

FIRST and Special Needs Students



Speaking the Special Needs Language

IDEA - Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

IEP - Individualized Education Plan. Required by federal law and monitored at the state and federal level for compliance. The individual must meet the diagnostic criteria and the disability must interfere with their learning.

504 Plan - Section 504 of the IDEA. Required by federal law. Typically used for students with a disability where the normal learning function is not impaired.



Disability Categories

- ▶ Autism Spectrum Disorder
- ▶ Blindness
- ▶ Deafness
- ▶ Emotional Disturbance
- ▶ Hearing Impairment
- ▶ Intellectual Disability
- ▶ Multiple Disabilities
- ▶ Orthopedic Impairment
- ▶ Other Health Impaired
- ▶ Specific Learning Disability
- ▶ Speech or Language Impairment
- ▶ Traumatic Brain Injury
- ▶ Visual Impairment



What is Autism?

The definition of autism is a complex process. Most experts agree that autism is a brain development disorder characterized by impaired social interactions, limited communication and repetitive behaviors. Signs usually appear before age 3. **The cause isn't clear, but recent scientific studies believe there is a strong genetic base.** New research comes out almost every day on possible causes. Some groups advocate for environmental causes such as induced labor, heavy metals, pesticides and childhood vaccinations.

Autism occurs four times more in boys than in girls. The diagnosis of autism spectrum disorders has drastically risen since the 1980's. Some studies now claim **1-150** children are diagnosed as autistic with occurrence in as many as **1-94 boys**. It is unclear if this is due to the different definitions of autism used today, diagnostic practices or if the actual amount of cases has increased.

There has also been an increase in the diagnosis of **Asperger's syndrome**. Some parents claim their child seemed different from birth while others say their child developed normally and then later in life, lost skills.

Characteristics of individuals with autism

- ▶ Exhibit awkward eye contact, posture or gestures.
- ▶ Difficulty with “dealing with” change in routine or environment.
- ▶ May misunderstand tone of voice, sarcasm, jokes, facial expressions
- ▶ Odd vocal pitch, volume or intonation
- ▶ Easily distracted
- ▶ Strong, narrow interests
- ▶ Literal and concrete thinking patterns
- ▶ May “stim” with rocking, tapping or pacing as calming strategies
- ▶ Easily overwhelmed
- ▶ Above average to superior intellect (“Little Professors”)
- ▶ Diligent with routine work and excellent memory.
- ▶ Tend to be good visual and spatial learners
- ▶ Sensory processing (sound, smell, taste, touch, see) channels are easily overwhelmed
- ▶ Delay in language processing and in responses

Potential trouble areas in the world of FIRST

- ▶ Initiating and sustaining effort
- ▶ Personal boundaries
- ▶ Working in groups
- ▶ Initiating, planning, organizing and carrying out tasks (Executive Functioning)
- ▶ Seeing another point of view
- ▶ Understanding the “hidden” social rules
- ▶ Assessing priorities and performance
- ▶ Asking for clarification or help
- ▶ Interpreting vague instructions
- ▶ Abstract concepts and the “big picture”
- ▶ Interpersonal relationships



Success Strategies

- ▶ Provide direct feedback to the individual, set clear boundaries.
- ▶ Allow frequent breaks.
- ▶ Avoid using idioms, metaphors and sarcasm.
- ▶ When working in a group, assign roles within the group to provide structure.
- ▶ Provide visual cues (especially with schedules)
- ▶ Explain the purpose of the task.
- ▶ Provide transition time and warnings.
- ▶ Avoid asking rhetorical questions ie. “What were you thinking?”



Helping individuals with autism

- ▶ When correcting a behavior:
 1. Diffuse the situation.
 2. Bring the individual to a quiet place, with few distractions, like a hallway.
 3. State the behavior.
 4. Explain the rule or social norm that the individual is breaking.
 5. Help the individual establish an “internal” or “personal” rule.
 6. Have the individual repeat the “rule” to you.
 7. Return the individual to the situation as soon as possible.
 8. Use subtle reminders of the “rule” as needed.
 - ▶ **Individuals may not be able to make and hold eye contact. It is not a sign of disrespect, but a specific difficulty in processing information across multiple sensory channels.
 - ▶ Avoid punishments or time-outs.
 - ▶ Work with neurotypical peers so they understand the challenges of an individual with autism. Peer feedback is very powerful!

Additional Resources

- ▶ <http://www.understandingspecialeducation.com/>
- ▶ [Ten Things Every Child with Autism Wishes You Knew](#) - Ellen Notbohm
- ▶ *Neurotribes : The Legacy of Autism and the Future of Neurodiversity*, Steve Silberman
- ▶ Your local special education teacher / department



Thank you

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