

AUTISM AND SCHOOL

This is a slightly altered transcript of an interview with a British autistic adult recalling life in primary school:

I would say, 'I cannot do this. I can't do it.' They put a math worksheet in front of me and said, here, do this. It's like, I can't do it. They try and make me do it, like, just get it over with.

It's not that I'm being lazy or objectionable. It's not that I don't want to do it. It's that I... I just didn't feel able to do it. Them trying to force the issue would then mean that I got more and more upset and annoyed and angry. At that age, around six or seven, I really didn't express myself well.

I'd just be like, 'No. Piss off, *I can't do it!*' And then I would get violent. I just struggled and I didn't feel that they were listening to me. I would start throwing things, flip tables over and then the teachers would drag me to my seat.

I would lash out at them and they'd physically restrain me. That was the worst time of my life, when I was in primary school.

It's likely that if the teacher had allowed the child to do something else or take a break, none of this trauma would have happened. There can be the same failure of understanding in responding to children with sensory or social overload.

The story below is excerpted from a story by Lisa Moran, an autistic advocate. An autistic student arrived at class finding the desks rearranged.

Standing in the doorway, I tune into the sounds of students talking at different speeds, at different decibels, changing topics with a squeal or two thrown in along with an argument here and there. It's so hard to think. I panic. There are at least 22 desk chairs squeaking on the floor, pencils being sharpened, the teacher giving directions, students finding new seats. I focus on a spot on the floor, completely overwhelmed. I'm rooted by panic from the change, the noise, and the confusion about where to sit. I can't find words to explain.

The teacher tells me she wants me to move. Will she touch me? I don't want to be touched. The teacher warns me again to get ready. I need to move. The teacher's voice is rising. She sounds angry. Is it me? I'm trying so hard. I move towards a desk, heart pounding, a strong perfume smell making it hard to breathe, a student bumps into me and I stop. My panic rises again. I finally find a desk with my name on it. My head hurts from the smells; I'm overstimulated and overwhelmed, so I sit and rock back and forth to calm myself. The teacher walks over and says, "See how easy that was? Now sit up straight and stop rocking."