**What is AUTISM?**
Information for Teachers and Education Assistants

**CHARACTERISTICS**

Social Communication

**Students with Autism:**
- May prefer to be on their own rather than interact with their peers or with adults.
- Might not respond when people speak or gesture toward them, even when their names are called.
- Might make little eye contact with others.

Although people with Autism might seek to be alone, they also often have a strong desire for relationships. As their approach might be clumsy, help is usually needed for them to form friendships.

Theory of Mind

A prime characteristic of Autism—impairment of Theory of Mind

**Theory of Mind is:**
- The ability to gauge the thoughts, intentions and feelings of other people.
- The ability to empathise—to be able to gauge the mental state of others.

Because of this characteristic, people with Autism may be considered to be uncaring, when in fact it is the impairment which may cause them to do or say “the wrong thing”.

**With the right support, students with Autism will thrive!**

**Communicating and Understanding**

Be aware of over-estimating or under-estimating the communication abilities of a student with Autism:
- Those with very limited ability to express themselves may have a much greater understanding than is immediately apparent.
- Those who have a high level of verbal skills and able to get their point across may have great difficulty understanding, processing and reacting to information presented to them.

**Students with Autism:**
- May be very concrete and literal in their understanding of language.
- May have very few words and need communication support.
- May talk with ease, particularly about their special interest, with little understanding that others may not be interested.

**Behaviour**

Challenging behaviour always occurs for a reason—the key is to search for and understand the reason/s.

Challenging behaviour is likely to occur because:
- The person is responding to a situation in the only way they know how.
- The environment overwhels—the noise and busyness.
- Anxiety overwhels—they know they won’t be able to complete the task.
- They are confused. What do they have to do?

**TOP 20 Tips and Strategies**

1. **Get to know your student** to develop a positive and trusting relationship.
2. **Ensure an I.E.P. is prepared** as soon as possible.
3. **Integrate therapy goals** into the I.E.P (most children with Autism have a therapy provider)
4. **Provide structure, routine and predictability.**
5. **Use individualised visual supports** to enable understanding and independence.
6. **Provide a visual warning** of impending change to routine, according to your student’s need.
7. **Provide a daily schedule** with images and/or words according to the student’s ability.
8. **Harness the student’s strengths** and incorporate special interests into tasks and projects.
9. **Implement a system of breaks** to enable the student to participate throughout the day.
10. **Adapt the curriculum**, where appropriate, according to the student’s ability.
11. **Explicitly teach new skills.**
12. **Help them to learn what to do** rather than focus on what not to do.
13. **People with Autism are often perfectionists**—stress may escalate if they feel unable to complete a task.
14. **Gradually increase the complexity of tasks.**
15. **Support the student’s communication and sensory needs.**
16. **They may be over-sensitive or under-sensitive to sound, touch/texture, taste or smell.**
17. **Adapt the environment** to support sensory needs and to provide meaning with labels.
18. **Implement a reward/reinforcement system** to provide motivation.
19. **Provide structure and/or quiet time** during recess and lunch. These are often the most difficult time for students with Autism.
20. **Call the Autism Association for Advice**, information or go to our website for training and printable resources.

**Early diagnosis and intervention is the key to improving outcomes**

**Autism affects more boys: four boys to one girl**

**The signs of Autism may be evident by age 2 or may only become apparent when the child starts school.**