangement of furniture to create distinct areas, with visual and contextual cues lets our students know what happens in each area. Using key symbols can also explain the purpose of each area.
- Visual aids help our students understand the world around them, classrooms encourage communication and independence by making photos/symbols readily available to encourage children's spontaneity when making requests.



- Remove unnecessary distractions:
  - **Physical:** excess resources/chairs/tables, store unnecessary equipment in classroom cupboards.
  - **Auditory:** be aware of competing sounds – from the computer/CD player, also be aware of subtle sounds that could prove a distraction – the buzz of lighting, the fridge.
  - **Visual:** Limit the amount of visual clutter – keep resources in lidded boxes, place plain material over cluttered areas, e.g. to cover messy tray units.



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Don't feel the need to use every display board – can back some display boards with the same colour backing paper as the blinds/walls to reduce visual distraction. Can consider using a consistent colour to match the walls/blinds/boxes on shelves/table to provide a clear visual background.

- Provide a distraction free, visually de-cluttered safe space for independent learning:

Work table areas should be away from the group table for individual work, (TEACCH system) bordered by a clear wall/divider.



Consider where students sit in the classroom and what they are looking at, are there any distractions that may make them lose focus?

- Structure – visual timetables

Why use a visual timetable? – it provides structure, removes uncertainty, gives students a sense of security as it enables them to predict what will happen next, builds sequential memory, helps them to understand what is expected of them, reduces anxiety and assists transition time.

Consider the type of timetable that is appropriate to the whole class/ individual students' needs: can use objects/pictures/symbols/words; also consider the length of the timetable – now and next board/ part day/full day. Think about how they know the activity has finished, e.g. turn the timetable card around on the board – place symbol in finished pocket – cross off written schedule.

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Due to the mixed learning needs of our students, we need to allow for sensory stimulating areas, as well as areas that are de-cluttered and clear allowing for our students to ASD to learn effectively with minimum distraction.

Take account of students' **sensory processing difficulties** – provide time throughout the day for them to enter a calm, quiet space to prevent sensory overload or take part in calming, deep pressure activities, such as using weighted blankets, the peanut ball, having deep massage.



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Timetabled sessions in our quiet learning room (distraction free, low stimulation room) are available for those students who struggle to function effectively in the main classroom.

Access to an outdoor environment to engage in vestibular activities is also essential for students who are in a hypo sensitive state and need 'sensory wake up' activities, such as swinging, jumping and running.

