

How to Adjust the Curriculum for a Student with Autism

What are the Disability Standards for Education?

Falling under the Disability Discrimination Act 1992, the 'Disability Standards for Education (2005)' outlines the responsibility of education providers to ensure that schoolwork is accessible and allows any student with a disability to participate in learning experiences.

To meet these standards, you may need to adjust learning environments and the curriculum to ensure that your student with Autism is engaged on the same basis as a student without a disability.

How do you make adjustments?

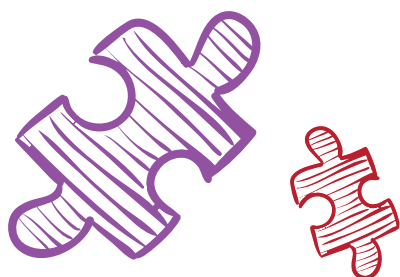
Create an inclusive school culture

Designing and adjusting your learning environments, instructional techniques and curricular tasks to allow all students to participate is one of the most effective ways to create a welcoming, inclusive school community. This approach ensures every student is given the opportunity to perform to their best ability and enjoys positive learning experiences.

Treat each student as an individual

The amount of adjustments you need to make depends entirely on the specific needs of the student with Autism.

Students with Autism have a wide range of strengths and needs that can differ from other students in the classroom. They may require varying levels of support and adaptation to the curriculum in order to participate in learning experiences. These adaptations can range from minimal to moderate or significant, depending on the individual student's needs (see the below table for more information).



Find the balance

It is important to provide a 'just right' level of challenge for your student, which allows them to expand their skills while also achieving success for their efforts. Finding this balance can build the student's engagement, self-esteem and motivation.

Think about task goals

When you are adapting a task or activity, asking yourself what the goal of the task for this particular student will guide the adaptations that you will need to make. For example, is the goal to learn a new concept, practise handwriting, demonstrate comprehension of a passage of writing, or something else entirely?

Keep the student's interests in mind

Everyone is unique – different topics, hobbies and activities will spark different people's interest. Many people with Autism experience more focussed interests that provide an opportunity for quality engagement. For example, you could motivate the student by incorporating their interests into activity topics or rewards for their positive behaviour and achievements.



What adjustments can you make?

Below are some suggestions for the types of adjustments you can make to provide an optimal learning environment for a student with Autism:

Environmental Adjustments

- Minimise distractions for the student by:
 - ◆ Removing unnecessary information or items at times that require concentration (e.g. turning off the SmartBoard when not in use or reducing large amounts of visual clutter around the classroom)
 - ◆ Positioning the student at the front of the classroom (i.e. closer to the whiteboard and teacher)
 - ◆ Seating the student away from the door, window and 'high traffic' areas
 - ◆ Reducing clutter and removing distracting items from around the student's desk
- Set up workstations or place items around the room to promote movement between activities, which provides sensory input while avoiding distractions
- Assign roles for group work to provide structure (e.g. note-taker, presenter, time-keeper and so on)
- Provide organisational checklists for the student to plan and organise their belongings and work materials
- Follow a consistent work routine every day to support structure and predictability
- Use a buddy system or assign a peer helper to assist the student with difficult work
- Individualise seating to suit your student's needs (e.g. consider chair height, using sensory cushions, using chairs with increased postural support or allowing for increased sensory movement)

Instructional Adjustments

- Reinforce positive engagement with difficult tasks by using a Visual Support with a motivating reward at the end that relates to the student's interests (e.g. a First/Then Board or Reward Chart)
- Implement Visual Supports and other learning materials to demonstrate relationships between concepts, including illustrations, tables, photographs, diagrams and conceptual graphics (e.g. Explosion Charts)
- Break instructions down into small, achievable steps
- Make worksheets more user-friendly by:
 - ◆ Increasing the 'white space' so they are less 'busy' looking (e.g. spacing text and sections, including subheadings or using bullet points)
 - ◆ Making key text stand out (e.g. highlighting, bolding or adding arrows)
 - ◆ Simplifying or reducing the words on the page
 - ◆ Covering unnecessary information
- Allow more time to process information
- Use concrete or physical objects to emphasise key concepts (e.g. to demonstrate the concept of 'volume', you could use a variety of different shaped containers and beakers to measure the volume of water held by each container)
- Incorporate 'helper' tasks throughout the day to provide the opportunity for movement, increased motivation and a sense of connectedness to the class (e.g. handing out worksheets)
- Model new or unfamiliar activities initially (i.e. demonstrate the steps yourself)
- Use a 'Green Dot / Red Dot' system to show the student where to start (green) and where to finish point (red) on a worksheet
- Focus on one concept at a time
- Use concrete or physical objects to demonstrate concepts and tasks

Minor Adjustments –
same activity, adapted
expectations

Moderate Adjustments
– similar activity, adapted
materials

Significant Adjustments
– different activity



Minor Curriculum & Task Adjustments

- Student performs the **same activity with adapted expectations** about the result and/or process – for example, you:
 - ◆ Reduce your expectations of the finished product
 - ◆ Have realistic expectations for the student's neatness
 - ◆ Allow the student extra time to process instructions and explanations and/or complete challenging tasks
 - ◆ Adapt the worksheet with less questions or components
 - ◆ Allow the student extra time to hand in homework and assignments
 - ◆ Provide the student with an Education Assistant (EA) to support their independence
 - ◆ Check in with the student frequently to ascertain their level of understanding
 - ◆ Allow the student to demonstrate their knowledge through a PowerPoint presentation, verbal feedback or the use of a scribe
- Student performs the **same activity with adapted materials** – for example:
 - ◆ Technology (e.g. typing, or using a voice recorder or video camera to verbalise thoughts before converting to text)
 - ◆ Hands-on or concrete materials (e.g. using blocks, counters or a calculator to assist with maths tasks)
 - ◆ Being provided with cloze or multiple choice activities
 - ◆ By using timers to structure the task and show the student how much time they have to spend on each step

Moderate Curriculum & Task Adjustments

- Student completes a **similar task with adapted expectations and/or materials** – for example:
 - ◆ Adapt worksheets with a different activity that has a theme that is similar or related to the class activity
 - ◆ Focus on the student's strengths and interests
 - ◆ Incorporate partnered or group activities that provide peer support
 - ◆ Allow the student to complete a similar task on a computer program or iPad application

Significant Curriculum & Task Adjustments

- Student completes a **different, parallel activity in the classroom** or a **different activity in a different part of the classroom or school** – for example:
 - ◆ Use colour-coded work files or individual work baskets to provide organisation, structure and predictability while enhancing independence
 - ◆ Provide the student with a different activity that is tailored to their special interests (though perhaps with a similar theme to their peers)
 - ◆ Consider if it is best to omit the task (especially for optional subjects) and use the time for learning in the student's preferred or strength areas
 - ◆ Incorporate some activities that focus on teaching independence and functional skills (e.g. money management)
- If significant adjustments to the curriculum are required, you may need to meet with the family to consider and discuss an adjustment plan for the curriculum

This content has been extracted from the Autism Association of WA's Autism Heroes Publication.

Designed with the Australian National Curriculum in mind, the Autism Heroes Education Pack contains lesson plans, a video and worksheets for students in Years 3–6. It also includes a range of resources that are designed to help you prepare and deliver the pack and to support understanding of Autism within your school. To find out more about this pack, or to purchase a copy visit: <https://autismheroes.autism.org.au/>