

Classroom Intervention

Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) – Challenges which Impact Active Engagement

Students with ASD have neurodevelopmental differences that limit their ability to predict the actions and intentions of their teachers and peers. These neurodevelopmental differences have a significant impact on active engagement. In particular, the following abilities tend to be the most compromised:

1. Predicting why they are being asked to engage in particular tasks,
2. Predicting the sequence of activities,
3. Predicting how to engage in activities,
4. Predicting the steps within each activity,
5. Predicting that others are a source of engagement or pleasure,
6. Predicting what to say,
7. Predicting that others are a source of assistance, and
8. Predicting how to regulate their emotions in a manner sensitive to others.

As a result, students with ASD:

- May not be motivated in to engage in tasks initiated by others, as they may not be able to determine the steps within the task as well as why they are being asked to engage in the task,
- May not know what to expect , as evidenced by difficulties with transitions initiated by others
- May have limited trust in others, as evidenced by heightened anxiety, frequent task avoidance and/or aggression toward teachers and peers; miscommunication and lack of predictability often leads to a history of repeated failure in social situations and negative emotional memory
- May not realize that others are a source of information, as evidenced by the use of unconventional gestures, language, and coping strategies as opposed to those learned through social imitation
- May not realize that teachers and peers can be a source of help, as evidenced by limited initiations and a reduced rate of spontaneous communication, both nonverbal and verbal
- May not realize that teachers and peers can be a source of emotional support and engagement, as evidenced by difficulties responding to bids for interaction and a limited range of communication for social purposes (e.g., asking for help, initiating play or conversation, and collaboration and negotiation)

Evidence demonstrates that accommodating a student's learning differences will significantly reduce these challenges and lead to increases in active engagement. Please refer to the *SCERTS Practice Principles for Success Checklist* to ensure that these accommodations are implemented.