

Classroom Ideas for Children with Asperger's Syndrome

1. **Routines:** Classroom structure should be kept consistent and predictable. Children with Asperger's Syndrome (AS) need to be able to anticipate each day's events. Change and the randomness of school settings often support environments that create high anxiety for AS children.

Where possible, arrange the day in advance with visual supports such as pictures/graphics depicting the different activities. Visuals are necessary for most AS children and will make teaching easier as they find it hard to concentrate on lots of words and verbal directions, which often have to be repeated. Visuals are permanent and can often describe an activity very quickly and effectively.

2. **Visual supports:** Where possible, always have visual support aides to assist the child's understanding. AS children experience difficulty comprehending, and visual supports assist both meaning and short-term memory. Visual memory is often far better than their auditory memory. You will find them useful for many children and it will help in not having to constantly repeat yourself. Visual supports are particularly useful in transition times between activities as well as during unstructured times, which are often problematic. The whiteboard can be set up to show the day's events, or a simple handout can be given to explain how a particular activity has to be completed.
3. **Rules:** Ensure your classroom is organised, structured and well managed. Children need to know what they can do and what they can't do. Simple class rules can assist with the effective management of students and can be reinforced when rule following behaviour occurs. In addition, when rules are not followed there should be appropriate consequences, which relate to the rules and can be applied as soon as possible. Sending a child to the Principal or suspending them for a classroom infraction may not have any meaning and may actually reward the inappropriate behaviour. Classroom rules could be worded like this:

- I WILL BE A FRIEND TO MY CLASSMATES
- I WILL TALK QUIETLY
- I WILL PUT UP MY HAND WHEN I NEED HELP
- I WILL BRING PENCILS AND PENS TO CLASS
- I WILL FOLLOW THE TEACHER'S DIRECTIONS

These types of rules require teaching e.g. what does "friend" mean, what does "talk quietly" mean. These rules will be more effective if they are supported by visuals and placed around the classroom on each wall where they are clearly displayed and can be referred to.

4. **Playground:** Often the most difficult time for many AS children is in the playground as they are noisy, unpredictable and maybe unsafe (e.g. bullying). These times often create anxiety in AS children and most would prefer not to have to go to the playground but instead choose a quieter area such as the library or classroom. If possible, allow some flexibility during these times where children can access both the playground as well as a quieter area. This will allow for the development of better playground behaviour and decrease anxiety as well as offer the child a calmer place if necessary. Some schools have also introduced structured play activities such as sand pits, car tracks, and interest clubs such as chess, computers, music, telephone books, street directories etc.
5. **Communication:** AS children can find verbal and non-verbal (e.g. facial expressions) communication difficult to understand and memorise. In addition, many AS children can have a high level of verbal communication however they may not necessarily understand everything they are communicating. When communicating with an AS child you should:
 - Simplify your language – only use key words and simple phrases
 - Be literal and avoid sarcasm
 - Express one idea at a time and say things in the order that they will happen
 - Give specific choices rather than open ended ones (eg. “Would you like to read a book or play on the computer?” instead of “What would you like to do?”)
 - Give plenty of time for a response – children with Asperger’s need extra time to process verbal
 - Talk in a normal, calm voice – angry and loud voices may trigger poor behaviour
 - Clarify meaning with the child to ensure that they do understand
 - Use positive statements – if a child needs redirecting, tell him or her what to do instead of what not to do
6. **Homework:** Due to the often obsessive nature of AS children, the end of school is just that – the end of school. It is very difficult for many AS children to understand that they have to do school work at home. If homework is non-negotiable allow the AS child to complete work which they have already mastered (practice) rather than ask them to do work which requires learning new material. Assignment work needs to be well planned and broken down into small sections - arrange the questions/topics in small chunks with visual supports and ask the child to complete a number of small exercises rather than giving it all at once.
7. **Empathy towards others:** Many AS children lack the ability to have or show empathy towards others. They don’t seem to have the ability to “stand in the other person’s shoes” or take another person’s perspective. For example, AS children may find it difficult apologising to another child for hurting their feelings, trying to feel what another person feels, imagining they are somebody else (eg. a convict settling in Australia), or how they felt during 9/11. AS children require help to recognise the effects of their actions on others and will need to be taught how to identify and respond to emotions appropriately.