

## **Tips for Art Teachers On Working with Students on the Autism Spectrum**

The environment of the art classroom can be very overwhelming for students on the Autism Spectrum due to their hypersensitivity. These students become over-stimulated by sights, sounds, touch, movement, smells, temperature, and/or size of the class. Below are some tips that may help the autistic student better manage in the art classroom:

1. Allow use of head phones or ear plugs to decrease the noise level
2. Be conscious of the noise level in your room
3. Have these students sit at the end of the row/table to give them more space
4. You may need to define the student's personal space with tape, foot prints, or chalk lines
5. Have a designated calm down area/space that students can go to when needed
6. Have a visual agenda of your class activities and review it with all students
7. Pre warn the student if this is a multi step project
8. For multi step projects, mark on calendar dates of the specific steps of the projects, when the project will be completed, and when the student will be able to take the project home
9. Remember that is very difficult for an autistic student to stop a project before it is completed...try giving several verbal warnings or give them a directive such as "color one more flower" and put your picture on the \_\_\_\_\_. Show them the calendar and say, they can finish the project and take it home\_\_\_\_\_
10. Pre warn students of the ending of an activity and forewarn of any known upcoming changes
11. Have a predicable routine if possible
12. Give them extra "wait time" for processing directions
13. Allow the students to have a reasonable amount of movement during class even when listening to directions
14. Remember many of these students do not act like they are paying attention but they are
15. Allow students to draw or doodle with art materials if you are giving long directions or long demonstrations
16. Have a designated art drawer of drawing paper or other art materials that students can access if the directions/demonstration is long or if the student finishes the project early
17. Do not force eye contact
18. Limit your verbalizations when talking directly to these students-use visual or gestural cues when possible
19. Try not to say too much too fast
20. Be direct, calm, and clear with directions
21. Avoid using abstract phrases like "save your breathe"
22. Pair these students with good role models and facilitate social interaction when possible
23. Provide breaks when needed—like going in the quiet hall to get a drink
24. Use a calming, reassuring voice for directives
25. Visually demonstrate the activity that the student is to do/sing
26. Refrain from joining in their argument
27. Recognize that students may be responding from a developmental age rather than their chronological age
28. Watch for signs of escalating stress level and intervene with a preventative step such as break, down time, safe spot
29. These students may often times be clumsy
30. Make sure these students know the expectations that we feel are common sense—such as what to do when the bell rings, what will happen if the student is tardy etc.

Remember some of the basic characteristics of a person on the Autism Spectrum:

- These students have difficulty putting themselves in another student's place and seeing other person's perspective
- Have difficulty reading the intentions and behaviors of others
- Have much difficulty with peer interaction
- Have much difficulty with any type of social skills
- Have much difficulty with communication
- May have specific and intense interests
- May have poor organizational skills
- Do not understand abstract language, puns, or innuendos
- Have difficulty with problem solving—when and how to ask for help
- Have a difficult time multi tasking
- These students do not understand "The Hidden Curriculum" which is a set of rules of guidelines that are often not directly taught but are assumed to be known...such as how to dress, how to greet people,

the daily schedule, which teachers will tolerate tardiness, if you need to pick your nose—do it in the bathroom and use a tissue etc.