Longhorn TIES: Transition• Inclusion• Empower• Success
Autism Spectrum Disorders Fact Sheet

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a neurodevelopmental disorder characterized by social, communication and behavioral challenges. Autism is known as a “spectrum” disorder because there is a wide variety of symptoms and behaviors. The following list is a general overview of autism spectrum disorder. An individual on the autism spectrum may exhibit some of the following characteristics:

- May exhibit awkward eye contact and gestures
- Difficulty with transitions, changes in classroom instructions
- Sensory sensitivity (lights, sounds, touch, smells)
- May have delayed responses
- May misunderstand tone of voice, jokes, facial expressions and sarcasm
- Oddities in vocal pitch, volume, intonation
- Strong, narrow interest
- May become easily distracted
- Displays literal and concrete thinking pattern
- May have difficulty understanding social rules such as personal space
- May use calming or focusing strategies such as rocking, taping or pacing
- May become easily overwhelmed

The following strengths and challenges are generally shared by students across the spectrum, although each individual student experiences unique strengths and challenges.

**Strengths**

- Above average or superior intellect
- Ability to follow instructions and rules very accurately when taught in the correct way
- Ability to carry out tasks with a high degree of accuracy
- Diligent with routine work and excellent memory
- Strong pursuit of knowledge within areas of interest
- Good visual and spatial learners
- Excellent attention to detail
- Out of the box thinkers

**Challenges**

- May misread social cues or facial expressions and body language
- Initiating, planning and organizing and carrying out tasks
- Understanding social rules
- Assessing priorities and performance
- Working in groups
- Interpreting vague instructions
- Sensory sensitivity may affect classroom success
- Abstract concepts and seeing the “big picture”
- Asking for clarification or for assistance
Ways to Support Students with In Person and Online Learning

• Be concise and specific with instructions and expectations
• Provide direct feedback and set clear boundaries
• Provide visual learning tools when possible (pictures, charts, spreadsheets)
• Provide visual examples on how to upload assignments, discussion postings, etc.
• Avoid idioms, metaphors and sarcasm
• Avoid cold-calling in class
• Supplement oral instructions with written instructions
• Explain purpose of the assignment
• Be patient and wait for the student to respond
• Ask clarifying questions to ensure student is understanding what is being asked of them

For more information on making learning accessible visit:
https://oi2.edb.utexas.edu/continuity/#/

Longhorn TIES: Transition●Inclusion●Empower●Success
Email: Ashley.richardson@austin.utexas.edu
Website: orientation.utexas.edu/LonghornTies
Phone: 512-232-7672

Support services begin with the new student orientation process and continue throughout the student’s academic career. • Cross-campus collaborations • Seminar courses • Social events • Resource and referral network • Transition meeting prior to orientation • 1:1 coaching meetings • Personal and professional skills training