

Schools

Children with autism present with a whole range of intellectual abilities. Some may have higher than normal IQ, while others qualify for a diagnosis of mental retardation. Their skills may be stronger in some areas (memory, math, music) than others (speech, self-care). Regardless of their abilities, it is important for children with autism to attend school because it provides a structured environment with clearly laid out expectations. Attending school is greatly beneficial to their development.

Seek the guidance of professionals to help you decide the best type of school for your child. Options include a regular school, an inclusive school (most children are typical, but the school will admit students with special needs), and special schools (meant specifically for children with disabilities).

The educational needs of children with an ASD vary considerably depending on their intellectual ability and their profile of strengths and needs. Children with an ASD might attend an ordinary mainstream school, a school for children with learning difficulties or an autism-specialist school.

Staff within all types of school and early education setting where children ASDs are educated will need to understand the implications of ASDs for teaching and learning and should look to modify the environment and curriculum plan. If staff is not aware of the ways a child is affected by an ASD, then the child might be perceived as naughty, lazy or disobedient.

A teacher will need to be knowledgeable of ASDs and know how to structure the classroom and the teaching material to promote learning. They will also need to be flexible and resourceful. All children with an ASD do not think and learn in exactly the same way. The importance of active partnership with parents and of communicating news of a child's difficulties in a sensitive way cannot be overemphasised.

For children with lesser abilities, activities of daily living and life skills, pre-vocational and vocational skills training are also a core part of the curriculum. Ideally therapists involved with the child (speech and language therapists, psychologists, occupational therapists) will contribute to the educational program and remain in communication with the parents and teachers.

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