



## **IDEAS AND STRATEGIES FOR THE CLASSROOM**

1. Use Task Analysis –very specific, tasks in sequential order.
2. Always keep your language simple and concrete. Get your point across in as few words as possible. Typically, it's far more effective to say "Pens down, close your journal and line up to go outside" than "It looks so nice outside. Let's do our science lesson now. As soon as you've finished your writing, close your books and line up at the door. We're going to study plants outdoors today".
3. Teach specific social rules/skills, such as turn-taking and social distance.
4. Give fewer choices. If a child is asked to pick a color, say red, only give him two to three choices to pick from. The more choices, the more confused an autistic child will become.
5. If you ask a question or give an instruction and are greeted with a blank stare, reword your sentence. Asking a student what you just said helps clarify that you've been understood.
6. Avoid using sarcasm. If a student accidentally knocks all your papers on the floor and you say "Great!" you will be taken literally and this action might be repeated on a regular basis.
7. Avoid using idioms. "Put your thinking caps on", "Open your ears" and "Zipper your lips" will leave a student completely mystified and wondering how to do that.
8. Give very clear choices and try not to leave choices open ended. You're bound to get a better result by asking "Do you want to read or draw?" than by asking "What do you want to do now?"
9. Repeat instructions and checking understanding. Using short sentences to ensure clarity of instructions. Pair verbal instructions with written instructions.
10. Providing a very clear structure and a set daily routine (including time for play).
11. Teaching what "finished" means and helping the student to identify when something has finished and something different has started. Take a photo of what you want the finished product to look like and show the student. If you want the room cleaned up, take a picture of how you want it to look some time when it is clean. The students can use this for a reference.

12. Providing warning of any impending change of routine, or switch of activity.
13. Addressing the pupil individually at all times (for example, the pupil may not realize that an instruction given to the whole class also includes him/her. Calling the pupil's name and saying "I need you to listen to this as this is something for you to do" can sometimes work; other times the pupil will need to be addressed individually).
14. Using various means of presentation – visual, physical guidance, peer modeling, etc.
15. Recognizing that some change in manner or behavior may reflect anxiety (which may be triggered by a [minor] change to routine).
16. Not taking apparently rude or aggressive behavior personally; and recognizing that the target for the pupil's anger may be unrelated to the source of that anger.
17. Avoid overstimulation. Minimizing/removal of distracters, or providing access to an individual work area or booth, when a task involving concentration is set. Colorful wall displays can be distracting for some pupils, others may find noise very difficult to cope with.
18. Seeking to link work to the pupil's particular interests.
19. Explore word-processing, and computer-based learning for literacy.
20. Provide peers with some awareness of the student's particular needs.

*Adapted from Pat Hensley who retired after 27 years of teaching in the classroom. She currently teaches graduate courses as an adjunct instructor for Furman University. She was chosen 2006 Teacher of the Year for her school and a district Top 10 Finalist (out of 5000 teachers). She is Nationally Board Certified as an Exceptional Needs Specialist and is on the National Board of Directors for the Council for Exceptional Children.*