

SCHOOL GUIDE

Classrooms where every child *can learn*

Autistic learners thrive at school when the day is predictable, the room is calm, and the adults understand what they are seeing. Most of what helps them helps every child in the class.



A little understanding at a school gate, multiplied over millions of interactions, *transforms lives*.

Teachers feel overwhelmed. Parents feel alone. This guide gives your staff practical steps to start with this term – no special budget needed.

In the classroom

- ☐ Use a **visual timetable** and go through it at the start of each day.
- ☐ **Warn before changes:** a new teacher, a trip, an assembly, a fire drill.
- ☐ Give instructions **one step at a time**, said and shown, in writing or pictures.
- ☐ Allow **time to process** before you repeat or rephrase a question.
- ☐ Break big tasks into **small, numbered steps**.
- ☐ Seat the learner **away from doors, windows, fans** and busy corridors.
- ☐ Keep the wall near their desk **clear of clutter**.
- ☐ Allow **movement breaks**, fidget items and ear defenders.
- ☐ Use their **interests** as a way into new learning.
- ☐ **Praise specifically:** say exactly what they did well.

SPOT IT EARLY

Signs a learner is becoming overwhelmed

Every learner shows it differently. Get to know their signs, and offer a break **before** overwhelm turns into a meltdown.

- Covering their ears or eyes
- More rocking, flapping, pacing or humming than usual
- Asking the same question again and again
- Going very quiet, or hiding under a desk or hood
- Suddenly refusing work, or trying to leave the room



Set up a calm corner

A calm corner is a quiet place where any learner can go to settle when the classroom becomes too much. It is **never a punishment**.

What goes in it

- A cushion, beanbag or soft mat
- Ear defenders or headphones
- A few fidget items
- A visual timer
- Soft light, away from the window glare

How to use it

- Teach it when everyone is calm
- The learner shows a break card instead of having to ask
- Agree a time on the timer
- Welcome them back without fuss

MELTDOWNS ARE NOT MISBEHAVIOUR

A meltdown is a response to overwhelm, not a choice.

- ✓ Stay calm and say very little.
- ✓ Reduce noise, light and the number of people nearby.
- ✓ Keep everyone safe, and give time.
- ✓ Talk about it later, once calm, to learn what triggered it – never as a punishment.



Through the school day



Arrival

Offer a quieter entrance, or arrival a few minutes before or after the crowd. Greet the learner by name.



Moving between lessons

Give a five-minute warning and show the timer. Let the learner leave a little early to avoid the rush.



Break times

Offer a buddy, a structured game or a quiet room. Watch closely: autistic learners are often targets of teasing.



Assemblies and events

Explain what will happen beforehand, seat the learner near an exit, and allow ear defenders.



Visual supports you can make today

Visual timetable

A picture or word for each part of the day. Tick or remove each one when it's done.

First-then board

"First reading, then break." The visit picture cards in folder 02 show the idea.

Break card

A card the learner shows to ask for the calm corner, without having to find the words.

Visual timer

Shows time passing, which makes waiting and moving on easier.



Working with families

- ☐ Ask parents what works at home, and what to avoid.
- ☐ Keep a home–school book or message thread, so news travels both ways.
- ☐ Share good news, not only problems.
- ☐ Agree one approach, so the learner gets the same message at home and at school.
- ☐ Keep what families tell you confidential.
- ☐ Send the **letter to parents** in this folder to explain what your school is doing.



Teaching the class

- ☐ Talk about differences openly: everyone learns, plays and feels in their own way.
- ☐ Explain that some classmates need headphones or breaks – that’s fair, not special treatment.
- ☐ Never discuss a learner’s diagnosis with the class without their family’s permission.
- ☐ Act quickly on teasing and bullying.

A SCHOOL-WIDE APPROACH

The biggest difference comes when every adult understands – not only the class teacher.

Receptionists, gate staff, drivers, cooks and cleaners meet autistic learners every day. The Africa Autism Inclusion Training Program trains your whole team, assesses your school against our sensory-friendly guidelines, and certifies it as an Autism-Inclusive Organisation.

WORK WITH THE ALLIANCE

Three ways your school *can join in*

Certify your school

Train your staff, have your spaces assessed, and earn the Autism-Inclusive Organisation badge.



Join the Alliance

africaautismalliance.org/the-alliance/join

Join the teacher directory

Teachers who support autistic learners can be listed so families across Africa can find them.



Register as a teacher

africaautismalliance.org/register-as-a-teacher

Be found by families

Our Schools directory helps parents find autism-friendly schools. Contact us to be listed.



Contact us

africaautismalliance.org/contact-us