How Educators Can Help Autistic People by Sensory Accommodations

Each autistic person has their own set of sensory sensitivities. Please ask the individual you work with to let you know how you can make accommodations that will work best for everyone.

Some common sensory issues and the accommodations associated with them are:

Do not touch an autistic person without asking first. Touch can be very uncomfortable for autistic people. Do not take this personally. With their permission, try deep pressure or light touch as alternatives. Some other areas affected by touch are difficulty gripping things, say, a pencil for writing, or experiencing discomfort due to the feel of clothing on the skin. Experiment with thicker pencils with cushion grips, for example, and varieties of clothes textures to find a good match.

Certain sounds can present problems for autistics. In a meeting, it is good to keep doors closed, as background sounds, such as a waterfall in a conference room, can be hard to filter out. It is helpful to have a quiet “sensory retreat room” to give people a place to go to recover from an overwhelming situation. Monitor sound systems closely, as harsh sounds like feedback may cause some autistic people to shut down.

Smell can also cause sensory overload. Ask fellow students not to use perfume or strongly scented toiletries.

Light is also an issue. Natural light is best. Incandescent light is usually tolerated well. Fluorescent lights, including compact fluorescents, can cause dizziness and balance and communication problems. Flash photography may cause seizures in autistic people who have epilepsy.

RESOURCES:

autisticadvocacy.org
autismacceptancemonth.org