

AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDERS: *Strategies for home and school*

What About the Other Children?

One of the most frequently asked questions at my workshops is “What about the **other** children?” Normally this is a reaction to using sensory tools and having different rewards or expectations. I have found the way to address this is to increase everyone’s acceptance that everyone is different and for all children and staff to have an understanding of ASD.

It is only natural that people (staff, students, community) want to know WHY students have different supports. In the same way we address nut allergies, religious differences and cultural differences by education, we need to do the same with ASD.

Activities to Build Acceptance and Understanding

We can build acceptance by doing activities that explicitly encourage students to understand individuality. An easy one to do is make a display where each child contributes a fish that reflects their individuality. In younger children they may just decorate a pre-cut out fish, whereas older children could write descriptive words about themselves on the fish in different coloured pens.



Have a discussion about how successful we can be if we all work together. A great way to do this is watch the snippet of the movie *Finding Nemo* where the fish are all caught in the net (Just Google these words together to find: YouTube, Finding Nemo, Swim).

A strong classroom community allows for individual differences and celebrates what makes each child unique.

Talking to Children about Diagnosis and 8 Key Strategies to Promote Understanding in the Classroom

It is very important that children on the spectrum learn and understand what ASD is, and how it affects them – both its strengths and challenges. They need to know how they experience the world differently from how their peers, family and community experience the world. Learning about their differences from us allows them to better adapt and advocate for themselves. It is recommended you start this conversation around seven years of age. Focus on discussing all aspects of the child’s strengths and weaknesses, interests and personality traits, with autism being just one part of them. Often families worry about the impact on their child of knowing about the diagnosis, but interestingly telling them about it has been found to be extremely positive and beneficial.

“Before I got a diagnosis I felt limited.” Dean Beadle

Dean’s diagnosis helped him understand himself, and he now uses that understanding to explain to schools and families how to support other children with ASD.

In the wonderful new book *Very Late Diagnosis of Asperger Syndrome* by Philip Wylie he says “Now I understood why I could not survive in an office environment for long, and why so many people misunderstood me. But, on the bright side, I had found the key to my life.”

Once the child knows about their ASD, it is wonderful to share with the class and peers.

1. Have permission from parents to discuss their child’s ASD in the classroom.
2. Explain ASD at the right level for the class. (See our range of great books on pg 7 to help with this).
3. Give ‘real life’ explanations about the sensory issues that students experience such as touch, movement, smell etc. “When Johnny walks out the door at lunchtime he finds it hard when people touch him as he moves. When he is bumped into accidentally he may push you away.”
4. Read stories to the class and explain the issues discussed in the book and relate them to what the children see in the child with ASD. (See recommended books on pg 3).
5. Explain how and why the child may play differently to other children.
6. Give children strategies to encourage someone with ASD to play with them.
7. Explain how children with ASD need sensory tools in the classroom.
8. Explain how to be a friend to someone with ASD.