

Autism Spectrum Disorder

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a form of developmental disorder, in which the processing of stimuli and information in the brain is disturbed. In people with autism, the brain processes information differently than the brains of people without this disorder. In the DSM-5 manual of psychiatry, the PDD-NOS, Asperger's and classic autism diagnoses are combined under the term Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). It can be indicated whether the degree of autism spectrum disorder is mild or severe (Dutch Autism Association).

The DSM-5 distinguishes two criteria on which autism spectrum disorder is classified:

1. Limitations in social communication and interaction.
2. Repetitive behaviour and specific interests.

Characteristics

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is different for every individual. In general they have a need for clarity and structure. They tend to become overstimulated more easily than others or might have difficulty 'reading' social situations correctly. This can negatively affect their studies or internship. Preferences in learning style, intelligence, parenting, age, character etc. influence whether the characteristics below are expressed or not.

Positive characteristics

- Language and communication:
- Excellent language ability with a large vocabulary (sometimes used somewhat more formal).

Information processing:

- Of one or a few subject areas in which the student has a high level of knowledge.
- Good at memorising details.
- Good at associative thinking.

Impairing characteristics

Language and communication:

- Difficulty using figurative language.
- Difficulty following the informative part of communication.
- Difficulty with non-verbal communication.
- Difficulty making contact, staying aloof or seeking too much contact.

Information processing:

- Difficulty distinguishing between main and side issues, making connections and capacity for abstraction.

Concentration and stress:

- Difficulty dealing with many stimuli at the same time.
- Difficulty with unfamiliar circumstances.
- Difficulty starting up.
- Energy problems.

Tips

It is not so much about the characteristics, but about the extent to which the student experiences obstacles during the study. Below are some tips per educational activity that can help students with autism spectrum disorder. Students with other disabilities or support needs may face similar obstacles and also benefit from the tips. Engage with the student to find out what helps or works best.

Contact hours

(lectures, working groups, etc.)

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- Be guiding and directive when providing teaching material, assignments or instructions.
- Ensure that the layout of teaching material is orderly and that it has a clear structure, clear use of language, and consistent instructions.
- Provide written instructions including the steps to be taken.
- Provide information in different ways (e.g. verbally, video, text).
- Use a variety of working methods (e.g. listening, question block, individual, discussion).
- Provide teaching materials in advance.
- Offer the possibility of audio recording and/or put your lecture online.

Independent study tasks

- Provide information by e-mail or use a digital learning environment.
- Offer help with planning.
- Provide help in developing good study methods.
- Provide written instructions including the steps to be taken.
- Give clear information on different information channels to be used.
- Split tasks.
- Work in pairs or with a study buddy.
- Monitor the progress.

Assessing and examining

- Provide in time written information about the test (form, content, assessment, which teacher, which room).
- Vary the types of tests (e.g. written, verbal, portfolio).
- Vary the kind of questions (multiple choice or open questions).
- Spread the times of assessments and the deadlines.
- Provide a quiet environment with minimal stimuli.
- Offer the possibility to take the exam in an alternative way.
- Give extra time to process the information properly.
- Give students the opportunity to have a moment of rest.

Internship and graduation projects/theses

- Announce an internship in time.
- Provide information on how to find an internship placement.
- If necessary, inform the workplace in advance.
- If necessary, provide an alternative placement.
- Provide a fixed point of contact.
- Formulate assignments clearly and simply.
- Split tasks and assignments.
- Offer help with prioritising and planning.
- Offer extra feedback moments.
- Set partial products with deadlines.
- Make the assessment criteria known in advance.
- Monitor the progress.

Note: this overview is not complete.

More information

- [ECIO, expert centre on inclusive education](#)
- [Hogeronderwijstoegankelijk.nl/en](https://www.hogeronderwijstoegankelijk.nl/en)
- [National Autistic Society UK](#)
- [Nederlandse Vereniging voor Autisme \(Dutch\)](#)
- [Syndromic Autism Revisited: Review of the Literature and Lessons Learned](#)
- [Succesvol Studeren met Autisme - Hanzehogeschool \(Dutch\)](#)

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ECIO, P.O. Box 1585 | NL-5200 BP 's-Hertogenbosch | +31736800783 | algemeen@ecio.nl |