**Autism checklist for staff**

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**I am in your class**

**I think differently**

**I have autism**

**How do you teach me?**

*I am in your class. I th*

**4 main areas of difficulty for students on the Autistic Spectrum are:**

**Social interaction difficulties**

* Make it difficult to understand social rules, other people’s emotions and feelings.
* Make it difficult to express their own emotions.
* Their interactions may appear formal, egocentric or “strange” so they may find it hard to form friendships, preferring to spend time alone.

**Social communication difficulties with verbal and non-verbal language**

* They have a very literal understanding of language and can be slow to process language.
* They may have difficulties understanding tone as well as jokes and sarcasm.
* Some have limited speech while others have good language skills but have difficulty understanding facial expressions & body language.

**Social imagination difficulties**

* Make it hard to understand and predict another person’s behaviour and imagine situations outside of their own routine.
* This makes it difficult to plan ahead and organise themselves.
* They find it hard to cope with new or unfamiliar situations.
* This can be accompanied by repetitive activities.

**Sensory sensitivity**

* They may be very sensitive to noise, light, smells and movement.
* This can make the hustle and bustle of college an unpleasant or frightening experience.

**The good news**

* The college environment is more “autism friendly” than school.
* It is calmer so there is less sensory overload.
* Everyone is more like an adult so there is less social overload.
* A new start can help students “reset” and develop better learning behaviours.

**The tricky bits**

* **Work demands** – more work, faster pace, higher expectation, a lot to organise.
* **Timetable** – lots of free time, independent study and coursework assignments.
* **Friendships** – more complex and subtle. Emerging sexual identity without the social skills.

**In the classroom, these are the tricky aspects to overcome**

* **Listening a lot** – because autistic students think in pictures and can’t work out the key points.
* **Writing a lot** – because of slow fine motor skills, so their brains work faster than their hands.
* **Working with others.**
* **Reducing their anxiety** (about choices, getting things wrong, sensory overload) to increase their learning.

**In the curriculum, these areas need support**

* **Organising**– knowing exactly what to do, how to go about it, when work is due.
* **Making choices** *–* guidance to help them play to their strengths when choosing projects etc.
* **Abstract thinking** – because they think literally.
* **Seeing the big picture** – because they need help to make connections and link ideas.

**What helps?**

**RULES ROUTINES REASONS WRITE IT**

**Rules**

* classroom expectations.
* When and where to hand work in.

**Routines**

* having structure is essential for their learning.
* demonstrating how to use VLE, show where homework will be posted etc.
* telling students about changes to usual schedule in advance (where possible).
* set up work buddies for more effective pair/group/collaborative work.
* timetable a subject extension(time, place, teacher, bring work you need help with).
* how to organise your subject into folders with section headings.

**Reasons**

* explain how classwork, activities and homework link together.
* extra input when teaching abstract concepts and to explicitly link ideas.

**Write it**

* write lesson aims and activities on the board.
* print power points, quick tests and homework instructions to reduce amount of writing, ensure accuracy so they can complete classwork later if necessary

A calm, consistent and positive manner helps students to build self-confidence and reduces anxiety. Making college life feel safe, predictable and accessible gives autistic students the best chance of independence.