



SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES FOR USE DURING PSHE LESSON

Autism is a developmental disability that usually appears during the first three years of life. The cause is unknown. It affects how a person's brain works, but not all people with autism are affected the same way.

When a person has autism, they may have problems:

- letting you know what they want,
- Thinking,
- understanding what other people say or want,
- ignoring sounds,
- ignoring things or people that are moving,
- ignoring lights,
- being touched,
- understanding social rules,
- showing affection,
- controlling their feelings,
- knowing how to play with other kids,
- and dealing with changes.

Autism is a "spectrum disorder." That means that not everyone with autism has all the problems. One person may have three of the problems listed while another person has only one. Some people with autism struggle to learn. Other people with autism are very smart and can do complicated math when they are 3 years old. Some people with autism have trouble being touched while others like to hug.

Many people with autism like to do things in the same order all the time and have things arranged the same way. This helps them stay calm.

Other people with autism have a very hard time ignoring noises, especially if they are upset or in a new situation. They may try to calm themselves by rocking, moaning, talking loudly or even screaming. The moaning, talking or screaming helps them drown out the other noises so they can calm down. They may also try to go under a desk or in a small, dark place where they feel safer. These and other signs are often indicators that their anxiety levels are increased or increasing, also known as rumbling.



ACTIVITY 1

This activity is designed to show how people with autism are bothered by things most people don't notice. People with autism are often extra sensitive to noise, movement and even things like background noises most of us don't notice. Remember, not everyone with autism has these problems.

Divide the class into groups of 5. Explain that they will each have a job to do. Go over their jobs and tell them they will start when you give the signal.

One student in each group will play the part of someone with autism. The other 4 people each have different jobs:

Person #1 - You will play the part of a person with autism. Your job is to try and listen to what Person #5 is reading to you so you can take a test on the material. Try to ignore everyone else.

Person #2 - Stand behind the student playing the part of someone with autism. Rub the edge of an index card (or piece of cardboard) against the back of their neck. You do not need to rub hard, but keep doing it over and over.

Person #3 - Grab a book (any book will do), lean close to Person #1 and read in a loud voice the entire time.

Person #4 - Pat Person #1 on the head and shoulder the entire time.

Person #5 - Using a normal voice, read a paragraph to Person #1 then ask them questions about what you read. Do NOT try to drown out the other noises.

Have all the students take a turn being Person #1 before you discuss it.

DISCUSSION POINTS:

How did it feel to be have so much commotion going on?

Did it make them want to scream or get away?

Were they able to concentrate on the paragraph being read?

What might have helped?



LEARNING DISABILITIES

There are many different kinds of learning disabilities and they can range from mild to severe problems.

ACTIVITY 2

This gives a general idea what it is like to have to struggle against what your brain may be telling you.

Dyslexia can cause a person to see letters switched around when they read (seeing “bule” instead of “blue”, for example).

You may wish to do this on a white board or hand-outs:

RED

BLUE

GREEN

YELLOW

ORANGE

PURPLE

Have the class read it out loud. They must read the COLOR the word is written in, not the word itself. Afterward, discuss how your brain wants to read the actual word. Even when you can make yourself do it correctly, you have to read much slower than normal. This is an example of how difficult it is for students with learning disabilities to get through the day. Their brain understands what needs to be done, but they have to struggle to make it come out right. Not being able to do this activity correctly does not mean you are not smart. It just means that your brain wants to do something different.



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ACTIVITY 3 - BACKWARDS

Write a number of different sentences backwards on a piece of paper. Giving them very little time, ask different students to read them correctly. Keep interrupting the student by urging them to hurry or tell them "This should be easy for you."

Example:

"ehT kcalb tac tas no eht toh nit foor"

"The black cat sat on the hot tin roof."

DISCUSSION POINT:

What were the difficulties faced in deciphering the sentence? Did being told to hurry help or make it harder? What would have helped?