



Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD)
Quick Guide
for Wisconsin Technical College System (WTCS)
Staff
2015

**Please see your technical college special services staff for additional information and assistance.
This Guide is available in alternative formats on request.**

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for an electronic copy.

The purpose of this guide is to offer basic information and guidance for staff within the WTCS. The guide is not research based, but includes experience-based knowledge from WTCS staff who worked directly with students on the Spectrum.

Acknowledgment

The WTCS ASD Work Group developed and composed the ASD Guide for WTCS Staff in 2013-2014. The WTCS thanks the following individuals for their efforts and dedication:

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Purpose

The purpose of this guide is to provide information and educational strategies for Wisconsin Technical College System (WTCS) faculty and staff who work with students on the Autism Spectrum. All strategies in this guide will not pertain to all students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and some of them may even be helpful to students who are not on the Spectrum.

Many students with ASD are completely aware of strategies that are effective for them in the classroom. It is critical and incredibly helpful to include the student in the discussion of accommodations and classroom management strategies.

Students on the Spectrum may exhibit behaviors different than what is expected or familiar; nevertheless these students have much to contribute and teach us about working with unique individuals. We hope you will find your work with these students both rewarding and exhilarating.

REMEMBER, at every WTCS campus there are trained Disability Service professionals who can help with students on the Autism Spectrum. Strategies in this guide should be used in conjunction with Disability Services and other campus resources. Please note that district policies and procedures such as, Federal Educational Rights Privacy Act (FERPA) and Code of Conduct, still apply. This guide is to offer basic information and guidance; it is not state policy nor research-based, but includes experience-based knowledge from WTCS staff who worked directly with students on the Spectrum.

WTCS Disability Services link, which includes a contact list of Disability Services Coordinators/Staff at each district:

<http://mywtcs.wtcsystem.edu/student-success/student-services/disability-services>

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Introduction

In 2009, the WTCS ASD workgroup developed and distributed an ASD guide for WTCS staff. It was our initial effort to offer WTCS staff information and guidance as it relates to students who are on the Autism Spectrum. Since 2009, there has been an explosion of public information relative to ASD and many more students are self-identifying as being on the Autism Spectrum.

The WTCS system, itself, has seen a steady increase in students with ASD who attend our technical colleges. WTCS has seen a 94% increase in attendance from students with ASD from 1994-2014. In 2013-2014, WTCS served 450 students who disclosed an ASD diagnosis. The percentage of youth with ASD that participate in postsecondary education and training programs is at or above the participation of youth with disabilities statewide. In addition, 20% of the students with ASD that have exited high school in 2014 participated in a Technical College Program leading to a two-year degree.

Due to these positive developments, the WTCS staff thought it was time to revise the guide, creating a "quick guide" primarily for those WTCS staff without specialized disability training. Since 2009, we have had much more experience in working with students with ASD. WTCS staff have developed many different instructional strategies for integrating students with ASD into the classroom, helping these students get the greatest benefit from their college experience. Many of these strategies incorporate the principles of Universal Design; thus, are beneficial for other students with disabilities as well.

How to Use This Guide

This guide is divided into sections with general characteristics/behaviors and related strategies for understanding and working with students on the Spectrum. These strategies are not necessarily related to legally mandated Americans with Disabilities Act and Amendments accommodations.

Here are some recommended steps in using this guide:

1. Think about current situation regarding student
2. Refer to the relevant section listed in the Table of Contents
3. On the left hand side you will find an Explanation of characteristics/behaviors
4. On the right hand side you will find related Strategies
5. **Please refer to the student's approved list of accommodations and work with the student and a Disability Specialist to determine which strategies are most appropriate**
6. Implement approved strategy
7. Provide feedback to Disability Specialist regarding effectiveness of strategy

Additional resources and information are provided in the appendices.

Appendix A: "I have a student who..." lists various student situations/behaviors and offers suggestions for addressing those areas.

Appendix B: Class Participation Guide for Student with ASD, an example of conversations to establish rules with students.

Appendix C: Assignment Submitted by Student with ASD, an essay written by a student with ASD addresses how he is different from his sister who has no diagnosed disability.

Appendix D: Strengths of People with ASD, characteristics which can be used to enhance the successful learning experience of students with ASD.

Observed Characteristics

This section will review the following observed characteristics of students with ASD...

- Rigidity/Routine
- Concrete Thinking
- Personal Interaction

Rigidity/Routine

Explanation

- Student might appear stubborn; unwilling to bend, and may not like change
- Might respond to change with inappropriate language or actions
- Might have a routine or ritual that they must perform, i.e., using the same door, choosing the same seat, or taking the same route

Strategy

- Advance notice of changes; post changes
- Post information to online learning platform
- Assess the need for the whole class to have set procedures or to make their own

Concrete Thinking

Explanation

- Students with ASD focus on details first as opposed to the overall concept
- Students with ASD often times may "under generalize"

Strategy

- Do not assume the student has prior knowledge of concepts or can generalize
- Use literal, explicit, and concrete examples when possible
- Explain basic tasks and knowledge specifically and sequentially

Personal Interaction

Explanation

- Many students with ASD may appear disinterested
- May try not to participate for fear of criticism
- Appear to be poor team players
- Might be cynical about not fitting in and the illogical way most other individuals behave

Strategy

- Remember that many students have more reserved personalities
- Rules can be used to provide a civil and safe environment
- Reinforce the ways students can contribute in classroom participation
- Give examples of equitable contributions; especially in group activities

Classroom Functioning

This section will review the following *Classroom Functioning* points...

- Disruptive Behavior
- Distractions
- Personal Interaction
- Self-Advocacy
- Self-Management

Disruptive Behavior

Explanation

- Student may raise hand often and contribute to class discussions, however they may be off topic or stuck on a previous detail
- Student may interrupt class with various inappropriate comments or behaviors

Distractions

Explanation

- Student may be distracted by other students or various environmental factors
- Students tend to focus on details and are preoccupied with specific topics of interest

Personal Interaction

Explanation

- ASD is a communication disorder, students are often times not very forthcoming and may seem distant
- Student may respond to questions/statements with very little expression and possibly a look of confusion

Self-Advocacy

Explanation

- Student may lack understanding of academic needs. The student may not know what questions to ask or may not ask for information in an understandable format

Self-Management

Explanation

- Student may experience difficulty with organization; can be inflexible and struggle with planning and shifting topics

Strategy

- Talk to student about behavior separately; set up a behavior contract; or create rules for student to follow
- Set up an alert system with the student; e.g., put a dash on the board or use a pre-determined word when the student is raising hand too often to cue them to wait until the end of class or write questions down to ask later

Strategy

- Set student up with a pre-arranged assigned seat near the door or in the back of the room; wherever the student can focus best
- E.g., close blinds, dim lights, reduce noise distractions

Strategy

- Allow students sufficient time to respond to questions and offer prompts as needed
- Use concrete examples

Strategy

- Follow up with student to make sure student is clear regarding directions and expectations

Strategy

- Provide an outline of lecture points
- Allow student to use computer for writing during class or audio recorder
- Give advanced notice of any changes

Classroom/Campus Environment

This section will review the following *Classroom/Campus Environmental* points...

- Sensitivity-noise, light, touch
- Fear/Anxiety
- Personal Safety
- Computer Use

Sensitivity (noise, light, touch)

Explanation

- Student may feel overwhelmed with various sensory experiences
- Flickering lights and loud, sudden noises can be extremely bothersome
- Applause or high-pitched background noise can be very distracting
- Touch may be over stimulating to some students

Strategy

- Be aware of light sensitivity
- Discuss optimal seating for student
- Be aware of volume in videos and during class activities
- Talk to student about their level of comfort with touch (e.g., CPR classes, clinicals)
- Discuss a plan for fire drills/emergency evacuations ahead of time

Fear/Anxiety

Explanation

- Students may have difficulty making sense of the world; therefore, may be very passive or easily excited
- Student may be very anxious or may not seem as anxious or as fearful as they should in certain circumstances

Strategy

- Discuss strategies with student/Disability Specialist regarding specific circumstances that are troublesome to the student

Personal Safety

Explanation

- Students are often vulnerable to being picked on or harassed and may not feel safe
- Students may be vulnerable to inappropriate suggestions or relationships

Strategy

- Discuss strategies with student/Disability Specialist regarding specific circumstances that are troublesome to the student

Technology Use

Explanation

- Students may not be aware that technology use is a privilege and can be monitored

Strategy

- Remind students of policies regarding technology usage, including how long to use a technology on campus

Learning Points

This section will review the following *learning* points...

- Participation
- Group Work
- Social Skills

Participation

Explanation

- Students may not share information or initiate/sustain conversation
- Following class discussion might be difficult especially if it is abstract in nature
- Some students may impulsively call out answers
- Some students require a longer processing time to answer questions or participate in discussions
- Some students may not understand hints or figurative language
- Student has difficulty remaining on topic or using appropriate language. Online classes can be especially problematic

Strategy

- Allow alternative forms of communication from student in a style in which they are comfortable
- Use an outline to identify purpose and expected outcomes of discussion
- Develop conversation rules
- Consider using a signal so the student knows when they will be called on
- Make sure your language provides concrete examples

Group Work

Explanation

- Student might appear socially avoidant, socially indifferent, or socially awkward
- Student may have difficulty interacting with other students
- Student may be unable to establish and maintain reciprocal relationships with people

Strategy

- Allow student to work independently
- Consider alternate assignment
- Assign student a particular role within the group
- Pre-assign groups
- Help student groups develop communication rules
- Help student groups assign workload and develop participation rules

Social Skills

Explanation

- Student may be unable to establish eye contact
- Student may not return the same pleasantries i.e., smile, good morning

Strategy

- Be aware this is not out of disrespect or disinterest
- Be aware this is not out of indifference or lack of wanting to establish rapport

Situational Points related to Meltdowns

This section will review the following *situational* points related to *Meltdowns*...

- Definition
- Management
- Triggers
- Prevention Plans

Definition

Explanation

- Student is in a crisis mode and may lose personal control, including having an inability to regulate emotions
- Student may appear stressed, angry, agitated, or “shut down.”
- Meltdowns are embarrassing and painful for the student and it is not manipulative behavior

Triggers

Explanation

- Unexpected changes (e.g., a “pop quiz”, fire drill, change in seating)
- Sensory issues (e.g., unusual sensitivity to visuals such as carpet patterns, sounds such as people chewing gum, or odors)
- Environment (e.g., room temperature, lights, computer buzzing, etc.)
- Stress build up (i.e., this could result from a change in routine earlier in the day or an innocuous occurrence)
- Emotional intensity

Management

Avoiding Meltdowns

- Students with ASD who have experienced “meltdowns” are encouraged to discuss this with Disability Specialist prior to attending classes

Strategy

- Inform students ahead of time of unexpected changes
- Be aware of excessive noises, odors, or visual stimuli

Prevention Plans

- These may be used with students with ASD and are created by the Disability Specialist, student, and faculty/staff
- The plans include:
 - A description of behaviors that indicate escalating stress
 - Potential solutions to avert problems
 - Helpful hints
 - Agreed-upon cues for both student and instructor when a problem is developing
 - Procedures for handling “meltdowns”
- Behaviors that jeopardize personal safety of students and staff will supersede a “Meltdown Prevention Plan” (i.e., Code of Conduct)
- Allow the student to remain in class if possible and move to an alternate area to calm down.
- Be quiet and assertive without using any physical restraints which could cause the student to become more agitated.
- If the student cannot stay in class, ask or assist the student to leave the room. A pre-determined safe place or places should be used so that the student can calm down and feel safe.
- Implement a predetermined plan with class (e.g., fire drills, evacuations)
- Follow up with the student and Disability Specialist to review the situation and update the plan as needed.

Universal Design

This section includes general instructional strategies, good for all students, based on the principles of Universal Design for Instruction...

- Syllabus
- Consistency
- Technology
- Summarize Information
- Assignments/Projects/Tests/Quizzes
- Learning Style

Syllabus should include:

- essential components of the class
- clearly written class expectations
- contact information
- simple grading scale that all students can follow
- disability accommodation statement
- rules regarding attendance policy, tardiness, participation, late work, etc.

Consistency

- organize class and give simple directions in predictable format
- follow routine
- post daily agenda
- be consistent with expectations and due dates
- in a lab or shop setting, minimize hazards by providing verbal or written warnings or precautions

Technology

- use technology to enhance instruction and increase accessibility
- provide all text and handouts in electronic format
- post oral directions in written/electronic format
- design handouts and slides so user can easily change font/spacing/color/size/background or remove graphics that may be distracting

Summarize Information

- at end of major topic, summarize main ideas
- arrange information consistent with its importance; distinguish "essential to know" information from "nice to know" information

Assignments/Projects/Tests/Quizzes

- provide effective prompting and feedback during and after task completion
- use grading rubric
- use varied testing format
- allow students to re-do assignments when it is clear the student did not understand expectations
- consider designing tests to cover smaller rather than larger amounts of information
- consider breaking longer, more complex assignments into smaller segments
- allow for a variety of ways students demonstrate knowledge; allow them to express themselves in a manner that is consistent with the way they learn
- clearly state rules for homework, including homework due dates

Learning Style

- use different modes (pictorial, verbal, hands-on) when presenting information
- design classroom activities that allow for movement, discussion, questions, demonstration, and/or group work
- use circular seating
- reduce distraction noises
- allow time for formulating questions or responses
- change activities; mix fine motor and gross motor skills

APPENDIX A

I have a student who...

This lists various student situations/behaviors and offers suggestions for addressing those areas
(compiled by WTCS ASD Guide Workgroup)

I have a student who...	Suggestions
Becomes upset by last minute changes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Post changes to online learning platform • Offer advance notice of changes to syllabus
Has difficulty following directions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give directions both verbally and in writing • Break them down into steps
Interrupts with constant questions Raises hand continually Talks whenever they please Talks off-topic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish rules for number of times student can answer or ask questions or raise hand • Work with Disability Specialist in determining a strategy that may work
Constantly fidgeting: rocking, humming, mutters under breath, hand flapping, etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer the student the ability to get up and move around with rules regulating this option • Work with disability specialist in determining a strategy that may work
Won't ask questions/seek out assistance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have a private conversation to set a date/time to meet individually
Doesn't hand in work on time or at all	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clearly state assignment directions and due dates both orally and in writing
Has difficulty focusing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Often helps to begin class with a review of the previous class • Summarize main ideas at the end of one topic before moving on to the next • Work with disability specialist in determining a cue to bring student in to focus • Design classroom activities that allow for movement, discussion, questions, and/or group work
Does well in class, but not on tests	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider using multiple test formats • Consider oral testing
I think has a disability and hasn't disclosed. Seems to affect the tone of the class and is affecting classroom atmosphere	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with Disability Specialist to discuss concerns
Can't respond to an essay question	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer different modes of testing • Have a private conversation to determine a mode to best demonstrate knowledge
Calls or contacts me an inappropriate number of times or parents contact me too often	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refer parents and student to Disability Specialist due to FERPA regulations and release of confidentiality information
I can't see as being able to find a job in this field	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is not something you need to worry about; there are supports in place for the student
I am worried about regarding an upcoming clinical placement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We realize that Clinical placements, Internships, Co-op's, etc., which are part of instruction, can often be complex situations; please consult the Disability Specialist on your campus if you have questions or concerns.

Appendix B

Class Participation Guide for a Student with ASD

You may establish rules by saying things such as:

1. Speak only when the teacher calls on you. Speak when the teacher says you can talk to another student (partner) one-on-one.
2. The teacher may ask volunteers to answer a question. For example, "Does anyone know the answer to this problem?" Every student should have a chance to speak. The maximum number of times you can respond, if you know the answer, is three for each class.
3. When you speak in class, stay on the topic so other students understand you. Off-topic statements confuse people.
4. If you have questions, but your questions are not directly related to the class discussion or the lecture, please wait. Ask your questions after class or during the teacher's office hours.
5. It is best to ask questions in a soft or medium voice. In groups, the same thing applies. If you speak in a loud voice, some people may be afraid to continue a conversation with you, especially people who don't know you very well.

Appendix C

Assignment Submitted by Student with ASD

A student with ASD wrote this comparison/contrast essay for a college English class. The faculty member questioned whether the student had independently written it. The Disability Specialist verified the authenticity of the paper. The faculty then accepted the paper. We are including it in this handbook as an excellent example of how students on the Spectrum perceive their world and the world of people without ASD.

As a first-born child, I did not realize how different two people could be. Everything I did was perfect. And the way I performed any task was simply the only way something should be done. Clearly, at that time, my way was absolutely the best and my methods were ideal. However, when my little sister Meg was born, all that changed. The strangeness of this little creature became even more apparent as she began to grow taller and move about independently. Upon observation of this child's eating and sleeping habits, I became resolutely convinced that she possessed an alarming disregard for routine. Additionally, the development of her personality differed from the ideal standard of behavior, which was mine. I could not even begin to understand why she chose certain activities as leisure time. Needless to say, the awareness that my little sister did not possess the same reverence for routine as me continued to shock and perplex me more and more as time passed. In short, before my little sister arrived on the scene, peace and orderliness reigned in the household as my parents catered to my schedule, but when Meg was born, I became aware that not everyone was like me.

Our activities of daily living could not be more diverse. I go to bed early and arise early. Meg stays up late and likes to sleep late. Then I enjoy a breakfast of two waffles between the hours of 6:00 and 7:00 a.m. Meg often skips breakfast! Lunch for me occurs at 11:00 a.m. and consists of eight slices of salami, four pickles, and four Oreo cookies. Meg cannot seem to make a decision and stick with it for lunch; she changes her mind all the time. For Pete's sake, she might have pizza one day, a hamburger the next, and maybe a salad or pasta the day after that! Another difference in daily routine is our personal hygiene. I used to hate getting haircuts, which now I don't, and I choose clothes depending upon their comfort level. I spend about 10 minutes getting ready for my day. My sister, on the other hand, spends hours on her hair! She washes it every day, blows it dry, and sprays it with chemicals. Additionally, she only buys clothes that are considered to be on the cutting edge of style, and then she spends two hours getting ready for her day and picking which of these stylish garments to wear. What a waste of sleeping time!

Another way in which Meg and I differ is in the realm of disposition. I am pretty much always happy. Meg is moody. For example, I am open and forthcoming. When our parents ask us about our day, I always talk with them and give them details. "Well, the bus was running late, but everything worked out alright. We have an assignment in English, and I'm finished with my Careers in IT class," I might say." Meg says "Nothing happened." She can be sullen, private, and closemouthed, whereas I am congenial, gregarious, and friendly. I also have a phenomenal memory. For example, I have memorized many excerpts from some of my favorite movies or plays, and I can reenact them word for word. Meg, on the other hand, struggles with her memory. The other night my sister was studying the periodic table of elements. I had not studied that table in years, but I remembered the elemental abbreviations! Meg was becoming increasingly

frustrated with trying to memorize a few choice elements. She even began screaming phrases like, "I hate this table of stupid stuff!" and, "when will I ever use this junk?" and (most frequently), "I hate chemistry!" What a night that was! Another difference between us is that I like to fix broken items. It soothes me. Meg is not bothered by impaired objects.

One time, she came home with a broken ceramic piece she made in school. She was content to leave it sitting there, in a state of obvious disrepair, upon her bedside table. I simply could not stand it. I grabbed the scotch tape and remedied her little ashtray (or whatever it was) right then and there. Another characteristic in which I differ from my sister is the trait of honesty. I resemble George Washington in this realm; I simply cannot tell a lie. Meg, on the other hand, will swear up and down that she did not have anything to do with breaking my father's digital camera, while she is standing there with the bits of pieces of the instrument in her hands.

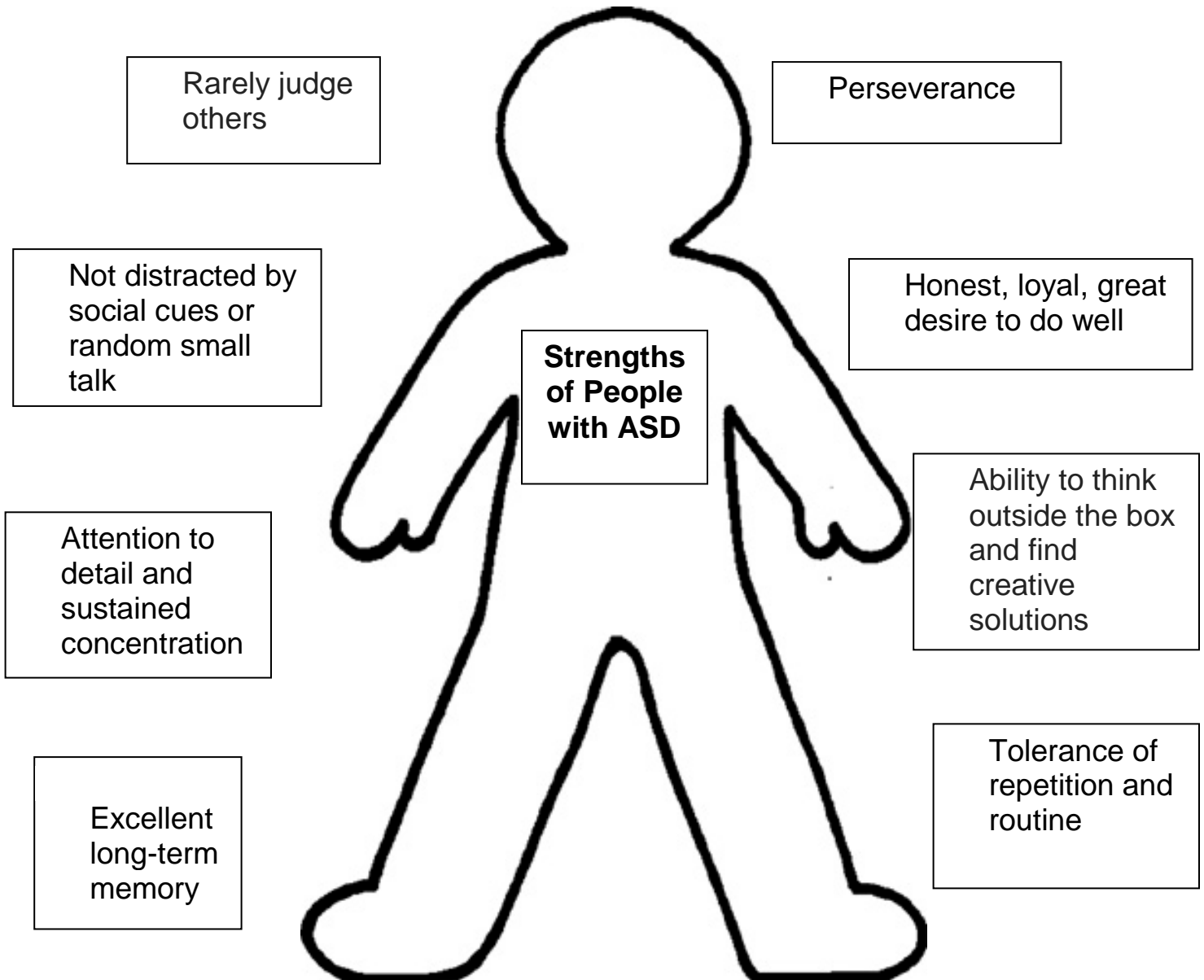
I do not understand my sister's choices of leisure pursuits. I prefer peaceful, solitary activities. For example, I enjoy my PlayStation, movies, plays, and the computer. Meg likes loud, raucous dances where many different people get together in loud, noisy environments and scream and holler to get each other's attention. They also fling themselves around in a rather ridiculous fashion. Apparently, Meg has a taste for the dangerous life. For example, just the other night she and her friends stayed out until 4:00 a.m. toilet-papering the houses of the boys' and girls' tennis teams. I simply do not understand why they feel they have to behave in this manner. Toilet paper is for use in the restroom, not on trees and bushes!

As a first-born child, I did not anticipate how opposite two people could be. I was unchallenged in my opinion that everything I did was the only correct way. When my little sister came along, all that changed. As I grew to love her more and more, I began to realize something. There is more than one way to be, and this is all right. It is true that before my little sister was born, life was peaceful and orderly, and I was the center of attention. But I have come to learn that change can be positive. I have learned to be more flexible, and I am now willing to try different activities. Being a big brother has been a wonderful experience in my life. I am still consistent. But I am more accepting of the differences of others.

Appendix D

Strengths of People with ASD

(compiled by ASD Guidebook Workgroup)



This list was compiled based on the experience of WTCS Disability Service Staff. We have found these strengths can be used to enhance the successful learning experience of students with ASD.



The potential of each student with ASD is often underestimated! The needs of these students will evolve and change over time. The challenges and difficulties faced by each student will range from mild to severe. The number of symptoms may vary from few to frequent. The students can be capable in many areas of life, but our greatest challenge is to recognize their potential.

Grandin and Duffy (2004)

