

SUPPORTING STUDENTS WITH ASD AT TUFTS UNIVERSITY

Tips for making your one-on-one meetings more accessible to ALL students, but specifically those on the Autism Spectrum



One-on-one meetings can be very stressful for students with for students. Consider these tips when meeting with a student to help make your meetings more accessible!

- Start with the environment. Is it over stimulating? What can be changed or modified? (white noise machines, less harsh lighting, covering up certain posters, turning off music in the background).
- Allow 1-2 minutes for quiet transition time at the beginning of the meeting for sensory adjustment and processing. Consider all the sensory stimulation that happens when you walk across a college campus. A person on the Autism Spectrum processes 100% of external stimuli consciously. Provide 1-2 minutes for the student to adjust to the new setting).

“I’m just going to finish writing this email...”

“I’m going to refresh my cup of coffee...”

- Have a clock visible (analogue if possible).
- Be clear and communicate the structure of the appointment in a sequential way (“first we’re going to ___ then ___”).
- Provide concrete meeting lengths and say the length outloud to the student (i.e. “I have us scheduled to meet for an hour which means we would end at ___ o clock.”)
*Don’t feel that you need to meet for the full length of time you have scheduled. If everything has been covered, explain why you are ending early: i.e. “I know I had us scheduled to go until ___ but we covered x,y,z already. Are there any other questions you have before we end our appointment?”
- **DO NOT BE A SURROGATE FRONTAL LOBE.** Mirror problem solving! We are trying to help all students build resiliency skills. For students with ASD who come to me with a problem, I’ll have them **sequentially** talk me through their plan. If they don’t have a plan yet, we look at what the problem is we are trying to solve and step by step figure it out together.
- Avoid colloquial speech/phrases (i.e. “thanks for letting me be your guinea pig”)
- Use visuals! Have a mini whiteboard for your office or scrap paper available to illustrate your ideas.
- Think about the way you’re sitting in your meetings. Is this too overwhelming for the student? Would sitting side-by-side relieve this pressure.
- Provide access to fidgets or stress balls to help reduce anxiety.
- ASK if you need to rephrase your question/explanation if you think the student doesn’t understand (i.e. “does that explanation make sense or should I explain it a different way”)
- Try to speak in a clear and even tone
- Be mindful of your strengths and weaknesses. Adapt when necessary.
- Use your Campus Resources! Reach out if you need some further strategies for supporting a student!

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