

Autism Information Fast Facts

ace **VCU**
Autism Center for Excellence

Top 5 Things to Consider when Setting up a Classroom to Support Students with ASD

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The beginning of the school year is right around the corner! Many teachers are setting up their rooms in order to provide their students with the supports needed to ensure success. As you set up your classroom for the upcoming year consider the following:

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▶ STRUCTURE YOUR DAY

Children with autism thrive in a structured and predictable environment. Establish routines early on and keep it as consistent as possible. In a world that's ever changing, routine and structure provide great comfort and support to a child on the autism spectrum. Define routines clearly and review routines daily. When you must deviate from your schedule provide warnings as soon as possible.

▶ USE VISUALS

A picture speaks a thousand words! Use them whenever you can. Children with autism learn faster and with greater ease when you use visuals. In fact, we all respond better to visuals. Show visuals of what to expect on the trip such as getting on the bus, arriving at the destination, planned activities, eating a snack and returning to school. Give written instructions instead of verbal whenever you can. Highlight or underline any text for emphasis.

▶ USE SCHEDULES

People with autism like order and detail. They feel in control and secure when they know what to expect. Schedules help students know what's ahead. Picture schedules are even more powerful because they help a student visualize the actions. Schedules can be broad or detailed. You can use them with any sequence of events. Some students may require a personal daily schedule while other students may only need a daily schedule for the classroom.

▶ MINIMIZE DISTRACTIONS

As you set up your classroom pay attention to where your students with autism will be seated. Windows, the hallway or free time areas can cause many distractions. Try to seat your student in an area that gives them an unobstructed view of your teaching. Look at your classroom walls. If anything on your wall does not support your teaching take it down. You don't want your student focusing on a cute picture at the expense of valuable learning time!

▶ HAVE A CALMING SPACE

Stress, anxiety, and misunderstandings happen in the best classroom situations — so be prepared have a calming area for your student with autism. This area doesn't have to be large, it can be as simple as a small corner behind the student's desk with a chair or beanbag, some noise cancelling headphones, and a few fidgets. Practice visiting the area while the child is calm and happy. It may be helpful to have the child sit in the calming space when performing tasks that are known to upset the child.

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