



Center for Accessible Resources

## **Working with autism or Asperger's syndrome students Center for Accessible Resources (CAR)**

Faculty may encounter students who appear to have characteristics or behaviors that look like autism or Asperger's syndrome.

### **Common behaviors**

- Individuals with autism process information in distinct ways, and may experience difficulties with verbal and nonverbal communication and social interactions.
- Individuals may be highly gifted in certain areas, such as math, science and technology, or music. Some may see numbers as shapes.
- Individuals are typically concrete, literal, and/or visual thinkers.
- Highly intelligent students may have difficulty with organization, initiation, and the ability to get thoughts from mind to paper.

### **Challenges students with autism or Asperger's syndrome may experience**

- Difficulty reading emotions/body language in others. Students have problems understanding social rules (i.e. personal space).
- Difficulty understanding motives and perceptions of others.
- Social discomfort; difficulty with group projects.
- Difficulty with transitions and changes in schedules. These can cause high anxiety.
- Hypersensitivity to sensory stimuli: may experience sensory bombardment from noises, activity, lights, textures and strong smells.
- Becoming so frustrated and/or overstimulated they freeze and are unable to use coping skills.
- Sensitivity to normal classroom chatter and activity.
- Problems with organization (including initiating, carrying out, and finishing tasks).
- Difficulty with writing. They may write ten words to most students' ten sentences. It may be easier for students to use a computer.
- Fixation on details and an inability to see the big picture. Tendency to notice errors, be a perfectionistic, and have a fear of failure.
- Difficulty with abstract thinking and generalizing; some rigidity in thinking.

- Difficulty with interpreting words with double meanings; they may be confused by metaphors and sarcasm. Writing and literature courses can be challenging.
- Ability to state facts and details in a writing assignment, but difficulty taking another's point of view, synthesizing information, comparing and contrasting, using analogies, similes, or metaphors.
- Problems asking for help.

### **Strategies for faculty**

- Provide a clear syllabus and clear expectations (or rules) for the classroom.
- Provide clear and explicit instructions in both oral and written formats.
- Provide advance notice of any changes made to the class schedule or assignments.
- Don't use absolute words like "always" or "never" unless it's exactly what you mean.
- Many are visual learners, so pictures, flow charts, and graphs may be helpful.
- Allow students to type their notes and essay questions.
- Assist with how to organize a project; students can feel overwhelmed.
- Make email communication concrete and clear.
- Students may be rule-oriented. If there's a need to address behavior, speak in terms of the "rules" of the classroom.
- Let them know that asking for help demonstrates intelligence.
- Model how to cope with frustration, i.e. staying calm.
- Help students shift their attention by bringing closure to a previous process.
- Emphasize that we learn from our mistakes; errors are opportunities to learn.
- For group projects, help students find a role that will be comfortable (i.e. doing background research or a PowerPoint vs. doing a verbal presentation).
- Students may need to sit in a specific part of the classroom to minimize distractions and sensory stimulation.
- Suggest possible resources to students: Tutoring Center, Center for Accessible Resources.

Need further assistance? Contact CAR!

To request this information in an alternate format please contact the Center for Accessible Resources at (541) 463-5150 or [accessibleresources@lanecc.edu](mailto:accessibleresources@lanecc.edu).

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