

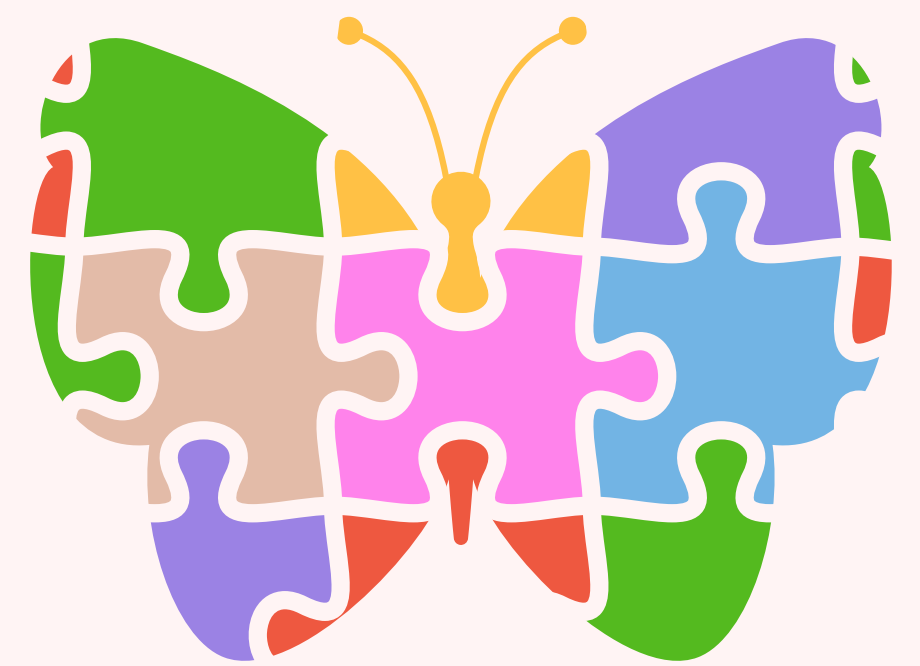
UNDERSTANDING AUTISM

in the classroom

AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a neurological difference that affects how a person perceives, processes, and interacts with the world. It influences social communication, sensory processing, and behavior – and it looks different in every person.

The word "spectrum" is important: there is no single "type" of autistic person. Some autistic students may be highly verbal and excel academically but struggle with social nuance. Others may have limited spoken language but communicate effectively in other ways. Some may need significant support throughout the day; others may need only minor accommodations.



What you might see:

Communication:

- Difficulty with back-and forth conversation
- Literal thinking
- May not pick up on unspoken social rules
- Unusual eye contact
- Flat or formal tone of voice

Learning/Attention

- Uneven skill profile
- Difficulty with open-ended tasks
- Strong memory but may struggle with flexible thinking or inference

Sensory:

- Sensitive to noise, light, or textures
- Covers ears, squirms or becomes distressed in loud environments
- Particular about clothing, food textures, or touch

Behavior:

- Repetitive movements
- Strong need for routine
- Repeated phrases or sounds
- Focused interests

Supports for Success

Every student is different. Get to know what works best for each learner.

Sensory considerations

Flexible seating (wobble cushions, standing desks, quiet corners), fidget tools, minimize unnecessary noise or bright lights, provide noise-canceling headphones for work-time or loud environments

Communication Supports

Use clear and literal language, pair verbal instructions with visual cues, allow extra processing time before expecting a response

Academic Accommodations

Break down tasks, offer choices when possible, use student's areas of interest to build engagement

Brain breaks

Jumping, hopping, spinning, balance exercises, stretching, deep breaths

Predictability and Structure

Post daily schedules, give advance notice before transitions, keep routines consistent, use visual timers

Social & Emotional Support

Teach and model social expectations, designate safe spaces, recognize and name emotions, have students work in groups or with partners

Positive Relationships

Learn and respect student's communication style, celebrate strengths and progress, involve students in goal-setting, collaborate with families and specialists

