



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.