

HOW TO TRANSITION TO TERTIARY EDUCATION



AUTISM

HELPFUL HINTS FOR PEOPLE WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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FOREWORD

FOREWORD

Penny Robinson

As someone who has ‘been there, done that’, and successfully transitioned to tertiary education – and out the other side into employment – it gives me great pleasure to write the foreword for this booklet of helpful hints.

I studied a Bachelor of Biomedical Science (with Honours), then followed my strengths and interests to do a Masters of Biostatistics. While doing my Masters, I started doing sessional tutoring. I’m now an Assistant Lecturer at Monash University.

I’m also part of the ‘I CAN Network’, which focuses on the strengths ('I CAN') of being on the Spectrum rather than the deficits ('I can't'). It is important to know and use your strengths (Exercise 2) and work out what you may need additional help with (Exercise 3), so you can achieve your best.

I started going to the various university Open Days with my dad when I was in Year 10. Initially this helped me with Year 11 subject choices, and it also gave me plenty of time to work out what my university preference was, and plan the transition – especially as I also did Year 12 over two years.

Starting going to Open Days early also gives you plenty of time to think about living arrangements once in higher education, plus travel arrangements. I was able to stay living with my parents – friends living in the country had to move. My dad’s work was very close to Monash Uni, so I was able to travel with him in the car most days (plenty of L-plate practice!). Most students have to drive themselves or get public transport.

Regarding disclosure – it is your decision whether you disclose, and who to. I started out only disclosing my Asperger’s Syndrome to Disability Services (which gave me alternative assessment arrangements). As I got more confident, more people knew. Disclosing my panic attacks to many students was part of my coping strategy.

My advice is to read the booklet, and do what will work for you – because everyone is different. Know your strengths and your weaknesses. Work to your strengths, and be prepared to ask for help for any weaknesses. Lecturers/tutors don’t know you need help unless you ask them!

And finally – find out if your university or TAFE is part of the ‘I CAN Network’. Knowing others on the Spectrum means that you’re not alone through your new journey of higher education.

For further information about my journey, you can read the article in The Age that features me (<http://tinyurl.com/Penny-TheAge>), or you can watch my 3 YouTube videos.

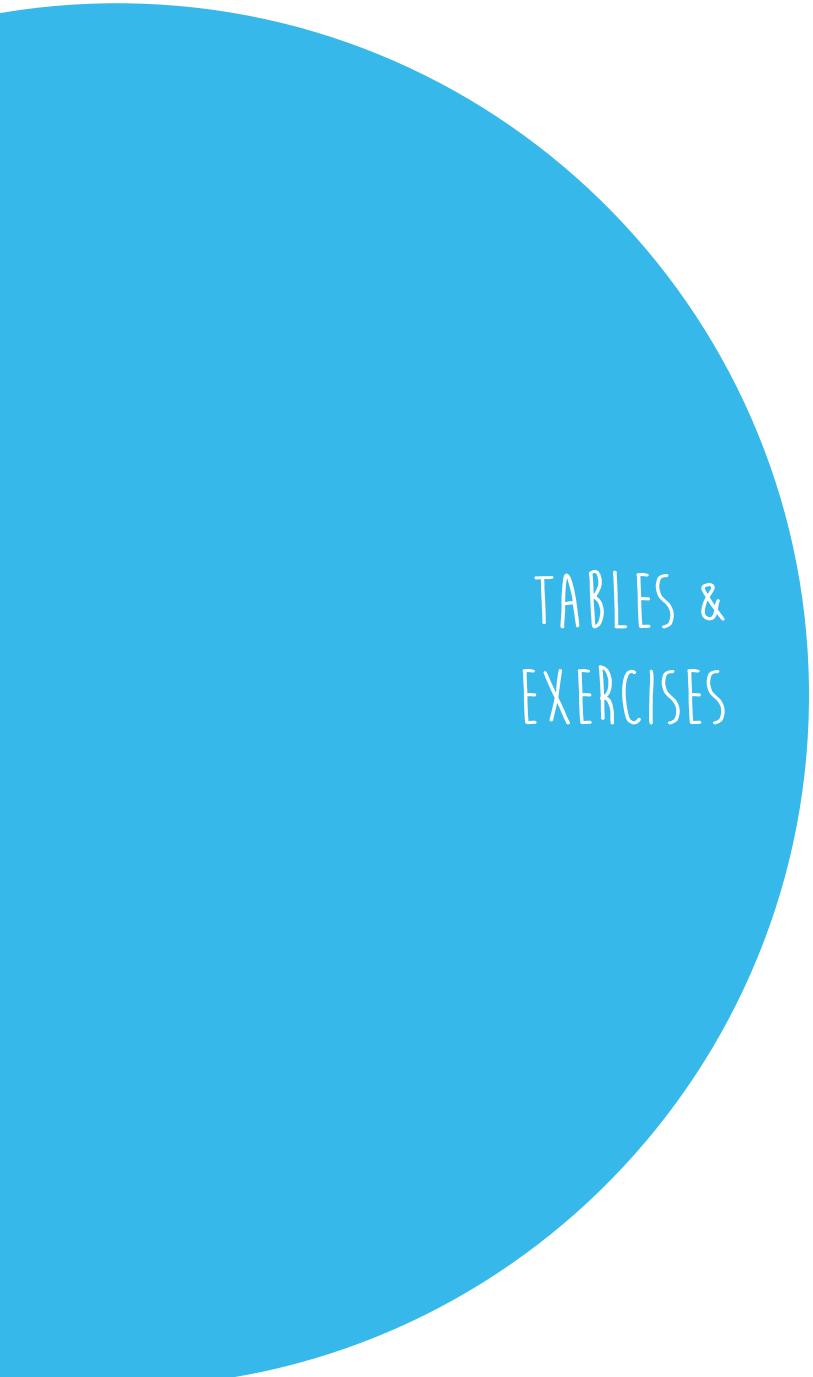
- My experience of higher education: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qsLWCK4ZJRM>
- My journey to an Assistant Lecturer: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=efd5b4NrqeY>
- My Spectrospective story: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FlwiQKiXslc>

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1. INTRODUCTION



1: INTRODUCTION

Congratulations on deciding to undertake tertiary study at university or TAFE. You will encounter many changes with this transition: a new physical environment, different teaching and learning approaches, and new expectations of you as a student. Coping with change and transition can be difficult for many people, and if you are on the Autism Spectrum you may find it particularly challenging.

Remember though, that through your previous schooling you will already have developed a number of capabilities and coping strategies for study. You will also have your own strengths, skills and expertise that you use in everyday life. It will be important to know what these strengths and strategies are so that you can use them in your new learning environment.

THIS BOOKLET

The purpose of this booklet is to:

- Provide you with helpful hints and strategies on making the transition to tertiary studies.
- Provide you with advice on how to succeed in tertiary studies.
- Provide you with information so that you can be aware of what to expect in your new learning environment.
- Help you identify 'early warning signs' that things are not going well and when you may need additional advice and support.
- Provide information about the people at university or TAFE who can support you in your tertiary studies.

This booklet discusses many changes to expect, but cannot predict all possible changes you may experience. Each university or TAFE is different; each campus is different; the staff are different; the students are different; and the way you experience it may be different as well. Nevertheless, a good logical approach to planning will help you cope with the transition.

This long version of *How to Transition to Tertiary Education: Helpful Hints for People with Autism Spectrum Disorder* includes useful information, student stories, answers to frequently asked questions, worksheets and links to additional resources. There is also a shorter version which emphasises the main points and has helpful checklists at the end of each chapter. Each covers the same information. It is up to you which one you prefer to use.

How to Transition to Tertiary Education: Helpful Hints for People with Autism Spectrum Disorder is available online at:
www.adcet.edu.au/autism-transition

HOW TO USE THIS BOOKLET

This booklet has been compiled from a range of helpful resources, as well as experiences of students on the Autism Spectrum.

Knowing what things might be different is helpful, so find this out. This information may help you with planning, organising and coping with your transition to university or TAFE. Being prepared also means having a plan in place for situations you may find particularly challenging, or for when you feel that you are not coping well. Preparing a plan when you are coping okay is a good strategy so that it is ready when you need it.

Read through this booklet as early as possible, preferably before you commence your studies. Complete the worksheets and checklists.

When issues arise, refer back to the relevant chapter and remind yourself of the strategies you planned. If situations come up that you did not expect and you are not sure of how to respond to these, remember there are people at university and TAFE who can support you. You are strongly encouraged to seek help at the earliest possible time if you feel you need help or are not coping.

STAFF KNOWLEDGE OF AUTISM

Whilst this booklet provides extensive advice and information to students, success at university or TAFE also depends on the staff that you deal with having a good understanding of the Autism Spectrum and how this impacts on life as a student. There is growing awareness of the condition across Australia and how to best support students. Some campuses offer specific programs for students on the Autism Spectrum, such as mentoring, induction programs and Autism training to staff. Make some enquiries about these before you commence your studies.

There are some teaching and support staff who have very limited understanding of Autism, and you may encounter some of these staff.

In these cases it will be helpful to:

- Be knowledgeable about how being on the Autism Spectrum impacts on your study.
- Be clear on your rights and requirements as a student. This booklet will assist you in this.
- Find a support person to assist you: a family member, friend or other staff member.
- Communicate this clearly and calmly to staff to improve support for yourself, and other students on the Autism Spectrum in the long term.
- Be your best self-advocate.

NDCO PROGRAM

This booklet has been prepared by the National Disability Coordination Officer (NDCO) program. The NDCO program is funded by the Australian Government to provide information, advice and support to people with disability who are transitioning to tertiary education. The support the NDCO program provides includes: discussing study options, meeting course coordinators, campus tours, assistive technology information, study strategies, and enrolment advice. To find your nearest NDCO, go to www.education.gov.au/ndcoprogramme

2: AWARENESS OF
YOURSELF AND OTHERS



2: AWARENESS OF YOURSELF AND OTHERS

This chapter provides information on Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) or Autism Spectrum Condition (ASC). Asperger's Syndrome is part of the spectrum. ASD will be the term used in this booklet, as it is the most well-known term.

You may find this information helpful to gain greater awareness and insight into some of your thought processes and behaviours.

ASD is a lifelong developmental condition that impacts on a person's ability to comprehend and interact with the world around them. The spectrum refers to the wide range of ways the condition can affect people. It can be characterised by difficulties in social interaction, communication and sensory sensitivities. It can also be characterised by strengths in direct communication, focus on detail and perservance in pursuing information on areas of interest.

Many adults are being diagnosed with ASD. These individuals may have known that they were different, and a diagnosis can provide a context for their characteristic combination of behaviours, skills and challenges.

It is important to know that every person with ASD is different. You are the expert on how ASD affects the way you think, comprehend and respond to your experiences.

TOM'S STORY...

At 16, Tom was diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome. He always knew he was different from his peers but could not understand why or how. He initially saw the school counsellor then a psychologist because of the bullying at school.

The Disability Coordinator at school provided some social skills training which assisted Tom greatly. In year 11, she included the TAFE Teacher Consultant who specialised in Autism Spectrum conditions in Tom's Post School Transition Planning meeting. This provided Tom with goals for the future. The courses proposed were within his interest range even though not his primary passion. (There were not courses in voice acting and Pokémon.)

Tom was included in a Transition and Orientation group at the TAFE. This short course gave him the opportunity to become familiar with his new environment, the people he would be working with and get to know other students with ASD. This helped reduce his anxiety about the changes in his life. During his courses at TAFE, Tom initially received some in-class support to help him focus, and some social skill coaching. As Tom's in-class skills improved, the support decreased to assistance for organisational and time management skills.

Diagnosis changed Tom's life and he is now very proud to call himself an 'Aspergian'. Currently he is a public speaker educating others about his life story and working for Autism Spectrum Australia as a blogger, online magazine writer, future leader, script writer and presenter. Thus, he has fulfilled all his passions, interests and skills. He has made friends, has a girlfriend and is positively influencing the lives of other young people on the Spectrum.

Most of the people around you are not on the Autism Spectrum. They can be referred to as neurotypicals (NTs). It is useful to compare how people with ASD and people without ASD interpret and respond to situations.

The table on the following page compares the common characteristics of people with ASD and the common characteristics of an NT person. You will probably identify with most of the common ASD characteristics to some degree. Remember everyone is different and every person with ASD will not have all of the ASD characteristics and not every NT person will have all the NT characteristics.

Highlight the characteristics that could affect your studies. Select the ones that most relate to you. They can be from either column. At the end of the table, there is space to add any others that you think are important for you. You could discuss these with someone who knows you well to get some feedback. This exercise will help to identify particular characteristics that might affect your tertiary studies.

EXERCISE 1: COMPARING CHARACTERISTICS OF PEOPLE WITH AND WITHOUT ASD

| CHARACTERISTICS | PERSON WITH ASD | PERSON WITHOUT ASD |
|-------------------------------|--|---|
| Literality | Takes the meaning of spoken or written words literally. | Is able to interpret the meaning of figurative speech and sarcasm. |
| Attention focus | Is only able to focus on one aspect of communication or one interest at a time. | Is usually able to focus on several different aspects or interests at one time. |
| Gathering information | Persistence and focus on gathering and cataloguing information on a given topic of interest. | Not always committed to gathering information on an interest in an organised manner. |
| Thinking patterns | Thinks in closed pictures; each event or experience is separate and exclusive. Example: Breakfast food is eaten at a specific time each day. | Thinks in open pictures, links events and experiences together to use learning in new situations. Example: Happy to eat breakfast cereal at any time of the day. |
| Recall of details | Has exceptional memory and/or recall of details, for example: names, dates, schedules, routines. | Can have difficulties remembering and recalling specific details. |
| Application of learning | Learning is specific to a given situation. | Can generalise learning to other situations. Is able to build on existing knowledge in new situations. |
| Time and motion | Has difficulty with distinguishing between past and present events and emotions. Has difficulty imagining self in a future situation. | Is able to distinguish between past and present emotions. Is able to visualise possible selves into the future. |
| Predicting outcomes | Has difficulty predicting outcomes or consequences of actions. | Is able to predict consequences and outcomes from actions. |
| Theory of mind | Has difficulty understanding that others have emotions, thoughts and ideas different from own. Has difficulty understanding another's perspective. | Is aware of others' emotions and understands that others' thoughts can be different from own. Is able to experience and express empathy for others. |
| Regard for others | Able to relate to others at 'face value', free of sexist, 'ageist' or cultural biases. | Often considers others in terms of biases and societal contexts. |
| Honesty | Gives honest comments or responses at all times. | At times may not give an honest comment or response if it will hurt another person's feelings. At times may give an honest response in language that is diplomatic and gentle. |
| Social priorities | Is often happy with own company and may have difficulty considering others' wants and needs. Can lack awareness of appropriate dress style and fashion. | Prefers the company of others and takes others' needs and wants into consideration. Is aware of style of dress and fashion. |
| Social situations | Can feel uncertain and anxious about how to act in social situations, especially if these are new to the person. Has difficulty understanding the context and expectations of a given social situation. | Can generally understand the unwritten rules of social situations. Is able to interpret a given social situation and understand appropriate expectations. |
| Organisation | Has difficulty managing timelines, and planning and prioritising study or work requirements. | Can generally plan, manage and prioritise study or work requirements. |
| Non-verbal communication cues | Has difficulty understanding facial expression, voice tones and body language. | Uses and understands facial expression, voice tones and body language as a significant part of communication. |
| Eye contact | Avoids eye contact with other people, especially when uncertain, nervous or in new situations. | Considers eye contact to be an important part of communication. |

| | | |
|--------------------------------|---|--|
| Rules and procedures | Adheres to rules and procedures. Can become stressed when these are not followed by self or others. | Is able to break some rules in some circumstances without feeling stressed. Is tolerant of others not adhering to rules in some circumstances. |
| Routines and unexpected events | Can become stressed and anxious when established routines are not followed. | May not have well-established routines. For those who do have regular routines these can vary without undue stress or anxiety. Is flexible and able to cope with change. |
| Sensory stimuli | Can be hypersensitive to external stimuli such as background noise, loud noises, bright lights or strong smells. Can be distracted by external stimuli. | Does not necessarily become distracted or is not usually hypersensitive to external stimuli. Is able to filter these, so can concentrate on task at hand. |
| Stressful situations | Reacts to stressful situations in an effort to stop the stimuli by doing such things as flapping hands, shouting, pacing, or extreme fidgeting. | Can show minimal reaction to stressful situations and stimuli. |
| Speech | May have difficulty entering, regulating and exiting a conversation. | Is generally adept at engaging in conversations. |
| Motor skills | May have difficulty with fine and gross motor skills, writing, or co-ordination. | Is flexible with fine and gross motor skills and co-ordination. |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |

QUESTION & ANSWER

Question: Some neurotypicals I know feel uncomfortable in social situations. Does this mean that they have ASD?

Answer: No, many neurotypicals may feel this way. Especially if it is a new group they are mixing with. Some people can take time to understand the social expectations and rules for a new group. It can take confidence to get to know new people or interact in some situations.

Question: I can identify with many of the characteristics of a person with ASD but not all of them. What does this mean?

Answer: Every person with ASD has different characteristics and can express these differently. It is a spectrum and each person may display a combination of the typical characteristics to varying degrees.

MORE INFORMATION

- Wendy Lawson – Understanding and Working with the Spectrum of Autism: An Insider's View
- Tony Attwood – The Complete Guide to Asperger's Syndrome
- <http://www.tonyattwood.com.au/index.php/books-by-tony/archived-papers/79-the-discovery-of-aspie-criteria>
- www.autismspectrum.org.au
- www.adcet.edu.au
- Inspirations <http://www.rmit.edu.au/browse;ID=p25qsta9g719>
- Ask an Autistic by Amythest Schaber <http://www.youtube.com/user/neurowonderful>.

3: KNOWING YOUR STRENGTHS AND CHALLENGES



3: KNOWING YOUR STRENGTHS AND CHALLENGES

Every person has their own set of talents, skills and character strengths. You will have used many of yours so far in your schooling and life in general. Knowing what they are and how you use them may help you cope better with the transition to tertiary study. You may feel more positive if you find ways of using them at university or TAFE.

Talents are qualities that you are born with and may be improved by purposeful actions. Examples of talents are perfect pitch in your singing voice, good memory or an ability to draw images.

Skills are a learnt ability that you have developed over time in order to carry out certain activities. Examples of skills are writing assignments, carrying out science experiments or managing your time.

Character strengths are virtues that you develop and use by choice. Examples of character strengths are kindness, fairness, curiosity and honesty. Knowing your character strengths and finding ways to use them every day is a good way to build mental wellbeing and cope with new situations such as making the transition to tertiary education.

Some characteristics of people with ASD can mean they have talents and skills that are beneficial for tertiary study.

Example 1: Many people with ASD have a strong focus on a particular subject or area of interest. If this interest is part of your tertiary studies, it will mean that you will have knowledge and information, and are highly motivated to learn more about this topic. It may also mean that you are less likely to become easily distracted from your studies.

Example 2: Many people with ASD have a very good ability to absorb facts and remember them. This will make learning new factual information easier for you.

Example 3: Being honest and reliable may mean that you can take on some additional roles, such as helping with equipment or filing notes. These roles can help you to gain valuable skills.

Below is a table that you can use to write down some the skills you have learnt and developed. Try to focus on those that will help you with your studies. Ask your family members and current teachers what they think your skills, talents and character strengths are.

EXERCISE 2: MY SKILLS

Write down some of the skills you have learnt and developed. These examples may help:

| ACTIVITY | SKILLS DEVELOPED |
|------------------------------|---|
| English pre-tertiary subject | Understanding different types of texts. Able to write essays – with introduction, logical arguments, and a conclusion. Able to write to required word limits. |
| Using computers | Knowledge of computer applications. Able to load software. Able to troubleshoot computer problems. |
| Part-time job at bakery | Following instructions. Working in teams. Knowledge of occupational health and safety. |
| | |
| | |

EXERCISE 3: MY TALENTS AND CHARACTER STRENGTHS

Ask your family members and current teachers what they think your talents and character strengths are.

| | TALENTS | CHARACTER STRENGTHS |
|-----------------------------|---------|---------------------|
| What my family say I have | | |
| What my teachers say I have | | |

CHALLENGES

All people have things that they find harder to do. These can cause challenges for your studies.

Below is a table that you can use to write down some of these things. Focus on those that you think will affect your studies. Try to write down some solutions or strategies that could be used to help with these difficulties. Particularly think of how you can use your strengths and skills to make things easier. These strategies will be discussed later in this booklet, so you can come back to this later if you have more ideas.

EXERCISE 4: MY CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIES

| AREA | CHALLENGES | STRATEGIES |
|------------------------|--|---|
| Communication | I have difficulty knowing how to respond to other students when they ask how my course is going. | Know some specific areas that you can comment on, such as the current assignment. |
| Sensory issues | | |
| Information processing | | |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |

QUESTION & ANSWER

Question: How can knowing my skills and strengths assist me to cope with the transition to tertiary study?

Answer: Knowing what your skills and strengths are can assist you in transition and other stressful times in a number of ways. Reminding yourself of your skills and strengths can improve your confidence, which helps you with new situations. Also knowing when you previously used your skills and strengths may help you find ways to use them in the new learning environment.

Question: I have a lot of knowledge and skills in my specific area of interest. Am I able to focus on this in all my study?

Answer: No, you most likely will not be able to solely focus on your particular area of interest in your studies. You will need to learn about other viewpoints, theories, or applications in this area. Use your depth of knowledge and your interest in the subject matter to motivate you to learn more, and to compare and contrast other viewpoints.

Who can help?

- Family.
- Teachers.

MORE INFORMATION

- Inspirations <http://www.rmit.edu.au/browse;ID=p25qsta9g719>
- Visit <http://www.viacharacter.org> to find out more about character strengths and to take a free on-line survey to find out what your character strengths are.

4: FAMILIARISING YOURSELF WITH THE CAMPUS



4: FAMILIARISING YOURSELF WITH THE CAMPUS

It will be important to familiarise yourself with your university or TAFE campus before you commence your studies. This will help you to know what to expect in the physical environment.

VISITING THE CAMPUS

Download the campus map from the university or TAFE website or obtain one from the campus. Highlight particular areas that you will be using, such as the library, lecture theatres and cafeteria. Consider taking photos of these locations if this strategy helps you.

Visit the campus and familiarise yourself with each of these places and find out how to get to each one. Having two routes to choose from can be helpful in case there are changes during semester, such as maintenance or a social event. Find things like the nearest toilets, evacuation routes for emergencies, assignment submission boxes, and mark these on the map too. Remember that things may look different during semester when students return.

Most universities and TAFEs have Open Days for future students to walk around the campuses, meet with staff and attend information sessions. Check the campus website for details of their next Open Day. You may wish to attend this. You can take family and friends along with you.

If you prefer to visit when it is less busy, you can arrange a private visit at another time. You may be given permission to sit in on some lectures before the semester begins. Speak to your schools career adviser or student support services for the campus, or contact a National Disability Coordination Officer (NDCO) to arrange this.

JAMES'S STORY...

James is a young man who came to TAFE straight from high school. He had been at his school for 12 years, knew the layout and the people well and did not need to think about where things were or how to get around – he simply knew. When he started at TAFE he felt uncomfortable and confused in the different environment, with lots of people coming and going, and all sorts of ages and cultures represented. When going to his classroom for the first time, James was unsure of himself and not certain that it was the correct place until the teacher arrived.

James then met with student support services and they were able to meet him prior to class and show him across to his classroom. As they went, they took pictures on James's phone. James then came in and met with student support and downloaded the picture into a simple document with captions giving directions and reminders.

James now walks to class on his own and if he gets confused or feels uncertain of where he should be, looks at his phone to confirm he is on the right track. To everyone else, James is just another student checking his messages.

LOCATING A DE-STRESS AREA

It is important to identify a place on campus that you can go to if you are feeling stressed or agitated. This may be a quiet place outside, an area in the library or a quiet corridor. Some campuses have a specific area that is set aside for people with disability. These areas provide a quieter place to study. Locate a de-stress area when you are feeling relaxed, so if you do get stressed, you know a safe place to go to help you calm down. Make sure that you know how to get there from all of the places that you will be spending time, such as the library, lecture theatres and cafeteria. If you find it hard to communicate when stressed, consider making a written note or card as a way of asking for help.

GILLIAN'S STORY...

Gillian was enjoying her TAFE studies and all was going well, until she arrived at her classroom one day and found a note on the door indicating that due to the necessity of carrying out unexpected maintenance to the room, classes would be held in an alternative location. She was unsure where the new room was located, and felt stressed about trying to find it before the class was due to start. She wandered around the building and was becoming agitated. Another student asked if she was OK and needed help to find the room, but Gillian was not able to respond. Gillian decided to go to her de-stress area, a seat in a quiet area of the library. She sat quietly there and practised some deep breathing relaxation techniques. After 15 minutes she felt much calmer. She decided to email her teacher to make a time to discuss any information covered in the class she missed, and to ask for directions to the new classroom.

TRAVELLING TO AND FROM UNIVERSITY OR TAFE

You will need to know how to get to and from the campus. It is advisable to plan your route and, if possible, take the journey a couple of times before the semester commences. Again, try to have an alternative plan in case there are any changes, such as road works or public holidays.

TABLE 1: TRANSPORT INFORMATION

| MODE OF TRANSPORT | WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW |
|-------------------------------|---|
| Public train, bus and/or tram | Timetables and connections. Public transport stops. Length of each part of journey. Travel passes or ticketing system. Public transport payment system. |
| Bicycle | Safest route including nearby bike tracks. Location of campus bike racks. |
| Private Car | Car parks available on campus or nearby. Car park payment system. |

ORIENTATION ACTIVITIES

It is advisable to attend any orientation and information sessions for new students. Check your university or TAFE website for information on their orientation events. These can take place before semester starts or during the first few weeks of semester. These sessions can be busy so try to go with someone if this helps you. Orientation activities can cover topics such as:

- Campus tour.
- Subject enrolment.
- Signing up for tutorials.
- How to get a student identification card.
- The university or TAFE's online systems.
- How to access support services.
- How to use the library services to find and borrow items and access online resources.
- Most universities also have orientation activities put on by student clubs and societies. These might be political, religious, sporting, social or ASD student groups. They can be a great way to meet people with similar interests.

UNIVERSITY ACCOMMODATION

If you need to live away from home in university accommodation, you will also need to familiarise yourself with this environment. This will include your room, bathroom, kitchens, dining room, laundry and recreation facilities. There will also be many new routines to establish. This can cause many additional challenges. It is outside the scope of this booklet to cover the issues involved in living away from home. It is strongly advisable to discuss with the accommodation services manager or student support services any impact your ASD may have on your accommodation.

QUESTION & ANSWER

Question: How can I find out if the campus I will be attending has a specific area for students with disability? How can I arrange access to this area?

Answer: The disability support service at your campus will be able to give you information about this area and arrange access for you. Ask them if there is a specific area on campus, and if so, whether they can take you to it to view, and then arrange access for you to use it.

Question: I can find the library and lecture theatres but I'm not sure how I locate the rooms where I will have smaller classes. Is there someone that can help me with this?

Answer: Tutorials and practicals are held in various rooms throughout the campus. You may be told the class venue during the first week of semester. It is important that you locate these rooms before the classes are held. You can download the campus map from the internet and find the locations this way, or you can ask student support services for help in locating the venues. Check if your university or TAFE campus is connected to the 'Lost on Campus' app. This app can help guide you to buildings within the campus.

Who can help?

- Your career adviser.
- National Disability Coordination Officer Program: <https://education.gov.au/ndcoprogramme>
- Disability support services at the university or TAFE where you are enrolled.

MORE INFORMATION

- Your university or TAFE website information for new students.
- Get ready for study and work: top ten tips for young people who have a disability or chronic medical condition:
www.uws.edu.au/ndco/getreadytotips
- Succeeding in College with Asperger Syndrome: A Student Guide.
- The Olga Tennison Autism Research Centre (OTARC): www.latrobe.edu.au/otarc
- Towards Success: http://services.unimelb.edu.au/disability/resources/towards_success/aspergers_syndrome

5: STUDYING AT UNIVERSITY OR TAFE



5: STUDYING AT UNIVERSITY OR TAFE

Much of the following information has been extracted from the Olga Tennison Autism Research Centre (OTARC), La Trobe university website: www.latrobe.edu.au/otarc. OTARC provides evidence-based strategies for supporting individuals with ASD and their families. The website development formed part of the research project 'Supporting Transition to and Participation in Tertiary Education for Students with an Autism Spectrum Disorder' conducted by the OTARC, and supported by the Victorian Government.

Studying at university or TAFE is very different from high school. You are expected to do more for yourself and there is less structure and less follow-up from teachers. As a tertiary student, you have to learn to become more independent in your studies. You are expected to manage your study timetable and deadlines.

This may include:

- Preparing for classes by reading class notes, textbooks and other recommended materials.
- Attending lectures and classes.
- Taking relevant notes or recording information from lectures.
- Finding your own resources from the library or internet for completing your assignments.
- Making sure you complete and submit assignments by the due date.

Help is available if you need it. There is a range of support services available at your university or TAFE to assist you. It is important that you ask for help when required.

The table on the next page outlines the main differences between studying at high school and at university or TAFE. Highlight the ones that you think you will find the easiest to manage. In a different colour, highlight the ones that you think that you will find most challenging.

TABLE 2: DIFFERENCES BETWEEN STUDYING AT HIGH SCHOOL AND UNIVERSITY OR TAFE

| STUDYING AT HIGH SCHOOL | STUDYING AT UNIVERSITY OR TAFE |
|---|---|
| It is a young person's learning environment. Your parents/guardians can be contacted directly to discuss any matters related to your attendance or study. | It is an adult learning environment. Staff at universities and TAFEs cannot discuss matters concerning your study or attendance with anyone else (including your parents/guardians) without your permission. |
| Schools may use online resources to supplement teaching material. | Many universities and TAFEs use online processes for student enrolments, course information, discussion forums, submission of assignments, and the delivery of course material. |
| Your classes are scheduled for you. | Lectures are set, but you may be able to select your preferred time for tutorials and practicals. |
| Teachers carefully monitor class attendance. | Attendance at lectures is not monitored. Attendance at tutorials and practicals is usually monitored. |
| Classes generally have about 25 students. | Lectures may have 100 students or more. Tutorials and practicals usually have about 20 to 30 students. |
| Teachers check your completed homework. | Lecturers and teaching staff don't check you have done required readings. However, tutorial discussions, assessment tasks and exams require that you have read these. |
| Teachers approach you if they believe you need assistance. | Lecturers and teaching staff expect you to approach them if you do not understand class material or task requirements. |
| Teachers often write information on the board to be copied in your notes or provide handouts of relevant information. | Lecturers may present their material without stopping, expecting you to note the important points. It is important to take good notes or record the lecture if handouts are not provided. Tutorials or practicals may extend or apply the lecture material. |
| Teachers often remind you of the due dates for assessment tasks. They may accept late submission with no penalties. | Lecturers expect you to keep track of the due dates for assessment tasks. You may have marks deducted for late submissions. |
| You usually spend 20 to 25 hrs in class between the hours of 8.30am and 3:30pm, Monday to Friday. | As a full-time university student you can expect to spend 12 to 20 hours each week in lectures or tutorials between 8am and 9pm, Monday to Friday. TAFE classes may require more contact hours. |
| You may study outside of class as little as a few hours a week. | University requires you to study at least 1 hour outside of class for each hour in class to keep up, e.g. 16 hrs of class time requires at least 16 hours of private study per week. |
| Study and revision tasks are often set by the teacher throughout the school year. | You will need to plan and manage your own study time and revision tasks. Some assessment tasks may be due at the same time. It is advisable to use a Weekly Planner and a Semester Assessment Planner. (See Chapter 6). |
| You often need to read or hear presentations only once to learn all you need to know about them. | Concepts and ideas can be more complex and difficult to understand. You may need to review lecture notes and other study material regularly. |
| You are expected to read short specific amounts of material (for example one book chapter). | You may be assigned extensive reading material. You may also be required to read additional material from books or journal articles. |
| Writing tasks may not require referencing or acknowledging information sources. | Universities have strict policies about plagiarism, which is using someone's work as your own. This includes the internet and other students' work. Find out the referencing guide for your course and follow these guidelines to acknowledge others' theories or research. |

GETTING YOUR WORK DONE

At universities and TAFEs, there is not the same daily routine or relationship with your teachers as at school. The amount of time spent at your university or TAFE in class will depend on your course. For example, if you do a science course you may have practical classes to attend as well as lectures and tutorials. It is important to understand the attendance requirements.

You will only be required to attend when you have classes. Some days you may not need to attend at all. You will be expected to do a lot of work outside class times. This can be done on campus in the library or other study area, or at home if you prefer. Some people find working at home easier because they can set up their study space just the way they like it. Others find that studying on campus helps to create a good study routine with fewer distractions. Find the time and place that works best for you.

EXERCISE 5: MY IDEAL STUDY SPACE

Below is some space for you to write about or draw your ideal study space. Some things to consider:

- Where is the space?
- What sounds can you hear?
- What colours do you see?
- How is the space laid out?
- What equipment is available to do your work?



UNIVERSITY LECTURES

Attendance at lectures is not compulsory but it is highly recommended that you do attend all your lectures to help you learn the course content. If you miss lectures it can be very difficult to catch up.

TUTORIALS AND LABORATORY CLASSES

Usually you enrol in tutorials and laboratory classes in the first week of semester. They then commence in the second week of semester. Your lecturer will let the class know when the first tutorials or laboratory classes will be held. It is important to attend the tutorial or laboratory class for which you are enrolled.

ONLINE SYSTEMS

Many universities and TAFEs rely on online systems for sharing information and managing student enrolments. Online systems and resources available for your studies may include:

- Course notes and additional reading material.
- Lecture or class notes and handouts.
- Recordings of lectures.
- Details of assessment tasks.
- Assignment lodgements.
- Class discussion boards and blogs.
- Email communication
- Links to readings held in the library.
- Links to related websites and online articles.

Find out about your course online resources and systems, and how to log in to these. If you have trouble accessing the online system or resources, check with your lecturer, teacher or tutor.

LIBRARY

The library should become a resource that you use for many of your study needs. Many libraries also have an online system. This is used for checking the catalogue, article and journal searches, requesting books, and checking due dates on borrowed items.

Learning how to use the library can be a stressful process for many students. Most libraries have special tours or introductory classes during orientation week. Request assistance from a librarian if you are having difficulties understanding the library system and processes.

ANNE'S STORY...

Anne had been in an Autism Spectrum support unit at high school that catered well for her needs. Communication and social skills were reinforced by teachers that understood her. During the last two years, a transition plan was implemented, which involved a TAFE Teacher Consultant.

Anne participated in a short transition and orientation program conducted at her local TAFE. This course explained expectations, adult learning environments, rights and responsibilities, how to get around the campus, and where other learning support areas and a safe time-out room were.

Anne also met some new people she could catch up with when she started her course. This all reduced her anxiety as she was familiar with everything. Good communication strategies have been established between Anne and the TAFE teachers. She is happy and independent. She appreciated the step-by-step early planning. This gave Anne time to adjust to each change.

ASSESSMENTS

Learning in a tertiary environment is more than just remembering and repeating information that is taught by your teachers and lecturers. At university and TAFE, assessment tasks will develop your critical analytical skills. You may be asked to gather evidence for and against an argument or compare and contrast theories.

Assessment tasks can include:

- Essays or assignments
- Posters
- Individual or group reports
- Literature reviews
- Laboratory reports
- Online discussion forums
- Formal exams
- Individual or group oral presentations.

Each subject or course may have very different forms of assessment. Your subject or course outline will provide an overview of your assessment tasks for the semester.

ONLINE DISCUSSION BOARDS OR BLOGS

Some courses have assessment tasks that require participation in online discussion forums. You may be required to make comments or ask questions about a given topic, and comment on other student's contributions.

You may find this style of assessment a positive way to interact and communicate with others.

It is important to be clear about the evaluation criteria for this task.

- How many words are expected?
- How many comments are required?
- How often are postings required?
- Do your postings require referencing?

Some students with ASD find online discussions challenging due to the required social interactions. If you find this type of assessment task too difficult or stressful due to your ASD, speak to student support staff in student services. It may be possible to arrange alternative assessment tasks.

GROUP ASSESSMENTS

Some courses have assessment tasks that require you to prepare and submit material as part of a group.

Group assessments work well when:

- Tasks are allocated fairly and evenly between group members.
- Everyone is clear on their allocated tasks.
- The group establishes clear timelines for completion of tasks.
- Everyone in the group is clear about the process.
- Members know how to best contact each other.
- The group meets regularly to discuss work in progress.

A good strategy when working as part of a group is to identify two components of the group task that match your skills and/or interests. Propose to the group that you take responsibility for one or both of these areas.

Some students with ASD find group assessments stressful due to the social interactions. If you find that these strategies do not work, and group assessments are too challenging or cause too much stress, speak to student support services. It may be possible to arrange alternative assessment tasks.

FULL-TIME OR PART-TIME STUDY LOAD

Some people find they are not able to study full-time at the tertiary level. They can feel overwhelmed by the course requirements. It can be possible to undertake fewer subjects for your course and still be considered a full-time student. Or you can study part-time. This can be beneficial in the first few semesters of tertiary study to help you adjust to the changes. You can always enrol in full-time studies in subsequent semesters.

If you are already at university or TAFE and wish to reduce your subjects during semester, it is important to talk with student services or student administration as soon as possible regarding your enrolment. Academic and financial penalties could apply for withdrawal from subjects after a certain time period into semester. Universities refer to this as the Census date. If you receive Centrelink payments, you will need to inform them of changes to your study load.

QUESTION & ANSWER

Question: I have received my first assignment back and was marked down for not answering the question correctly. I thought I had provided all the relevant information. How do I learn what is expected from an assignment?

Answer: To receive good marks in tertiary assignments, you need to answer the question provided. This requires analysis and evaluation of the information. Speak to your tutor or someone from learning support about how to interpret and answer assignment questions.

Question: Sometimes I go to the library and get absorbed in reading, so that I forget to attend classes. Is there a way that I can be reminded what time it is, and that I have a class?

Answer: One way to remind yourself to attend classes is to place a calendar alert on your mobile phone, tablet or computer. Place all your lectures and classes into the calendar with an alert set for 10 or 15 minutes before the time the class starts. This way you will have an electronic reminder.

Who can help?

- Student transition officers.
- Disability support staff.
- Learning support staff.

MORE INFORMATION

- Check your university or TAFE website for learning advice for new students.
- La Trobe University Academic Language and Learning Unit:
www.latrobe.edu.au/students/learning#La%20Trove%20University%20Academic%20Language%20and%20Learning%20Unit
- University of Canberra Academic Skills Centre: www.canberra.edu.au/current-students/student-support/study-skills
- Get ready for study and work: top ten tips for young people who have a disability or chronic medical condition:
www.uws.edu.au/ndco/getreadytontips
- Succeeding in College with Asperger Syndrome: A Student Guide

6: ORGANISING YOUR STUDY



6: ORGANISING YOUR STUDY

Students who are well organised and have good study techniques are more likely to succeed in their studies. It is important that you have strategies in place from as early as possible in your studies. To be successful at university or TAFE, you need to study consistently throughout the semester, right from the first week.

Study includes:

- Attending classes.
- Completing assessment tasks.
- Reading prescribed text book chapters and articles.
- Reviewing course material for tests and exams.
- Sourcing and reading additional material relevant to your assessment tasks.

Many students ask for and receive additional assistance with their studies. It is important to ask for assistance if you require help with your studies.

This can include:

- Understanding the requirements of a classroom task or request.
- Understanding expectations of an assessment question or task, such as the type of information to include.
- Understanding the information covered in class or lectures.
- Having some extra time to complete test and exams.
- Having assistance with note-taking or being allowed to record lectures.
- Alternative assessment methods.

If you have questions about the class material, make an appointment with your teacher/lecturer. If you have questions about the tutorial or laboratory material, ask the tutors and teachers during class or make an appointment to see them after class.

You may also make an appointment with the learning support services. They can assist you in understanding assessment questions and how to approach an assessment task.

Some students with ASD find using assistive technology helpful in their studies. For example, speech recognition software enables you to create and edit documents, search the web, and write emails quickly and accurately just by using your voice. The disability support service at your university or TAFE will be able to advise you on helpful assistive technology.

SEMESTER PLANNING

Plan early for all your studies. Remember the 5 Ps: Proper Planning Prevents Poor Performance!

It is strongly recommended that you spend at least one hour studying and completing assessment tasks for every hour of contact time at university. For example, if you have eight hours of classes per week, you should spend at least eight hours a week on additional study. It is important to have a copy of the Unit Outline for each of your subjects. These include an overview of the subject, key learning objectives, and assessment tasks.

Make note of each assessment task, the due dates and what percentage of the semester mark they are worth. Try to allocate the time you spend on an assessment task in proportion to the mark it is worth. For example, generally you would spend twice as much time working on an assignment worth 20% of the overall semester mark than you would on one worth 10%. It is important to get assessments in on time, even if you are worried that they are not perfect. You can have marks deducted for submitting assignments after the due date.

A Semester Assessment Planner is a good way to organise your study time. Make a large one (approximately A3 size) to place on your wall. On your Semester Assessment Planner, note all assessment tasks on the day they are due, what type of assessment task (for example: essay, Lab report, test), and their percentage proportion of the semester mark. Make note of the time the assignments are due, as this can vary for some subjects. Consider what study activities you need to do to complete the assessment, how long it will take to do each one, and how far ahead of the due date you should start.

It can be useful to break assessment task activities into stages.

For example, preparing an assignment has five stages:

Stage 1: Ensuring you understand the question and assessment criteria.

Stage 2: Searching for and finding relevant references – from text books, additional books, journal articles, web data bases.

Stage 3: Reading information and highlighting parts you will use in the assignment, and conducting practical work if required.

Stage 4: Writing a draft.

Stage 5: Reviewing and editing your draft (if necessary) before submission.

On your Semester Assessment Planner, record the date you should start each assessment task activity. This will assist you to plan for your studies.

TABLE 3: SEMESTER ASSESSMENT PLANNER (EXAMPLE)

| WEEK/DATES | BIOLOGY | GEOGRAPHY | HISTORY | COMPUTING |
|------------|---------------------------------------|--|--|---|
| 1 | | | | |
| 2 | | Research for assignment 1. | Research for assignment 1. | |
| 3 | Prac report due Thursday. Worth 10%. | Research and write up assignment 1 draft. | Research assignment. | In-class online test Monday. Worth 5%. |
| 4 | | Review, edit and submit assignment 1. Due Monday. 1000 words. Worth 10%. | Research and write up assignment 1 draft. | In-class online test. Monday. Worth 5%. |
| 5 | Prac Report due Thursday. Worth 10%. | Research for assignment 2. | Review, edit and submit assignment 1. Due Wed. 1000 words. Worth 15% | In-class online test. Monday. Worth 10% |
| 6 | | Research and write up assignment 2 draft. Check online discussion. | | In-class online test Monday. Worth 10%. |
| 7 | Prac Report due. Thursday. Worth 10%. | Review, edit and submit assignment 2. Due Monday. 2000 words. Worth 20%. Participate in online discussion. | Research for assignment 2. | |
| 8 | | Meet with group to plan presentation. Participate in online discussion. | Research for assignment 2. | In-class online test Monday. Worth 10%. |
| 9 | Prac Report due Thursday. Worth 10%. | Online discussion due. Total 1000 words. Worth 10%. | Commence writing assignment 2 draft. | In-class online test Monday. Worth 10%. |
| 10 | | Meet with group. | Review and edit assignment 2. | |
| 11 | Prac Report due Thursday. Worth 10%. | Meet with group to finalise presentation. | Submit assignment 2. Due Wed. 3000 words. Worth 45%. | |
| 12 | | Group presentation and paper. Due Tuesday. Worth 20%. | | In-class online test Monday. Worth 10%. |
| 13 | Start exam revision. | Start exam revision. | Start exam revision. | Start exam revision. |

This Semester Assessment Planner will give you an overview of your study assessment deadlines. It is important to also plan your study on a weekly basis.

WEEKLY PLANNING

Once you have made your semester plan and know what needs to be done, you can start making a plan for each week. A Weekly Planner (See example, Table 5) will assist you to organise your time so that you stay up-to-date with your course requirements. Include all of your regular commitments, such as:

- Lectures and classes.
- Scheduled group project meetings.
- Private study time for each subject.
- Any deadlines or assignment stages that need to be completed.
- Travel time to and from campus.
- Work or family commitments.
- Sport or other activities.
- Sleeping time.
- Meal time.
- Exercise time.

Most TAFEs and universities will make an individual student timetable available for each student, based on their enrolment. This is a good place to start your weekly plan. Some people find it easy to colour code their Weekly Planner. Use a different colour or symbol for each subject or activity. This visual layout also helps you to see if you are dividing your study time well between each subject. You can also see if you have a good balance between studying and other commitments.

A Weekly Planner should be realistic and achievable. There are only 24 hours in a day. Remember to include some relaxing time too so that you can catch up with friends, read the latest comic book in your favourite series, watch a movie or go for a bushwalk. These can be good rewards. Having fun and doing things other than study is important.

Private study time

You need to plan your private study time to be as effective as possible. It is important to be able to maintain concentration and focus, and to undertake study that helps you meet your course requirements. Some strategies that may be useful include:

- Allocating private study time in one-hour chunks of time. You might consider breaking each hour into studying for 45 minutes, then a break for 15 minutes, as a transition to your next class, activity or study block.
- Alternating subjects in your study time. For example, study geography for one hour, and then study science for another hour.
- Allocating specific tasks for your private study time. For example, use the time to work on upcoming assignments or to read required readings.
- Planning private study time to link with lectures or classroom requirements. For example, have one hour study time before a class to review readings or material.
- Allowing some breaks for resting, exercise and meals so that you don't wear yourself out.

Update your weekly planner

It is important to update the tasks on your Weekly Planner each week to ensure that you keep up with the task requirements of your course. Make time for this on your weekly planner.

- Check your Semester Assessment Planner for any assignment tasks that need to be incorporated into your Weekly Planner.
- Write a weekly 'To-do list' or the key goals for the week (See example, Table 4).
Write down the tasks that need to be accomplished for each subject this week.
This can either be in the form of a table, a list or another way that suits you best.
- Allocate time for these tasks in your Weekly Planner.

TABLE 4: 'TO-DO LIST' (EXAMPLE)

| SUBJECT | TASKS |
|-----------|--|
| History | Read chapter 9 and 10 of the text book before class. |
| Computing | Review notes to prepare for in-class test. |
| Geography | Go to library and search data bases for at least ten additional references for assignment. |

It is important to review your Weekly Planner each week using the following questions to assess your progress:

- Am I following the plan?
- Am I staying focused on tasks allocated?
- Is it assisting me to meet my study requirements?
- Does the plan need to be changed?

If you are consistently not following your Weekly Planner and not meeting your study requirements, it is important to ask for help with managing your study.

TABLE 5: WEEKLY PLANNER (EXAMPLE)

| | Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday | Saturday | Sunday |
|------------------------|---|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 9 am | Prepare for computer online assessment. | | Computer lecture. | | Computer lecture. | | Family and friends time. |
| 10 am | Prepare for computer online assessment. | Biology lecture. | Read history tutorial readings. | Geography lecture. | History research. | Write history assignment. | Family and friends time. |
| 11 am | History lecture. | Biology lecture. | History lecture. | | Geography research. | Write history assignment. | Family and friends time. |
| 12 pm | | | History tutorial. | Society club. | | | Family and friends time. |
| 1 pm | | | | | | Free time. | Family and friends time. |
| 2 pm | Geography lecture. | Biology prac. | History assignment. start writing | Geography group project meeting. | Geography research. | Free time. | Family and friends time. |
| 3 pm | | Write up biology prac. | Proof read biology prac report. | Geography prac. | Society club get-together. | Start writing geography assignment. | Family and friends time. |
| 4 pm | Computer prac. | Write up biology prac. | Geography assignment | | | | |
| Research. | | | Review biology text book. | | | | |
| 5 pm | Gym. | | | Gym. | | | |
| 6 pm | | | Free night. | | | | |
| 7 pm | Read history tutorial readings. | Read history tutorial readings. | | | | | Check Semester Assessment planner. |
| Do 'To-do list'. | | | | | | | |
| Do new weekly planner. | | | | | | | |
| 8 pm | | Geography online discussion. | | | | | |

SAM'S STORY...

Sam went to see the Student Transition Adviser at his university after he had failed some units during his first semester of study. The Student Transition Adviser spent time with Sam going through the Unit Outlines, explaining the requirements and expectations. They spent time goal-setting and putting together a study plan, which involved timelines for completing assessments throughout the second semester. Sam would also need to commit to various study activities each week, so these were scheduled onto a Weekly Planner as well.

They also discussed the group assessment and class participation aspects of the unit requirements that Sam was uncomfortable about. The Student Transition Adviser then arranged meetings with each of Sam's Unit Coordinators to introduce Sam and seek possible assessment alternatives for him.

Sam and the Student Transition Adviser met on a fortnightly basis during the semester to ensure Sam was meeting the Unit requirements, and to provide an opportunity for any other concerns and issues to be discussed. As a result of the meet-and-greet with his teaching staff, Sam found that as the semester progressed he was able to approach them directly without assistance from the Student Transition Adviser. Semester Assessment and Weekly Planners gave some structure to his studies which helped him keep up-to-date with his assessments and study requirements. Sam passed all units in second semester, even achieving a distinction grade for one of his units.

ORGANISING FOR EXAMS

Many university and TAFE courses have exams at the end of the semester. Sometimes there are also in-class tests during semester. You will need to carefully manage your study for tests and exams. It is advisable to start studying for exams as early as possible. Regular review of course material helps to learn the new information. Do not leave it to the last few days before the exam.

Finding out about the exam

- Check your exam timetable online. Ensure that you are clear on the date, time, duration, materials allowed and venue.
- Most exams are held in large rooms with many students. It can be possible to arrange an alternative venue that is smaller and quieter. There is a cut-off date for requests for alternative examination conditions so you need to ensure that your request is made before this date. You may also be entitled to other special provisions. Speak to the disability support staff about alternative examination arrangements.
- Find out as much as you can about the structure of the exam. Exams can be multiple-choice, problem-solving, short-answer questions, practical demonstrations, essays or a combination of these formats.
- Look at past exams for the subject/course. These should be available through the library or on the internet site. The questions will be different but you will be able to familiarise yourself with the exam format.
- Understand what percentage each exam question is worth. You can then calculate how much time can be spent on answering each question during the exam.
- Use your course outline to guide you on the themes of the material during semester.

Studying for the exam

- Use Weekly Planners to plan your study for the exams.
- Allocate specific tasks to chunks of study time.
- People find it useful to write summaries of the information, use mnemonics, or use mind-mapping to review the information.
- Use past exams to practise answering questions.
- Practise answering questions to the time restrictions of the exam.

Sitting the exam

- Try to get eight hours sleep the night before an exam. This will be more beneficial than staying up all night cramming.
- On the day of the exam, ensure you leave plenty of time to get to the venue.
- When the exam begins, it can be worthwhile taking a couple of minutes to scan the exam as a whole. It is advisable to note the duration to spend on each section or question, and what time you should start a new section or essay question.
- It is more important to answer or attempt to answer each required section, rather than spend the entire exam time on only part of the exam.

Exam essay questions

Here are some tips for approaching exam questions:

- Select the questions that you will answer.
- Spend a couple of minutes on each one underlining the key words.
- What are you asked to do? You may be asked to describe, compare, contrast or analyse. What theories and concepts do you need to refer to?
- Do a very brief outline of the essay on one of your exam booklet pages. Note down the key points you will make. This will help you structure your essay to answer the question.

QUESTION & ANSWER

Question: What happens if my study plans are interrupted by the occurrence of unexpected situations?

Answer: Sometime situations arise, such as a relative visiting or an event on at university or TAFE that you would like to attend. Your timetable needs to be flexible enough to accommodate unexpected events. You may need to make some minor adjustments to stay on track. For example, on Tuesday evening you study Biology, but now you need to attend a family dinner that evening. Thursday evening is free from study, so this week you will study Biology on Thursday and not Tuesday.

Question: I am unsure how to start studying for exams. There has been so much material covered in the course this semester. How do I know what is important to know or not know?

Answer: Your Unit Outline should have the key learning points for the subject. This can be a good guide. You can also make an appointment to talk to your tutor or teacher about the important material to review. Learning support or student services support staff may be able to assist you with general exam preparation.

Who can help?

- Student services.
- Learning support team.
- Teaching staff.

MORE INFORMATION

- www.adcet.edu.au
- Towards Success in Tertiary Study with Asperger's Syndrome and other autism spectrum disorders:
http://services.unimelb.edu.au/disability/resources/towards_success/aspergers_syndrome
- <http://www.latrobe.edu.au/otarc>

7: WHAT SUPPORT COULD BE HELPFUL



7: WHAT SUPPORT COULD BE HELPFUL

Many students with ASD need additional support for their tertiary studies. It is important to know that you have a right to ask for help and adjustments that will help you participate in education and training.

YOUR RIGHTS

The Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) aims to protect the rights of people with disability, and to ensure that they are treated as fairly as people without disability. The Disability Standards for Education outlines the rights of students and the responsibilities of education and training institutions to abide by this Act. Under these standards all education providers, including universities and TAFEs must consult, make reasonable adjustments and eliminate harassment and victimisation.

Consulting includes discussions with you about what type of support and adjustments could assist you in your studies. It also includes meeting with you to check that the supports in place are working well, and make any changes if required.

An adjustment is reasonable if it supports your learning needs and also does not place undue hardship on other students, staff and the education provider.

Education providers are also obligated to have strategies in place to prevent the harassment of students with disability.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Universities and TAFEs need to ensure that reasonable adjustments do not threaten the core or essential requirements of a course. These are called inherent requirements, and students must meet these in order to complete a course or unit. Assessment tasks should be based on the inherent requirements of the course. The inherent requirements of a course are not always clear. You have a right to question how a given assessment task measures the inherent requirements of a course. If it does not, you then have a right to ask for an alternative assessment task if an assessment task is not appropriate for your learning needs.

Example 1: The course assessment includes a group assignment. However, the social interactions of groups are too challenging for you. If the ability to work as part of a group is not an inherent requirement of the course, you can ask for an alternative assessment task. But if teamwork is an inherent course requirement, then you will need to be assessed on working as part of a team.

Example 2: The subject assessment requires students to do a presentation to the whole class. If public speaking or presentation skills are not inherent requirements of the course, you can ask for an alternative assessment. You may be able to present to your teacher only, or a small group, or by a video presentation.

SUPPORT SERVICES

Students with disability, including ASD, have the right to specialised student support services to assist with participation in their course. They also have the right to access general student support services on the same basis as students without a disability.

Most university and TAFE campuses have disability support staff who support students with disability to access reasonable adjustments they may require for their study. They will work with you to develop a Learning Access Plan (LAP) or Reasonable Adjustment Plan (RAP) that outlines what learning supports your university or TAFE can put in place for you. You can ask for your LAP or RAP to be reviewed or changed at any time.

DISCLOSING YOUR DISABILITY

You will need to tell the disability support services about your ASD if you want a LAP or RAP to assist with your studies. You may also need to provide documentation about your condition from a health professional. Disclosing your disability is a personal decision.

Students who decide not to disclose may do this because:

- They fear they may be discriminated against.
- They don't like being referred to as having a disability.
- They don't think they will need reasonable adjustments.
- They think if they receive additional support they will be seen as different from others.
- They are worried about what might happen to their personal information.

Benefits of disclosing

There are many advantages to disclosing. Many students with ASD are much more successful with their tertiary studies once they have disclosed and sought appropriate assistance.

It is therefore recommended that you consider the benefits of disclosure very carefully:

- You will be able to discuss your specific learning needs and options for reasonable adjustments with disability support staff.
- It will help university or TAFE staff understand your learning style.
- Supports can be put in place to help you with your studies.
- The personal information you provide to disability support services about your ASD is protected under the Privacy Act. As you are an adult over 18 years of age, the university or TAFE must ensure that the information you provide to them will be kept confidential.
- You will have the right to decide who else gets the information, and will need to give written consent for your information to be shared with anyone else (including your parents).
- Even if you feel confident about your ability to succeed in studies with minimum support, it is beneficial to disclose so that if any issues arise, the disability support staff are aware of your situation.
- Disability support staff can help you plan for future circumstances, such as sitting exams.
- Often additional support can be provided to you in such a way that other students are not aware that you are receiving this service.

From 2015, NSW TAFE students who wish to access funded disability support MUST disclose their disability at time of enrolment. Unfortunately, there is no specific ASD identifier on the enrolment checklist, so you are advised to check the 'Learning Disability and Other' box, and to indicate that you wish to have contact with a Teacher Consultant.

PETER'S STORY...

Peter had been doing TAFE courses for about 18 months but had not completed any subjects. Peter's teacher asked him if he would like some support organised. Peter gave permission for contact to be made with his mother. Peter's mother was unaware that he was struggling with his studies. She disclosed that Peter had ASD. Peter was unaware of his diagnosis as his mother had not explained it to him.

Tutorial support was organised and Peter caught up and has now nearly completed his course. He is happy and has started interacting with other students both inside and outside class time.

Since gaining information and self-awareness of his ASD, Peter is now better at asking for assistance when he needs it. His disclosure has also helped teachers understand when and how Peter learns best. Peter is also happier knowing who he is, identifying the positives and celebrating his differences. This self-advocacy and disclosure now helps him stay on track with his studies.

ASSISTANCE PROVIDED

Here are some examples of what you may need help with and what reasonable adjustments or other assistance may be available from your university or TAFE. Highlight the ones that might be useful for you so that you can discuss them with support staff. Look back at the exercise you completed in Chapter 3 for some ideas.

TABLE 6: SUPPORT FOR STUDY

| What I need support with | Possible adjustments or support |
|---|--|
| Untidy and illegible handwriting. | Disability support services may organise for a note-taker to take notes in lectures for you or discuss Assistive Technology options. |
| Writing quickly enough to keep up with lecturer. | Disability support services may organise for a note-taker to take notes in lectures for you or discuss Assistive Technology options. |
| Writing and listening at the same time. | Disability support services may organise for a note-taker to take notes in lectures for you or discuss Assistive Technology options. |
| Understanding abstract terms without concrete examples to clarify concepts. | Speak to your lecturer or tutor afterwards and ask for an alternative concrete example. |
| Deciding what is important when reading text books or journal articles. | The learning support service can help you with strategies to determine key messages. |
| Interpreting general or large chunks of instructions. | Ask your instructor for clarification of instructions. Relay back to them your understanding of what is required. They can then provide additional information. |
| Concentrating on topics that do not interest me. | Do a Weekly Planner and allocate time and tasks to these topics. You will then be more likely to concentrate on them for the time allocated. Follow the advice in Chapter 6 of this booklet. |

| | |
|--|---|
| Setting goals and being organised. | Do a Semester Assessment Planner, and then a Weekly Planner each week. Follow the advice in Chapter 6 of this booklet. Counselling or transition support staff may be able to assist you. |
| Knowing what to study for in exams. | Talk to your tutor about an exam preparation strategy. |
| Sitting exams in unfamiliar surroundings. | Disability Services can arrange an alternative exam venue. Ask to visit this room before the exam. |
| Being distracted in large exam rooms. | Disability Services can organise an alternative exam venue that is a smaller room, with less people and less distractions. |
| Being unable to concentrate in large lecture theatres. | Sit as near to the front of the lecture theatre as you can. Try and sit next to other students who concentrate. |
| Feeling stressed or overwhelmed by the workload. | Review your Semester Assessment Planner and Weekly Planner (Chapter 6). Talk to transition support staff or counselling staff about your concerns. If you are doing a full study load, consider withdrawing from one subject. This can still be regarded as a full-time study load. |
| Managing anxiety and stress | Talk to a counsellor in student support services. |

QUESTION & ANSWER

Question: I am enrolled at university full-time doing 4 subjects. I am feeling overwhelmed and stressed by the workload. Someone has suggested that I withdraw from one subject and only study 3 subjects. Is this advisable?

Answer: If you find that studying 4 subjects is overwhelming, it is advisable to study 3 subjects. You will still be regarded as a full-time student. Studying 3 subjects will give you more time to become familiar with the requirements of tertiary study. It therefore can be a good idea for the first one or two semesters. You can always decide to increase your enrolment to four subjects in subsequent semesters. However, it is important to know that if you drop a subject after the university Census dates there will be academic penalties and a financial cost for the subject.

Question: I received some learning assistance through high school. I am now enrolled at TAFE and have seen the disability support staff to discuss my ASD. I would like to try studying with no extra help. Do I have to use the support offered to me?

Answer: No, it is your choice to use the services and support offered through disability support services. It is good that you have already seen the disability support staff; therefore, if any issues arise, staff are aware that you have ASD and this can make getting support easier and quicker if required.

Who can help?

- Student services on your campus.
- Disability support staff.

MORE INFORMATION

- Education Standards: <http://www.ddaedustandards.info>
- www.adcet.edu.au
- <http://pubsites.uws.edu.au/ndco/disclosure/>

8: FINDING KEY PEOPLE WHO CAN HELP YOU



8: FINDING KEY PEOPLE WHO CAN HELP YOU

It will be important to find key people you can go to who can assist you at university or TAFE. Find one or two 'go to' people at your campus. These people will be able to help you with questions you may have about managing your studies, or life in general. They may be able to help you contact other staff, such as lecturers or tutors. Letting them know about your ASD diagnosis and some of your challenges in the learning environment is a good idea. This will enable these staff to better understand you and provide tailored support and assistance if you need it at any stage. This chapter provides an explanation of the roles of some of the staff who could be your 'go to' people. It is a good starting point. It is important to know that actual titles may vary between universities and TAFE campuses. To find out their exact title and how to access their support, look on your university/TAFE website for student assistance. Or visit a student information desk on your campus and ask for titles and how to arrange an appointment with these staff.

DISABILITY SUPPORT STAFF

Universities and TAFEs are required by law to ensure that students with disabilities (including ASD) are able to access and participate in education. Therefore universities and TAFEs have disability support staff who can assist with your participation in the learning environment. Disability support staff help many students with ASD with issues such as:

- Developing a Learning Access Plan (LAP) or a Reasonable Adjustment Plan (RAP).
- Note-taking for classes.
- Access to a Disability Study Centre if available.
- Advice on the use of assistive technology.
- Loan equipment for note-taking.
- Special arrangements for exams, such as a separate room, use of a computer or scribe.
- Time-management and organisational skills.
- Extensions for assignments.

TRANSITION SUPPORT STAFF

Universities and TAFEs understand that the transition to tertiary study is difficult for many first-year students. Some campuses have staff to assist all new students cope with the changes and new expectations. Transition support staff help many students with issues such as:

- Timetabling.
- Campus familiarity.
- Time management and organisational skills.
- Study planning.
- Subject and course selections.
- Communication with the academic staff.
- Understanding the university or TAFE processes.

COUNSELLING SUPPORT

Counselling staff are available at most universities and TAFEs. Counselling staff help many students with issues such as:

- Coping strategies.
- Managing anxiety and stress.
- Dealing with relationships.
- Depression.
- Communication and social skills.
- Course selection and career planning.
- General life issues.

LEARNING SUPPORT

Many universities and TAFE's have a unit to support students to learn academic skills. These staff help many students to learn skills such as:

- Understanding the assessment task.
- Approaches to academic writing.
- Assessment planning and organisation.
- Spelling and grammar.

STUDENT MENTORS

Some universities or TAFEs have student mentor programs to assist students to adjust to tertiary study. Some campuses have mentoring programs specifically for students on the Autism Spectrum. These mentors help students with issues such as:

- Locating class rooms.
- Navigating around the campus.
- Support with communication.
- Understanding assessment requirements.
- Finding useful clubs and societies to join.

CASE STUDY – STUDENT MENTOR PROGRAM AT AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL UNIVERSITY (ANU)

ANU students who identify with ASD have the opportunity to join a Participation Assistant Program to assist them in transitioning to university studies in their first semester. Participation Assistants (PAs) are ANU senior students who, where possible, have a background or experience of ASD either in their own families or have worked in the area of disability. PAs provide individualised, creative and flexible support to meet the needs of each student in the program. Generally, PAs and the student with ASD meet once a week during first semester. Support provided includes: orientation to campus and university systems (including IT/online systems); organisation and planning (timetabling, keeping track of assessments, when to start revising for exams etc.); liaising with professional and academic staff.

QUESTION & ANSWER

Question: I am seeing the disability adviser and the first year transition support officer on my campus. Do I talk to them about the same things? How do I know who is best to help me?

Answer: Both the disability adviser and the first year transition support officer should be able to help you, each in a particular way. Ask both of them to clarify their respective roles and how they differ from and complement each other.

Question: How do I find out if my campus has a student mentor program?

Answer: Ask student services about any available student mentor programs.

MORE INFORMATION

- Your university or TAFE website page outlining support for students.
- www.adcet.edu.au

9: COMMUNICATION TIPS



9: COMMUNICATION TIPS

All social interaction can pose challenges for people with ASD. Being a tertiary student can pose new and additional challenges. It is important then to know what to expect in certain situations and have some strategies for these circumstances.

Some university and TAFE campuses provide communication training or peer mentor support for students with ASD. Look on your campus website or ask at student services to find out if this support is offered. If it is available, it is advisable that you use these services. They provide the opportunity to learn and practise skills to increase your communication skills.

COMMUNICATING WITH LECTURERS

Most university subjects and some TAFE subjects involve attending lectures. Lectures are often held in large rooms or auditoriums (sometimes called lecture theatres). They are usually attended by a large number of students. Attendance is not compulsory, but it is highly advisable that you attend all your lectures.

A presentation is given by academic staff. Mostly there is little or no interaction with students during the presentation. It is advisable not to ask the lecturer questions or make comments during lectures unless asked to do so. You may wish to write down any questions or comments you would like to make and ask the lecturer after the lecture has concluded.

Lecturers at university and TAFE often have other work to do along with lecturing and running tutorials. Some of the other work that they may be involved with includes conducting research, supervising higher degree students, maintaining equipment, doing field work and presenting at conferences. This additional work can mean that they are quite busy on some days.

Lecturers usually have scheduled student consultation times available every week where students can ask questions about lecture material or assessments. If you feel comfortable, you can go to their office to speak to them during these times. If you are not comfortable doing this or the times do not suit you, you can send an email asking your question or asking for a time for a meeting. Most lecturers will respond to emails within 48 hours. Remember that they are busy, so be patient.

EXERCISE 6: MY LECTURER/TUTOR CONSULTATION HOURS AND CONTACT DETAILS

| NAME | SUBJECT | PHONE | EMAIL | HOURS |
|------|---------|-------|-------|-------|
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RACHEL'S STORY...

Rachel had a question about an assignment that she was having trouble with. She could not do any more work on that part of the assignment until she had clarification on what to do. Each time she went to the lecturer's office, the door was closed. The deadline for the assignment was coming up soon so she was getting worried.

There was a timetable on the lecturer's door showing two time slots for student consultations, but unfortunately these both clashed with other lectures that Rachel had to attend. She sent the lecturer an email outlining her question. The lecturer replied the next day with a short answer to the question and offered to make a time to meet later in the week if more information was required.

Rachel started work on the assignment and then took it to the lecturer at the agreed time to get some feedback and make sure she was on the right track. She was then able to finish the assignment on time.

COMMUNICATING WITH TUTORS AND SMALL CLASS TEACHERS

Tutorials are generally smaller classes that give the opportunity for students to discuss the course material or undertake practical activities. Attendance at these may be compulsory, unless you are covered by a medical certificate or have extraordinary circumstances that prevent you from attending. You may need to speak to the tutor about any non-attendance.

These small classes can provide challenges for students with ASD. Many are uncertain as to:

- When do I start talking?
- How long do I talk for?
- When do I stop talking?
- What topics are okay for discussion in the group?
- How and when do I ask questions?

It is important to know that participation in the discussion is not always compulsory. If you feel anxious about talking in groups, it may be worth disclosing to your tutor/teacher about your ASD and how this impacts on your participation. This way they can understand and not ask you directly to make any comments.

Sometimes, students can dominate discussions in small classes. It is not appropriate for any student to dominate class discussions, as all students need the opportunity to participate. It is important to ensure that your input to class discussions is relevant, and therefore you need to base your responses or questions on information from the lectures, text books or assigned readings. Avoid answering questions that you do not fully understand.

If you feel anxious about talking too much in groups, it may be worth disclosing to your tutor/teacher about your ASD and how this impacts on your participation. This way they can understand and you can ask them to indicate to you when it is time to stop talking. They also may be able to work out a formula with you about how much talking to do. For example, a certain number of questions per class, or a time limit for responses.

Depending on the class structure, there may be time during or after a tutorial to ask questions about assessment tasks or lecture material. If you are nervous, consider writing down your question or making notes. You can also email questions or concerns to your tutors. Make the emails polite, short and concise.

Usually tutors will have time allocated to student consultation. You can request a meeting to meet with your tutor or teacher about the course material or assessment tasks. It is advisable to have specific questions prepared for the meeting.

CHRISSEY'S STORY...

Chrissey is a bright and happy student who is fascinated by her field of study, Agricultural Science. Chrissey was finding that some of her fellow students didn't seem to know the same things that she already knew and that the class needed to spend time on things that Chrissey had learnt previously. Chrissey also wanted to ask lots of questions of her teachers as her mind leapt ahead from subject matter to interrelated topics and back again. Chrissey noticed some people getting frustrated with her asking lots of questions and the teacher often said to her that she needed to wait until they got to that as a group shortly. Chrissey was also getting frustrated and was not sure if this was the right subject for her.

The teacher spoke with the entire student group and everyone agreed to set aside 15 minutes at the end of each session for tabled questions to be addressed. Now during class, students can still ask questions, but if it is something that does not directly relate to the content at hand, it gets noted to one side of the whiteboard to be dealt with in the Q&A time. The teacher has final decision on what gets tabled. For any extra questions, students need to arrange appointments to speak with him outside of standard class time. Chrissey now has a framework of how and when to ask questions and has learnt to trust that they will be followed through. The teacher is able to progress through the required content and everyone's frustration and anxiety levels have decreased.

COMMUNICATING WITH PEERS

Many students with ASD find social situations with other students create the most stress for them. It can be difficult understanding the non-verbal cues, innuendos and social rules that accompany much peer communication. However, successful communication with your peers can make your tertiary learning experience much more satisfactory and enjoyable. Many students discuss the course and assignments and share helpful tips. Therefore, as well as the benefits from friendships, you could also gain helpful support and advice about your studies.

It can be difficult to know how to initiate conversations with strangers. One advantage of being a student is that course work is something that everyone in the class has in common, so it can be an easy way to start up a conversation. For example, you could ask the student sitting next to you in the tutorial if they have started the next assignment. It is advisable that you make a list of possible questions you could ask other students in your course. Use some of these to start a conversation. Listen to their responses, as these may provide information for further questions and discussions.

You may wish to observe others' interactions for some important communication rules. These include: degree of eye contact, physical distance from others, appropriate greetings, and the amount of talking versus listening you should do. Practice using these rules in your communication with other students.

Some campuses have clubs and societies for students to join. They often have social events on a regular basis. The advantage of these is that it brings students with common interests together. It is an easy way to get to know others and belong to a social group. Some campuses have societies for students with ASD.

The cafeteria can be a popular place for students to meet. However, they can be very busy, chaotic and noisy places. You may find this distracting. The busiest times in the cafeteria will most likely be between 12pm and 2pm (lunchtime) and after lectures finish for the day. If you are meeting other students, suggest a quieter place, or meet in the cafeteria before or after the busiest times.

DEREK'S STORY...

Derek is a tertiary student who avoided eye contact as he found it too intense. It made him feel very anxious. A fellow student told him that it made him appear disinterested and untrustworthy. Derek then learnt the trick of looking at the bridge of people's nose, rather than the eyes. It does not make him look untrustworthy anymore and he does not get so anxious in social interactions.

Who can help?

- Student services.
- Student counsellors.

MORE INFORMATION

- Synapse: www.autism-help.org
- Tony Attwood, The Complete Guide to Asperger's Syndrome
- Wendy Lawson, Understanding and Working with the Spectrum of Autism
- John Harpur, Maria Lawlor & Michael Fitzgerald, Succeeding in College with Asperger Syndrome: A Student Guide
- Towards Success in Tertiary Study with Asperger's Syndrome and other autism spectrum disorders:
http://services.unimelb.edu.au/disability/resources/towards_success/aspergers_syndrome
- www.autismspeaks.org/family-services/tool-kits/postsecondary

QUESTION & ANSWER

Question: I emailed my teacher with some questions I had about the course work. In her response, she directed me to read certain chapters in the text book. I was frustrated as I had read those and still did not understand some of the material. I emailed her again and asked some more questions but she repeated that I should read the text book. Should I email her again to say that I have read the text book and I am frustrated with her advice?

Answer: You should email your teacher again explaining that you have read the relevant chapters in the text book but that you still have some questions, and ask for an appointment to see her. It is best to avoid a sequence of emails with no real outcome.

Question: I enjoy talking to another student quite often in my prac class. I thought we were friends but sometimes when I pass him in the corridor he does not stop for a talk. I am not sure if he wants to be a friend.

Answer: You should not feel that the person does not like you because they do not always stop for a talk. Maybe they need to get to class and do not have time to talk. You should just say hello to him in the corridor and keep enjoying your longer chats in the prac class.

10: MANAGING STRESS AND ANXIETY



10: MANAGING STRESS AND ANXIETY

STRESS

Experiencing some stress is part of everyday life. Small amounts can be healthy and can motivate people to work towards action and accomplishments. However, consistently high levels of stress can be unhealthy. Some students experience unhealthy levels of stress at university or TAFE.

Some of the things that contribute to stress at university or TAFE can include:

- An assignment might be difficult to write.
- You do not understand the requirements of an assessment task.
- You may find the course work uninteresting or too challenging.
- The course work may be too slow or too fast paced.
- You may consider assessment feedback to be unfairly critical.
- You may not be following a study timetable and feel you are falling behind.
- You are unable to find a quiet place in the library to study.
- There is a change in venue for the classes.
- You have issues relating to your fellow students.
- You feel socially isolated and anxious when around your peers.
- You are distracted by external stimuli in class.
- A lecturer's communication style, for example, they may say 'umm' too much.

Stress affects the feelings you have, and can lead to anxiety, anger, fear and a feeling of being overwhelmed. Stress also affects the way your body feels. High levels of stress can cause some people to experience increased muscle tension, quicker heart beat rate, churning in the stomach, headaches or the desire to rock or flap.

ANXIETY

Some level of anxiety is helpful as a natural response to heighten awareness to possible threats or dangers. Consistent anxiety is unhealthy. It can become a problem when it does not subside, and it prevents you from performing everyday tasks. For example if you always experience anxiety when you enter a classroom or cafeteria this could indicate that you are not coping well.

PANIC ATTACKS

Panic attacks are a reaction to stress and anxiety. They can be triggered by stressful situations such as not knowing what to do in a situation, being ridiculed by others, or relationship breakdowns. Panic attacks can be a terrifying experience where the body reacts as if it is in immense danger, but is actually in a situation where most people would not be afraid. Panic attacks are accompanied by unpleasant physical symptoms such as quick heart-rate, difficulty breathing, muscle pain, stomach pain, dizziness and sweating, along with the fear that the attack will lead to death or a total loss of control. These physical symptoms are the body's response to danger. It is important to know that the symptoms do not mean that you have a life-threatening physical illness.

MANAGING STRESS, ANXIETY AND PANIC ATTACKS

- There are a number of techniques to help manage stress, anxiety and panic attacks. They can be used to prevent your reactions from getting out of control, and can be done to make things better.
- Choose 2-3 techniques that you will be most confident and able to use.
- Practise these every day, even when you are experiencing low levels of stress or anxiety.
- You can then be confident in using these techniques to cope with challenging situations.

Muscle relaxation exercise

This will help you identify the difference between tension and relaxation in the muscles. Practise this for 15 minutes twice a day.

Focus on 4 main muscle groups:

1: Hands, forearms and biceps (arms).

2: Head, face, throat and shoulders.

3: Chest, stomach and lower back.

4: Thighs, buttocks, calves and feet (legs).

Tense muscles for 5-7 seconds and relax for 10-15 seconds.

Meditation

Meditation is an effective way to relax your body and mind. Guided meditations are available on CD, Apps or through internet sites. Aim to practice meditation at least once every day.

Slow breathing

- This can be used to calm you before you go into a stressful situation or while you are in a stressful situation. Slow breathing can also be used to manage a panic attack. The longer and deeper you breathe, the more you will relax. Practice this several times a day.
- Breathe in slowly and deeply through the nose.
- Count to five slowly as you breathe in.
- Hold the breath for a few seconds.
- Count to five slowly as you breathe out.
- Do this 6 times and if you still feel anxious, repeat for another 6 times.

Mindfulness

Practising mindfulness is an effective way to reduce stress and anxiety. This involves being fully aware of the present moment and approaching each experience with an attitude of curiosity and openness. Mindfulness can help you cope with hurtful thoughts and feelings. A psychologist or counsellor can help you learn mindfulness.

Fabic Behaviour Scale

This is a visual chart to help change the unwanted behaviours that are caused by anxiety. The scale uses faces and colours to help show how you may feel as your anxiety levels increase.

It uses a 3-step process to:

1: Learn to read your own or another person's body signs to identify what the body is doing to show anxiety.

2: Gain an understanding of what might be causing the tension in your life.

3: Learn behaviours that can be used to respond to and manage challenging aspects of your life.

Although the steps are simple, support is often required to effectively apply these 3 steps to your life. A psychologist can assist you with this.

Physical exercise

Regular physical exercise can help reduce feelings of stress and anxiety. It is an essential part of emotional wellbeing. Try to make exercise part of your daily routine. This could include a 30-minute brisk walk, jogging, water sports, bike-riding or working out at the gym.

Diet

Some people find that high-caffeine foods such as coffee and chocolate can act as a trigger for panic attacks. If this is the case for you, avoid these products.

Think and act positively

Thinking and acting positively can increase your emotional wellbeing and decrease stress and anxiety.

- Do something you enjoy every day.
- Remember to think about what you are good at.
- If you did the character strengths exercise in Chapter 3, think of a way to use your character strengths every day.
- Each night, write down 3 good things that happened that day (for example, got to the lecture on time, handed in assignment, talked to a classmate).

Visualisation

Using your imagination to visualise pleasant thoughts or memories can help create a relaxed state.

- Practise this by first getting comfortable, and then choose a favourite peaceful place that is real or imaginary.
- Focus the imagination: what does it look like, what can you hear, what are the smells associated with the place, and what can you touch?
- Repeat affirming statements to yourself such as 'I am letting go of tension', or 'I am feeling relaxed'.

Practice using visualisation three times a day for a few minutes or longer. This is usually easiest in the morning and at night in bed. Eventually, with practice you can use visualisation in everyday situations when feeling stressed.

Don't fight panic

(extracted with permission from www.autism-help.org)

When experiencing a panic attack, remember the sensations are unpleasant and frightening, but not life-threatening. It does not matter if you feel frightened or unsteady, as these feelings are just an exaggeration of normal bodily reactions. Don't add to your panic with scary thoughts about what is happening or where it might lead. Allow time to pass and for the fear to fade away.

Use one or all of the following positive statements:

- 'This feeling isn't comfortable or pleasant, but I can accept it.'
- 'I can be anxious and still deal with the situation.'
- 'I'll just let my body do its thing. This will pass.'
- 'This anxiety won't hurt me, even if it doesn't feel good.'

WHEN TO SEEK ADDITIONAL HELP

If you are persistently experiencing high levels of stress or anxiety, or you feel depressed, it is important that you talk to someone who can help. Make an appointment with a student counsellor or your GP to discuss these experiences, thoughts and feelings.

BRETT'S STORY...

Brett was a first year university student undertaking a degree in Information technology. Brett had been diagnosed early in his school years as being on the Autism Spectrum. At the beginning of the semester, Brett became very stressed and anxious about the new environment, the expectations and study load. There were also concerns raised by the teaching staff about some of Brett's behaviours when he was under stress, such as talking too much, too fast and not listening to instructions. Brett would also get very excited and start to distract other students in tutorials.

The staff undertook training with an Autism consultant to learn more about Autism and how best to meet Brett's needs. The consultant also worked with Brett to identify strategies that would help him focus and control his emotions and responses. Some of these included a quiet space where Brett could go to calm down and de-stress. The consultant also worked with Brett on the FABIC Behaviour Scale 3-step process to behaviour change. Brett was able to identify in step one how his body reacted when he was anxious or in uncomfortable situations: his behaviour, his emotional reactions, physiological responses, feelings, and thoughts. Brett was able to code his reactions and behavioural responses with a colour. He then identified strategies for the colour zones that indicated he was experiencing stress and anxiety. For example, when Brett was in the orange zone, Brett needed to go to his identified quiet space, or take a walk away from people. Brett made his lecturers aware of the scale and one lecturer pasted the scale on the back of his phone. When Brett showed signs of anxiety, the lecturer would bring his phone out and ask Brett what zone he was in. Brett would say the colour and the lecturer would then encourage Brett to use his strategies for that colour zone.

QUESTION & ANSWER

Question: There are a lot of different stress reduction techniques provided in this booklet and I think that if I practised all of them every day it would take a lot of time. Do I need to do them all?

Answer: No, you don't need to do them all. Select the ones that you think would work best for you and practise those ones. If you experience high levels of stress or anxiety, use the ones you have practised, and then evaluate them by asking the following questions: Can I use them easily in a stressful situation? Did they help me feel less stressed and anxious? Find and use the techniques that work best for you.

Question: During high school, I was seeing a student counsellor for mental health issues. I found this helpful. Should I continue seeing a counsellor?

Answer: It would be advisable to contact the student support services at your campus and arrange to see a student counsellor. Discuss with them what assistance your high school counsellor was providing. They can help you decide if you should continue seeing a counsellor.

Who can help?

- Student counsellors.
- GP.
- Psychologist.

MORE INFORMATION

- www.autism-help.org
- Towards Success in Tertiary Study with Asperger's syndrome and other autism spectrum disorders: http://services.unimelb.edu.au/disability/resources/towards_success/aspergers_syndrome
- <http://fabic.com.au/products/fabic-3-step-process-behaviour-change>
- <http://fabic.com.au/products/behaviour-scale-faces>
- John Harpur, Maria Lawlor & Michael Fitzgerald, *Succeeding in College with Asperger Syndrome: A Student Guide*
- Dr Russ Harris, *The Happiness Trap* (a program based on mindfulness)

11: INFORMATION FOR PARENTS



11: INFORMATION FOR PARENTS

As parents, you will have provided a significant level of support in your son/daughter's education and life in general. You will no doubt be experts in knowing your son/daughter, what their strengths and challenges are, and the impact of ASD on their lives. Many of you will also be experts in overcoming educational challenges and advocating for responses that meet your son's/daughter's needs.

As your child transitions into tertiary education and adulthood, your parenting role will change. You may find that it is less hands-on and more facilitative. You can still support your son/daughter in a number of ways, and at times it is of vital importance to help with their transition to tertiary studies. However, the support and processes may be very different from how you have previously provided assistance. It will be important for you to encourage independence wherever you can.

In most cases, your son/daughter will be 18 years of age by the time they reach their tertiary studies. All persons over the age of 18 years (unless a guardian is appointed) becomes protected as an adult under Commonwealth and State Privacy laws.

This means that the university and TAFE staff must ensure that:

- They only collect personal information that is relevant to the situation.
- Any information collected about your son/daughter's disability and their actions to make reasonable adjustment is confidential.
- They only share this information with you if your son/daughter has given consent, and generally written consent is required.

You will need to check with the university or TAFE your son/daughter is attending about their processes and policies.

It is important to discuss this new relationship dynamic with your son/daughter. Approach it as a partnership arrangement and be explicit about what role your son/daughter wants you to have. If they are moving away from home, discuss what contact they would like, such as a schedule of visits and phone calls.

If your son/daughter needs to move away from home to take up study, there will most likely be many additional challenges and anxieties. This booklet does not have the capacity to address these issues. You are strongly advised to contact the university accommodation services and talk to them about the types of residency support and assistance that is generally available to students with ASD. Also enquire about any student mentor programs that are offered. However, if you wish to speak more specifically, you will need written consent from your son/daughter.

EARLY PLANNING

- Be involved as much as you can in the early planning process while your son/daughter is still in secondary school.
- Make an appointment with the school career adviser to talk through the options.
- Help your son/daughter explore the options through Open Days, sourcing information on the internet, and talking to family and friends about their experiences with university or TAFE.
- If possible, attend Open Days with them, or arrange for a personalised tour of the campus.
- Assist your son/daughter to develop the skills, independence and resilience they will need as adults.
- Discuss the option of a part-time study load. It is possible to study fewer subjects but still be considered a full-time student by the tertiary institution and by Centrelink. This can assist with the transition process.

DURING THE TRANSITION

It is important that you and your son/daughter have information and knowledge on the range of support services available. Knowing what to expect is essential for planning and coping with the new environment. Use this booklet to guide you and your family to access specific information relevant to the campus your son/daughter will be attending.

- You need to be clear on what type of support can be offered to your son/daughter.
- Discuss with your son/daughter the benefits of disclosing their ASD. Students with ASD who disclose and are provided with appropriate support are much more successful in their tertiary studies.
- It may be appropriate to attend the initial meeting with your son/daughter and the campus support services.
- Discuss the option of your son/daughter providing written consent for the disability practitioners to share information with you if required.
- Respect that staff at the university or TAFE will need your son's/daughter's consent to talk to you about progress and any issues that arise.
- If your son/daughter has provided consent for you to talk to student support staff, contact them and discuss the best way for you to be involved in supporting their education.
- If problems arise, provide emotional support, resources and information.
- Encourage your son/daughter to identify solutions to problems rather than solve them yourself.
- Where appropriate, provide practical help with transport, resources, or organising financial assistance through Centrelink.
- Check in regularly with your son/daughter about their study progress, organisational skills and emotional wellbeing.

If you are very worried about something, contact the student support services and ask to talk to someone about your concerns. While they will not be able to provide you with specific information about your son/daughter, they will usually be happy to listen to your concerns. They may be able to provide you with general advice and information.

SALLY'S STORY...

Jill's daughter, Sally, has Asperger's Syndrome and lives on campus 2½ hours away from the family home. One month before Sally started at university, Jill rang Disability Services in desperation after a stressful time trying to assist Sally with online class enrolments. The Manager offered to meet with them both and get everything sorted: class enrolments, student card, etc. Sally was also offered assistance including special provisions for exams, a 'student friend' employed by Disability Services to assist in her transition to university, the option of notifying her lecturers of best practice to assist her learning, as well as a Disability Adviser on campus that she could turn to if she ever needed help. Sally also gave her mother, Jill, written permission to speak to her university if she ever needed to.

The last two years have gone relatively smoothly but not without a couple of hiccups where Disability Services have been most helpful. A misunderstanding early on about an assignment resulted in Sally having to attend an interview with the Professor. Here, Disability Services provided an advocate for her at the interview. It was still very stressful, but at least Jill knew there was someone there supporting her. Knowing that Sally stays in regular contact with her Disability Adviser and is getting the assistance and support she needs gives Jill real peace of mind.

Jill also helped with Sally's transition to university by assisting her to find a university course back in year 11 so she had 18 months to think about the move and still be comfortable with it. And because Jill knew that Sally would need to leave home to take up study she gave her cooking lessons and lots of advice to avoid food poisoning! Jill has encouraged Sally to email assignments to her before they are due. That way even though Jill doesn't know much about the subject matter, it's a useful way of checking in on what Sally is up to and gives Jill the opportunity to give feedback (and lots of praise for a job well done!) Jill and Sally also have an unwritten rule that they text every day just to say, 'Hi are you ok?' They try to limit talking on the phone to once or twice a week because Jill knows that Sally finds small talk on the phone especially tedious.

Who can help?

- School careers counsellor.
- Student services at the campus.
- National Disability Coordination Officer program: <https://education.gov.au/ndcoprogramme>

MORE INFORMATION

- NDCO, Getting young people with disabilities ready for study and work: A Guide for parents: www.uws.edu.au/ndco/getreadytotips
- <http://www.latrobe.edu.au/otarc>
- www.autismspeaks.org/family-services/tool-kits/postsecondary
- http://www.idrs.org.au/pdf/Guardianship_and_administration_laws_across_Australia_by_Ben_Fogarty.pdf

12: STUDENT CHECKLIST

12. STUDENT CHECKLIST

Before semester commences

- Read this Helpful Hints booklet.
- Download a map from campus website.
- Visit the campus on an Open Day or arrange a personalised visit.
- Locate the library, lecture rooms and toilets.
- Locate the cafeteria and bookshop.
- Identify a quiet place to go to de-stress.
- Practise travelling to and from campus.
- Attend pre-enrolment information sessions relevant to my course.
- Locate student support services.
- Contact student support services to enquire about supports provided to students with ASD.
- Give consideration to disclosing my ASD.
- Practise using at least one stress reduction technique.
- Identify my skills, talents and strengths.
- Identify the things that I may need help with.

At the beginning of semester

- Attend course orientation sessions.
- Attend a library orientation or information session.
- Read information for new students pages on campus website.
- Find the contact and titles of staff who could help me if required (my 'go-to' people).
- Make an appointment with disability support staff to arrange a LAP or RAP.
- Ensure I have relevant documentation about my condition, required by support staff.
- Get a student identification card.
- Obtain a copy of the Unit Outline for each of my subjects.
- Enrol in tutorials or laboratory sessions.
- Draw up a Semester Assessment Planner.

Throughout the semester

- Do a Weekly Planner each week.
- Follow my Weekly Planner.
- Make sure I understand assessment tasks and if not check with teaching staff.
- Regularly practise stress reduction techniques.
- Remember my strengths, talents and skills.
- Read relevant chapters of this Helpful Hints booklet when needed.
- Get additional support when required – if feeling overwhelmed, highly stressed, or unsure of requirements.
- Take time for relaxation and recreation.

13: HELPFUL RESOURCES



13: HELPFUL RESOURCES

AUTISM – GENERAL

Tony Attwood (2007) The Complete Guide to Asperger's Syndrome

Comprehensive coverage of aspects of Asperger's Syndrome for children through to adults. Contains information on cognitive processes and abilities, special interests, emotions, life after school and relationships. Useful for individuals, parents and professionals.

Tony Attwood (1998) Asperger's Syndrome: A guide for parents and professionals

Information on Asperger's syndrome, including cognitive processes, language, social behaviour and routines.

Autism Spectrum Australia (Aspect)

Australia's leading supplier of services for people with an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and other disabilities. They provide information, intervention and a range of services to meet the needs of people with an Autism Spectrum Disorder or other disabilities, and their families.

www.autismspectrum.org.au

Simon Baron-Cohen (2008) Autism and Asperger Syndrome (The Facts)

Detailed information on the current understanding of Autism and Asperger Syndrome. Includes information on education and intervention. This book is designed for people with these conditions and their families.

Fabic Behaviour Scale

Resources to support the 3-step process to behaviour change. This is based on the understanding that unwanted behaviour is a result of anxiety. Their scale is a visual communication chart that, when used effectively, supports people to read signs of anxiety, understand the causes of tension and teaches people the appropriate behaviours that would support them to feel more equipped to manage the aspect of life they are finding challenging.

<http://fabic.com.au/products/fabic-3-step-process-behaviour-change>

<http://fabic.com.au/products/behaviour-scale-faces>

Ian Hamilton (2007) An Asperger Dictionary of Everyday Expressions

This book explains everyday phrases that are intended to be interpreted symbolically, and which would be meaningless, confusing or embarrassing if interpreted literally. The dictionary contains a clear guide and includes politeness ratings, indicating the level of offence that may be caused when using certain words or phrases.

Wendy Lawson (2001) Understanding and Working with the Spectrum of Autism: An insider's view

This book is based on Wendy's experience and understanding of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). It provides information on the cognitive processes that people with ASD use to understand the world around them compared to neurotypical individuals.

Jeanette Purkis (2014) The Wonderful World of Work

Resource about employment aimed at young people on the Autism Spectrum. It includes helpful information around time-management and organisational skills, and advice on what options are available after school and tertiary study.

Amythest Schaber Ask an Autistic

YouTube media clips on a range of Autism topics. Amythest provides clear explanations of what it means to be on the Spectrum.
<http://www.youtube.com/user/neurowonderful>

Mark Simon (2005) Facial Expressions – A Visual Reference for Artists

This book links facial expressions to emotions. It includes more than 2,500 photographs of 50 faces — men and women of a variety of ages, shapes, sizes, and ethnicities — each demonstrating a wide range of emotions and shown from multiple angles.

Synapse

This site provides help with over 350 free fact sheets of autism-related information, with an emphasis on practical strategies.
<http://www.autism-help.org/>

The Olga Tennison Autism Research Centre (OTARC)

Established to advance knowledge on the nature and causes of Autism Spectrum Disorders, as well as to develop and study evidence-based strategies for supporting individuals and families affected by these conditions. Some of the information and links on the website are relevant for people with ASD. <http://www.latrobe.edu.au/otarc>

TERTIARY STUDY AND AUTISM

Aspirations

The personal stories of 11 people on the Autism Spectrum. They talk about their experiences of the transition from school into tertiary education. It aims to inform others who are on the Autism Spectrum in preparing for a more successful transition experience.
<http://www1.rmit.edu.au/disability/aspirations>

Australian Disability Clearinghouse on Education and Training

This website contains up-to-date information and resources to support students with disability in tertiary education. This includes information on reasonable adjustments, disclosure and assessments.
www.adcet.edu.au

Disability Standards of Education

This website is provided by the Australian Government Department of Education. It contains fact sheets to assist students, parents and schools to understand the standards and ensure that students with disability can access and participate in education and training.
www.ddaedustandards.info

NDCO, Your right to an education

Easy-to-read guide to the Education Standards. It will outline the rights of students and obligations of education providers under the Disability Discrimination Act.
www.ddaedustandards.info

John Harpur, Maria Lawlor & Michael Fitzgerald (2003) *Succeeding in College with Asperger Syndrome: A Student Guide*

This handbook provides information to help students on the Autism Spectrum prepare for tertiary study, interact with staff and fellow students, cope with expectations and pressure, and understand their academic and domestic responsibilities. It contains first-hand interviews with students and many practical recommendations.

NDCO, Get ready for study and work: top ten tips for young people who have a disability or chronic medical condition

This resource aims to help people with a disability plan for their future. It includes a workbook to help young people prepare for their life after school. It covers each of the top ten tips and contains lots of practical activities and advice.
www.uws.edu.au/ndco/getreadytotips

NDCO, Getting young people with disabilities ready for study and work: A Guide for parents.

This resource builds on the successful *Get ready for study and work: top ten tips for young people who have a disability or chronic medical condition*. It contains useful information on the steps and roles parents can take to support their son/daughter to get ready for further study or work.
www.uws.edu.au/ndco/getreadytotips

Towards Success in Tertiary Study with Asperger's Syndrome and other autism spectrum disorders

This booklet has been written for students who are studying or intend studying at tertiary level and who have Asperger's Syndrome or another Autism Spectrum Disorder. It contains useful information and advice on preparing for study, successful study techniques, communication tips and dealing with stress.

http://services.unimelb.edu.au/disability/resources/towards_success/aspergers_syndrome

The Postsecondary Educational Opportunities Guide

This guide is designed to help people on the Autism Spectrum and their family explore the different opportunities and learning environments after leaving high school. Although it is a US-based website, it includes useful information on topics such as how to obtain services, advice for parents, peer-to-peer advice, life on campus and the differences between college and high school.

www.autismspeaks.org/family-services/tool-kits/postsecondary

The Olga Tennison Autism Research Centre (OTARC)

OTARC was established to advance knowledge on the nature and causes of Autism Spectrum Disorders, as well as to develop and study evidence-based strategies for supporting individuals and families affected by these conditions. This website contains useful information on ASD, preparing for study at university or TAFE, strategies for successful study, and links to further information.

<http://www.latrobe.edu.au/otarc/your-questions-answered/support>

STATE-BASED AUTISM SERVICES

Each Australian state has an Autism Association to provide support and information to individuals, families and professionals. This may include fact sheets, support groups, practical support, workshops and referral to other organisations.

| | |
|-------------------|---|
| ACT | http://www.autismaspergeract.com.au/ |
| New South Wales | http://www.autismspectrum.org.au/aap |
| Queensland | http://www.autismqld.com.au/ |
| South Australia | http://www.autismsa.org.au/ |
| Tasmania | www.autismtas.org.au |
| Victoria | http://www.autismvictoria.org.au/home/ |
| Western Australia | http://www.autism.org.au/ |

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Biographies

Mary Brake

Mary Brake has worked and studied in the area of Autism between the UK and Australia for over twenty years. Her work, embracing people of all ages who have ASD has involved direct teaching, program development, and capacity building of educators across many varied learning systems. Through her current role of Autism Consultant for the Department of Education (Tasmania), Mary facilitates understanding of ASD in terms of accessing relevant curriculum, specific learning needs, and suitable delivery within an appropriate environment.

Shaun Corcoran

Shaun Corcoran currently holds the position of Disability Liaison Coordinator at Bendigo Kangan Institute Victoria and is convener of the Victorian TAFE Disability Network.

With a background in the community sector as a practitioner and manager, education as a resource developer / teacher and technical advise in allied health bio medical services, Shaun brings a broad cross-sector knowledge and experience base to inclusive education.

Marita Falkmer

Marita Falkmer is a Postdoctoral Fellow in the Cooperative Research Centre for living with Autism Spectrum Disorders (Autism CRC). Since 1996 she has had on-going collaboration with the Swedish National Autism and Asperger Association, and contributed to developing inclusive teaching strategies of students on the Autism Spectrum for the Swedish National Agency for Education. Marita Falkmer has a Masters of Sciences in Teaching. Her PhD is in Disability Science and is called *From Eye to Us; prerequisites for and levels of participation in mainstream school of persons with Autism Spectrum Conditions*.

Sue Hancock

Sue Hancock has worked in the ACT education system over the last 12 years in the area of special education and is currently working as a Disability Adviser in the Office of Access and Inclusion at the Australian National University providing professional support and advice for students with a disability. The ANU Access and Inclusion Disability Team were finalists in the 2013 ACT Chief Minister's Inclusion Awards for Inclusion in Education & Training. Sue was an inaugural Committee Member of the Asperger Syndrome Support Network ACT now AutismAspergerACT.

Julie Harrison

Julie Harrison has worked at the Australian National University (ANU) for the past 8 years and is currently the Manager of Access & Inclusion at the university. Prior to this, she was the Manager of the Disability Services Centre at the ANU and also worked at the University in the Disability Services Centre as a Disability Adviser. For two of those years she worked as the Operational Manager of the Tjabal Indigenous Education Centre. Julie worked previously for over 10 years in the ACT education system in the field of Special Education support delivery, as well as working as an AUSLAN Interpreter for the Catholic Education Office.

Debbie Hindle

Debbie Hindle has over 25 years' experience working in the area of supporting people's transition to further education, training or employment. This includes five years as a National Disability Coordination Officer for Southern Tasmania. She established a state-wide working group to focus on supporting better transitions for people with Autism Spectrum Disorder. She recently completed a Masters in Positive Psychology through the University of Melbourne.

Colleen Hooper

Colleen Hooper currently holds the position of National Disability Coordination Officer for Southern Tasmania. Prior to this Colleen worked in the Disability Employment Service sector for over 20 years and was State Manager , Tasmania, for a large disability employment service and job services provider. She brings to her current role this extensive knowledge of disability employment and the issues faced by many people with disability and utilises this expertise when addressing barriers preventing people with disability from participating in tertiary education. Colleen is able to reflect on how access to further education has a direct impact on employment opportunities.

Berinda Karp

Berinda Karp is a Teacher /Consultant for Students with Disability at Western Sydney Institute of TAFE , Mount Druitt Campus. She provides support services to students with Intellectual Disability, Learning Disability and those on the Autism Spectrum. Berinda has held this substantive position for over 25 years and has four degrees including a Masters in Education majoring in Special Education and currently undertaking a PhD. Her topic being the Transition and Orientation of Students on the Autism Spectrum to post school education. She runs a unique Transition and Orientation Program for TAFE students on the Autism Spectrum.

Amanda Richdale

Amanda Richdale is a psychologist and principal research fellow at the Olga Tennison Autism Research Centre, La Trobe University. She has worked in autism for over 25 years across a wide range of areas including assessment and diagnosis. She led the project on supporting tertiary education students with ASD funded by the Victorian government, and is currently project leader for the Autism CRC longitudinal project on school leavers with ASD.

NOTES



This booklet and other resources are available at:
www.adcet.edu.au/autism-transition

www.ndcotas.com.au