

This lesson plan is suitable for students in upper primary to high school.

Lesson Plan – Student Stories: James

James, who is 13 years old, has Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). This is often referred to simply as 'Autism'. It's called a 'spectrum disorder' because Autism covers such a wide range of abilities. It is not unusual for Autistic individuals to be highly skilled in one particular area or experience difficulties in other areas. James is brilliant at music. He is able to instantly play on the piano any tune he hears. While we know people with Autism might have some impressive skills, James' ability with music is exceptional – a rare ability that might be described as a 'savant' skill.

Sometimes, James needs help with getting his message across and understanding what others are saying. He uses and responds to visual supports, which help him a lot. People with Autism often have good visual skills. They are able to understand more from what they see, rather than from spoken words. A number of James' visual supports are small cards showing a few words or a picture to help him understand. For example, James instantly knows that a picture of a water fountain means he can go outside for a drink. School can sometimes appear stressful or overwhelming for James. If the teacher sees that James is becoming overwhelmed, she knows that a few minutes outside and a drink might help him to feel calm.

James also has difficulty tolerating certain sounds which don't seem very loud to most of us, but sound very loud to him. He often wears ear defenders to reduce the level of noise. James also prefers not to be touched. James enjoys music so he can tolerate it even when it's loud.

If James is in a crowded space where his arms or legs might touch others, he can become quite stressed, and experience unpleasant or painful sensations. As we get to understand James, we realise there are things we can do to help him to avoid situations that cause him discomfort.

First 5 minutes – read Tamara's story

5 to 10 mins – class brainstorm

What have you learned about Autism?

10 to 25 mins

Go into groups and talk about how you might feel if you had Autism

25 to 55 mins – class discussion on how to best support your Autistic classmates

Expect an understanding of:

- the need for visual supports (why?)
- communication difficulty
- sensory differences – (sound, touch, taste and smell)
- how you can help your classmates

If there's a student with Autism in the class, it is recommended to discuss with the student's family beforehand about the level of involvement they wish to have in this session. Other students should be encouraged to talk about how they could provide help to their classmates.