

# Autism 101

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# Overview

## About ASCV

- Review what Autism is and who it affects
- Identify primary characteristics of Autistic individuals
- Recognize ways to adapt environments and communication to accommodate diverse learners

# What is Autism?

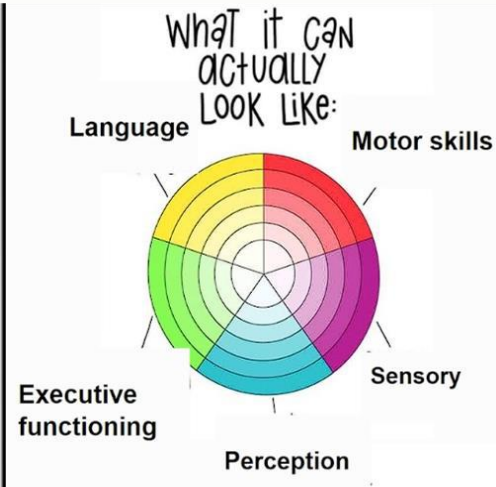
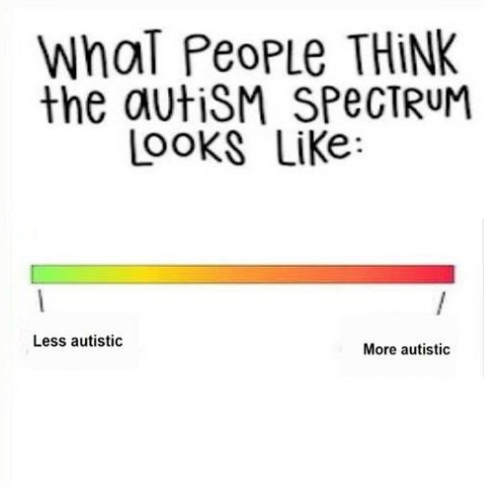
**How many of you have a personal connection with an Autistic person?**

**What comes to mind when you hear the word Autism?**

# Autism

**A lifelong, brain-based developmental disability that affects information processing and impacts:**

- Communication
- Sensory processing
- Body movements
- Social behavior
- Emotional regulation



# Who does Autism affect?

## 1:36 children in the United States

- 4x more prevalent in boys than girls
- Looks different across genders

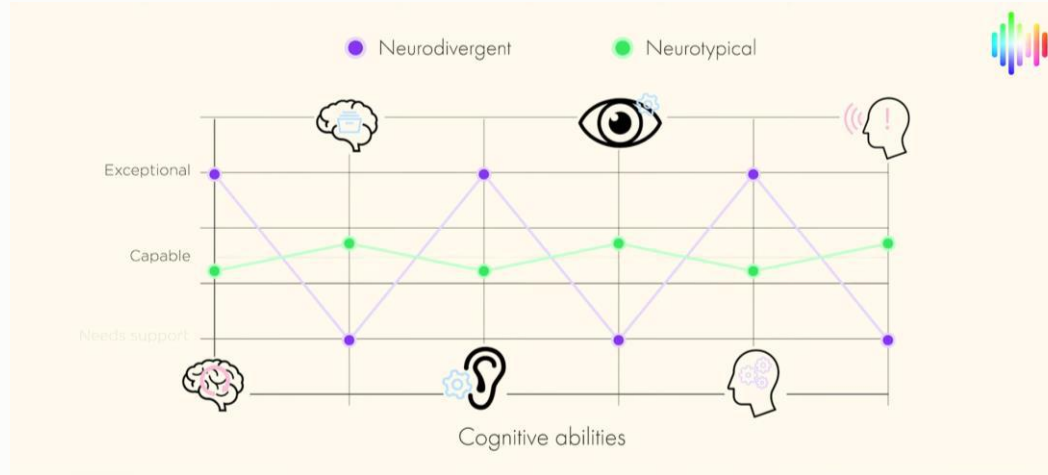
## Autism is seen in all racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds

- Differences in evaluation, diagnosis, and services



# Talking About Autism

- **Person-First vs. Identity-First Language**
  - Person with Autism
  - Autistic person
  - Pay attention to personal preferences
- **Support Needs vs. Functioning Labels**
  - Requires substantial support to \_\_\_\_\_, minimal support to \_\_\_\_\_
- **Puzzle piece vs. infinity symbol**



# Autism

- Can see characteristics of Autism as early as 18 months
  - May start losing skills around this age
- Co-occurring medical and psychological conditions are common
  - Auditory processing disorder, anxiety, ADHD, epilepsy, intellectual disability, sleep disturbances
- Autism is not a mental illness
- There is no known cause for Autism
- Individualized approach to therapies and support



**Yeah, but what really is it?**

# Social Communication & Interaction Characteristics



# Strengths

- Thinking independently
- Direct communication
- Honesty and reliability
- Working independently



**True or False:**

**Autistic individuals do not want to socialize and prefer to keep to themselves.**

# False: Most Autistic individuals want to socialize and can make friends.

- **Outside lens views autistic people as awkward**
  - Judgments, bullying, ostracization
  - Self-isolation as a response
- **Relationships may look different**
  - Info-dumping
  - Sharing space without speaking or engaging directly
  - Less small talk



# Social Differences

- Developing and maintaining relationships
- Might not show\* anticipatory behaviors
- Might not see\* shared enjoyment and/or interests with others
  - Play skills
- Might not display\* shared interest through joint attention
- At a young age, behavior is communication



# Communication Differences

- **Challenges with using/interpreting nonverbal behaviors**
  - Facial expressions, gestures, body language, etc.
- **Limited or exaggerated facial expressions**
- **Avoiding eye contact and looking at people**
- **Difficulties understanding what is not explicitly stated and nonliteral language**
  - Inferences, metaphors, sarcasm
- **Unique tone and/or intonation when speaking**
  - “Robotic,” “singsong”



# True or False:

## Most Autistic people speak to communicate.



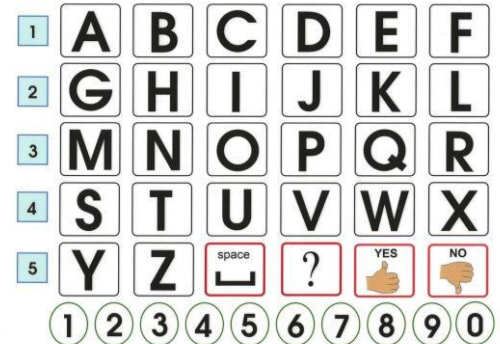
# True: About 1/3 of autistic people are believed to be non-speaking or minimally speaking.

- More common for younger students to be non-speaking
- Some people remain non-speaking, minimally speaking, or unable to express their ideas accurately through speech
  - Apraxia/Dyspraxia
  - May vocalize



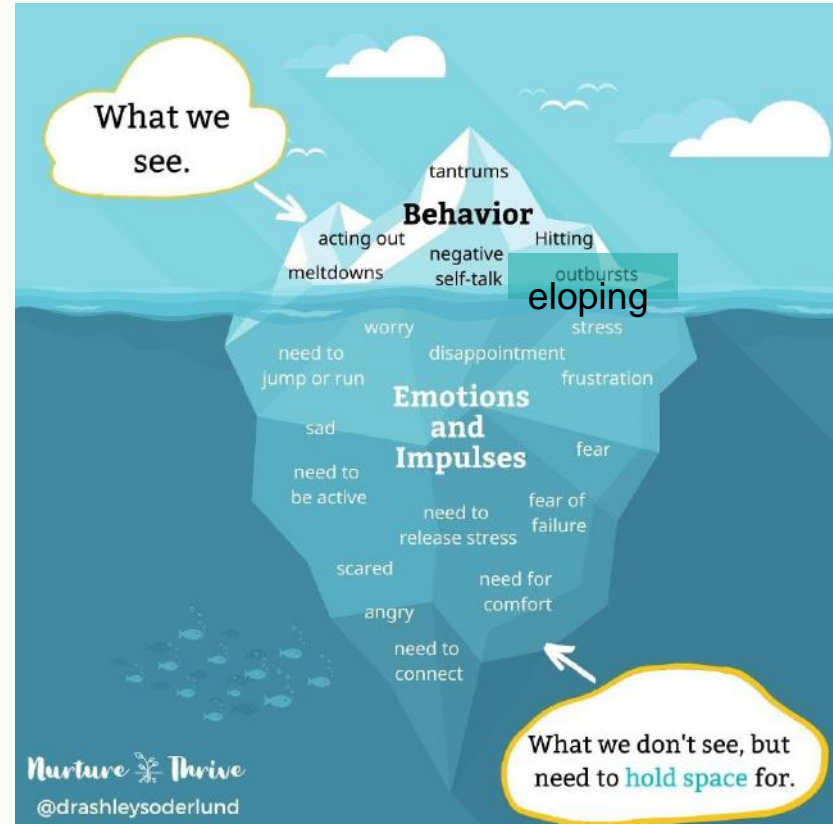
# Alternative & Augmentative Communication (AAC)

- Non-speech methods of communication
  - Sign language
  - Pictures
  - Letterboards
  - Typing
  
- Presume competence!



# Behavior is Often Communication

- Be a “detective” to figure out what needs are
  - ABCs of behavior
  - How well is someone functioning to do what is requested?
  - Caregiver input
- Have visual supports to aid in communication



# Restrictive & Repetitive Patterning Characteristics



# Strengths

- Pattern recognition
- Noticing details
- Memorizing and learning information quickly
- Adherence to rules, schedules, and routines
- Great long-term memory



# Communication Differences

- **Difficulty with back-and-forth conversations**
- **Social stories**
- **Scripting and echolalia**
  - Recite lines from a song, movie
  - Repeat what someone has said
  - Ask the same question, even if you have answered



Amy says hello to the camp every morning!



\*Odin took my hand and led me to his bedroom at one point during this interview



**KAPWING**

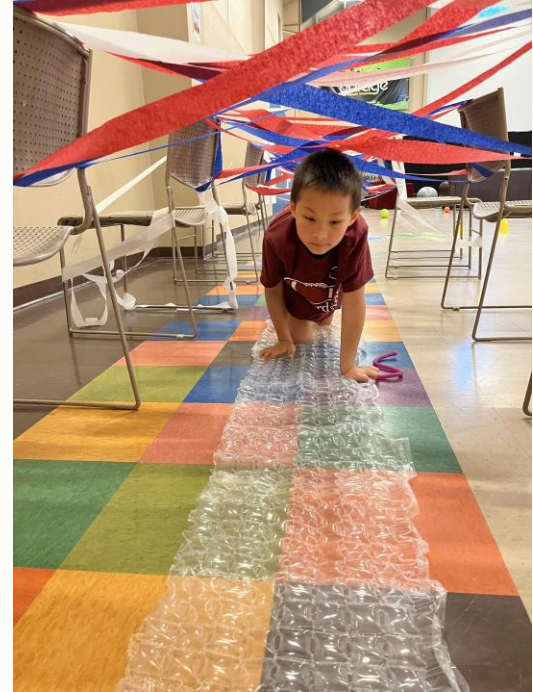
# Interests and Behaviors

- **“Stimming”**
  - Hand flapping, clapping, finger flicking, rocking, grimacing, etc.
  - Listening to or watching something repetitively
- **Distress with transitions or changes in routine**
- **Established rituals**
  - Strong preference or insistence on following routines in precise detail
- **Focus on small details rather than the big picture**
- **Passions and preferences**
  - May not seem to match with the individual’s age
  - Use as reinforcers!



# Sensory Differences

- Marked distress over changes in seemingly trivial aspects of the environment
- Attraction to certain tastes, textures, smells, colors, movements, etc.
  - “Picky eater”



# Water Safety

- Affinity to water
- High occurrence of elopement/wandering
- Lower awareness of danger
- Knowledge about individual skills, habits, etc.
  - Ensure adequate supervision



# Thinking in Pictures, or Other Characteristics of Autistic Minds



# Strengths

- Thinking and learning visually
- Unique problem-solving skills
- Creative ways of interpreting information from the environment



# Communication Differences

- Can recite information but has challenges applying it
- **Challenges with executive functioning**
  - Planning and completing tasks
  - Concept of time



# Sensory Differences

- **Over- or under-reactivity to sensory stimulation**
  - Differences with filtering and processing input
  - Sensory seekers and avoiders
    - May not like being hugged or cuddled
    - May put things in their mouths
    - May be messy with eating and other activities
    - May need to jump or spin before doing tasks
- **Synesthesia**



# Interests and Behaviors

- **Motor differences**
  - Apraxia of muscle movements
  - Apparent “clumsiness”: bumping into things, tripping, dropping items
  - Walking on toes
  - Messy handwriting
  - Moves very slowly, quickly, or seemingly without control
  - Difficulty walking long distances



# Sensory Overload



Special interests  
Time alone  
Swimming

unable to sit still



crying

covering face or ears



outbursts/frustration

not communicating

not listening

aggression/agitation



meltdowns/shutdowns



trying to leave

**True or False:**

**Autistic children (and adults) tend to have more tantrums than non-Autistics.**

# False: Autistic people do not have more tantrums than non-autistics.

[@SupernovaMomma](#)

## Tantrum

Has a goal

Because they want or don't want to do something

Needs attention

Ends when the need is met/they get what they want

Can be regulated

## Meltdown

No goal

Sensory, emotional, or social overload

Does not need attention

Unconscious reaction/involuntary response

Inability to think

Unlimited time frame

Overwhelming and draining

Hitting

Stomping

Screaming

Self-harming

Kicking

Throwing

Biting

# Shutdown

## Shutdown

No goal

Sensory, emotional, or social  
overload

Does not need attention

Unconscious  
reaction/involuntary response

Inability to think, move,  
respond

Unlimited time frame

# Response

## Meltdown Response

- Affirm safety
- Provide calming sounds
- Give person some space, but be close enough to respond to harming stims if needed
- Let person come to you when ready

## Shutdown Response

- Dark, quiet space
- Alone time to recuperate

- Compassion
- Patience
- Minimize sensory input
- Ask beforehand what a person needs for support



# Practical Strategies for Accessibility & Inclusion

What adaptations and accommodations do you currently offer to meet the needs of diverse learners?

What are your goals for incorporating campers on the Autism spectrum?

# How to be an Ally

- Create safe spaces for Autistic people and their loved ones to feel welcome by staff and peers
- Build strong rapport and establish open communication with caregivers



# Promoting Inclusive Attitudes

- Variety of activities and opportunities for learning and engagement
- Incorporate multiple methods of communication
- Question cards and prompts for conversation
- Buddy system around interests
- Personnel with a connection to the community
- Books, movies, etc. that represent diverse identities and interests
- Quiet time/Quiet Area



# Universal Design

- Access to sensory support tools
- Make space for and encourage movement
- Reduce visual distractions and unnecessary noise
- Options between quiet and louder spaces
- Variety of seating options
- Clear signage
- Challenge by choice



# Pre-Registration Communication

- **Camp registration questions**
  - Any accommodations at school?
  - Sensitivities?
  - Communication methods?
  - Preferences: foods, interests, activities
  - Support needs: routines, hygiene, eating, dressing?
  - Consider an intake interview
- **Caregiver and participant preparation**
  - Social story
  - Daily schedule
  - What to bring?
  - Program-specific words to add to AAC?



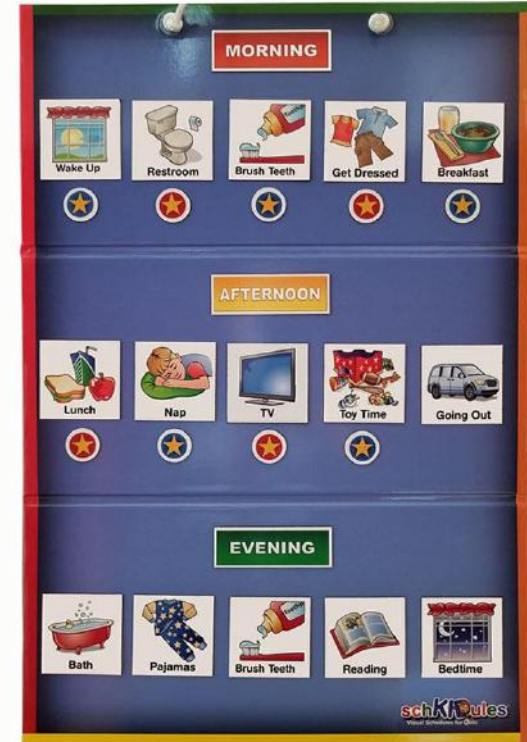
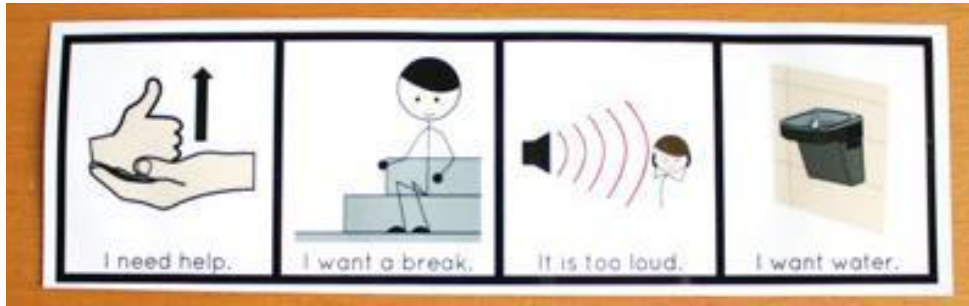
# Setting Autistic Individuals Up for Success!

- **Presume competence!**
  - ALL Autistics have the ability to learn, think, and understand
  - Communicate directly with the individual when possible
  - Appropriate accommodations



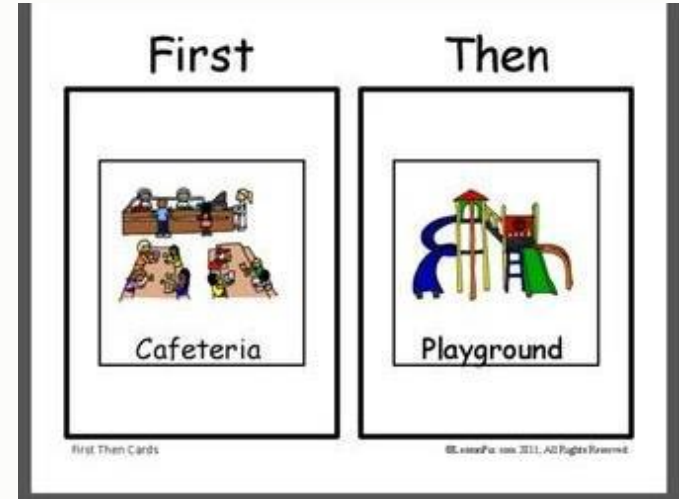
# Setting Autistic Individuals Up for Success!

- Establish routine
  - Each part of day is structured
  - Facilitate calm, rest, health, learning, fun
- Use visual supports



# Setting Autistic Individuals Up for Success!

- Model appropriate behaviors
- Establish clear boundaries
- Redirect when necessary
- Incorporate choices
- Break tasks down into easy steps
- Help identify emotions and behaviors
- Incorporate breaks into schedule



# Setting Autistic Individuals Up for Success!

- Focus on strengths and interests, not just challenges
- Give new interventions and strategies time to work
- Accept that mistakes will happen
- Have fun!



# Stay Connected with Us!

For more information, visit our website and follow us on Social Media!

[www.ascv.org](http://www.ascv.org)

Facebook

Instagram

- Programs for all ages
- Support groups
- Volunteer opportunities
- ASCV Member events
- Community events

## Volunteer

Our passionate volunteers make a tremendous impact in the lives of the individuals and families we serve. Whether individually or as part of a group, volunteers play a vital role in our mission. We invite you to volunteer and make a difference.



Many volunteer opportunities involve working directly with the youth and families we serve, including mentoring and providing childcare monthly support groups. We also have volunteer opportunities for administrative office support and event support.

## ASCV Volunteer Opportunities

To find out more about the opportunities available please click on the category below.

# Resources

# Autism Society of America Affiliates

- **Get connected to affiliates in your area!**
  - 70+ affiliates

<https://Autismsociety.org/contact-us/#affiliate-list>



# Autism Resources- Canada

- <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/autism-spectrum-disorder-asd/support-autism-spectrum-disorder-asd.html>
- <https://autismalliance.ca/membership/members/>
- <https://autismcanada.org/resources/>
- <https://www.autismbc.ca/>
- <https://www.asontario.org/>



# Additional Resources

- CDC Milestone Tracker app- <https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/actearly/milestones-app.html>
- The ABCs of Behavior- <https://www.modelteaching.com/education-articles/classroom-management/the-abcs-of-behavior>
- Social Stories Library- <https://autismlittlelearners.com/social-stories-for-school/>
- Visual Supports- <https://autismlittlelearners.com/free-visual-supports/>,  
<https://www.adaptingforautism.com/visual-supports/pe-visuals-schedules-special-education/>
- Promoting Autism Inclusive Activities-  
[https://www.autismeducationtrust.org.uk/sites/default/files/2021-09/aet\\_promoting-autism-inclusive-attitudes.pdf](https://www.autismeducationtrust.org.uk/sites/default/files/2021-09/aet_promoting-autism-inclusive-attitudes.pdf)
- Summer Camps for Autistic Children (U.S.)- <https://www.angelsense.com/blog/special-needs-summer-camps/>

# Questions? Comments? Reflections?

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