

RED FLAGS FOR CLASSROOM TEACHERS: IDENTIFYING STUDENTS WHO MAY HAVE FEATURES OF AN AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER

Information provided for sharing only

Here are some indicators that a student may have features of an autism spectrum disorder, a related disorder or a special learning need. If any of the behaviors listed below are observed, please refer the student for an evaluation, using the procedures that are in place in every school in the United States. If you need help, talk to a special education teacher or the principal.

Remember to view each child objectively, thinking about observable actions. Do not decide that there is a “reason” that justifies behavior that is not typical. Take action to find out what is really going on. All typical children want to have friends and typical children acquire social skills “automatically” as part of their development. These skills allow them to participate successfully as a member of the group. If a child does not acquire these skills automatically, we need to find out the real reason.

It is of the utmost importance to identify and support students in the autism spectrum and students with other special learning needs as early as possible. Do not allow children who may have special needs to go from one grade to another without a professional team assessing the student for eligibility for services and supports. “Waiting” is NOT an effective, educational practice. Although the process of referral can be cumbersome, it is well worth it when it identifies needs that can be met during the educational life of the child or young adult.

SOCIAL DIFFERENCES

- The student has no friends.
- The student has very few friends, or only has friends that seem to be “using” her.
- The student is not automatically invited by other children to participate in activities outside of school.
- The student uses naïve social initiations and responses, not in keeping with her age and her cognitive abilities in other areas.
- The student does not play with the other children as expected; he may not appear interested in their games, or may not know how to join in.
- The student has difficulty managing social interactions in group settings.

BEHAVIOR AND INTERACTIONS

- The student does not seem to understand the effect his behavior has on others.
- The student seems to have true difficulty taking the perspective of another person, even when it is explained to them.
- The student appears to be egocentric, uncaring or self-absorbed (as judged by others)
- The student’s interests seem restricted and repetitive.

- ❑ The student chooses certain toys or activities to the exclusion of all others.
- ❑ The student's play appears scripted or like a reenactment, rather than creative, imaginative, or novel.
- ❑ The child displays limited understanding of role-play and make-believe.
- ❑ The student will play in a parallel style (rather than interactively) when it is no longer age-appropriate.
- ❑ The student displays difficulty with unexpected changes in the environment, even when these changes are explained to them in advance.
- ❑ The student may appear vulnerable and be targeted for bullying.

COMMUNICATION: CONTENT AND STYLE

- ❑ The student does not seem to have natural, conversational social reciprocity, particularly with other children.
- ❑ The student does not shift conversational topics easily in response to the lead of a conversational partner.
- ❑ The student does not seem to understand subtle, social cues such as time to end a conversation or time for someone else to talk.
- ❑ The student does not respond in a typical way to the non-verbal cues of others and may appear to "ignore" the messages sent using facial expressions, body language or gestures.
- ❑ The student does not use non-verbal cues (such as gestures, body language, conversational space and facial expression) like typical children.
- ❑ The student does not always respond to the social overtures of others.
- ❑ The student tends to interact socially better with adults.
- ❑ The student seems very bright, but socially inept.
- ❑ The student has only a few favorite topics and seems to want to talk about the same ones most of the time. These topics may change over the years.
- ❑ The student continues to make the same social mistakes over time, even though gaining skills in other areas.
- ❑ The student does not seem to benefit from being "talked to" about social issues and social skills.
- ❑ The student seems to want to be alone and "self-isolates".

SENSORY AND MOTOR ISSUES

- ❑ The student experiences fine and/or gross motor difficulties.
- ❑ The student appears awkward and uncoordinated in a way different from same-aged peers.
- ❑ The student seems very sensitive to environmental stimuli such as noise, temperature, or textures.
- ❑ The student seems to hear selectively, sometimes appearing deaf.
- ❑ The student seems surprisingly under-sensitive to a stimulus such as pain.