

Unstructured Times

The classroom is a useful resource for all pupils before registration, during break and at lunchtimes.

The rooms can be used to enhance the school day for pupils with autism. Remember that 'good autism practice is good practice for all pupils'.

Your room could provide the structure and support needed for pupils during unstructured time.

Here are some examples of how secondary classroom are used out of lesson time:

- ◇ Relaxation breathing
- ◇ Mindfulness Meditation
- ◇ Lego Time
- ◇ Manga Reading Club
- ◇ Small group snack room
- ◇ Sound of Silence Room
- ◇ Pokemon Card Game
- ◇ Football Highlights Catchup
- ◇ CBBC Newsround
- ◇ Anime Fan Club
- ◇ Brain Gym

Low Arousal Classroom Checklist:

- Name of classroom displayed on door, possibly with object related to the function of the room which reduces anxiety for some pupils and helps to promote memory eg food technology might display a tea spoon
- Tidy classroom
- Provision of a clutter free workstation / desk optional learning space
- Anxiety reducing strategies are displayed
- Visuals to reduce need for verbal instructions: lesson structure displayed, list of equipment needed, group work cards to clearly define the role of individuals, graphic organisers /writing frames
- No overly vibrant displays
- Clear and visual expectations: broken down tasks, WAGOLL
- Reduce/eliminate noise distractions eg fan of projector, bell, buzzing light
- Dress yourself plainly
- No scent, perfume, aftershave
- No smelly breath eg coffee breath
- Calm tone of voice
- Slower body movements
- Clear facial expressions



AUTISM FRIENDLY ENVIRONMENTS

Low Arousal Classrooms



The teacher's approach and the classroom environment need to be calm and ordered to reduce anxiety and help maintain concentration. For example, lighting, volume, background noise, colour scheme all need to be considered.

AUTISM FRIENDLY ENVIRONMENTS ARE LOW AROUSAL ENVIRONMENTS

Sensory Issues

Pupils on the autism spectrum experience sensory differences. Sometimes this can be a hypersensitivity or a hyposensitivity. Some pupils will experience a hypersensitivity to a stimulus and then hyposensitivity to the same stimulus on another occasion

A sensory overload will lead pupils who are on the autism spectrum to experience 'fragmentation'. This can be painful, create stress and heightened anxiety.

Watch the video:



Autism and sensory sensitivity

At these times you are likely to see:

- ◊ withdrawal
- ◊ challenging behavior (usually so they are taken out of environment)
- ◊ meltdown



“IF I GET SENSORY OVERLOAD I JUST SHUT DOWN; YOU GET WHAT'S KNOWN AS FRAGMENTATION ... IT'S WEIRD, LIKE BEING TUNED INTO 40 TV CHANNELS.”



“MY BOOK MIGHT START TO LOOK LIKE THIS ONE ABOVE.”

What can I do to help?

The National Autistic Society advises you to:

- ◊ **Be aware** Look at the environment to see if it is creating difficulties. Can you change anything?
- ◊ **Be creative** Think of some positive sensory experiences.
- ◊ **Be prepared** Tell the person about possible sensory stimuli they may experience in different environments.

“It is of course desirable that people are exposed to a wide range of experiences but that this is done in a planned and sensitive way.

It is recognised that for the most part the individual may benefit most in a setting where sensory and other stimulation can be reduced or controlled.

Supplementary relaxation and arousal reduction therapies, multi-sensory rooms, music and massage, sensory diet etc may be helpful in promoting calm and general well-being and in reducing anxiety.”

National Autistic Society