

**Top Ten tips and tools for helping students with
Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) to prepare for and cope with crises
Aspy and Grossman The Ziggurat Group**

Tips and Tools	Description
1. Thoroughly prepare for changes or new experiences and give frequent reminders of regular expectations. Teach the crisis plan	Students behave best when there are no surprises so crises will always present a challenge. When possible, "walk through" what to expect. Practice when there is no drill by walking the student through the procedure and teaching key information (e.g., there will be loud sound in this hallway). Provide a written description or visual support of what to expect. Be specific (e.g., When there is a fire drill you will hear a loud buzzer. A teacher will walk your class outside. You should try not to talk loudly. You may miss regularly scheduled activities). Provide predictability and routine.
2. Be positive and remain calm.	Students with ASD need more praise and rewards than their peers. Praise is especially important when you are teaching any new skills. A crisis is not the time for discipline. When you see a student with ASD rumbling, try using the words, "You're okay" or "That's okay." Sometimes simple, positive words can go a long way.
3. Students often respond better to pictures and written words rather than spoken words	Use visuals such as daily visual schedules. When possible, note schedule changes. Pictures depicting sequences and skills are often helpful.
4. Don't talk a lot.	Use short phrases. Especially when the student is worried or upset. Avoid verbal overload.
5. First -Then	Students with ASD like rules. Use this language to help get students to follow directions. For example, "First ____ then you can finish your work."
6. Use the "buddy system" (for peers and adults)	Educate other students to become buddies who can assist in times of crisis. Teach the student with ASD to use their buddy. Respond as a team.
7. Remember that facial expressions and gestures may be confusing.	Often, students with ASD cannot tell if someone is serious, afraid, or sad. Narrate feelings (e.g., "I am feeling serious because drills help to make everyone safe"). Also, remember that the student's facial expressions may not accurately reflect how he/she feels (e.g., may smile when anxious).
8. Remember, many students are more aware of sound, temperature, smells, light, and textures. You may need to find ways to help them to protect from sensory overload/underload.	Some students will become very upset over things that don't bother others. They may need a break away from sounds, smells, heat, etc. Use strategies such as allowing to use headphones, sunglasses, or hooded jacket. Alternatively, they may seek out certain types of stimulation. Consult with OT for specific calming sensory strategies prior to crisis. Consider identifying a calming area. Remember to be quiet-spoken (no louder than necessary).
9. Teach skills before and after crises. Do not assume that the student knows what is obvious to everyone else.	Social narratives are written descriptions reassurances and reminders that help a student understand social information. Students with ASD need to be taught things that come naturally to others. They may misbehave without realizing it. We need to teach them the social "rules." We need to teach them WHY a specific behavior is a problem.
10. Avoid using abstract language and words with double meanings.	Some students with ASD take words literally or they may become confused with abstract language. For example, "Hold your horses" doesn't mean, lift your horse up. It means "wait."