



## OBSERVATION CHECKLIST EXPLANATION

The four page Observation Checklist is designed to assist a school's child study team with information to decide whether to initiate an evaluation of autism. When using this checklist, information must be gathered for all four pages. There should be significant dysfunction (several checks) in all four areas (pages), if autism is a possibility. If it is noted that many checks are on the sensory page, and not on the other pages, an occupational therapy evaluation in the area of sensory dysfunction may need to be considered. If many checks are on the language page only, then a speech and language evaluation only may be needed. If only behavioral and/or social skill problems are indicated, then an evaluation for emotional impairment may be necessary. Be cautious here – carefully review the sensory section for it is often the basis for the social and behavioral problems that arise. When all four pages contain many checks, then the child study team should consider a referral for a special education evaluation for autism.

When considering the possibility of Asperger's Syndrome in the middle school and/or high school student, the profile may initially appear quite different. Often these students have a high IQ when tested, but are performing below their ability level. Sometimes they test low yet seem brighter than the IQ suggests. What often stands out is the lack of friends their own age and their poor social understanding. Sensory differences are disguised or accommodated so as not to stand out. The observer will need to review anecdotal notes and records from previous years, especially preschool and early elementary years. A video of the student's first birthday or other social event in the preschool years may provide valuable information. The observation checklist becomes an interview/record review compilation rather than an observation checklist. When and how did the student learn to speak, and how did he speak in those early years? What behavioral issues have surfaced, and can they be explained by looking through the lens of autism? Was the student "different" but successful with teacher support in the elementary years, but having more difficulty now that there is no longer one teacher, but many? This checklist is much more difficult to fill out quickly when used with an older student in middle or high school.

The Autism Society of America has provided the following 18 traits, half of which should occur across many different situations and be inappropriate for the age of the student, if the student does have autism. These symptoms can range from mild to severe.

- Difficulty mixing with other children
- Inappropriate laughing and giggling
- Little or no eye contact
- Apparent insensitivity to pain
- Prefers to be alone; aloof manner
- Spins objects
- Insistence on sameness; resists changes in routine
- No real fear of dangers
- Sustained odd play
- Echolalia (repeating words or phrases in place of normal language)
- May not want cuddling or act cuddly
- Not responsive to verbal cues; acts as deaf
- Inappropriate attachment to objects
- Noticeable physical over-activity or extreme under-activity
- Unresponsive to normal teaching methods
- Difficulty in expressing needs; uses gestures or pointing instead of words
- Tantrums-displays extreme distress for no apparent reason
- Uneven gross/fine motor skills (may not want to kick ball but can stack blocks)

## **Observation Checklist**

# Sensory Responses

Observer name: \_\_\_\_\_

Student name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## SIGHT

- \_\_\_\_\_ Scrutinizes visual detail for prolonged periods of time
- \_\_\_\_\_ Regards own hands for prolonged periods of time
- \_\_\_\_\_ Regards reflection for prolonged periods of time
- \_\_\_\_\_ Stares
- \_\_\_\_\_ Looks out of peripheral vision
- \_\_\_\_\_ Attends to changing levels of illumination
- \_\_\_\_\_ Squints or covers eyes in natural light
- \_\_\_\_\_ Closely regards spinning objects
- \_\_\_\_\_ Fails to blink at bright lights
- \_\_\_\_\_ Is fascinated with shiny objects

## HEARING

- \_\_\_\_\_ Hums or vocalizes to block noise
- \_\_\_\_\_ Sometimes acts as though deaf
- \_\_\_\_\_ Closely attends to self-induced sounds
- \_\_\_\_\_ Closely regards own screaming
- \_\_\_\_\_ Lacks startle response to loud noise
- \_\_\_\_\_ Delayed response to verbal directions
- \_\_\_\_\_ Covers ears
- \_\_\_\_\_ Places fingers in ears
- \_\_\_\_\_ Bangs objects repetitively
- \_\_\_\_\_ Behavioral changes with noise
- \_\_\_\_\_ Inability to tolerate group noise
- \_\_\_\_\_ Sensitivity to daily noises (phone ring, cough, dog bark)

## BALANCE

- \_\_\_\_\_ Has poor balance
- \_\_\_\_\_ Seeks movement
- \_\_\_\_\_ Avoids activities that challenge balance
- \_\_\_\_\_ Whirls body
- \_\_\_\_\_ Walks on toes

## TOUCH

- \_\_\_\_\_ Flinches or gives other exaggerated response when touched
- \_\_\_\_\_ Does not seem to notice extreme temperature change such as when going outdoors in cold
- \_\_\_\_\_ Rubs surfaces for prolonged periods of time
- \_\_\_\_\_ Examines surfaces with fingers
- \_\_\_\_\_ Removes clothing frequently
- \_\_\_\_\_ Is very aware of different textures
- \_\_\_\_\_ Rubs body where touched by another
- \_\_\_\_\_ Withdraws from possibility of being touched
- \_\_\_\_\_ Avoids getting messy
- \_\_\_\_\_ Needs excessive personal space

## Taste

- \_\_\_\_\_ Has strong food preferences
- \_\_\_\_\_ Has strong texture preferences
- \_\_\_\_\_ Likes only a limited number of foods
- \_\_\_\_\_ Existence of pica

## SMELL

- \_\_\_\_\_ Smells food items before eating
- \_\_\_\_\_ Is intensely aware of smells
- \_\_\_\_\_ Smells many objects
- \_\_\_\_\_ Smells parts of the body

## PAIN

- \_\_\_\_\_ Delayed response to pain
- \_\_\_\_\_ Lacks response to injuries
- \_\_\_\_\_ Does not seem to feel pain normally

## BODY

- \_\_\_\_\_ Makes darting-lunging movements
- \_\_\_\_\_ Rolls fingers
- \_\_\_\_\_ Flips hands
- \_\_\_\_\_ Rocks
- \_\_\_\_\_ Paces
- \_\_\_\_\_ Runs in circles
- \_\_\_\_\_ Jumps repetitively
- \_\_\_\_\_ Bangs head repetitively
- \_\_\_\_\_ Hits/bites self
- \_\_\_\_\_ Has facial grimaces
- \_\_\_\_\_ Grinds teeth
- \_\_\_\_\_ Has stiff posture
- \_\_\_\_\_ Has flaccid body posture
- \_\_\_\_\_ Has unusual body posture
- \_\_\_\_\_ Lacks motor coordination

# Observation Checklist Behavior

- Strongly dislikes changes in routine
- Excessively tidy or precise
- Repetitive gestures
- Repetitive movements
- Becomes upset when his/her things are moved
- Cannot problem solve in active social situation
- Understands only from his/her own viewpoint
- Unable to empathize with others
- Reads for information only
- Difficulty generalizing skills learned
- Does not handle criticism/correction well
- Invades the personal space of others
- Perfectionist
- Difficulty stopping mid-task
- Rigid thinking
- One track mind
- Does not learn from mistakes

## During the student's spare/free time he/she:

- Watches television
  - Usually game shows
  - Usually credits
  - Usually preschool shows
  - Usually specific videos
- Plays video games
- Moves about
- Manipulates objects repetitively
- Lines things up
- Holds specific/familiar objects
- Reads
- Plays with building toys
- Plays with infant toys
- Plays alone
- Watches others

## Student is fascinated/preoccupied with:

- Television commercials
  - Game shows
  - Dates of the calendar
  - Clock times
  - People's watches
  - Numbers
  - Reading
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## Student shows a strong interest in:

- Phone numbers
- Vacuums
- Trains
- Vehicles
- Biology
- Weather
- Science fiction
- Has a special interest area not listed

## Student shows exceptional talent in:

- Decoding
- Memorization
- Music
- Knowledge of calendar/dates
- Math
- History

## Student reacts to approach from peers by:

- Ignoring
- Moving away
- Directing
- Tantrums
- Yelling
- Increase in repetitive behavior

## Student reacts to approach by a familiar adult by:

- Ignoring
- Moving away
- Directing
- Tantrums
- Yelling
- Increase in repetitive behavior

## Student reacts to approach from stranger by:

- Ignoring
- Moving away
- Directing
- Tantrums
- Yelling/Screaming
- Increase in repetitive behavior
- Is overly friendly

# Speech and Language

\_\_\_\_\_ Non-verbal

\_\_\_\_\_ Speech is repetitive

\_\_\_\_\_ Minimal speech

\_\_\_\_\_ Speech lacks spontaneity

## Typically makes needs known by:

\_\_\_\_\_ a vague distress sound

\_\_\_\_\_ Seems to have many ideas which he/she is unable to express verbally

\_\_\_\_\_ a vague gesture

\_\_\_\_\_ Has difficulty initiating conversations

\_\_\_\_\_ a well-defined gesture

\_\_\_\_\_ Conversation is repetitive

\_\_\_\_\_ signing

\_\_\_\_\_ other alternative communication system

\_\_\_\_\_ Has a limited number of preferred conversation topics

\_\_\_\_\_ words

\_\_\_\_\_ Is not able to productively contribute to conversation initiated by another

\_\_\_\_\_ phrases or sentences

\_\_\_\_\_ Repeats words he/she hears immediately after hearing them

\_\_\_\_\_ Does not use social greetings flexibly

\_\_\_\_\_ Repeats commercials almost word for word

\_\_\_\_\_ Has difficulty understanding causality

\_\_\_\_\_ Speech frequently lacks meaning

\_\_\_\_\_ Language has little evidence of imagination or symbolism

\_\_\_\_\_ Utters words, phrases, or sentences which appear to have no meaningful connection to situation in which they are said

\_\_\_\_\_ Often interprets words literally

\_\_\_\_\_ Talks to self

\_\_\_\_\_ Uses aberrant behavior as a form of communication

\_\_\_\_\_ Makes non-communicative sounds

\_\_\_\_\_ Understands and enjoys slap stick humor but fails to get the point of verbal humor

\_\_\_\_\_ Frequently uses personal pronouns incorrectly

\_\_\_\_\_ Talks at others rather than engaging in reciprocal conversation

\_\_\_\_\_ Communication limited to requesting and/or protesting

\_\_\_\_\_ Has difficulty understanding the 'point of view' of others

\_\_\_\_\_ Usually cannot answer 'who, where, what, why' questions

\_\_\_\_\_ Voice is overly loud or soft

\_\_\_\_\_ Uses monotonous intonation

## Observation Checklist

# Social Skills

- Does not use objects or toys in the same way as other children his/her age do
- Fails to seek comfort when distressed
- Uses objects or toys in unusual ways (peculiar or perseverative)
- Often does not smile back when people smile back at him/her
- Does not typically imitate other children in play
- Sometimes smiles or laughs 'for no known reason'
- Does not typically initiate play with other children
- Frequently looks frightened or anxious 'for no known reason'
- Does not try to engage others in play by bringing them toys, etc.
- Becomes irritable 'for no known reason'
- Engages in sensuous play rather than using toys symbolically
- Prefers working alone
- Will imitate pretend play when it has been taught to him/her
- Prefers being alone
- Engages in imaginative play but is quite repetitious
- Difficulty working in cooperative groups
- Will respond to game or play session if approached by others
- Is aloof when around other people
- Seems to enjoy interactions with others, but remains passive
- Is indiscriminately friendly
- Has developed some relationships but more with adults than peers
- Is perceived as being odd or peculiar by others
- Relates to adults in more immature fashion than intellectual ability would suggest
- Lacks awareness of other people's feelings
- Enjoys rough physical play primarily
- Is frequently inadvertently rude
- Does not have a 'best friend' in the community
- Seems unaware of normal social conventions
- Lacks the skills for initiating and maintaining long term relationships
- Frequently does not respond when his/her name is called
- Has difficulty understanding the concept of taking turns
- Is very independent, seeking very little help from others
- Often does not look at people when they talk to him/her
- Often rejects affection
- Seems to deliberately refuse to look at people sometimes
- Accept affection only when he/she feels like it
- When he/she looks at people he/she often 'looks through' them
- Is preoccupied with non-living things
- Face often does not show emotion
- Forms attachments to unusual objects