

School for the Asperger's Child

The school environment often presents a unique challenge for the child with Asperger's syndrome. School is truly a balance between learning in class, class assignments, homework, and children socializing with each other. How teachers communicate information to them is of extreme importance, as is the school environment itself. The best way for a child with Asperger's to learn is by breaking down assignments visually and structuring the classroom environment both aesthetically and by the way that assignments are presented to him/her. Understanding that communicating needs easily (especially when your child does not understand what is being taught) is often difficult for the child with Asperger's.

Making sure that your child's teacher understands the unique way that your child learns, whether it is through visual or verbal instruction in the classroom is of extreme importance to your child's success in school. If your child's teacher understands what your child's individual strengths are in as far as learning and retaining information, then his/her teacher can build on that in the classroom. Often seen in children with Asperger's syndrome is that they do better with instruction that is very concrete and literal rather than with concepts that are abstract in nature. Often when information is presented with visual aides and when the information is broken down in smaller pieces, the tasks seem less daunting.

Homework and class assignments can often be a source of extreme anxiety and frustration to a child with Asperger's syndrome. In an effort to please and have everything "perfect", they become anxiety-ridden in their attempt to complete assignments and homework without error. They will often also become anxious when a number of assignments are given to them and they are unsure of what and where to start first. Utilize your child's teacher by having him/her break down the tasks on a chart and map out the times that assignments are due in class and also at home when homework is given. For example,

In class:

9:00-9:30- work on math problems in class

9:30-10:00-read over vocabulary words and memorize for test tomorrow

Homework:

3:30-4:00-write down spelling words in agenda and study for spelling test

When class assignments and homework are marked down and they are able to see the work visually in their own "special folder", the tasks become structured and the work and amount become less daunting.

The school itself for the Asperger's child is often a big source of their anxiety. All schools for children with Asperger's are filled with SENSORY experiences that will often put

the child into “overload” by the end of the school day. This is often a common complaint reported by parents with children with Asperger’s syndrome. Often seen in Asperger’s children as well as children with Autism, is that they have significant sensitivities to noises, being touched by other students or by teachers, certain smells at school, and visuals. By the end of the school day, the actual combination of trying to conform to all of the social rules (remember they are very often “people pleasers”), complete class work, and the sensory overload often puts the child into meltdown mode.

There are a number of strategies or interventions that can be used that are highly effective if conveyed properly to your child’s school and teacher/s.

- 1.) Visual aides of the social rules or mores in the classroom are often helpful ie...
respect each other, wait your turn, do not tease or make fun of others
- 2.) Students in class are given a written schedule of the day’s assignments and any changes to the schedule are conveyed to them in advance
- 3.) Keep the classroom door shut to cut down on the amount of noise in the classroom
(remember children with Asperger’s are often very sensitive to loud noises)
- 4.) Organize the classroom to be less cluttered so there are less distractions
- 5.) Have the intercom, phones, class bell in class turned down to a lower volume

Above all, keeping a structured environment whenever possible will provide your child with Asperger’s with the least amount of stress to bring about school success.

Kara T. Tamanini, M.S., LMHC
Author and Therapist
Founder of Kids Awareness Series
www.KidsAwarenessSeries.com

Kara T. Tamanini is a licensed therapist that works with children/adolescents on a variety of childhood mental disorders.