

Rochester Institute of Technology

Autism Spectrum Disorders Fact Sheet for Faculty

Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) are neurodevelopmental disorders characterized by difficulties with social interaction and communication. Asperger's Syndrome (AS) falls within this spectrum and is sometimes referred to as "high functioning autism." The following list is designed as a general overview of the autism spectrum. An individual on the autism spectrum may exhibit some of the following characteristics:

What You Might Notice

- May exhibit awkward eye contact, posture, and/or gestures
- Difficulty with changes in classroom, seating, and syllabi
- Sensory sensitivity (lights, sounds, touch, smells)
- May have delayed responses
- May misunderstand tone of voice, jokes, facial expressions, sarcasm, and other subtle messages
- Oddities in vocal pitch, volume, intonation
- May be easily distracted, particularly in long classes
- Strong, narrow interests
- May come across as argumentative, rude, or monopolizing
- Displays literal and concrete thinking patterns
- May use calming or focusing strategies such as rocking, tapping, or pacing
- May become easily overwhelmed

The following strengths and struggles are generally shared by students across the spectrum, although each individual student experiences unique strengths and challenges. Consult the strategies column for ways to better assist students to have a successful experience both in and out of the classroom.

Strengths

- Above average to superior intellect
- Passionate commitment to ideas
- Strong sense of equality and justice
- Exceptional talents in one specific area
- Diligent with routine work and excellent memory
- Strong pursuit of knowledge within areas of interest
- Good visual and spatial learners
- Original ways of solving problems

Struggles

- Initiating/sustaining effort
- Setting boundaries
- Working in groups
- Initiating, planning, organizing, and carrying out tasks
- Seeing others points of views
- Understanding social rules
- Assessing priorities and performance
- Asking for clarification or assistance
- Interpreting vague instructions
- Abstract concepts and seeing the "big picture"

Strategies

- Provide direct feedback, set clear boundaries
- Allow breaks during class
- Consider allowing laptop for note taking
- Avoid cold-calling in class
- Avoid idioms, metaphors, sarcasm
- Consider assigning group roles
- Provide visual learning tools when possible (pictures, charts)
- Supplement oral instructions with written instructions
- Explain purpose of assignment
- Utilize syllabus and note changes as soon as possible