Is E-Learning Effective for Autistic Secondary Students?



Real voices. Real impact. Developed in collaboration with autistic young adults, who shared their ideas and experiences to create a resource that reflects what matters to them.

E-learning courses can be a challenge or an opportunity for autistic learners. In Ontario, all high school learners must complete two online credits. Knowing which courses are available and how other autistic learners have succeeded can help you choose programs that meet your unique needs and lead to success.

Benefits of taking online courses	Challenges of taking online courses
Flexibility to support self-regulation needs: Learn from home where you can take breaks and manage sensory needs without judgment.	**Limited access to accommodations:** Some schools and educators have challenges recognizing and providing accommodations in a virtual setting. You may need to be persistent and advocate repeatedly for additional support.
Energy conservation: Without the demands of commuting, social interaction, managing sensory overload, etc., you may have more energy to concentrate on coursework.	**Reduced social connection:** Building relationships with peers is more difficult and requires a whole new set of 'social rules'. You may find learning these rules can be challenging with fewer supports.
Control over time, pace, and space: E-learning allows autistic learners control over when and where they study and allows them the ability to learn at their own speed.	**Unpredictability and lack of structure:** Online courses sometimes experience technology issues, crashes, and other ways that can disrupt learning and trigger anxiety.

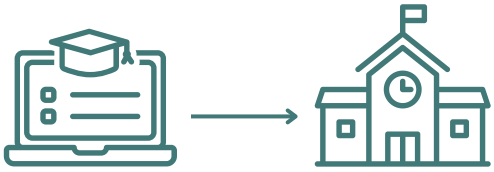
Where can I take online courses?



Online courses from your school board

Schoolboards offer a wide range of courses that can be completed as part of a school day, evening courses, or online summer school. Some courses are live with other learners, and some can be completed whenever you want during the day.

Each schoolboard operates their programs differently, so you will want to speak to a guidance counsellor to learn more.



Online courses from other school boards

You may find that your schoolboard does not offer the online courses that you are looking for. To help you find what you need, most schoolboards are part of a group of boards that offer courses together.

You can ask your guidance counsellor or schoolboard to take courses though other boards using an e-learning consortium.



The Independent Learning Centre (TVO ILC)

Sometimes learners need a faster, slower, or more flexible online course to meet their needs. TVO ILC offers courses that can be taken at any speed and any time.

Most schoolboards can enrol you in TVO ILC courses or if you are over 18, you can enrol through their website for an administrative fee. However, it is independent, so you are responsible for setting timelines and meeting your goals with fewer supports than a board provided online course.



Private Online Schools

Ontario also has a range of online private schools that offer courses and credits. These courses can vary in format, offerings, and quality.

Make sure to do your research to see which private school programs meet your needs for flexibility and accommodations.

How can I be more successful in my online course?

- **Be clear and direct about your learning needs:** Frame accommodations as non-negotiable needs, not requests, and put them in writing to create a documented trail of communication. That includes sharing important documents like an IEP with the online school.

- **Create a space to help you focus and be comfortable:** Examples can include noise-cancelling or semi-noise calling headphones, flexible seating, and sensory tools.

- **Set boundaries:** It can be helpful to set specific times or places where you will do your e-learning. This helps separate learning from downtime.

- **Practice self-compassion and flexibility:** Remember that shutdowns happen. Give yourself permission to pause, recover, and return to the material later.

How can caregivers help?

- **Promote routines and accountability:** Help your learner set up, and stick to, a consistent schedule for when they will complete their online class requirements.

- **Set-up a 'workspace':** Consider your learner's self-regulation, movement, attention needs and set up a space that meets those individual needs.

- **Encourage self-advocacy skills:** Guide your learner's in learning how to ask for what they need. This may include helping them write emails or practicing scripts for advocating for accommodations and expressing learning needs.

- **Plan to take breaks:** Develop a proactive plan that includes breaks to relax, calming activities, and how the learner can access any missed materials (e.g., can the teacher record the lesson or provide a note-taker).

