

The Bridge London Outreach Service

In Class Support for ASC Students in Secondary School

1. Make everything visual and predictable.

- Use simplified language;
- Check I am clear about the task and help me to identify the steps to complete it;
- Write down instructions for me, if necessary / Give me a tick list of the tasks I have to do;
- Use additional visuals to help me with the lesson (e.g. word banks, spidergrams)
- Think carefully where I am sitting so that I have a positive peer to help me, if needed, and I don't get distracted by others;
- Write the lesson structure on the board so I can see what we are going to do e.g.

Introduction

Listen to 4 mins of a podcast

Writing task

Finish

- Frequently remind me of the class rules / write the class rules down.

2. Allow me to leave, if I need to

- Let me use a 'Break pass'/'Toilet' card or agree on a wordless signal with me so that I can leave the class without any fuss;
- Let me leave class early so I can get to other classes on time, or go down to the lunch hall before the crowds

3. Help me manage my workload

- Give me homework already written down or email it to me
- Set homework that I can manage and help me devise a homework/study timetable for home;
- Give me printed sheets instead of expecting me to copy from the board.

4. Prepare me for any change

- Let me know if there's a supply teacher, a non-uniform day or an upcoming trip to the theatre

5. Remember, anxiety is the main emotion in autism.

- Give me the benefit of the doubt: it's very likely that my behaviour can be explained by my condition;
- Give me a chance to correct things before giving me a consequence;
- Above all, remember that if I'm *giving* you a hard time, I'm probably *having* a hard time myself:

'If I arrive late into your class, it's probably because I'm overwhelmed with anxiety every single morning before I leave home';

'If I'm avoiding my work, it's probably because I'm not sure what I'm supposed to do, or because the noise of the class is too much for me';

'If I'm not looking at you, or fiddling with something, it's probably because eye contact is too intense for me, and I can listen to you better when I'm not looking at you'.

General tips for ASC pupils in secondary school

1. Identify 'safe places'

A safe place is an area where the student can go to when feeling anxious e.g. the library, sitting near Reception desk, the SEN Support room. This space must be available at all times. Agree with the student the procedure for accessing the area - Is it just for break times? What about other times of the day? Can the student use the break pass to go to the safe place?

2. Identify 'friendly faces' at school.

Identify some members of staff as a first point of contact for issues relating to anxiety or social difficulties. Ensure that the staff members receive appropriate training and support to deal with these issues.

(The Bridge Outreach Team can offer staff support, advice and resources for these sessions).

3. Offer regular 'check-ins'

Many students with autism find it hard to identify their emotions and may become highly anxious without understanding why. Whilst some students may seek help, others may need prompting to do so. Regular, timetabled, brief meetings can monitor a student's stress levels as well as provide daily or weekly reminders for independence skills.

4. Offer support in unstructured times

These may be the most difficult times for students with autism. Lunch clubs are a good way to help them form social relationships within a structured environment and with adult support. Make sure that the staff running the clubs are aware of a student's social strengths, needs and useful strategies. Clubs can develop new practical or physical skills, give a student an opportunity to show off an existing skill (raising their self-esteem), or work on social skills explicitly. (The Bridge Outreach Team has devised The Buddy Project – a 10 week social skills group package for use in Islington Secondary Schools).

5. Use school behaviour management systems appropriately

Make sure the student understands, and has their own copy of, all behaviour expectations and sanctions. Many students will follow these rules explicitly, but some will find it difficult to regulate their anxiety and the consequent behaviour. Use any 'timeout' or detention sessions not to punish the student, but rather to help them understand their behaviour, and together come up with individual strategies for next time.