

Difficulties at lunch and break times

Advice & Support for:

Overview



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Break and lunch time



Difficulties at lunch or break times - a guide for teachers

Less structured parts of the school day such as lunch or break times can be difficult for autistic children and young people to cope with. This may be for a number of reasons such as difficulty with communication, social skills and sensory differences.

Here, we look at how teachers and other school staff can help them during break and lunchtimes.

We also talk about changes to the school day and how important it is to set appropriate and achievable homework.

Break and lunch time

In contrast to their peers, children and young people on the autism spectrum may not enjoy break and lunch times. This could be because they:

find the lack the structure and routine that they need difficult

are daunted by noisy, busy and unpredictable environments, such as the dining hall

can lack the fast processing of conversation and social interaction skills that are needed

may be fearful of bullying, including social isolation.

Here are some ways you can help

Organise structured lunchtime clubs, focusing on shared interests.

Provide social learning.

Try using social stories or comic strip conversations if a pupil is concerned about a particular situation.

Ensure that there is good supervision by staff that have had understanding autism training.

Teach autism awareness and acceptance amongst peers.

Have a zero tolerance 'no bullying' policy and ensure that all staff are aware of procedures.

Use a buddy system or have a buddy bench in the playground.

When using a buddy system, it's important to not let the autistic child or young person become too dependent on just one person. If they do and that person is absent then their anxiety level may increase and this can lead to distressed behaviour or a meltdown.

Some autistic pupils may find social interaction too demanding. If you have tried to help them form friendships, but can see that they would rather be alone, then try to accommodate them having this time in a quiet and safe area.

Changes to the school day

Pupils on the autism spectrum can find any kind of change or transition difficult. Having a different teacher or learning support/teaching assistant can be unsettling as can changes in the timetable due to enrichment activities. It's important that you prepare them for change.

Lesson changeover times can also be challenging. It may be appropriate for you to allow an autistic pupil to leave the class early so that they can avoid busy and noisy corridors. You could also match them with a mentor or buddy who can accompany them.

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