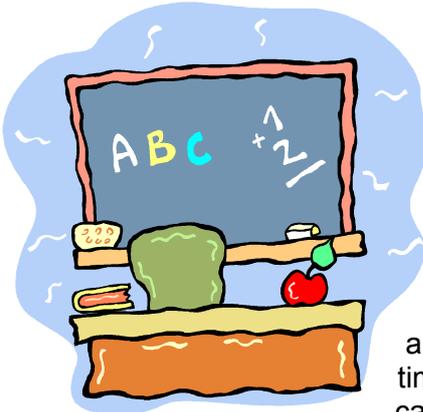


The Learning Environment

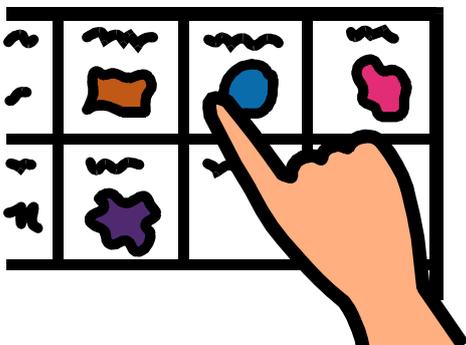
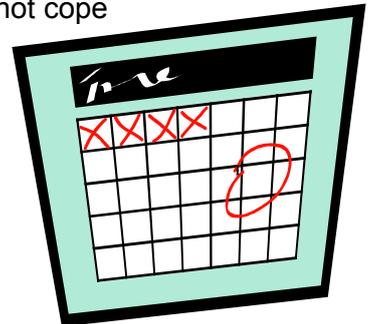
Individuals who are on the autism spectrum are particularly in need of sympathetic learning environments. Too much information and sensory overload are very real problems and each person will have their own set of particular needs, which will become clearer as adults become more familiar with the child.



A structured room should have clear boundaries and individuals should be taught that certain activities occur in certain places, and what is expected of them in those places. Expectations should be made clear and should be consistent.

Any room can be structured in order to give a clear view of what goes on there. Rooms should be tidy and things should be put back in the set place each time it is used, as far as is possible. Many difficulties can arise from items being misplaced if an individual expects it to be in a specific area.

Individual Work Systems may be required for individuals who cannot cope with sitting as part of a group. These should be tailored to the individual, but should be based on familiar class routines, to enable them to work independently, whilst adhering to the typical structure of the day. Through use of the system, if it is designed appropriately, the individual should become more independent and begin to organise themselves for activities and work. Individual systems can be set up for all types of work including; academic; vocational; social skills; community access; independence and life skills.



Some individuals who have autism will respond particularly well to visual schedules. These should be tailored to the individual and contain as much information as is appropriate.

Some schedules could be determined by time and others by activities, depending on the ability level of the student. However, be careful not to use times for students who may become stressed if these are not adhered to consistently. More information about visual strategies and schedules can be found later.

Good Practice to Ensure an Effective Learning Environment



Ideas & Tips Box

Clarity of delivery

It is essential that information is delivered clearly to the individual. This may require the use of simplified language to take into account comprehension levels.

It is important to give one instruction at a time and do not assume that the person has understood.

Language needs to be as unambiguous as possible.

Remember that young people with autism tend to have difficulty understanding idioms and similes and are also unsettled by uncertainties that are implicit in phrases such as 'We'll see'.

It is always helpful to look at any advice given by Speech and Language Therapists, and other professionals, if they have been involved.

Use of visual support

To enable the individual to understand instructions and routines it is vital to most people with autism to use visual supports (more information about this is given later).

A calm environment

Calmness is core to maintaining attention and reducing the individual's anxieties.

It is difficult for many people who have autism to concentrate where there are distractions.

It may be helpful to provide a distraction free area for the individual to work in at those times when the individual needs to be able to concentrate.

A chill zone

It is absolutely essential that the school identifies an area that the individual is able to go to when they need time out or when they become distressed.

Building in regular rest breaks will be necessary for many individuals who are not able to cope well with normal work loads.

Use of adult help where appropriate

Staff need to establish at what stage this is likely to be required and where to encourage independence without abandoning someone to probable failure.

Achieving balance is difficult to develop but it can be done, resulting in the individual maintaining self esteem and inappropriate behaviours being minimised.