

**ECHO IDAHO**

K12 Supporting Students  
with Autism

# What We're Missing When Supporting Autistic Students Through Their Eyes & Experience

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# Learning Objectives

- Understand the unique challenges autistic students face in traditional learning environments.
- Identify at least 3 strategies to create a more inclusive and supportive classroom for autistic students.
- Recognize the importance of neurodiversity acceptance in promoting academic success for autistic students.

# Navigation Challenges: Getting Lost in the Process

- Autistic individuals have a hard time generating “cognitive maps” of new spaces and unable to remember landmarks.
- Pave the way for success. This can look different for students in grades K-2<sup>nd</sup> versus grades 3<sup>rd</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> (6<sup>th</sup>).
- Wayfinding can also apply to digital spaces like websites and apps.

# Auditory Overload: Navigating Loud Environments

- Up to 77.6-86.6% of autistic children may experience auditory hypersensitivity.
- Huge spaces like the cafeteria and lobbies are usually high traffic areas that can cause high stress.
- Support auditory processing; give autistic students more think time. Six second pause, repeat the prompt, avoid rephrasing “same words matter.”

# Food for Thought: Supporting Autistic Students with Eating Preferences

- Autistic children have food aversions at a rate of 5x higher than neurotypical children.
- “Safe Foods” is food that look and taste the same with each bite.



# From Pickiness to Possibilities

Emily Kuschner, PhD (CHOP) lists 7 ways to support a picky eater:

1. Rule out medical issues
2. Stay calm
3. Take steps toward tasting
4. Tune into textures
5. Play with food
6. Offer choice and control
7. Be careful with rewards

# Recess Realities: Observation and Supports

- Recess can last anywhere from 10-35 minutes
- Gen Ed inclusion doesn't always translate to recess inclusion
- Walking along the playground's perimeter, standing near the door to go inside, hanging next to adults
- Keys to success:
  1. Use picture cards or visual schedules
  2. Facilitate adult guidance
  3. Incorporate their interests

# Inclusive P.E.

- Unfriendly sensory environment
- Sensory Processing is different for every child; manage noise to their needs (headphones or earplugs), sensory breaks, modeling especially when they lose
- P.E. teacher should want to be autistic-inclusive in their activities
- Sense of justice; correction of peers, inflexible, prolonged rumination
- Modify “unfair” situations; level the playing field, adjust roles, reframe success around individual goals

# Handwriting Hurdles: Autism Considerations

- 60% of autistic students struggle with handwriting.
- Explore adaptive writing options. Triangular pencils, thicker pencils, or weighted pencils. Cushioned grips. Lined paper.
- Focus on letter in formation families.
- Create a calm environment.



# Assessment Hurdles

- Sensory overload
- Communication barriers
- Routine disruption
- Social interaction
- Generalization issues
- Motivation and understanding
- Create an assessment plan for autistic students

# The Silent Struggle & Being a Self Advocate

- 40-65% of autistics have Alexithymia. Best described as “emotional blindness”
- Teach and model communication
- Provide scripts or sentence starters
- Foster metacognition (thinking about their thinking)
- Role-play scenarios
- Celebrate attempts





# References

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