

How to Support Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders

Education Bureau 2015

Introduction

Parents always wish to provide their children with the best living and learning environment in order to nurture them to achieve success in future. With early identification and support, children with special educational needs (SEN) may adapt to everyday life and the learning environment, and develop their potentials.

What are Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD)?

ASD is a congenital developmental disorder caused by abnormalities in the functioning of the brain. Although the symptoms may vary from person to person, all individuals with autism mainly have difficulties in the following three aspects:

Social Interaction

- Lack initiative to interact;
- Difficult to establish rapport with friends and peers;
- Weak in using body language to communicate; and
- Difficult to understand others' thoughts and feelings, not good at reading meaning behind speech or facial expressions.

Verbal Communication

- Delayed speech development;
- Use repetitive and monotonous speech; or speak with unusual speed and pitch;
- Difficult to start and maintain a conversation; and
- Weak in imaginative play.

Behaviours and Interests

- Rigidly stick to certain practices and resistant to change, such as insisting on using the same route;
- Repetitive body movements, such as rocking back and forth;
- Restricted patterns of interests, such as only interested in drawing maps; and
- Preoccupation with certain parts of objects.

Roles of Parents

I Suspect that My Child may have ASD...

- Initiate contact with his/her teachers, the student guidance personnel or the social worker

of the school. Schools can then give appropriate assessment and guidance services.

My Child is Assessed to have ASD...

- Provide the school with the SEN information of your child promptly and proactively, including forwarding his/her psychiatric report to the school for arrangement of appropriate support services;
- Maintain communication with the school's student support team, class teacher and subject teachers to understand your child's learning in school; and discuss appropriate support strategies with them when necessary;
- Learn to handle your own emotion first and adjust your expectations towards him/her. Praise your child for his/her efforts and positive deeds;
- Help your child develop peer relationship as early as possible, for example, arrange your child to interact with peers sharing the same interests;
- Help your child understand his/her own and others' emotions and thinking with measures such as demonstration, role play and story-telling, and help him/her learn social rules;
- Give him/her instructions in simple, clear and direct language to enhance his/her verbal comprehension;
- Make use of visual cues (such as picture cards, schedules, good behaviours record forms and mind maps) to help your child understand abstract instructions, daily routines and the content of texts;
- Encourage your child to express his/her needs in simple words or sentences through repeated demonstrations and imitation;
- Help your child adapt to changes by giving prior notice;
- Make use of your child's interests to foster his/ her motivation in learning, communication, and developing good behaviours, e.g. by rewarding him/her with pictures of his/her favourite objects;
- Guide your child to express and regulate his/ her emotions to reduce problem behaviours, for instance, providing emotion cards to help him/her express himself/herself; and
- Identify your child's interests and strengths with a view to helping him/her develop his/her potentials.

For further information on supporting children with SEN, parents may refer to the "Parent Guide on the Whole School Approach to Integrated Education" on the Education Bureau (EDB) website (please see the back page for the website).

Support Services and Strategies

In general, students with ASD having average intelligence will attend ordinary schools. Students with both ASD and intellectual disability (ID) are placed in schools for children with ID with the consent of the parents.

Schools will provide the following support in accordance with the needs of the students:

Ordinary Schools

➤ “3-Tier Intervention Model”

Schools provide Tier-1 quality teaching to all students, including students with diverse needs, by adopting effective teaching materials and methods, and making adjustment in the instruction based on continuous monitoring of the students’ learning progress. Tier-2 support is “add-on” intervention in the form of small group learning support for students with persistent learning/ adjustment difficulties. Students with ASD usually need small group training on social communication and emotional/behavioural regulation. Schools will arrange Tier-3 support for students who have more support needs in the form of individual education plans.

➤ The common strategies deployed by schools to support students with ASD include:

● **Structured Learning Environment**

Establish clear classroom conventions and schedules to facilitate the adjustment of the students;

● **Visual Strategies**

Post “visual cues” such as pictures, photos and text in the classroom to remind students of the classroom rules and appropriate behaviours;

● **Peer Support**

Enhance peer interaction between students with ASD and their peers, such as arranging peer play groups for students with ASD to learn to interact with others;

● **Speech and Communication Training**

Provide needy students with individual or group training on speech and communication;

● **Social and Emotion Training**

Provide needy students with individual or group training to enhance their social and emotional management skills;

● **Social Narrative Stories**

Help students understand social situations and teach them appropriate social responses with social narrative stories; and

● **Good Behaviours Reward Scheme**

Set concrete behavioural goals with students and strengthen their good behaviours through feedback and rewards.

➤ Professional Support: Arrange educational psychologist, speech therapist, etc. to provide services on assessment, consultation and professional support.

Special Schools

Through the “Resource Teaching Programme for Autistic Children in Special Schools”, students with ASD studying in special schools are provided with enhanced support in addition to normal classroom teaching in the form of individual or small group intervention, in-class support and follow up intervention in accordance with their needs, learning performances and nature of teaching activities.

Useful Websites and Telephone Numbers for Enquiry

Education Bureau

<http://www.edb.gov.hk>

Hong Kong Regional Education Office (Tel: 2863 4646)

Kowloon Regional Education Office (Tel: 3698 4108)

New Territories East Regional Education Office (Tel: 2639 4876)

New Territories West Regional Education Office (Tel: 2437 7272)

General Enquiries on Special Education (Tel: 3698 3957)

Educational Psychology Service Section

- Hong Kong (Tel: 3695 0486)
- Kowloon (Tel: 3698 4321)
- New Territories East (Tel: 3547 2228)
- New Territories West (Tel: 2437 7270)

Special Education Resource Centre (Tel: 3698 3900)

<http://www.edb.gov.hk/en/edu-system/special/resources/serc/index.html>

Parent Guide on the Whole School Approach to Integrated Education

<http://www.edb.gov.hk/attachment/en/edu-system/special/resources/serc/download/ieparentguide.pdf>

Operation Guide on the Whole School Approach to Integrated Education

http://www.edb.gov.hk/attachment/en/edu-system/special/support/wsa/ie%20guide_en.pdf

Department of Health

- Child Assessment Service (Tel: 2246 6659)
<http://www.dhcas.gov.hk/eindex.html>
- Student Health Service (Tel: 2349 4212)
<http://www.studenthealth.gov.hk/eindex.html>

Social Welfare Department

<http://www.swd.gov.hk/en/index>

The Hong Kong Council of Social Service

<http://hkcss.org.hk/e>

OneClick

<http://oneclick.hku.hk/en>