

Autism Awareness Circle Time Ideas

Before using any of these circle time ideas, you should establish your pupils' current understanding and experiences of autism. You may wish to:

- discuss what children have learned about autism and what they know so far.
- ask the children if they can identify any areas in which someone with autism might have difficulties.
- ask the children if all people with autism experience the same difficulties. Does everyone with the condition need the same amount of help/support?
- ask the children to think about differences and similarities between each other. Encourage them to celebrate their uniqueness.

You might want to use the following headings to aid your discussion:

How are you different to the person next to you?	Do you ever get mad or frustrated? What things make you feel this way?
How do you react when you get mad or frustrated?	Are there any noises which bother you? How does this make you feel?
Are there any foods that bother you? Are there any smells that bother you? Why?	How would you feel if you didn't have anyone to play with at school?
How do you react when you are excited/happy?	How do you like to play?

Possible Games and Activities

1. Ask children to stand up if they like football, stand on one leg if they like spaghetti, hold up their left hand if they have blue eyes, etc. Use a number of different statements to ensure that everyone has the chance to be involved.

Ask the children to name a way they were the same as someone else, and how they were different to another person in the classroom.

2. Secretly, pick a characteristic such as eye colour/wearing a jumper/brown hair, etc. Ask children to stand up, calling them by name and not explaining why they are being asked to stand. Reward all those children standing up.
 - Ask the children standing - how do they feel?
 - Ask those children who did not get a reward - how do they feel?
 - Discuss feelings of frustration, not understanding why they were not rewarded, not feeling like it was fair. (Make sure that you eventually reward everyone!)
 - Discuss the idea that, people with autism do not always understand why something is happening, and they can be confused and frustrated, which can make them angry.

3. Give children large sheets of paper in small groups of 3 to 6. Ask the children to think about the following and write their ideas on their sheets (you may want to give different groups a different area to think about, or all groups can work on each activity):
- Think about the school day. What things might happen that someone with autism might need help with? For example, encourage children to think of noises at playtimes or in the dinner hall, the rules of games, moving around the school, crowds of people, etc.
 - How might we help someone who has autism around the classroom? For example, encourage children to think about helping with understanding rules, following instructions or changes to a timetable or routine.
 - How might we help someone with autism in the playground? Think about buddy systems, a quiet area, etc.
 - What pictures or labels around school might help someone with autism?

After the session, children can bring their sheets to the front and explain their ideas to the rest of the class.

Additional Learning Challenge

Pick a part of the school day that you have identified as potentially stressful for a person with autism, e.g. assembly, play time or lunchtime. Ask children to think of an idea to help someone who is struggling in this situation- it could be labels/pictures/instruction charts/a quiet area to get away from the noise/stress, etc.

