

Strategies at Hand was created to provide special and general education teachers and paraeducators with easily accessible tools for working with students on the autism spectrum.

For ease of use, the various types of tools are color coded as follows:

- **Blue** – Learning environments
- **Purple** – Areas of student need
- **Green** – Transitions (planned and unplanned)
- **Orange** – Alphabetical explanations of strategies marked with an “*”
- **Yellow** – Resources and references for further information on a range of topics related to students with autism spectrum disorders

The interventions are presented from least to most restrictive, meaning that the earlier strategies are often simple and easy to provide, whereas later strategies may require more support and knowledge/training. Therefore, we recommend that you move from the top to the bottom of the categories.

Strategies at Hand is meant to be used as a supplement to research-based strategies designed to meet the unique needs of individual students who have autism spectrum disorders. It is not an exhaustive list of strategies and resources but presents a wide range of true-and-true interventions. We hope you find it helpful in providing the best possible support for your students.

GENERAL EDUCATION CLASS

Communication

- Provide student with picture communication system*
- Use simple sign language for functional skills with the student (e.g., toilet, help, hungry)
- Provide written language/pictures to support communication
- Use assignment book
- Allow wait-time for processing verbal requests
- Use short verbal phrases when making requests (e.g., “Time to work.”)
- Alert student’s attention to key points using such phrases as, “This is important; listen carefully”
- Teach the meaning of idioms and analogies; this is important as students with autism spectrum disorders are literal thinkers

Social

- Use mixed grouping so that beginning, middle and high-level students can learn from each other
- Allow students to work in pairs
- Develop and practice Social Stories™* or social scripts*
- Use pictures with words to present choices
- Integrate team-building exercises
- Have student/parent present to others about autism spectrum disorders

ACADEMIC

- Teach how to use and allow use of calculator and word processor
- Offer software to support instruction* (Resources)
- Supply books on tape/CD/mp3 or videos
- Integrate leveled texts*
- Shorten or make available different or simplified format for tests/ assignments
- Set clear and concise expectations
- Use differentiated instruction and universal design strategies* when developing lessons
- Develop engaging activities that incorporate student interest(s) based on a learning style/interest inventory*
- Have available alternative types of paper (e.g., raised lines, different spacing, colored paper)
- Provide graphic organizers*
- Remove non-essential activities from required assignments
- Mix and vary academic tasks (alternate new skill with maintenance skill)
- On worksheets and tests, circle or use highlighter to indicate items that student must complete
- Hand out one assignment at a time
- Allow student alternatives to handwritten assignments (e.g., allow keyboarding, dictating/ recording responses)
- Use study guides

TRANSITIONS

SCHEDULED

- Review personalized schedule at the beginning of each day
- Remind student of next activity throughout day using pictures/ words
- Have schedule ready and available based on student's communication style, building on literacy (e.g., words with pictures)
- Use timer to show time left in an activity
- Use timer to show time left for transition
- Practice transitioning skills
- Be sure navigation to next environment is student friendly (e.g., environment/materials are ready for the student to enter and begin work)
- Eliminate down-time
- Have activity ready when student arrives
- Give student object/task to focus on during transition, such as special transition pass, sensory item, etc.
- Have individualized auditory accommodations ready (e.g., headphones, earplugs, music, taped directions)
- Follow a non-preferred activity with a preferred activity
- Provide early release between classes
- Arrange for transition buddy

ASSESSMENT OF LIGHT, SOUND, AND ODOR

Many individuals with autism spectrum disorders have heightened awareness of light, sound, odor, taste, touch, and other factors in our environment. Students may be **hyper-sensitive** to environmental factors that typical individuals are not (or at least not to the same intensity). They may seek to leave an environment where they feel overwhelmed.

Other students may be **hypo-sensitive** and seek out sensory information. These students look at materials, especially shiny objects, listen to noises by putting their ear to objects (e.g., drum) or to the floor to hear and feel the vibrations, mouth objects, or not be aware when they are hurt or in pain.

- ✓ If a student seems to become agitated when going to certain environments OR prefers one room over any other, he may be experiencing a reaction to sensory stimuli. One way to address this is to assess the student's reaction to various environmental factors and modify, as suggested below. An evaluation from an occupational therapist can help determine appropriate environmental adaptations.
- ✓ If the room has a lot of pictures and other stimuli on the wall, try reducing the number of materials to see if it influences behavior.

RESOURCES

The following resources include items frequently used to assist teachers and parents when working with individuals with autism/Asperger Syndrome. The list supplements the explanations in the previous section and is by no means exhaustive.

Asperger Syndrome

- Attwood, T. (2006). *Asperger's Syndrome: A guide for parents and professionals*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- Bareket, R. (2006). *Playing it right! Social skills activities for parents and teachers of young children with autism spectrum disorders, including Asperger syndrome and autism*. Shawnee Mission, KS: Autism Asperger Publishing Company.
- Coucouvannis, J. (2005). *Super skills: A social skills group program for children with Asperger Syndrome, high-functioning autism and related challenges*. Shawnee Mission, KS: Autism Asperger Publishing Company.
- Cumine, V., Leach, J., & Stevenson, G. (1998). *Asperger Syndrome: A practical guide for teachers*. London: David Fulton Publishers.
- Dunn, M. (2006). *S.O.S. – Social skills in our schools: A social skill program for children with pervasive developmental disorders, including high-functioning autism and Asperger Syndrome and their typical peers*. Shawnee Mission, KS: Autism Asperger Publishing Company.