

Model for an ASD Centre: For Students from Grades 7-12

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The panic has been growing in you since you found the suspension notice that fell out of your child's knapsack five minutes ago. Suspension? Conduct injurious to...? Then the phone rings. It's the school.

An ASD Centre is a novel support model where the characteristics, associated features and needs of students with ASD guide the activities with the goal of continually providing tools to the students in preparation for the eventual transition to adult life. (École secondaire catholique Algonquin – Conseil scolaire catholique Franco-Nord)

Creating an ASD Centre in an educational institution is beneficial, as much for students with ASD as for other students facing their own challenges, without having received a diagnosis of ASD. Here are some key elements to consider in the set up of this type of room:

Room Choice

- Choose a room that is easy to access during the school day, preferably in the centre of the school. This encourages daily visits by students with and without ASD.

Open Door Policy During Breaks and Lunch Periods

- Allow students with ASD to fraternize with their peers, while developing social, communication and self-regulation skills in a welcoming and understanding environment.

Physical Set Up and Equipment in an ASD Centre

- **Work tables:** for individual work, group activities, discussions and group lunches
- **Kitchen Corner:** refrigerator, dishes, sink, microwave, etc. to help encourage the development of activities of daily living and a sense of responsibility

- **Relaxation Corner:** an area apart, dimly lit with different relaxation tools (e.g., bubble tubes, beanbag chair, heavy blanket, fibre optic lights, fidget items)
- **Study Carrel:** for individual or quiet work – when a student wants to be on his or her own, yet still be part of the group
- **Sitting Area:** a library with books on ASD that may be of interest to students. Also include comics, magazines on video games, sports, animals, etc. Comfortable chairs allow more personal conversations between students or between staff and students, particularly in a time of crisis or for important discussions
- **Whiteboard:** to write the thought of the day or the week as well as the date. An opportunity to reflect on the hidden curriculum
- **Aquariums:** in addition to creating a peaceful area, the presence of an aquarium encourages the sharing of knowledge and ideas and might even trigger new interests. The upkeep helps develop a sense of responsibility in the students
- **Games Corner:** chess – cards - Lego® - to learn to play different games, develop social skills, share ideas, negotiate, compromise, etc.
- **Dividers:** to separate one area from another and allow students to be alone, yet among others
- **Sensory material:** different objects to accommodate the sensory needs of the students: stress balls, fidget items, modeling clay, etc.

Other Important Aspects to Consider

- **Lighting:** it is preferable to avoid fluorescent lights. Opt for indirect natural light. Students appreciate lamps and lava lamps, which create a calm atmosphere and take into account their sensory differences
- **Entry and Exit Register:** to monitor students' comings and goings and as data, as needed
- **Visual Aids Related to ASD Needs on the Walls:** Circles of intimacy, zones of regulations, types of breathing, mantras/key phrases (instruments of the mind) as well as more specific strategies, all essential to self-regulation and social comprehension

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