

## **Tips for Bus Drivers On Working with Students on the Autism Spectrum**

The environment of the bus 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 number of students on the bus. Below are some tips that may help the autistic student better manage themselves on the bus:

1. Assigned seating preferably close to the bus driver
2. You may need to define the student's personal space on the seat with tape, or chalk lines
3. Be conscious of the noise level on your bus
4. Allow students to use headphones or ear plugs to muffle the noise on the bus
5. Allow student to use items that will comfort them--such as looking at book, drawing, listening to music on his CD player, hold fidgets etc.. to keep the student calm
6. Have rules visually posted in your bus and refer to them as needed
7. Limit your verbalizations when talking directly to these students-use visual or gestural cues when possible
8. Try not to say too much too fast
9. Be direct, calm, and clear with directions
10. Tell the student what to do --such as "sit down" as opposed to asking them "do you want to sit down?"
11. When you give the student a direction, give them extra "wait time" for processing that direction- do not continuously repeat the direction
12. Pair these students with good role models and facilitate social interaction when possible
13. Be aware that these students are easy targets to be teased or bullied by other students on your bus
14. Remember many of these students do not act like they are paying attention but they are
15. Pre warn students of changes such as substitute bus driver, change in bus route, etc.
16. Do not force eye contact
17. Avoid using abstract phrases like "save your breathe"
18. For students who have difficulty touching/kicking items (such as the back of seats) or using bus equipment improperly (such as opening/closing windows)--put a visual "stop" or universal no sign on them
19. Refrain from joining in their argument
20. Recognize that students may be responding from a developmental age rather than their chronological age
21. Watch for signs of escalating stress level--such as rocking, tense body language, escalating voice level—verify you know they are getting upset—reassure them—and redirect them to items/activities that will calm them
22. Make sure these students know the expectations that we feel are common sense—such as being especially quiet on snowy and icy days because the bus driver needs to concentrate more
23. Confidentiality is paramount. Do not tell others that you have an autistic student on your bus, unless you have permission from the autistic student's parent
24. The special education teacher of record is your resource for any specific information pertaining to that autistic student

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 be overly sensitive to sights, sounds, touch, movement, smells, temperature, and/or number of students on the bus
- 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...how to greet people, the bus schedule, if a bus driver frowns at you, he/she wants you to be quiet etc.