Learning to Read the Signs.

Working with High Functioning Autism Students at the High School Level
• Autism Support Teacher at Houston County High School, Warner Robins, GA., 4 years.
• Itinerant Autism Teacher for 2 years. Worked PK-12.
• Taught Special Education 17 years.
• 1st Autism student (diagnosed) 8 years ago.
• LOVE MY JOB!
• 39 Autism students served at HCHS in our program.
• 2 full time teacher starting this year.
• 3 full time paraprofessionals for our program alone.
• Not everything that steps out of line, and thus “abnormal”, must necessarily be ‘inferior.’ Hans Asperger (1938)

• People with high-functioning autism or Asperger's syndrome do not have the delayed language development that's typically found in people with autism. In addition, people with high-functioning autism have average or above-average intelligence. However, they may show other behaviors and signs similar to what's seen with other types of autism. These include:
  • A delay in motor skills
  • A lack of skill in interacting with others
  • Little understanding of the abstract uses of language, such as humor or give-and-take in a conversation
  • Obsessive interest in specific items or information
  • Strong reactions to textures, smells, sounds, sights, or other stimuli that others might not even notice, such as a flickering light
  • Unlike people with other forms of autism, people with high-functioning autism or Asperger's syndrome want to be involved with others. They simply don't know how to go about it. They may not be able to understand others' emotions. They may not read facial expressions or body language well. As a result, they may be teased and often feel like social outcasts. The unwanted social isolation can lead to anxiety and depression.

• Average age of diagnosis between the ages of 8-11
Did you know that 97% of ALL communication between people is Non Verbal?

This makes it all the more difficult for our students to navigate the social realm of high school.
• Research explains that autistic children are not able to automatically read people. This is a very important skill they have to be taught and explained.

• EACH OF YOU ARE DIFFERENT AND HAVE DIFFERENT WAYS TO COMMUNICATE!

• Seven classes and seven different teachers makes it difficult for them to decipher how each of their means of communication is to be interpreted.
• Share effective ideas, tools or techniques you use in your classes!
Children with HFA need to be taught how to handle and cope with social situations as well as recognize character in others.
1. **Physical world (ages 2-5)**
   Children are focused on the physical environment and not necessarily other individuals in it.

2. **Wanting to have friends (ages 6-8)**
   Children begin to notice and become interested in other children. They are often rejected because they are socially behind their peers. They begin to realize they are different.

3. **Functional Friends (ages 9-12)**
   Children forge “friendships” with others that share common interests. They exchange information but not much more.

4. **Loneliness (teenage years)**
   Children are looking for acceptance but unfortunately find rejection. Much of the feedback received from peers is derogatory. When they reach out or others reach out to them they often misinterpret intent.

5. **Partner (teenage-adulthood)**
   Individuals are looking for a partner. Think about who is likely to be a partner of someone with Asperger’s Syndrome.

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**Stages in Friendship for the Child with Autism/HFA**
• Think of a poor driver:
• They do what they want
• They do not see or recognize the “social” signs

• Teach kids how to prevent “social” accidents and limit the damage to themselves. They need to learn when to use the brakes, when to do a U turn and how to read signals

Allow U Turns
• Weekly during our scheduled Bear Paws I am allowed time to work on a social skill my students need help with.
• Topics may include bullying, true friends, schedule changes, self advocacy, dating (dances and social situations).
• SmartBoards make social stories interactive and more enjoyable to the students.
• Share effective ideas, tools or techniques you use in your classes!

Carpooling
Classroom Make Up
Any person at HCHS associated with the Autism Program or is someone the students can go to for assistance has a puzzle piece on their door. It can be the Dept. Chair, Administrator or Counselor. This visual helps the students see where they can go throughout the building if they need assistance.
We use the following visual to make sure our students are not out of class without permission. We allow our students to come to our room for assistance but we have to make sure we don’t encourage “escape” behavior.
Our students feel as though they are part of a group. For many this is the first time they have had this opportunity in the school setting.
HFA/Asperger students don’t like open wide spaces. We have worked the arrangement of the furniture to make the larger room feel more comfortable and less “intimidating”.
Many of my students have food sensory sensitivity and therefore eat a very specific diet. We provide them a space where they can prepare their food in our classroom. Many of my students also do not like the noise and chaos of the lunchroom so we have a very large number of students that come to eat in our room.
A large part of my Independent Studies class time is working on my students organization. We use a folder system to help the students with work they need to complete for their other classes. The paraprofessionals can put any missing assignments on the board organizer and in their folders so they know what to work on in my class.

Creating an organized binder at the beginning of the year and working to keep it organized during the school year is a skill we work on daily.
Owners Manual
Each of my Independent Study classes has an organizer with each student’s folder. It is easy to locate and keeps the clutter to a minimal.
The paraprofessionals and I will write down upcoming tests, quizzes and projects on the white board to provide the students with another visual reminder of what is due in their classes.
Mrs. Justen’s example of how she alerts her students to their having an upcoming test in their classes.
Due to their lack of motor skills many of my students don’t like to use their lockers. I provide a space for them to leave their textbooks. Lockers can be particularly difficult for our students because they are in tight spaces and require “time constraints” between classes.
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• Share effective ideas, tools or techniques you use in your classes!
Make it Visual
• The ASD student’s strength is that they are often visual learners.
• When HFA students were younger most used some type of visual schedule. For example, placing a check mark or removing a picture helped the student understand where they were to go next.
• At the High School level, Task Analysis has replaced the need for a picture or visual schedule.
• Writing the daily assignment step by step will help them achieve their desired goal independently with minimal intervention from the teacher or paraprofessional.
Schedules are such a help to our students that I make sure I have them posted throughout the room. I include ALL schedules including activity, Bear Paws, and even tutoring so they will have access to this information.
• ASD students do not interpret the non-verbal nuances most students learn at a very early age.
• Verbal explanations need to be short and concise. To help the ASD child learn the communication process it is helpful to pair a verbal request or directive with a visual (Task Analysis).
• ASD students work best within a structured environment.
• When the structure is removed, many of the behaviors they display are a result of their misunderstanding of what is expected of them or what they are suppose to be doing.

Structure and the Environment
**Priming**

- Priming is a non-conscious form of human memory, which is concerned with perceptual identification of words and objects. It refers to activating particular representations or associations in memory just before carrying out an action or task.
  - Class schedules
  - Locker schedules
  - Change in daily routine
  - Drills
  - Change in environment (classrooms, buildings)
• Share effective ideas, tools or techniques you use in your classes!

Carpooling
• Having paraprofessionals out in the building throughout the day is how I am able to keep a handle on what my students are doing in their classes.
• 39 students x 7 teachers = Too much for 1 person.
• They are in individual classes helping with labs, tests, transition, organization and discipline.
• Overworked and underpaid!!
• Allows me to have the documentation needed to monitor IEP goals and objectives in their classes.
• Try to show my appreciation daily for their work with our students.

We are a Team
• Each paraprofessional keeps a notebook divided up by periods. They write down current assignments, upcoming projects, tests or quizzes.

• Progress monitoring is done weekly on the attached sheet so we can use this to complete information for IEP’s and parent conferences.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class Period</th>
<th>Class Period</th>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Class Period</th>
<th>Class Period</th>
<th>Student</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>have all materials out</td>
<td>taking notes</td>
<td>have all materials out</td>
<td>taking notes</td>
<td>taking notes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>self advocating</td>
<td>copy of notes or power points</td>
<td>self advocating</td>
<td>working on assignment</td>
<td>copy of notes or power points</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>focused on lesson</td>
<td>working on assignment</td>
<td>focused on lesson</td>
<td>needed to be redirected</td>
<td>working on assignment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>needed to be redirected</td>
<td>actively engaged in lesson</td>
<td>needed to be redirected</td>
<td>actively engaged in lesson</td>
<td>actively engaged in lesson</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>attempting work</td>
<td>sitting appropriately in desk</td>
<td>attempting work</td>
<td>sitting appropriately in desk</td>
<td>sitting appropriately in desk</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>organized notebook</td>
<td>socially engaged with peers</td>
<td>organized notebook</td>
<td>socially engaged with peers</td>
<td>socially engaged with peers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>homework log updated</td>
<td>complete HW &amp; CW</td>
<td>homework log updated</td>
<td>complete HW &amp; CW</td>
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Notes:
**Paraprofessional Duties and Responsibilities:**

- Check the board as soon as you come in for daily assignment and due dates of upcoming assignments. Write these in your spiral to communicate to Mrs. Beck.
- Listen to Mr. Godfrey’s instructions for the daily assignment.
- Sit with the students (not in the back of the room away from the students) and actively monitor their progress. Ideally, having the students in the same area will be best so you can monitor and assist. If they are having difficulty, please model how to do the assignment and then monitor if they are able to complete. If they don’t understand the assignment you should **guide, reteach and demonstrate** until they get the concept.
- The students should come to you first before going to Mr. Godfrey. If you see them going to his desk, intervene.
- When testing, monitor their responses and if they are being unsuccessful, assist with suggestions or examples to help them understand the question or concept.
Self Advocacy

• Ability to communicate with others to acquire information and recruit help in meeting personal needs and goals (Balcazar, Fawcett & Seekins, 1991)
• ASD students often can not communicate their needs effectively or correctly due to their difficulties with language and reaction to stressors.
• Teaching my students to ask for help has to be done through role playing and modeling.
• Transferring this skill to their post secondary and employment experiences is vital.
Everything I do in my class is to help my students be more successful in their classes and ultimately prepare them for the real world. Once way is to constantly ask this question of them? I tell them daily “There isn’t a Mrs. Beck in the real world.”
The Autism Support classroom is a place where my students know they can come if they are having a problem while at school.

Knowing they have an advocate helps them get through the challenges they face each day.

Learning to ask for a “break” before a behavior escalates is one of the main skills I work with my students on daily.
Students are given the following “cool down” passes at the beginning of the year to keep on them at all times. The faculty at our school know that all ASD students can use this pass to come to one of the Autism Teacher’s room when they need assistance. If a child is not able to communicate their needs this eliminates the need for explanation.

**Passing Zone**
Because many of my students have sensitivity to light, I have had special blue filters placed on my fluorescent lights. This helps with their ability to see the flickering as well as creates a more calming environment in which they can work.
• Solitude (being alone in a safe place such as the child’s bedroom) can serve as a restorative method for children with HFA
• Children need a place to feel safe and secure, a place where they can calm down.
• This is not a place of punishment but one where the child can regroup.
My sensory room is available to my student whenever they self advocate and ask for a break from the stressors they encounter throughout the school day. I keep sensory items such as stress balls, bean bags, weighted balls and fidgets for the students to use if necessary. This room also allows us a private place to talk and discuss behavioral issues they may have encountered in a class.
• Share effective ideas, tools or techniques you use in your classes!

Carpooling
• Driver’s License
• Vocational Rehabilitation Services
  • 11th grade IEP Meeting
• Disability Coordinators at post-secondary schools.
• Roosevelt Warm Springs
  • Excellent resource for our students.

Transition
To succeed in a postsecondary school environment, students with disabilities need self-advocacy and self-determination skills to:

- Understand their rights and responsibilities
- Understand their disability-related needs
- Be able to advocate for needed supports and accommodations
• Everyday there will be a challenge or situation that requires us to backup, make a U-turn or change directions completely.
• Showing that it is ok and you can adjust helps the students learn to cope with these situations better.
• How we deal with the daily speed bumps is vital in helping our students learn to adjust to changes or difficulties.
• NEVER TAKE WHAT THEY SAY PERSONALLY – LAUGH!

Speed Bumps