

IF I'M SO SMART, WHY IS
SCHOOL SO HARD?

Supporting Students with Asperger Syndrome in
Elementary General Education Classrooms

Supporting by Adding Structure

What is structure?

Increasing predictability

Schedules

Visual supports

Dealing with Change

The student's need for structure and predictability is the **FIRST** consideration in planning supports



What is Structure?

- **Scaffolding that adults create in any environment-
such as:**
 - **Arrangement of furniture and materials**
 - **Use of schedules**
 - **Design of tasks**
 - **Presentation of tasks / assignments**
 - **Use of visual cues and reminders**
 - **Increased predictability in environment**
 - **Forewarning when something unexpected will occur**

Why is it Important?

- **Children with autism have an inordinate need for structure.**
- **When we don't create appropriate structure for them, they create structure for themselves by:**
 - **Lining things up**
 - **Being ritualistic**
 - **Retreating to their own thoughts**
 - **Refusing / tantrums / meltdowns**
 - **Being very selective in what they will do**
 - **Being highly stressed/anxious**

How Do I Know it is Working?

With appropriate structure, students will be **better able** to:

Initiate activities

Communicate

Focus on a task

Handle transitions

Manage their own behavior

Focus their attention

Manage anxiety/stress

Generalize skills from one environment to another

Structuring the Environment for AS



- ❑ **Establish routines**
- ❑ **Establish clear expectations**
- ❑ **Use visual supports (lists, calendars)**
- ❑ **Decrease stress**
- ❑ **Supervise unstructured time**
- ❑ **Work collaboratively with parents**

Use of Class Rules-Clear Expectations



- **Concrete rules for the class/group**
 - **Displayed prominently**
 - **Referred to frequently (“Our rule is. . . “)**
 - **Adapted when needed, with advanced notice/warning**
- **Clearly state expectations. Make directions explicit.**

Visual Schedules

Daily, Individualized

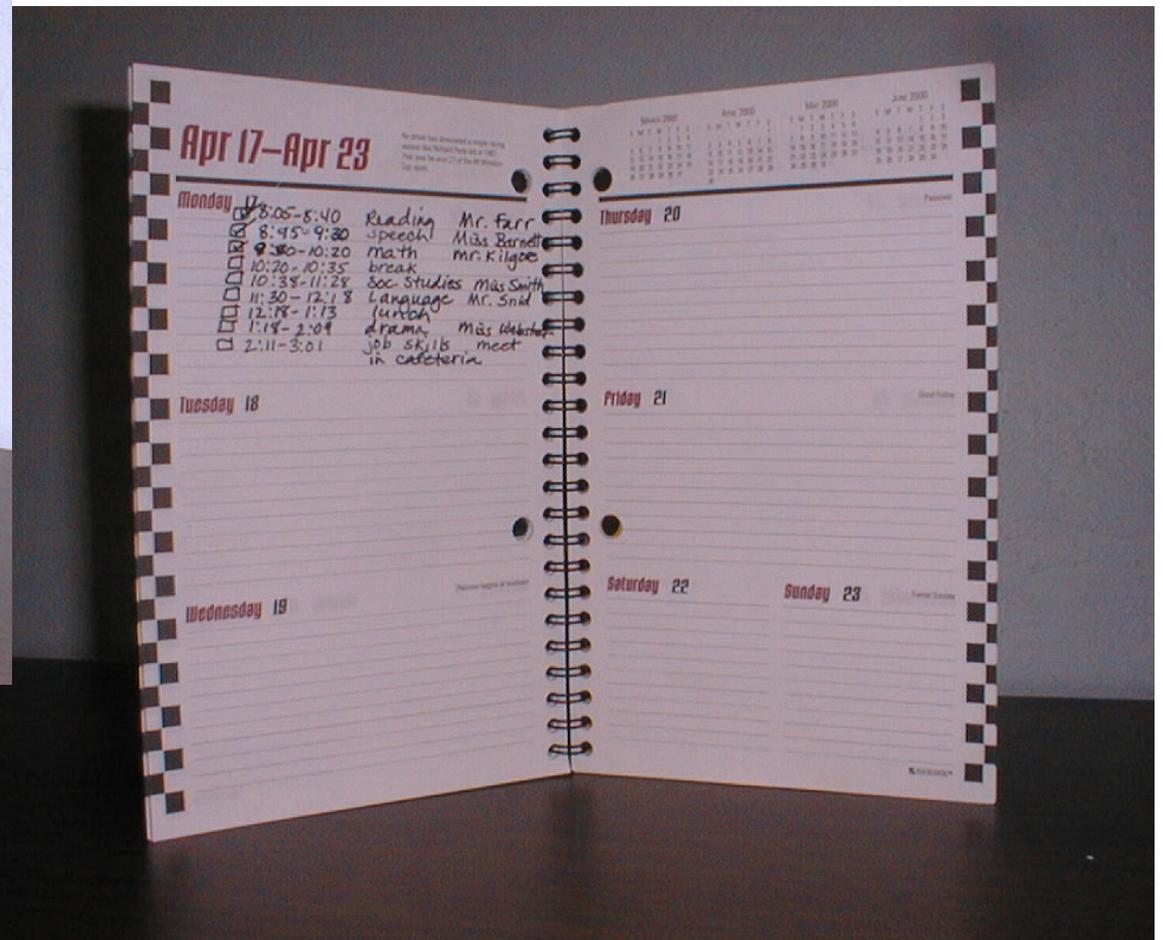
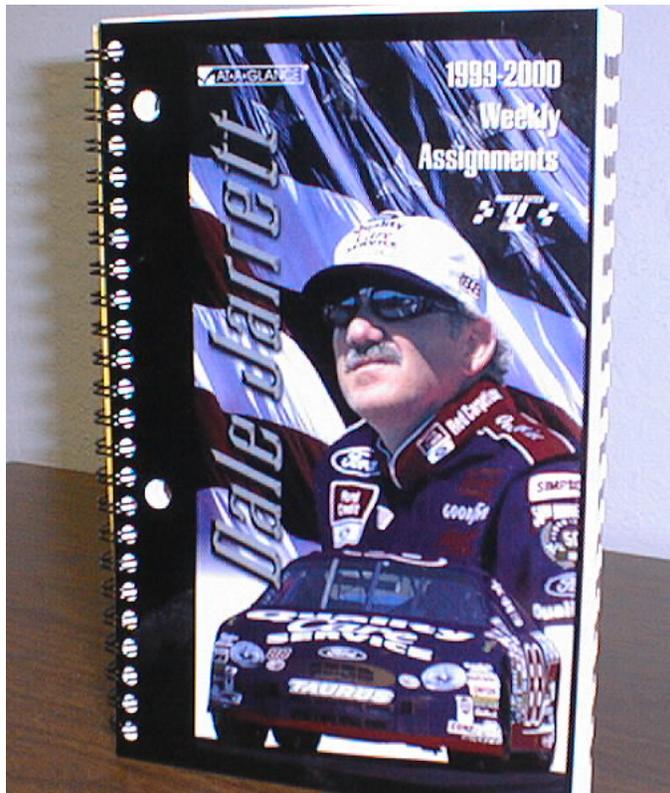
Essential
support for
AS

- ❑ Facilitates anticipation of events.
- ❑ Helps develop understanding of time.
- ❑ Helps student handle change.
- ❑ Increases on-task behavior.
- ❑ Facilitates transitions.

A handwritten visual schedule titled "Robby's Day" is displayed on a piece of paper. The schedule is organized into three columns: "Time", "Skill/Activity", and "Expectation". The activities listed include arriving, working on a workbook, taking a break, sorting rings, another break, identifying names, another break, sorting cubes, and a final break. The expectations for each activity are written in detail, such as "hang backpack", "zipper down", "get workbook", "pick colour", "use timer", "R chooses from break basket", "sort by colour", "count", "R identifies name", and "Sort by colour".

Time	Skill/Activity	Expectation
10:15	Arrive	- hang backpack - hang jacket - zipper down
10:20	Workbook	- get workbook - pick colour - hobby colours
10:30	Break	use timer R chooses from break basket
10:35	Round Ring	sort by colour count
10:45	Break	- -
10:50	Name	R identifies name
11:00	Break	-
11:05	Cubes	Sort by colour
11:15	Break	
11:20	Number Number	- 1-5

“Assignment book” Schedule



Indicating Change on a Schedule

- For a change that you **know about ahead** of time (assembly instead of math):
 - Indicate the change on the schedule.
 - When you review the schedule, make note of the change.



Indicating Change on a Schedule

- For a change that you **just find out** about (speech teacher is sick):
 - Draw the student's attention to the schedule and in some way indicate a change is going to be made.
 - “uh oh-change”
 - White out
 - Universal “not” sign
 - Place new symbol, write new information or have student indicate new information.

School Landmines-Luke Jackson



“For any kid, whether they enjoy it or not, school is a whole minefield of challenges and new experiences. For kids on the autistic spectrum it seems as if we spend all of our time stepping on these mines and the whole school experience becomes a very difficult one.”

Change – Luke Jackson



“At school everything changes so often. Going into a classroom to find that we then have to join another class because the teacher is off, or move desks for no apparent reason, all adds to the hassle of school.”

Visual Supports

- ❑ **Visual sequencing of tasks**
- ❑ **Visual calendars**
- ❑ **Written/drawn warning of change**
- ❑ **Reminder cards**
- ❑ **Supports for task completion**
- ❑ **Create a school map**



Additional Classroom Ideas

- **Always use teacher selected groups**
- **Give plenty of “think time” after you ask a question**
- **Encourage mistakes**
- **Keep the flow in information between home and school open**
- **If child talks to himself as he works, encourage “whispered thoughts”**
- **Create a code for asking for help**