

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

The environment of the music 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 music 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/risers 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 students of the ending of an activity and forewarn of any known upcoming changes
8. Have a predicable routine if possible
9. Give them extra "wait time" for processing directions
10. Allow the students to have a reasonable amount of movement during class even when listening to directions
11. Remember many of these students do not act like they are paying attention but they are
12. Do not force eye contact
13. Limit your verbalizations when talking directly to these students-use visual or gestural cues when possible
14. Try not to say too much too fast
15. Be direct, calm, and clear with directions
16. Avoid using abstract phrases like "save your breathe"
17. Pair these students with good role models and facilitate social interaction when possible
18. Provide breaks when needed—like going in the quiet hall to get a drink
19. For students who have difficulty constantly touching musical instruments-like piano-put a visual "stop" or universal no sign on them
20. If possible allow student at the end of the period, as a reward, to play a musical instrument for a few minutes
21. Use a calming, reassuring voice for directives
22. Visually demonstrate the activity that the student is to do/sing
23. Refrain from joining in their argument
24. Recognize that students may be responding from a developmental age rather than their chronological age
25. Watch for signs of escalating stress level and intervene with a preventative step such as break, down time, safe spot
26. These students may often times be clumsy
27. 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.
28. Give these students music to take home and practice before a concert/music presentation
29. Tape the choreography of the concert/music presentation, so they can take it home and practice
30. Mark on a calendar when concert/music presentation is and when the rehearsals are
31. During rehearsals, when these students are not practicing, allow them to move around or take a break

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.