



BBB AUTISM SUPPORT NETWORK

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Advice for Peer Tutors

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When you do not know how to help, ask a teacher, a program assistant, the parents or a sibling of the student with autism, or another peer tutor who has known the person longer. Know to whom you may turn for help or advice for your classmate with autism before you start working with him/her.

Treat classmates with autism like people first. People with autism are just that: people who happen to have the disability of autism. Please avoid references to "the autistic" or "the disabled." Rather say, "the person with autism" or better yet, use their name. These individuals have the same feelings and personalities as you. They just cannot always show it as clearly.

Be consistent in how you refer to your classmate with autism. Use whatever name he/she prefers. Avoid calling him/her by their given name one time and by a nickname like "pal" or "buddy" the next.

Be specific when discussing plans or directions. For example, do not say, "I'll meet you near the room after class." Instead say, "I'll meet you at locker number 220 at 12:05 p.m."

DO NOT BE LATE! Many people with autism have a hard time understanding the concepts of time and waiting. Therefore, when you are late, they are not able to figure out on their own that an emergency or some other event may have delayed you. The result is that they may feel confused, upset, and insulted. If necessary, plan to be early and wait for him/her.

Remember that taking a little extra time or trouble to include your classmate with autism in your social plans could be very important to him or her. They need and want friends and social opportunities, and do not always know how to show that need to others.

Do not tease or be sarcastic with the person with autism. In order to understand the humor in teasing or sarcasm, people must be able to detect double-meanings. The person with autism may not have that knowledge. Teasing has probably already been a very unpleasant part of that person's life.

If you see others teasing, laughing at or making fun of a person with autism, try explaining a little about the person to them. They may only be laughing because they do not understand the person or the disability.

Do not make promises that you cannot keep. Avoid phrases like, "maybe we'll go to the show together someday." This may be interpreted as a promise. They seldom process all of the qualifiers, such as "maybe" or "someday."

Do not borrow things from the person with autism. Having others borrow items can be frustrating for any person—mainly because people seldom return what they have borrowed on time and/or in the same condition that it was before it was borrowed. The person with autism already handles too many frustrations in daily life. This is one frustration, which easily can be avoided.

Remember that you can play an important role and make a wonderful difference in the life of a person with autism.

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