



Special Needs information sheet on autism spectrum disorders

1 Studying with an autism spectrum disorder

The term autism derives from the Greek and means “strong self-absorption”. Autistic disorders can manifest themselves in very different ways. Today we speak of autism spectrum disorders (ASDs). People with a disorder from the autism spectrum perceive their environment in a different manner. It takes a great deal of effort for them to empathise with other people and to communicate with them adequately. They find it difficult to read their interlocutors’ moods from their faces. They tend to avoid contact. They usually prefer to organise everyday processes in the same way (rituals). Hypersensitivity or hyposensitivity to light, smells or noises are frequent. If the symptoms are less distinctly recognisable, a sufferer’s environment or sufferers themselves often notice them only much later. Symptoms differ widely from person to person. Surveys have revealed that approx. 1% of the population are affected by an autism spectrum disorder.

2 Information concerning dealing with students suffering from an autism spectrum disorder

- Clear indications and structures are helpful. In social situations, in particular, it has a supportive effect when a discussion is conducted in a well-structured and factual manner.
- The way in which people with an autism spectrum disorder perceive their environment and think differs strongly from that of the other “neurotypical” people.
- Autistic people differ widely from each other even though there are experiences that they share. This is why we speak of an autism spectrum.
- It may be supportive to substitute alternative formats for a presentation, for example, or to discuss the sequence of such a situation (such as a conference) in clear detail.
- Autistic people often experience social events (events taking place in the evening, small talk, parties, etc) as exhausting.
- Autistic people’s strengths can manifest themselves in all areas. However, there are strong points which most autistic people share to a lesser or greater degree: reliability, tenacity and a sense of responsibility, precision, a low degree of suggestibility and a predilection for logical thinking.
- Adaptations to examination situations are ordered in writing after consultation. The procedure can be found on the relevant internet page of Special Needs: <https://www.unisg.ch/en/universitaet/hsgservices/beratung/beratungsstellen/special-needs/nachteilsausgleich> (for instance a separate room, arrangements with the faculty member or a later deadline for the submission of work).

3 Contact

If you have any questions and concerns, please contact the Special Needs Advice Center on specialneeds@unisg.ch or +41 71 224 31 91 / nachteilsausgleich@unisg.ch or +41 71 224 22 23.