

## Building Rapport with Autistic Students

### What is Rapport?

Rapport is an integral part of achieving effective classroom collaboration. Classroom teachers all use techniques to promote relationships between students and staff in their classrooms. When there is "good rapport" it means that individuals have good working relationships. Good relationships between teachers and students increases academic achievement, improves student attitudes, increases students productivity and interest in the classroom. (Korinek, et al as cited by Henley (2006) p.89)

Rapport can be used to avoid behavior problems by:

- Establishing trust
- Creating a nurturing environment
- Knowing their students
- Connecting with students' lives outside school
- Advocating for youths
- Understanding developmental needs
- Avoiding stereotypes
- Ensuring gender equality
- Dealing with cultural diversity
- Enhancing student teacher relationships

Some ways teachers can build rapport:

- Showing a sense of humor
- Availability before, after or outside of class
- Encouraging class discussion
- Showing interest in their students
- Knowing students' names
- Sharing personal insights and experiences with the class
- Relating course material in everyday terms and examples
- Understanding that students occasionally have problems that arise and inadvertently hinder their progress

Common positive effects of rapport on academic behavior include:

- Increased enjoyment of the teacher and subject matter
- Motivation to attend class more often
- Motivation to pay more attention in class

Building rapport with individuals with autism is particularly important because they may not automatically understand the teacher-student dynamic. Without rapport, the student with autism may not see the teacher's reinforcement or knowledge as valuable.

Tips for building rapport with students with autism:

- Spend time engaging with the student
- Expose the student to varied items and activities and take note of preferences
- Get to know your students; learn something about your students' interests, hobbies, and aspirations
- Relate interests to what students are learning or how s/he is reinforced
- Understand the student's capabilities
- Communicate to the student on his/her level
- Call the student by name
- Hold materials back so the student has to interact with you to complete a task
- Chat with your students; show an interest in them as individuals. Make them laugh
- Praise the student
- Make eye contact with each student - make sure to keep your expression neutral or positive
- Make yourself accessible - before and after class/school
- Be flexible; there are times when students need a separate test or need to be able to turn their work in late
- Be gentle; if a student performs poorly, take care to communicate clearly that it is the quality of work you find unacceptable, not your student
- Stay positive and smile regularly