

A Spectrum of Possibility: Tips for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder on Building Relationships with College Professors

Building relationships with professors can help them better understand how students learn best and how to implement accommodations students may need in class. The tips listed below come from students with autism and may benefit students with a wide variety of learning needs.

Meet privately and early on to get to know your professors

Students on the autism spectrum often repeat a single concept: “Personal relationships with professors are crucial.” Meetings with professors allow students to share strengths, support needs, and preferences. In private meetings, students can ask questions to satisfy a need for knowledge at a depth not required for the purposes of the class, thus minimizing what classmates might perceive as distracting behavior (i.e., posing multiple, seemingly irrelevant questions). Continue to build your relationship with your professors throughout the semester.

“

[Instructors] would be willing to delve into information a little deeper than they would for the regular class. After class I'd talk with them and become personal with them... you talk to them and ask them their opinion on something, they're more than willing to answer it for you. (Virginia Commonwealth University student)

”

Disclose your accommodations to your professor early in the semester

It is your responsibility and decision to disclose your disability to receive accommodations in your college classes. Most colleges have a designated person or office that determines eligibility for services and classroom accommodations. Each student must choose to register with the disability support services office on campus and meet with the coordinator to determine appropriate accommodations. If you are determined eligible for accommodations, you will likely receive a letter that specifies your accommodations. It is your responsibility to discuss this letter with your professors. Talking to professors early on in the semester helps them to know what your specific learning supports are to incorporate into the class. Waiting too long to discuss your accommodations can impact your academic performance.

“

I requested accommodations through DSS and I told my professors and advocated my situation...my professors are so nice and they are willing to work with me. (Virginia Commonwealth University student)

”

Turn in assignments on time

At the beginning of the semester go through your class syllabus and find the due dates for your papers, tests, quizzes. These are important dates to remember so using a planner is a good idea to help you keep organized. Remember to check your planner regularly, and to continuously check your professor's class webpage for any updates or additions to the syllabus. It is your responsibility to keep up with the class, not the professor's.

“

They (students) are more likely to lose points turning something in late and have a lower grade because of that than they are to lose points because they don't understand the material. (College of William and Mary student)

”

Be an active learner in your classes

Attend class regularly. You never know when the professor will mention something important about an exam or assignment! While in class, listen and ask questions, take notes, and participate in class discussions. Ask questions for clarification if you need additional information to understand the class material.

“

I might ask questions in the class, not to disturb the class, but because I have a genuine interest or because I don't understand it and I need a little bit more. (Virginia Commonwealth University student)

”

For more information, please see our video series *A Spectrum of Possibility*: centerontransition.org/asd. This four part video series highlights experiences and advice from college students with ASD as well as parents, high school counselors, and college professors. The series was produced by Virginia Commonwealth University's Center on Transition Innovations with funding from the Virginia Department of Education.

Additional resources

The 411 on Disability Disclosure: ncwd-youth.info/assets/guides/411/411_Disability_Disclosure_complete.pdf

8 Ways to Take Control of Your Time: bigfuture.collegeboard.org/get-started/inside-the-classroom/8-ways-to-take-control-of-your-time