



Learn to identify autistic and ADHD children and how to help them be successful.

At some point in your teaching career, you will encounter a student with an Autism Spectrum Disorder. An estimated 1 in 110 children have ASD. These are some symptoms of an autistic child:

1. May have communication and language delays.
2. Can find social interactions challenging.
3. May show non-standard social mannerisms, like rocking back and forth.

Autism is a “spectrum” disorder, with a range of characteristics whereby some students exhibit difficulties in all three areas, while others display difficulties in only one or two areas.

An autistic child can be frightened by change and functions best when adhering to strict routines. This is why, during transition, you should tell your students; for example, “In two minutes we will change from our art project to reading.”

When there is a sudden change, distress will be exhibited by showing little emotional expression and avoiding eye contact. To help make transitions as smooth as possible for autistic children:

1. Use visual cues. Don't just say it, show it. Use concrete materials to complement verbal information.
 - Post agendas. Give students the visualization of what the day with you will look like.
 - Generate checklists for tasks and create cue cards that outline expected behaviors and procedures.
 - Place visual cues on a desk where the group is working or on top of the individual desk. To minimize any social stigmas, place reminder cue cards inside the respective student's desk or posted inside a notebook, folder, or organizer.
2. Prepare for changes. Students with autism are the ultimate creatures of habit and function well in a classroom that is structured with daily routines. There will, of course, be changes in the daily routine as the class transitions from one activity to another. There may be a change in the school routine, such as a substitute teacher, an assembly, or a modification due to weather. Use a visual representation to forewarn an autistic child of the change. Ask for confirmation, with a smile, that they understand a change is forthcoming.

All students respond well with a teacher who has a classroom that is organized, structured, and consistent.

Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is a different diagnosis, but it is treated with a similar sensitivity from the teacher. As the term implies, these students exhibit symptoms of having difficulty in paying attention and of being hyperactive. Although a teacher cannot prescribe medication (the most common form of treatment), you can provide a calm, structured environment.

1. Keep your classroom from being overly-decorated with too many bright colors that add to a child's hyperactivity.
2. Have a few selected materials available, rather than a wealth of materials that could potentially create confusion and conflict with other students over the use of the items.
3. Structure activities so levels of participation are calm and not just fun, fun, fun! ADHD children take time to calm down.
4. Portray a calming demeanor in the classroom. A teacher who is frenetic and thinks his or her role is to entertain the class by leading an activity or discussion is mistaken. Waving arms, making weird sounds and noises, and running around the room giving everyone high-fives or a fist-pump, patting people on the back and commending student responses with “Good Job, Good Job,” will go home wondering why the hyperactivity of all the students, even those who are not ADHD, has made this teacher exhausted at the end of the day.