

Information and Recommendations Concerning Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD, e.g. Asperger Syndrome)

Excerpts from: www.autismus.de (*Autismus Deutschland e. V.*—Federal Association for the Promotion of People with Autism)

What is autism?

Autism is, in a sense, an invisible disability. What we can see are the social communication behaviors and restrictive behavior patterns. What we can't see are the special characteristics of perception and information processing that underlie these autistic behavioral traits. To understand autism, however, one absolutely has to know these special characteristics and take them into account in inclusive interaction with autistic people and when creating an autism-friendly environment.

Autism is a complex and varied neurological developmental disorder. Autism and autism spectrum disorders are also frequently referred to as perception and information processing disorders that affect social interaction, communication and the behavioral repertoire.

Diagnosis of “autism” or “autism spectrum disorder”

Autism spectrum disorders are “profound developmental disorders” and are defined as medical diagnoses under F 84 in the current ICD 10 (International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems), the diagnostic criteria of the World Health Organization (WHO). A distinction is made between “**childhood autism**” (F 84.0), “**Asperger syndrome**” (F 84.5) and “**atypical autism**” (F 84.1). In practice, however, it is becoming more difficult to make this distinction, as increasingly mild forms of the individual disorders are being diagnosed. The term “**autism spectrum disorder**” (ASD) is therefore frequently used as an umbrella term for the entire spectrum of autistic disorders.

Characteristics

The characteristics of childhood autism can already be observed before the age of 3 and are particularly apparent in three areas:

- Social interaction
- Communication
- Repetitive stereotypical behaviors

For more information, see:

https://www.autismus.de/fileadmin/user_upload/Was_ist_Autismus_Infoblatt_A4_2018.pdf

Strengths* (ASD)	Weaknesses* (ASD)
Punctuality	Social and emotional interaction
Reliability	Two-way communication
Hardly any absenteeism	Repetitive stereotypical behaviors
Honesty	Self-organization
Precision	Structuring and prioritization
Diligence	Problems distinguishing between important and unimportant
Loyalty	Changing a course of action or details of the personal environment, since everyday tasks are often performed in a rigid and routine manner
Motivation	Spontaneity, initiative and creativity
Work results	Special characteristics of the perception and processing of environmental and sensory impressions

Strengths* (ASD)	Weaknesses* (ASD)
Comprehension	Great difficulty with the perception and processing of environmental and sensory impressions > constant sensory overload
Professional identity	Special characteristics of social interaction and communication
Perseverance	Special behavioral characteristics
Professional competence	Possible accompanying psychological disorders and problems

* Not an exhaustive list

Special characteristics/forms of autism spectrum disorders:

- What has been learned can often not be recalled spontaneously; this can be especially problematic for oral examinations. It is therefore helpful if course content can be recalled and presented in as structured a manner as possible.
- A precise topic definition or outline is extremely helpful.
- Many people with autism spectrum disorder have difficulties distinguishing between important and unimportant.
- An unclear assignment or outline of course content can cause the student to become overwhelmed or only able to provide unspecific answers to specific questions.
- Contact and interaction with other students is beneficial and, if possible, learning together in a work or study group is always useful.
- Tips on the material, perhaps on priorities or other important aspects, are helpful.
- People with autism have difficulty interpreting and sending social and emotional signals. Reactions to other people's feelings and behavioral adjustments to social situations are rarely appropriate.
- In the area of communication, the development of language use and comprehension are equally affected. As a result, mutual conversational exchange and flexibility in speech expression and speech melody are as underdeveloped as the accompanying gestures that would emphasize verbal communications or underline their meaning.
- Students with ASD have difficulties concentrating and paying attention. The environment or the way an event is organized create too much distraction and frequently lead to impatience. Impulsivity can, however, be used productively. Above all, students with ASD need clear, manageable structures. This also applies to group size and a quiet learning environment. Providing frequent breaks and dividing tasks into smaller parts is helpful for reducing the stress on these students. Directly assigning tasks or directly addressing the student can help with concentration. A clear formulation of objectives and expected performance reduces disruptive behavior.
- The developmental disorder can result in people with autism having almost no social contacts due to difficulties communicating. They also generally experience constant sensory overload. People with ASD are very reliable, honest and precise. They frequently display special abilities in the area of logical thinking. Clear instructions and repetitive procedures can help people with autism. They are frequently assisted by an accompanying person who can explain tasks and situations again. If clear simple structures are provided, other students can also benefit from the strengths of a student with ASD.

What information should proctors and examiners receive in advance?

- Proctors should already be informed before the examination/written examination of any accessibility accommodations and/or accompanying persons based on the approval notification issued by the examination board.
- Examiners should be informed of relevant autism-related characteristics the student might display, for example, during an oral examination (possibly use school experiences for this).

Asperger syndrome:

> [10 rules for how you and people with Asperger syndrome can get along better](#)

Possible study support tasks performed by a higher semester student (“Pate/Patin”), tutor, mentor, etc.:

- Assistance with **organization and orientation**:
 - **Help with orientation on campus**
(including familiarization with buildings, rooms, lecture halls, cafeterias, etc., particularly those relevant for the degree program concerned; use of building plans; taking time when making difficult room changes)
 - **Help with organizing studies**, e.g.:
 - Coordinating schedules
 - Meeting deadlines
 - Examination/written examination registration and de-registration
 - Room changes
 - Assistance with preparing the course schedule/study schedule (include subject-specific study advisory service and caregivers)
 - Help with preparing and requesting notes
 - Accompanying during and evaluation of online seminars
 - Preparation for appointments, formalities, etc.
 - Help using technical aids (e.g. photographing writing boards, video recordings)
 - Assistance in practical areas of life, such as accompanying/orientation when changing rooms
 - Developing structuring aids for work requirements
 - **Creating a so-called “network map”** with important contact information, such as
 - Who do I contact in different situations?
 - Emergency numbers
 - Contact information for the subject-specific study advisory service
 - **Help with self-study** is particularly needed with respect to
 - Organization
 - Time management
 - Meeting deadlines and complying with formalities
 - Organizing the course schedule/registering for seminars
 - Task management and prioritization
 - Structuring and archiving
 - Proper use of libraries
 - Term papers, seminar talks
 - Contact with teachers and other students (e.g. smaller study groups)

“autism&uni” best practice guides for supporting autistic students in higher education

A European project has prepared a number of guides on autism and university studies for various target groups. The guides inform various target groups about issues related to dealing with autism in higher education.

- [Best practice for HE lecturers and tutors](#)
- [Best practice for professionals supporting autistic students within or outside HE institutions](#)