

Supporting Girls with ASD within school

Girls with ASD are often undiagnosed and go unnoticed; this is for a variety of reasons one main one is that their behaviour is very different to an ASD boy. Girls may mimic the behaviour, interest and even speech patterns of people they are friends with in an attempt to fit in and to be accepted. They may memorise information about their friends interests, learn scripts so they can talk to new people, become fixated on one person and be determined to make them their 'best friend'. These are only some of the factors that make it harder to identify a girl with ASD, girls are very good at masking. Below are some ideas and strategies on how you can support girls with ASD within your school.

Difficulties/Characteristics	Strategies
Learning	
Abstract concepts and auditory processing	Make learning concrete, contextual and visual
Likes routine, dislikes change	Structure all transitions (for example in lessons, between lessons, after school holidays)
Can appear to be quiet, shy, awkward, compliant, passive	Give them praise and rewards (if they are able to accept this)
Do not always ask for help, or appear to be avoidant	This is usually to mask difficulties- unsure you check their understanding
Explosive outbursts or meltdowns	Understand and address their fears, triggers and sensory overload
Perfectionist	Build flexibility in making mistakes and re-drafting work
Very determined and likes to be in control	Offer guided choice
Fine motor or sensory difficulties	Make reasonable adjustments for example allowing touch typing instead of writing my hand
Enjoys reading and has a good imagination	Incorporate this into their learning
Difficulty following dynamics of class discussions	Allow to write their thoughts rather than voicing them in front of whole class

Social	
Mirror behaviour, affect different personalities and may not have a strong sense of their own identity	Select a partner(s) to model behaviours, use video, role play, social scripts to show how to respond appropriately
Be social immature and vulnerable	Provide structured activities for social time
Try to impose scripted, controlling play on peers	Encourage and model reciprocity A social language programme to navigate social rules
Emotional	
Need to feel someone 'gets' them	Liase with home; how is anxiety being acted out at home?
Camouflage emotions or mask symptoms at school	Support independence and generalisation of skills, building flexibility into challenges
Be exhausted from the pressure of constant social imitation/mirroring	Practise dealing with fears and rehearse difficult situations in a safe environment
Experience anxiety more intensely than others	Parent support groups to share experiences
Shut down or cry over small things due to sensory/emotional overload	Signpost to specialist services and local ASD support; Cygnet, CAMHs, Klub Ice T, NEFLT, Kent Autistic Trust, IAsk, Me2, Includes Us2, Dover SmArt Project
Struggle with injustice	"Mean what you say and say what you mean" Have clear and consistent rules and expectations. Make them feel good about themselves, help them to accept that this is the way they are and that is how other people are. Show them why misunderstandings have occurred without judging them. Allow them to have their own goals, targets and hopes, not ones that have been imposed by the school or other people.