

Autism-Friendly Classrooms:

Practical Strategies for Teachers



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Every child learns differently. And that is okay!



Inclusion means all children learn together, no matter their abilities

- ✓ Inclusion is NOT treating all children the same
- ✓ It is giving what each child needs

Take out your notebook, write today's date, and solve the first 5 questions quickly!

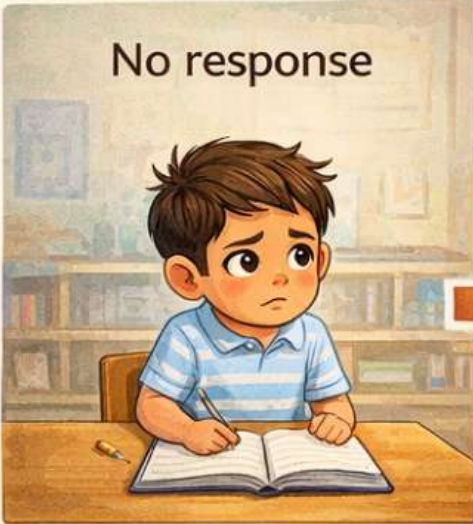
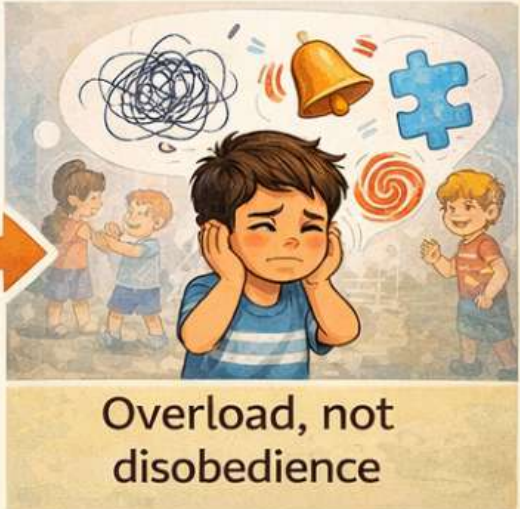


- Brain overload
- Difficulty processing multiple inputs
- Anxiety spike



*"He is not ignoring you.
He is overwhelmed."*

CORE FEATURES

AREA	WHAT YOU SEE	WHAT IT MEANS
Communication	No response 	Processing delay 
Behaviour		Overload, not disobedience 
Social	Alone 	Difficulty initiating 
Sensory	Covers ears Pain, not dislike 	

First – Then – Then



Math



Break



Drawing

SETTING UP THE CLASSROOM

1. Visual Timetable

👉 Use:
Pictures (not just words)
Remove completed tasks (gives control)

2. Seating Strategy

✗ Near noisy door



✓ Near calm area

✓ Predictable surroundings



Pro Tip: 🙌 Avoid placing near:

🚫 - Windows (visual distraction)

🚫 - High-traffic zones

3. Safe Space / Calm Corner



Teacher:

“If you feel upset, you can sit here.”

4. Sensory Toolkit



Stress ball

**Noise-cancelling
headphones**

**Chewable
item**



WHEN to Use Sensory Toolkits



1. Before Overload (Preventive use)

- Before noisy events (assembly, bell, group activity)
- During long sitting tasks
- During transitions (class change)



➡ Goal: Prevent stress from building up



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2. Early Signs of Distress

Watch for:



Fidgeting, restlessness



Covering ears



Avoiding work



Increased movement



Act early — don't wait for **meltdown**

WHEN to Use Sensory Toolkits

3. During Overload / Meltdown



**Child crying, shouting,
or shutting down**



**Unable to follow
instructions**



**Goal: Calm the nervous system,
not teach**

WHEN to Use Sensory Toolkits

HOW to Use Each Tool

● 1. Stress Ball / Fidget Toy

Use when:

- Child is restless
- Needs movement while sitting

How:

- Give quietly without drawing attention
- Allow use during classwork



Tip: Not a reward—it's a support tool

HOW to Use Each Tool

● 2. Noise-Cancelling Headphones

Use when:

- Loud classroom
- Sudden noises (bell, shouting, group work)



How:

- Offer before noise starts
- Teach child to request/use independently



Tip: Combine with a **quiet corner** if needed

HOW to Use Each Tool

● 3. Chewable Item

Use when:

- Child is biting pencils, clothes, nails
- Appears anxious or seeking oral input

How:

- Provide safe chewable alternative
- Keep it easily accessible



Tip: Normalize it—**avoid** making **child feel different**

IMPORTANT RULES FOR TEACHERS

✗ Don't:

- Use as punishment ('Take this and sit quietly')
- Remove suddenly
- Over-restrict use

✓ Do:

- Offer calmly and discreetly
- Teach child when to use
- Observe what works best



COMMUNICATION – THE BIGGEST GAME CHANGER



HOW TO GIVE INSTRUCTIONS:



GOLDEN RULE:



“SHORT + CLEAR + ONE STEP”



WRONG:

“Take out your notebook, write the answer, underline, and submit quickly.”



RIGHT:

- Take out notebook.
(wait 5 sec)
- Write 3 lines.



WAIT TIME RULE:

Always wait 5–10 seconds



ADD VISUAL SUPPORT:

- Say + Show: “Write” 
(point to picture)



WHY?

Processing in autism is slower but accurate.



PRO TIP:

Use child’s name first: “Aarav... (pause)... write 3 lines.”



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BEHAVIOUR MANAGEMENT

SCENARIO 1: CHILD SHOUTS / CRIES

🧠 Reality: 👉 Meltdown ≠ Tantrum

Meltdown



✓ No control

✓ Overload

Tantrum



✗ Goal-directed

✗ Wants something



STEP-BY-STEP RESPONSE:

- ✓ Stay calm (face neutral)
- ✓ Reduce noise
- ✓ Remove audience
- ✓ Offer safe space



Teacher Script:

*"I see you are upset.
Let's go to quiet corner."*

✗ NEVER:

- ✗ Shout
- ✗ Punish
- ✗ Lecture



BEHAVIOUR MANAGEMENT

SCENARIO 2: CHILD THROWS OBJECTS



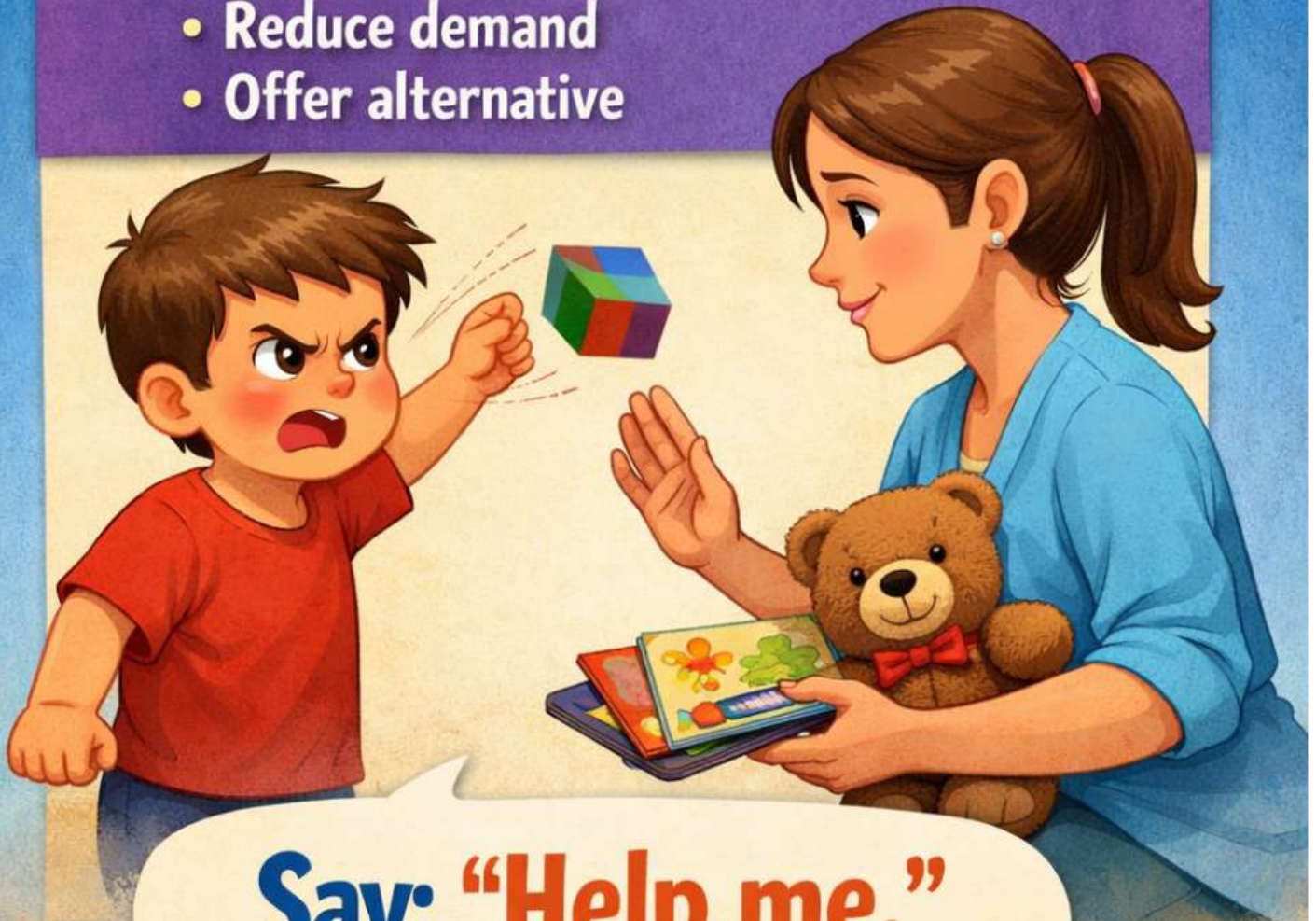
REASON:

- Frustration
- Communication failure



RESPONSE:

- Block safely
- Reduce demand
- Offer alternative



Say: “Help me.”

(teach replacement behaviour)

SENSORY ISSUES

Scenario: School bell rings → child panics



EXPERIENCE:

- Sound = **pain** (not just loud)



SOLUTIONS:

1. Pre-warning:

- “Bell in 1 minute”

1. Pre-warning: “Bell in 1 minute”



SOLUTIONS:

2. Headphones

1. Bell in 1 minute”



TYPES OF SENSORY ISSUES

Type	Behaviour	Solution
Sound	 Covers ears	 Headphones
Touch	 Avoids contact	<u>Don't force</u> 
Movement	 Constant fidget	 Allow movement breaks
Visual	 Distracted	 Reduce clutter

SOCIAL SKILLS TRAINING

TEACH LIKE A SUBJECT:

Step 1: MODEL

Say: "Can I play?"



Step 2: PRACTICE

Role Play



Step 3: REAL SITUATION

Try it out!



BUDDY SYSTEM:

Assign kind peer: "This is Aarav's learning buddy."



! MISTAKE:

Saying: "Go play with others!"

(Too vague)



SOCIAL SKILLS TRAINING

Scenario 2: Child Interrupts / Talks Out of Turn



UNDERLYING DIFFICULTY

- Poor impulse control
- Difficulty understanding turn-taking rules



TEACH IT SYSTEMATICALLY

STEP 1: DEMONSTRATION

Teacher shows the correct behavior:

Raising hand and waiting quietly



Calling Out Answers



Waiting with Hand Raised

STEP 2: GUIDED PRACTICE

Role-Play Activities



Step 3: In-Class Application

During Lessons:

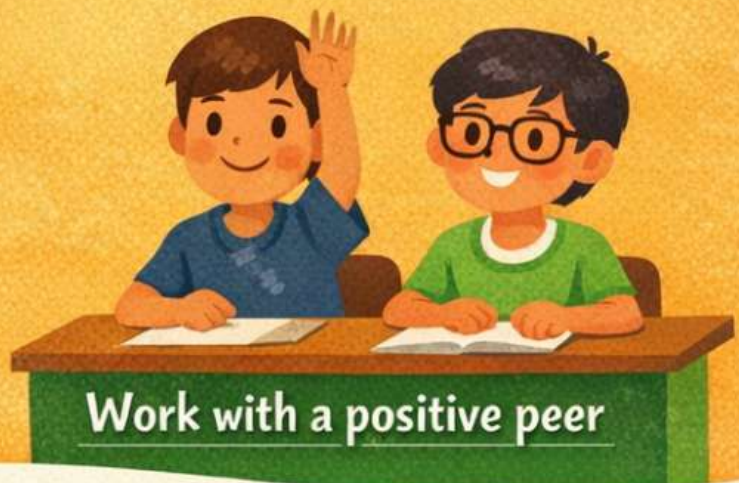


“Aarav...
raise your hand.”

Teacher Language:

“Raise your hand first, then speak.”

Support Strategies:



Work with a positive peer

Common Pitfall:

✗ Saying: “Don’t interrupt”



✓ Instead: “Raise your hand
before speaking.”

SOCIAL SKILLS TRAINING

CHILD DOES NOT SHARE / SNATCHES TOYS



DIFFICULTY:

- Understanding ownership
- Waiting turn
- Emotional regulation



TEACH LIKE A SUBJECT

Step 1: Model

Teacher Shows:

“Can I have a turn?”

Can I have
a turn?”



SOCIAL SKILLS TRAINING

CHILD DOES NOT SHARE / SNATCHES TOYS

Step 2: Practice

Use structured game

- Practice:
- ✓ Asking
- ✓ Waiting
- ✓ Giving back



Step 3: Real Situation

During play:
Teacher guides:

“Say: My turn please.”

“Say: My turn please.”

✗ Teacher Script

- Use timer ⌚ (clear turn duration)



- Turn-taking cards
(My turn / Your turn)
- ✓ Teach how to ask and wait

⚠ Common Mistake

- ✗ Forcing child to share immediately



GOLDEN PRINCIPLE — FOR SOCIAL SKILLS —

“Do not assume the child
knows social rules —
*teach them like
math or language*”



TEACH STEP BY STEP!

ACADEMIC INCLUSION



SCENARIO:

Same worksheet → child stuck



ADAPT TASK:

STANDARD



Write paragraph



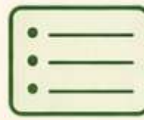
Long answers



Lecture



ADAPTED



Fill in the blanks



MCQs



Visual + Demo



RULE:



Same concept, different method.

STANDARD



Write a paragraph on
"The Water Cycle."

ADAPTED



Fill in the Blanks
1. Water heats up and turns
into _____.
2. This is called _____.

SAME CONCEPT, DIFFERENT METHOD



ACADEMIC INCLUSION

READING COMPREHENSION

Scenario: Whole class reads a long passage → child loses focus and cannot answer questions



ADAPT TASK

Standard	Adapted
 Read full paragraph	→ Short, highlighted sentences
 Answer long questions	→ Choose correct answer (MCQ)
 Silent reading	→  
 Audio + teacher reading	→ 

Break it into
SMALL CHUNKS



Highlight
KEY LINES



Use **PICTURES**
to explain



ACADEMIC INCLUSION



WRITING TASK

Scenario: "Write 10 sentences about your day"
→ child unable to start

Standard

☒ Write freely

 Long paragraph

☒ No support

Adapted

☒ Sentence starters

☐ Fill-in-the-blanks

 Visual prompts (pictures)

RULE:

 Same concept,
different method

Let's Write About Your Day!



This morning I _____



At school I _____



For lunch I ate _____. At recess I _____



At recess I _____



Before t beb I _____



HOW TEACHER HELPS



Give starters:

"Today I..."

"I went to..."



Allow drawing + labeling



Accept short responses



★ **RULE:**



Focus on expression, not perfection

SUCCESSFUL TRANSITIONS!

Avoiding a Meltdown...



**5 Minutes
Left!**



**2 Minutes
Left!**



**1 Minute
Left!**

Countdown Timer

5



MINUTES

2



MINUTES

1



MINUTE

5

4

3

2

1

TIME'S UP!

First – Then Rule



**First
MATH**



**Then
PLAYGROUND**

SUCCESSFULL TRANSITION!

PLAYTIME → CLASSWORK



Scenario: Children are playing → asked to return to class → child resists or becomes upset



STRATEGY

1.

Pre-warning:

→ “5 minutes more play... then class”



2.

Visual cue:

→ Show picture of classroom
→ Use bell / timer



3.

First-Then rule:

→ “First pack toys, then drawing activity”



3.

“First pack toys, then drawing activity”

Smooth Transitions for Kids

Tips for a Stress-Free Shift!

1. Give a Warning Cue

"In 5 minutes, we'll clean up!"



2. Use Visual Supports

Show a schedule or timer



3. Give Clear Directions

"Time to put the toys away."



4. End with a Fun Activity

"Now, let's go play outside!"



★ **Outcome:** Child shifts smoothly without resistance



FREE TIME → STRUCTURED TASK



1. Join Before Redirect

Hey buddy, can I sit with you for a minute?



Sit together briefly.

2. Countdown

2 more minutes... then we start work!



"2 more minutes... then we start work!"

3. Transition Object

You can bring your toy with you.



Take your toy to the desk.

4. First-Then Rule

First worksheet, then you can play again!



"First worksheet, then you can play again!"

GOLDEN RULE FOR TRANSITIONS

Prepare the child
➡ before the change —
don't surprise them.



Helping kids know what's coming next!

What is Positive Reinforcement?

1. Child does a good behavior



Examples:

- ★ Praise
- 👉 Favorite toy
- 😊 Stickers
- 🍭 Treats

2. Child receives a reward



3. Good behavior increases

Action followed by reward leads to repeat!

It's rewarding a child for positive behavior, to encourage them to do it **again!**

Helping Autistic Kids Thrive!

POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT SYSTEM



Scenario: Child completes task

REWARD SYSTEM:

★ Star Chart ★

 Token Economy

 Immediate Praise



OOPS!

Common Mistake:

✗ "Good boy!"

Too Vague

WORKING WITH PARENTS & TEAM



—  Ask:

- ✓ What triggers child?
- ✓ What calms child?
- ✓ Interests?



GOLD TIP:



Use child's interest
(e.g, trains) in teaching



WORKING WITH PARENTS

MANAGING MELTDOWNS (HOME-SCHOOL CONSISTENCY)



COLLABORATIVE APPROACH



"What usually
triggers meltdowns
at home?"



"What helps
calm your child?"





Joint Plan

Use same calming strategy at school and home



Quiet corner



Deep pressure



Headphones

Use same words:



Why it works



Child experiences predictability
and safety across settings





Working with Parents



IMPROVING COMMUNICATION SKILLS



Scenario:

Child struggles to express needs
(cries instead of asking)



COLLABORATIVE APPROACH

Teacher + Parents decide:



Teach simple phrases:



“Help me”



“I want water”



Joint Practice

Use same phrases at:

School



Home



Reinforce immediately when child uses words



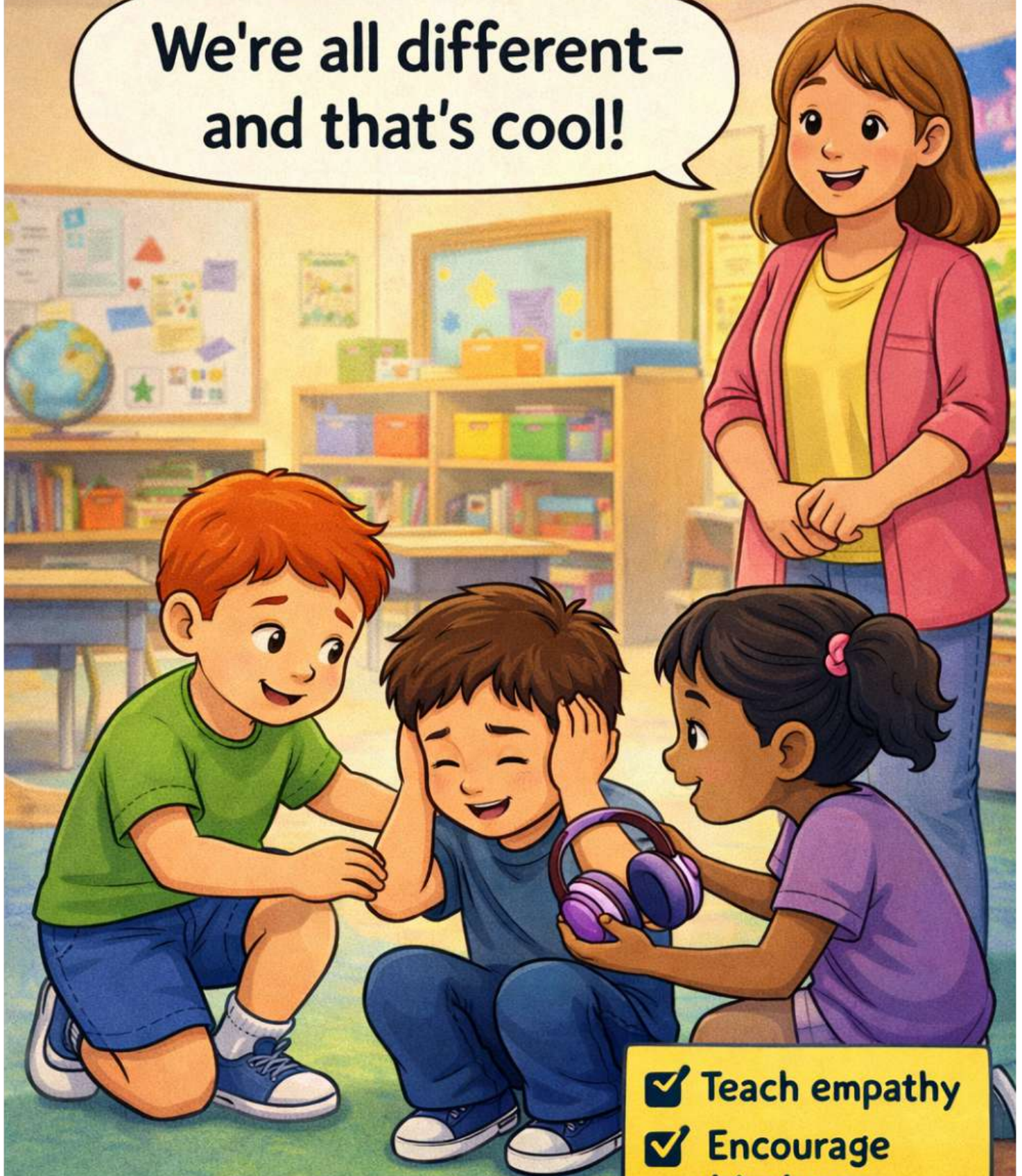
Why it works



Repetition across environments =
faster learning

Build a classroom culture of acceptance

**We're all different—
and that's cool!**



- ✓ Teach empathy
- ✓ Encourage kindness

BUILDING CLASSROOM CULTURE OF ACCEPTANCE

"UNDERSTANDING DIFFERENCES" ACTIVITY



Scenario:

Students notice that Aarav behaves differently (covers ears, plays alone)



STRATEGY

1. Teacher-led discussion:

➔ "Everyone learns and feels differently."

Everyone learns and feels differently."



Simple analogy:

Some people like loud music, some don't.



Some need quiet to feel comfortable.



Class activity:



Ask students: "What makes you comfortable?"

"What makes you comfortable?"

♪ I like loud music!



I like hugs!



WHY IT WORKS



Builds Empathy

**We All
Have Unique
Traits!**

Normalizes Differences

OUTCOME



Children Stop Teasing



**Start Understanding
& Accepting**



HELPING ROLES / BUDDY SYSTEM

Scenario: Aarav struggles during group work or transitions

@ STRATEGY

1. Assign classroom roles:

“Helper buddy”

“Line partner”



Helping Partner



Helping Partner

2. Teach peers HOW to help:



“Speak softly”



“Give time to respond”



“Show, don't rush”

BUILDING CLASSROOM CULTURE OF INCLUSION

TEACHER SCRIPT

“We help each other learn.”

WHY IT WORKS

👍 Encourages inclusion through action, not just words

OUTCOME



Aarav participates more

Peers feel responsible and kind

GOLDEN PRINCIPLE



Acceptance is not taught by lecture — it is built through daily classroom experiences.



TEACHER SELF-CARE

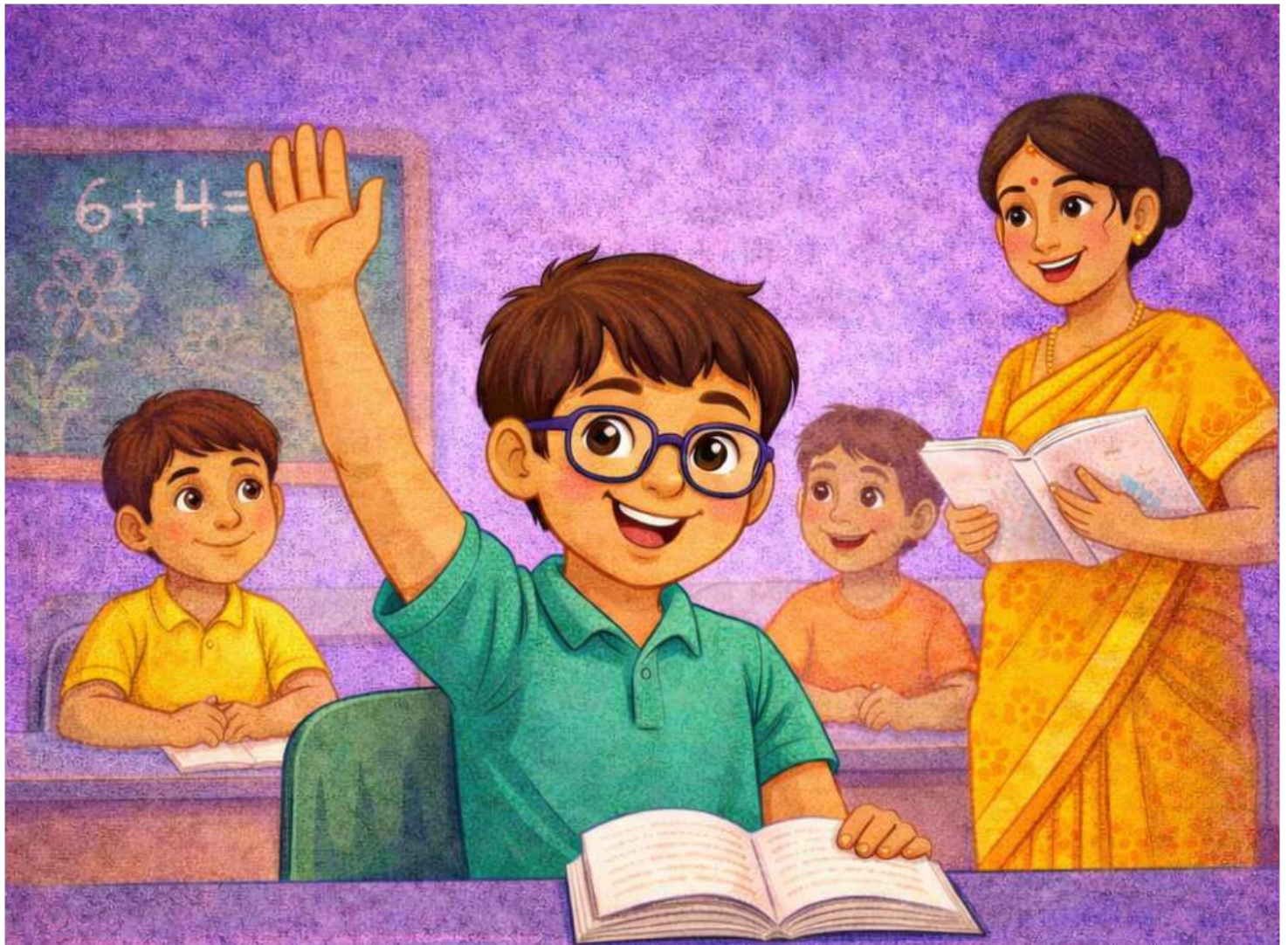


MESSAGE:



You cannot pour from an empty cup”

- Take short breaks
- Share responsibility
- Seek support



Inclusion is not about
changing the child.
It is about changing
the environment.