aspect
Autism Spectrum Australia

Supporting Autistic students



Classroom strategies and regulation

Creating inclusive classrooms involves thoughtfully designing both the learning environment and the way we respond to students' regulation needs. This information sheet brings together practical guidance on setting up autism-friendly classroom spaces and everyday strategies to support regulation across the school day. Together, these approaches support engagement, wellbeing and positive learning outcomes for all students.

Our purpose
a different brilliant®

Understanding, engaging and celebrating the strengths, interests and aspirations of people on the autism spectrum.

Classroom strategies

Creating a classroom environment where Autistic students feel understood, supported and empowered benefits all learners. Autism-friendly classrooms combine thoughtful layouts, clear routines, effective resources and inclusive practices. When learning environments are intentionally designed, all students can benefit, academically and socially.

1. Design the physical space for comfort and clarity

Purposeful classroom layouts and sensory considerations can support predictability, reduce anxiety and help students feel safe and ready to learn.

- Defined learning zones: create visually clear areas for group work, independent tasks, quiet breaks and sensory regulation. Each zone should be clearly labelled with words and pictures.
- Calm sensory environments: neutral colours, natural light and reduced noise support students' regulation and engagement.
- Quiet spaces: set aside low-stimulus areas where students can regulate and take breaks when needed.
- Clear sightlines: arrange furniture so students can easily see the teacher, visual supports and exits, with minimal clutter.
- Supportive physical environments: thoughtful layout and sensory design help students feel safe, regulate and be ready to learn.
- Teaching space routines: show and practice how different classroom spaces are used. Explicitly teach when and how to use each space. For example, how and when to access quiet spaces.

Supporting Autistic students

2. Establish predictable routines and visual supports

Clear routines and visual cues helps Autistic students understand expectations and manage transitions.

- Visual schedules: show daily activities visually so students know what to expect throughout the day.
- Structured transitions: use countdowns and visual timers and supports to prepare students for changes between activities.
- Consistent routines: keep daily routines predictable and give advance notice when changes are coming.

3. Use resources that support learning and regulation

Practical resources help students manage sensory needs and participate in learning.

- Sensory tools: items such as headphones, fidgets and supports can help students manage individual sensory needs.
- Flexible seating: offer a range of seating options so students can choose what helps them focus and feel comfortable.
- Communication supports: visual aids and AAC (Augmentative and Alternative Communication) tools support understanding and expression.
- Organisational supports: labelled storage and task breakdowns in small clear steps can support organisation and understanding of expectations.

4. Build routines that support social and emotional skills

Explicit teaching of social understanding supports inclusion.

- Social stories and narratives: use short, clear stories to explain social situations, expectations and routines.
- Peer mentoring and group activities: structured peer support and guided group work build connection and belonging.
- Behaviour of concern: focus on understanding the reason, why the behaviour is occurring, adjust the environment or expectations to reduce stressors, and support the student to learn new ways to communicate or meet their needs.

5. Collaborate, reflect and learn

Strong partnerships and ongoing learning support better outcomes for students.

- Listen to student voices: collaborate with the student to understand their strengths, interests, preferences, goals and support needs, using their preferred ways of communicating and engaging meaningfully in decision making
- Working with families and specialists: collaborate with families and professionals to understand each students' individual strengths, preferences and needs
- Valuing Autistic perspectives: when developing professional practice and knowledge about autism, actively seek out and learn from a diverse range of Autistic voices, alongside families and professionals.



Supporting Autistic students

Regulation strategies

All students move through different levels of readiness across the day. Regulation is supported by calm adults, sensory-aware environments and predictable choices.

Before school starts – set students up for success

- Reduce lighting or sources of noise based on student preferences.
- Predictable routines with visual schedules and clear choices.
- Quiet space students can access when they need it.
- Flexible seating with clear pathways.
- Agreed sensory supports ready to use (headphones, fidgets, movement options).

During the school day – what you might notice

- Increased movement e.g. pacing, rocking, leaving seat.
- Withdrawal e.g. pulling back, quiet, seeking space.
- Heightened emotions e.g. louder voice, tears, frustration.
- Quiet presentation e.g. low energy.
- Communication looks different e.g. reduced language, scripted phrases, uses device to communicate, gestures or is silent.
- Sensory needs shift e.g.seeking or avoiding input such as sound, light, movement, deep pressure.
- These responses are information signals, not misbehaviour. Use them as prompts to pause, reduce demands and offer support.

In the moment – supports that help

- Reduce demands: pause non-essential tasks, reduce demands and allow time.
- Reduce verbal input: use fewer words, maintain a steady tone, offer clear choices between two options and give time to process information.
- Offer breaks or a change of space.
- Provide co-regulation e.g. model breathing, calm voice, supportive presence.

After school – reconnect and plan

- Acknowledge effort and the student's signals: reconnect calmly.
- Reconnect and rebuild rapport: avoid consequences for stress responses; focus on repair and predictability.
- Reflect on what helped; update the student's plan and share with the team or family if useful.

Want to learn more?

Visit the Aspect website
for evidence-based resources

Join the Community of Practice
Connect with a supportive network of educators creating inclusive classrooms together



Based on the idea of a different brilliant®, Aspect's approach:

- Respects difference and diversity
- Builds a person's skills based on their strengths, interests, aspirations and support needs
- Develops autism-friendly environments
- Supports others to understand and embrace autism and to develop respectful supportive interactions.



aspect.org.au/get-in-touch

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