

# Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

## Symptoms that interfere with learning:

desire for linear structures , sustaining attention and concentration, difficulties with eye-contact, language difficulties (i.e., non-verbal cues, sarcasm, jokes), sensitivity to noise, developing/maintaining relationships with classmates

### Common Barriers

- Students with ASD can feel overwhelmed from the school environment for reasons that include but are not limited to sensitivity to bright lights or processing multiple things that are happening at the same time which can make it difficult to achieve academic success
- Students with ASD may find it difficult learning course content that is outside of their interests or unfamiliar to them which may affect their motivation to succeed academically

### Strategies

#### GOAL SETTING

Write down SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, and Timed) goals and make sure your planned activities align with your main goals, such as college, work, close relationships, but also your physical and mental health

#### TIME MANAGEMENT

- Use digital planners with repeat and reminder function, and sync with a phone app – this provides a daily structure and prevents overwhelm from the complexity college offers. It helps you to focus on what needs to happen in the present moment:
  - Organize time by the hour instead of a to-do list, with space for breaks, rest, exercise, social time, and meals (follow the schedule from your instructor/syllabus)
  - Plan for flexibility by allowing free time for fun things to do, spending time with your family and/or friends, and relaxation activities – this will help you keep the planner attractive
  - Avoid getting overwhelmed by breaking activities down in smaller tasks and plan them by spreading them out over time. Use the Pomodoro technique, study 25 minutes, take a 5 minute break and repeat this cycle maximum 4 times then schedule a longer break (30-60 minutes).
- Check your calendar at the start of each day and several times throughout the day to help you stay on task and maximize your motivation

## Common Barriers

## Strategies

### PLANNING

- Reward yourself, i.e., with a small break, sending a text to a friend, a telephone call with a loved one, visiting a friend, TV time, a weekend away from campus (not used as an escape but used as a reward)
- Plan big papers well in advance to allow time to meet with your professor to discuss the topic, do library research, work on the content (edit, rewrite, and organize), and use several drafts (it doesn't need to be perfect in a first attempt)
- Plan relaxation strategies frequently throughout the day, such as naming 3 things you are grateful for, journaling on something positive that happened over the past 24 hours, exercise, breathing techniques, yoga, or meditation
  - For mindfulness practice ideas watch:  
The Happy Secret to Better Work – Shawn Achor:  
[https://www.ted.com/talks/shawn\\_achor\\_the\\_happy\\_secret\\_to\\_better\\_work?language=en](https://www.ted.com/talks/shawn_achor_the_happy_secret_to_better_work?language=en)

## Common Barriers

- Transitioning from high school to college can be challenging for students with ASD since college life is less structured, which can result in significant difficulties that include but are not limited to making friends, reaching out for resources and assistance, and performing well in their classes

## Strategies

### ORGANIZATION

- Organize or join a study group with students at or slightly above your performance level to hold each other accountable and to gain clarification on key terms, concepts, ideas etc. It helps you understand that you know what you are supposed to know and creates greater confidence.
- Create study guides on your own or with classmates to help study for tests/exams in your courses

### HELPFUL RESOURCES

- Colleges have a selection of resources available to all student at no cost, examples are academic advisors, academic coaches, disability services, counseling, writing consultants, tutors, teaching assistants and your instructor is a great resource as well. They all welcome your questions and are dedicated to your success

### LIFE -STYLE TIPS

- A good living environment (i.e., on campus residential hall/off campus apartment) can have a significant impact on your mental and physical health
- Getting 7-9 hours of sleep a night, a balanced diet to even out your blood sugar levels, drink plenty water, limit caffeine and alcohol, and regular exercise help building resilience to (flexibility in dealing with) stress
- Being actively engaged in extracurricular activities in college can positively impact how you perform academically, check out the wide variety of clubs on your campus as teaming up with like-minded individuals is a great way to make friends
- Building a strong supportive network with fellow students, faculty and staff on campus, a mentor, academic advisor, academic coach, or other services as well as family can lead to the following:
  - feeling a sense of belonging/connectedness
  - feeling well supported
  - Increased resiliency to stress

## Advocating for Yourself

### When Self help Strategies are Insufficient

- When dealing with overwhelming levels of anxiety, seek out assistance from [UND's University Counseling Center](#) or a therapist
- Depending on individual barriers students experience, they may connect with [UND's Disability Services for Students Office](#) to see if they are eligible for accommodations
- Visit with an [Academic Coach](#) at UND for more information about individually tailored strategies

### References

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