**A DIRECT, POSITIVE MESSAGE THAT THESE STUDENTS BELONG IN THE FIELD IS THE MOST IMPORTANT FACTOR FOR LONG TERM SUCCESS**

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Keep in mind when designing the learning content for autistic young adults

**Common Strategies for Learning Success with Autistic Students:**

* Clear, concrete directions & information presentation
  + Eliminate ambiguity
  + Provide direct, straightforward feedback
  + Avoid idioms & metaphors
* Allow breaks & [stimming](https://embraceasd.com/stim-like-a-bee/) (e.g. stim tools, fidget tools) for regulation & increased engagement
* Create a routine
  + Predictability of class time = less anxiety = more engagement
* Provide visual learning tools such as schedule, syllabus, pictures, charts, videos etc.
  + Providing as much information about *what to expect* will reduce anxiety & therefore free up energy to focus on classwork
    - Explaining *why* we are working on something helps engagement
    - Avoid cold-calling
  + Displaying a schedule reduces anxiety
  + Displaying the homework, class assignment, etc.
  + Supplement oral information with written information (e.g. lecture slides)
* Provide extra processing time
  + After presenting a question, allow a few more seconds before expecting an answer
  + Extra time on tests/quizzes if needed
* Allow laptop for notes
  + Alternatively, for increased engagement in-class time, *provide notes/guides notes* → eliminates difficulties with hearing, processing, holding information in head, converting to notes, writing, while paying attention to the next thing that is said
* Consider common sensory, cognitive, behavioral, emotional, and social strengths and difficulties in chart below when designing learning activities

\*this list is not exhaustive, but rather a general list of common helpful strategies → **collaboration with students themselves about their needs and preferences** will lead to greatest level of success

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| **Autism Fast Facts**  **“If you meet one person with autism, you’ve met one person with autism”** | |
| **Common Strengths** | **Common Difficulties** |
| **Sensory strengths:**   * Heighten visual perception * ”tunnel” vision (intense focus) * Greater intensity of colors * Acute hearing * Heightened smelling | **Sensory difficulties:**   * Sensory overwhelm   + Breaks help minimize sensory overwhelm, which makes meltdowns & shutdowns less likely * Visual field overwhelm * Meltdowns * Shutdowns * Increased sensitivity to certain frequencies & volumes of sounds (hyperacusis) |
| **Cognitive strengths:**   * Lateral thinking → novel problem solving & thinking “outside the box” is heightened * Pattern recognition abilities heightened → rational decision-making * Giftedness more likely in autistics * Savant syndrome (10-28.5% of autistics vs. 1% of neurotypicals) * Strong memory system * Encyclopedic knowledge * Superior problem solving (can be up to 40% faster than neurotypicals) * Hyperfocus * Hyper-systemizing (if, and, then thinking) * Strong attention to detail | **Cognitive difficulties:**   * Low theory of mind → difficulties with attributing mental states of others → can lead to misinterpretation * Rigid/inflexible thinking   + Literal thinking * High prevalence of PTSD * Alexithymia (difficulties identifying and expressing emotions) is common * Identifying faces/forgetting faces * Excessive daydreaming * Easily excitable “resting network” of the brain * Seeing the “big picture” * Executive functioning difficulties   + Sustaining & directing attention   + Planning   + Organization   + Initiating and sustaining tasks   + Emotion regulation   + Working memory   + Verbal reasoning   + Inhibitory control (self-control) |
| **Behavioral strengths:**   * Strong work ethic * Commitment to honesty & integrity * Strong sense of justice * Intense passion for learning * Completing work quickly when engaging in a special interest or hyperfocus * Routine is highly preferred → autistics can excel with a strong routine | **Behavioral difficulties:**   * Habitual (repetitive) behaviors → can lead to “getting stuck” on things   + Routine changes = anxiety → manifest in many behaviors |
| **Emotional strengths:**   * Can be “hyper” empathetic → perceptive of others’ emotional states * [“Energy”](https://autismlevelup.com/my-energy/) flow in body is a common way of interpreting autistic’s internal and external environments | **Emotional difficulties:**   * Some autistics have trouble identifying & expressing their emotions (Alexithymia = ~40-65% of autistics vs. ~10% of neurotypicals)   + Can show up as “lack” of facial expression, differing facial expression from allistic people * Differing responses from allistic (non-autistic) people:   + Reduced emotional expression (facial, etc.) |
| **Social strengths:**   * Deep, engaging, stimulating conversation about topics of interest * Communication with other autistics & neurodivergent individuals is strong * Once social rules are understood, autistics tend to follow them well and can excel in many familiar social situations * Loyal | **Social difficulties:**   * Communicating with non-autistics can lead to misunderstandings on both sides * [**Masking**](https://embraceasd.com/masking-is-it-good-or-bad/)= “acting neurotypical” leads to burnout * Difficulties with social predictions   + Opens autistic individuals up to vulnerabilities, social exclusion, etc. * Working in groups * Understanding novel social rules * Perspective-taking * Honesty + having different social cues than non-autistic people = bluntness |

**References & Resources:**

<https://embrace-autism.com/>

<https://www.neurodiversityhub.org/resources-for-universities>

<https://neuroclastic.com/>

<https://autisticadvocacy.org/>

<https://www.news-medical.net/news/20210422/Youth-with-cognitive-disabilities-have-potential-to-pursue-a-career-in-STEM-shows-study.aspx>

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