

**Special points of
interest:**

- Nearly a quarter century ago, the Autism Society launched a nationwide effort to promote autism awareness, inclusion and self-determination for all, and assure that each person with ASD is provided the opportunity to achieve the highest possible quality of life.
- In 2018, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention issued their [ADDM autism prevalence report](#). The report concluded that the prevalence of autism had risen to 1 in every 59 births in the United States – [twice as great](#) as the 2004 rate of 1 in 125 – and almost 1 in 54 boys.



Pulse!

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April is Autism Awareness Month

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What is Autism?

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a complex developmental disability; signs typically appear during early childhood and affect a person's ability to communicate, and interact with others. ASD is defined by a certain set of behaviors and is a "spectrum condition" which means that it affects individuals differently and to varying degrees. There is no known single cause of autism, but increased awareness and early diagnosis/intervention and access to appropriate services/supports lead to significantly improved outcomes.

Some of the behaviors associated with autism include delayed learning of language; difficulty making eye contact or holding a conversation; difficulty with executive functioning, which relates to reasoning and planning; narrow, intense interests; poor motor skills' and sensory sensitivities. Again, a person on the spectrum might follow many of these behaviors or just a few, or many others besides. The diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder is applied based on analysis of all behaviors and their severity.

Autism is treatable. Individuals with autism do not "outgrow" autism, but studies show that early diagnosis and intervention lead to significantly improved outcomes. For more information on developmental milestones, visit the CDC's website. Here are some signs to look for:

- *Lack of or delay in spoken language
- *Repetitive use of language and/or motor mannerisms (e.g., hand-flapping, twirling objects)
- *Little or no eye contact Lack of interest in peer relationships
- *Lack of spontaneous or make-believe play
- *Persistent fixation on parts of objects

National Autism Awareness Month represents an excellent opportunity to promote autism awareness, autism acceptance and to draw attention to the tens of thousands facing an autism diagnosis each year.

Autism

the world from a different perspective



Each individual with autism is unique. Many of those on the autism spectrum have exceptional abilities in visual skills, music and academic skills. About 40 percent have average to above average intellectual abilities. Indeed, many persons on the spectrum take deserved pride in their distinctive abilities and “atypical” ways of viewing the world. Others with autism have significant disability and are unable to live independently. About 25 percent of individuals with ASD are nonverbal but can learn to communicate using other means.

Some Additional Challenges...

Sensory Processing

Many people with autism have unusual responses to sensory input (also called stimuli). These responses are due to difficulties in processing and integrating sensory information. Vision, hearing, touch, smell, taste, the sense of movement (vestibular system) and the sense of position (proprioception) can all be affected. This means that while information may be sensed normally, it may be perceived much differently.

Organization and Attention

Focusing or sustaining attention to subjects that others find interesting or important can be extremely difficult, while at the same time the ability to attend to something motivating to the individual with autism can maintain considerable intensity. Many autism specific interventions view building this shared focus, or ‘joint attention’ as a component of instruction. The ability to appropriately shift attention, and the speed with which this occurs, is also a noted deficit in autism. This can have profound effects on communication, learning and social ability.

Cognitive Impairment

While average or above average intelligence is intrinsic to the definition of Asperger Syndrome and usually recognized in individuals characterized as having High Functioning Autism, according to most research, some degree of cognitive impairment has been shown in a majority of individuals with classic autism.

Motor Challenges

Many people with autism experience challenges with muscle tone and/or coordination that can affect their ability to function at age appropriate levels. In some, the difficulty is in motor planning and execution. This can extend from speech to gross motor activities.

Emotional Issues, including Anxiety and Stress

Anxiety and stress are very real byproducts of the challenges of autism. Understanding this while interacting with and supporting students will be helpful. Recognizing that many of the ‘behaviors’ of autism may also be signs of stress or anxiety (pacing, distractibility, acting out, nail biting, repetitive actions, etc.) may help in determining the supports needed for an individual student.





How Do We Support Students with Autism

Below is a list of five things teachers can do to support their students with Autism:

- * Connect with the family. Share your difficulties in the classroom and collaborate with the parents on the best strategies to assist the student.
- * Make a list of the child's strengths.
- * Understand how the student learns. This child will not learn like your other students. Many students with autism learn visually. Hence, what will help is a visual schedule. Or break things up to help him understand and stay calm.
- * Ask for additional help. You have at least 20 other children looking for your guidance. Yes, it's not possible to pay attention to one child, while the others are in limbo. An aide is extremely useful in this case. She can sit with the students and guides this child when he gets inattentive, so that your class can move smoothly.
- * Have a behavior plan in place. Individuals on the spectrum get overwhelmed quickly because of something called sensory overload. It's important to pick up the early signs and have a designated area where the student can go with the aide if he has a meltdown or gets anxious. He can rejoin the class when he's ready. It makes the child feel assured and safe, and keeps your class functioning smoothly as well. A behavioral consultant can work out a customized plan, which can be followed at school.

Helping Peers Support Students with Autism

Autism education or sensitivity training can occur in a generalized manner, in which students learn about acceptance and sensitivity not related to a particular student at school. It can also be much more specific to the needs of that student and his or her family.

How to Be a Friend to Someone with Autism *adapted, Peter Faustino, PhD*

- 1 - Take the Initiative to Include Him or Her - Your friend may desperately want to be included and may not know how to ask. Be specific about what you want him to do.
- 2 - Find Common Interests - It will be much easier to talk about or share something you both like to do.
- 3 - Be Persistent and Patient - Remember that your friend with autism may take more time to respond than other people. It doesn't necessarily mean he or she isn't interested.
- 4 - Communicate Clearly - Speak at a reasonable speed and volume. It might be helpful to use short sentences. Use gestures, pictures, and facial expressions to help communicate.
- 5 - Stand Up For Him or Her - If you see someone teasing or bullying a friend with autism, take a stand and tell the person that it's not cool.
- 6 - Remember Sensory Sensitivity - Your friend may be very uncomfortable in certain situations or places (crowds, noisy areas, etc.). Ask if he or she is OK. Sometimes your friend may need a break.

For More Resources Please visit: www.autismspeaks.org

Upcoming Events:

April 19th - 21st

Spring Recess

Next Issue:

May 6, 2019