



The Uniquely Abled Academy® Replication Guide

Element 6: Provide Resources for Instructors

Element 6.2: What Teachers Need to Know About Working with ASD Individuals

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A cohort may be a blend of varying ages, backgrounds, and diagnoses, as long as the exhibited symptoms are highly similar (although caution should be used about mixing in any except those with a level 1 autism diagnosis). Past cohorts have had a wide range in age, degree of work experience, and formal education.

Feedback noted from previous cohorts:

- These students thrive in a structured setting; change is difficult for them.
- A need exists to not be surprised but be forewarned about what the class will cover, when and how. Consistency is very important.
- Some students responded well to the instructors' sense of humor while others were not quite sure how to react.
- Stress changed their demeanor drastically when they felt overwhelmed by projects in their Manufacturing classes.
- They are not always sure how to accept constructive criticism.
- Attention spans varied. Class breaks were necessary as was the change in activities.
- Feedback was very important verbally and in writing. Many students wanted to know if they were doing an assignment correctly.
- Motivational techniques and gentle nudges to participate were helpful to some who were reluctant.

A successful approach needed to include the following steps each time the class was in session.

- "Housekeeping" time to find out how everyone was doing and if any issues were bothering them. (Helped us to gauge the temperament of the class and each student).
- Review important concepts from the last class session.
- Discussion with class about new concepts.
- Return homework with helpful and clear written feedback.
- Collaboration activity (small group).
- Multi-modality approach using technology and/or YouTube videos when possible, to illustrate a point/new concept.



- Included scenarios focusing on interpersonal skills in the workplace.
- Summary at end of class to ensure students understood the homework assignment and important concepts covered in that day's class session.

If a particular class meets only once a week, then building trust was important between class sessions. Therefore, usually one (sometimes both) of the instructors emailed students and encouraged them to ask questions about the concept discussed in class and how it pertained to them specifically. Constructing a resume was something done in parts through email. With deadlines set for each part, the students were required to email the section to one of the instructors. In turn the students would receive feedback for improvement.

Strategies for Intervention

- Remember: behavior is communication. Be observant. Will be able to tell what is common and uncommon for them. When not feeling well will see some behavior changes.
- Look for the “Why?” There is always a reason.
 - Was there a trigger? What are they trying to convey?
- Offer alternate communication methods.
- Stay calm and patient.
- Speak in a low voice with simple phrases (short and direct) – esp. when things are not going well. Don't overexplain and only ask one question at a time.
- Remember to give processing time.
- Offer a break.
- Do not bombard with questions.
- Avoid interruption of stimming (if not in danger).
- Keep students informed of what is happening or will happen – beforehand when possible. Esp. when is a change in routine.
- Give choices/options when possible – especially with a visual aid (pick picture “a” or “b” – they tend to be visual learners).
- Demonstrate desired action or outcome – do well with modeling from videos or see someone do it.
- Repeat request only after an adequate amount of time has passed.
- Offer reassurance, help them feel safe/valued. Give positive feedback, encourage.

Strategies for Handling Moments of Overwhelm/Meltdowns

- Moments of feeling overwhelmed may occur, as well as a meltdown. Noise, particularly unexpected sound, is something that can cause a meltdown. It is best to head it off by trying to conduct class in a quiet space and preparing students.



- Be aware of what else might be going on in the vicinity of the training, e.g., welding, etc.
 - Expose students ahead of time as to what distractions might happen.
- These moments may look like:
 - A panic attack.
 - Shutting down/becoming quiet – inability to speak or respond.
 - Loss of control of emotions.
 - Acting angry or aggressive.
- When a student becomes overwhelmed or has a meltdown it is important to understand that it is not a tantrum or a choice, they are a neurological/physical reaction to stress.
- It is important to have a nearby room where students can go to calm down and relocate to this area or a quiet space should a student become overwhelmed.
 - Go to this room a few times in advance so they know where it is and the room is familiar.
- Schedule breaks during the classes (just like a normal workday).
- It is important to know if your students are prone to elopement or run away from a situation. Have them talk to you about if this is something they occasionally do. Remove them from the situation before it becomes full blown.
- Have a list of coping mechanisms. Ask students what they use for coping mechanism.
- Stay calm and patient.
 - The priority should be to keep the student safe.
 - Move to a quiet area if possible.
 - Remove others if the student will not move.
 - Remind/allow student to use calming strategies/techniques to regain control.
 - Plan with campus security in advance. – training, plans for different situations.
- Watch “Can you make it to the end?” to gain a deeper perspective of what it is like to encounter the world with autism.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aPknwW8mPAM>

Comments from UAA instructors

- Communication on shop floor is very direct and cut and dried, so students fit well into this environment.
- Having a counselor in the room was very helpful when extra hands were needed to assist students.
- Be cognizant that there is more interaction on the shop floor.
- Helpful to emulate employment timing.
- Students are very aware of time- it is important to stay on schedule.
- Students love and appreciate the structure of the program.



- Students follow directions well. Be sure to be direct when giving a work task, no innuendo. “Did you see the chips?” doesn’t work. Instead say “Clean up the chips.”
- Parents are unique too – many tend to be overprotective. Need to educate parents as well. Parents aren’t always going to be there for their children.
- Must have a sense of humor – can’t take yourself too seriously, e.g., two individuals talking about an instructor when he was standing right there next to them.
- Tailor the campus tours: provide headphones, be aware of smells, leave machines running to gauge sounds.