

Nathan

What Teachers Should Know

Who is Nathan? What are his strengths and interests?

Nathan is a sensitive 4th grader, anxious to please and have friendships. He is academically capable and is achieving at grade level expectation with accommodations, despite a diagnosis of Asperger's Syndrome or High Functioning Autism. He enjoys many different activities at home and has a strong and affectionate relationship with his younger sister and his parents. He is kind and caring with his cat and dog, enjoys computer games, reading, watching videos, karate, collecting Yu-Gi-Oh and playing with neighborhood peers. He is especially anxious to be considered a "good student" and a "good son".



What are current challenges for Nathan?

Nathan has received services for his disability since the age of two and has made significant progress in all areas. However, Nathan continues to exhibit difficulties associated with his diagnosis.

1. "Sticky thinking" and stress responses associated with his disability.

Verbal Perseveration

Nathan tends to withdraw into self-talk or focused talking to others on his current interest, movie scripts, favorite expressions and other verbal self-stimulatory behavior for multiple reasons, including:

- **The topic is exciting** and it is difficult to move on to less exciting topics, or
- **He is feeling anxious** and uses the current favorite repetitive language to self-soothe, or
- **He is protesting something** in the environment (e.g., a long wait time, activities he is not interested in performing) but can not access appropriate language at a particular moment to describe his displeasure, or
- **He is attempting to engage others** in a topic of interest, without the necessary steps in a conversational exchange: assessing the social situation, introducing a topic of interest to others and shifting to other topics when conversation partners signal a change. This can result in inappropriate social initiation behaviors.

Stress, Anxiety

Nathan's "sticky thinking" is also associated with anxieties. He worries about potential future actions and can become distraught due to his difficulty shifting topics. For example, a brief fear about his dog might result in a need for adult reassurance for several days. He also worries about others' reaction to him, and sometimes over interprets correction, rebuffs and the normal give and take in peer groups. Nathan is very sensitive and the effects of bullying can be especially profound on students with his vulnerability.

Nathan also suffers from night awakenings and night terrors at times which are often observed in children with his disability. These problems can affect school functioning if it significantly interferes with adequate sleep.

2. Fine and gross motor deficits

Motor skills have impacted mastery of daily living skills, but currently only extended written language tasks are problematic for Nathan. At times Nathan appears to draw letters, rather than rapidly executing the form from his verbal memory. During the “drawing”, he sometimes loses his train of thought. The dual task of rapidly producing letter formations while simultaneously communicating his thoughts in writing is often a challenge for Nathan and will increasingly require accommodations as the written demands of upper grades increases.

What Supports Does Nathan Need in School?

- Daily record keeping is essential to assure the family and medical providers are aware of each day’s successes and challenges. Record keeping should emphasize not just what happened during the day, but also all-important variables occurring at the time of any difficult behavior (subject area, time of day, interactions going on around him, number of minutes on the task when the disruption occurred, strategies used to return Nathan to instructional control). Teacher/aide recording of likely function of the behavior will be especially important: Was this a protest? An attempt to gain attention? An attempt to escape something (a hard task, lengthy written work, transition to something new, etc.)
- Daily record keeping described above must be shared with physicians to monitor attention, anxiety, and potential feelings of depression which are associated with the disability as well as to aid in titrating medication
- Frequent verbal and gestural reinforcement to assure him he is well liked and accepted by adults and peers is required, in addition to access to reinforcers and desired activities for meeting performance expectations.
- Keyboarding opportunity for regular schoolwork, completed at his desk, to produce anything beyond a simple sentence is essential.
- Adult assistance that is minimally intrusive in prompting performance should occur. Intrusive prompting by instructional aides should be monitored.
- Extra time to complete necessary work., often to be done at home, is necessary.
- Learning tasks must be judiciously selected so he is only producing seatwork that is necessary to learn the material. This needs to be followed by testing to determine if he has mastered the educational objective of the assignment. A high volume of written work will produce high stress for Nathan.
- Schedule instruction and contingent access to desired activities throughout the day will help motivate Nathan.
- Opportunities to calm himself throughout the day should be available. A quiet break in the room can take only minutes and is preferable to removal to other locations. (Removal to other locations should always be carefully recorded and communicated with family and physicians as this may signal a need for further evaluation and plan development.)
- Use of peers to motivate, involve, and include Nathan in recess and free time activities, including a Circle of Friends to assist him in believing himself to be well liked will be critical for him.
- Due to his sensitivity and vulnerability, careful administrator and teacher monitoring of peer groups to assure Nathan is not being bullied will be important.