

Talking Matters

www.talkingmatters.com.au Ph: 8255 7137
 Helping your child to reach their potential



Senses and ASD

Students with autism spectrum disorder often find sensory stimulation such as noise or visual information distracting, over stimulating and sometimes stressful. Likewise the constant social contact which occurs in the classroom can be stressful for children with ASD.

You can help with this as follows:

- Talk to the child's occupational therapist if they have one. If they do not a referral may be helpful.
- Be aware of the individual child's particular sensory sensitivities such as: oversensitivity to noise, sensitivity to specific noises, sensitivity to certain visual information, sensitivity to smells or touch, and minimise the student's exposure to these things as much as is possible.
- Seat the student in a position where exposure to uncomfortable sensory information is reduced as much as possible. This may mean providing the student with a table by themselves.
- Provide the child with a place where they can take a break from sensory or social stimulation for short periods of time. This may be a pile of cushions in a quiet spot in the classroom, or a pop-up tent to minimise visual stimulation. Providing the student with a set number of "timeout cards" to request a break and a timer to indicate when the break is over, allows control of the time spent in the quiet spot, and encourages the student to regulate management of their own sensory needs.
- Build into the student's schedule some quiet, relaxed activities, perhaps based around their special interest, to wind down from activities which are demanding in terms of social or sensory requirements. The student may be to cope with more stimulation if they know that an opportunity to wind down is coming soon.
- Be aware of which activities may be over stimulating such as assemblies, music lessons, unstructured playtime, group work, and work in noisy areas such as art or science areas and provide support strategies as much as possible.



Some students with autism spectrum disorders seek sensory stimulation through movement and touch particularly. These behaviours may include wriggling, fiddling, touching others and mouthing objects. The student's occupational therapist can often provide strategies for managing his behaviour. Providing acceptable sensory input such as sitting on a "sit and move" cushion or holding a sensory toy may help reduce unwanted behaviours.

