

Autism Awareness Lesson Plan

Learning Objectives

Everyone has strengths and needs

Everyone learns differently

Kids with Autism are learning how to be good friends

Kids with Autism are learning how to talk to others

Kids with Autism might use their senses differently

Autism definitions: what it is, incidence

There are some ways to help a classmate with Autism

Teaching Plan:

Different Types of Learners:

Use your own experience as an example. Share with the students your strengths and weaknesses. (Example: I am really good at reading, but terrible at basketball, even if I try really hard)

Ask the students for their own examples. What are they good at? What are they still working on?

Introduce "brain energy". Talk about how everyone's brains are different, and that your brain uses energy to work. Use yourself as an example. (Example: Because I am really good at reading, my brain has a lot of energy in the reading area. But my brain doesn't get enough energy in the basketball area so that is a lot harder for me.) Use the students' examples as well.

Introduce autism as a neurological disorder by talking about brain energy. (Example: I have a lot of friends who have something called Autism. That means that just like you, some parts of their brains get more energy than other parts. But unlike you, some parts of their brains get way too much energy, and it takes the energy away from other important parts of their brains. Some of my friends with Autism can do college math but can't tie their shoes, because the math part of their brain is taking too much energy from the other parts of their brain.) Try to give several examples.

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Teaching Plan:

Verbal Skills:

Ask the students how old they were when they learned to talk. Explain that most kids learn to talk when they are around 1 or 2 years old.

Explain that some kids with Autism learn to talk when they are 1 or 2, but some don't learn until they are much older, and some adults with Autism are still learning how to talk.

Ask the students how they would feel if they couldn't talk. What kinds of problems might that cause? What would they do instead?

Explain that some kids with Autism are very good at talking, but when they get upset they might forget their words or use the wrong words. How might this cause problems?

Friendship Skills:

Remind the students that for everyone, some things are easy and some things are hard.

Ask the student how many of them think they are good friends. Ask how many think that recess is easy and playing is fun.

Explain that some kids with Autism think these things are hard. The friendship/social skills parts of their brains might not get enough energy.

Describe how conversation skills and play skills might be different in a child who has Autism.

Ask the students, "if someone is having a hard time being a friend, what can you do?"

Sensory Needs:

Remind the students that different sections of your brain get more energy than other sections. Ask the student if they remember what their senses are. List the five senses. Tell the students that their senses are controlled by their brains. For example, your nose sends smells to your brain.

Use yourself as an example of how some senses are stronger or weaker than others. Tie this to the brain energy example from earlier. (For example, I wear glasses because the section of my brain that controls signals from my eyes is not getting enough energy.)

Explain that for some people with Autism, certain senses might get too much energy and others might not get enough. For example, some kids with Autism might be able to hear every teacher in the building, or a fire alarm that is very far away that no one else can hear. Loud noises (or even regular noises) might hurt their ears.

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Teaching Plan:

Autism Specific Learning:

Give some details about Autism.

What is Autism? Autism is something that some kids have. It means their brains use energy differently than our brains do. Just like us, some things are easy for them and some things are hard for people with Autism. People with Autism usually have a harder time with things like talking to others, being a good friend, and using their senses the way we do.

Assure the students that you can't catch Autism. Although no one knows what causes Autism, it is something you get before you are born or when you are very little. Being friends with someone with Autism can not give you Autism.

Talk about how many people have Autism. Try to put it in a context that they can understand. 1 in 110 people have Autism. (So in a school there might be about 3 kids who have Autism, or in a neighborhood there might be 2, etc.)

Activities:

Sensory Understanding Activity:

Materials: paper with thick, straight line down center, one for each student; scissors for each student; papers with thin curved or jagged lines all over the page, one for each student; two or three of each item: gloves, sunglasses, loud music, rubber bands, tape

Procedure:

Give each student a piece of paper with a thick straight line and a pair of scissors. Ask them to try to cut on the line as exactly as possible. Give them a few minutes to do so. Ask them to show how they did.

Then give each student one of the pages with crazy, difficult lines. Before they start to cut, ask them to try it in a more difficult way. Have half the class switch the scissors into their non-dominant hand. Give several students gloves to wear while cutting. Have some students wear dark sunglasses while cutting. Attach rubber bands to several pairs of scissors to make it more difficult to cut. Have several students cut while the paper is taped to their desk. Play loud music or noise near several students. Flash the lights on and off while they are cutting. Finally, give them only 30 seconds to complete their best cut.

Discuss how this was more difficult than the first round. Explain that for some students with Autism, all school tasks can be difficult if they require coordinating so many difficult things.

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Activities:

Art Projects:

Have the students do an art project that symbolizes similarities and differences. Some ideas:

- students trace their handprints on construction paper and decorate
- students paint puzzle pieces (the autism awareness symbol)
- students create cardboard images of themselves and link them together
- students create a collage about ways they are similar to and different from classmates

Books to Read Aloud about Autism:

"I Have Autism" by Pat Crissy

"Ian's Walk" by Laurie Lears

"Asperger's Huh?" by Rosina Schnurr

"Taking Autism to School" by Andreanna Edwards

"Autism Through a Sister's Eyes" by Eve B. Band and Emily Hecht

"Andy and his Yellow Frisbee" by Mary Thompson

"To Be Me" by Rebecca Etlinger

"Ten Things Every Child with Autism Wishes you Knew" by Ellen Notthbohm

Online Videos:

There are a variety of online videos about Autism. Many of these can be accessed through national websites such as www.autismspeaks.org.

YouTube also has interesting videos about Autism that may be appropriate for a variety of age groups. Some examples:

- http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OmQDF6R_cHR

- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xwq3LTPWm5k>