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“Autism is the like a ultimate square peg, and the problem with pounding a square peg into a round hole is not that the hammering is hard work. It's that you're destroying the peg.”

— [Paul Collins](#)

Therakids

ADDRESSING THE NEEDS OF EDUCATORS AND PLANTING THE SEEDS OF CLASSROOM WELLNESS.

HOW TO SUPPORT THE STUDENT WITH AUTISM IN THE CLASSROOM

1. **STRUCTURE PHYSICAL SPACE:** Children with autism seem to respond more positively while in a structured environment. Set up separate areas or activity centers. Use clear visual “boundaries” to define those areas. Make sure that the room is well organized and free of clutter. Use natural lighting when possible.
2. **CREATE A DAILY SCHEDULE:** Children with autism respond well to order. Having a predictable day can make them feel more secure. Picture schedules can be used as a support. Make a picture card for major events (circle time, lunch, play etc.) that occur throughout the day and place them on a Velcro strip near the child. Teach your student to take the appropriate card off the schedule immediately prior to doing that activity. Visual cards also help the student if something is going to be different. If the class usually goes outside for recess and inclement weather prohibits playing outside, you might use the “universal no” card (red slash) to indicate that the class is not going outside.
3. **USE VISUAL AIDS WHENEVER POSSIBLE:** Students with autism are “visual learners”. They typically have a very difficult time understanding and committing to memory information that is presented in an auditory format. Visual aid examples are: visual timers, rule list, labeling items and shelves, social scripts or stories, reward sheets for behavior, and a choice board for snack choices. “I’m thinking” and “Ready” cards can also be used for the student as a visual means of communicating that he/she needs additional processing time.
4. **USE LISTS TO TEACH:** Task lists break down the task to be accomplished into its various steps. When a student uses a task list, they can check off each step as it is completed.
5. **EASE TRANSITIONS:** Students with autism seem to feel more secure when things are constant. Transition periods can be difficult for students with autism. Transitions can be unpredictable and can result in non-compliance or unusual behavior. These behaviors occur because a student feels stressed or anxious. For these transition periods, a student with autism will require a visual reminder about upcoming changes. Visual timers are a learning aid that will help remind the student about when the activity/environment is going to change.
6. **BE CLEAR, CONCISE AND CONCRETE WHEN COMMUNICATING:** Get to the point using as few words as possible. If you ask a question or make a request and your student is non-responsive please restate and/or reword your language. Students with autism usually require additional time to process information. You may try using the “5 second rule” of counting to 5 before saying anything else. Avoid using figures of speech and sarcasm. The student will most likely interpret the language very literally and as a result will take your words at face value. Students with autism also have a difficult time reading nonverbal signals. This places them at a disadvantage when interacting with others. Make sure to give clear choices instead of giving open-ended questions or statements.
7. **USE OF POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT:** Punishment often does not work for students with autism because it emphasizes what was wrong and does not specify what the student should do. Rewarding appropriate behavior and ignoring those behaviors that are “inappropriate” is a good approach.
8. **REDUCE ENVIRONMENTAL DISTRACTIONS:** Students with autism typically have a difficult time with unrelated noise, the proximity of other students, and visual distractions. These things will often impact their ability to pay attention to what you would consider the most important aspect of the classroom. The sense of taste, smell, balance and body awareness may affect their performance as well.
9. **KNOW YOUR STUDENT:** Each student with autism is **unique!**

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The Autism Program of Illinois.
Central Illinois Regional Training and Service Center.
The Hope Institute for Children and Families.

Therakids P.C. provides specialized occupational, physical and speech therapy services to help children overcome developmental concerns. Services are provided in the school setting throughout southwestern Illinois by licensed occupational therapists, occupational therapy assistants, physical therapists, physical therapist assistants and speech-language pathologists. **Email: www.Therakids.org**