



Autism 101

Training Packet

2016



Thank you for participating in the Autism Society of Colorado's Autism 101 Training!

Autism 101 is a training offered by the Autism Society of Colorado (ASC) to organizations that are interested in learning more about autism. The presentation covers the following topics:

- What is autism?
- What does autism look like?
- How do I support an individual with autism?

Upon your request, ASC can tailor the Autism 101 presentation to meet your organization's needs. For example, we can address topics such as insurance or education. Autism 101 has been delivered to businesses, healthcare professionals, libraries, museums, schools, and more. We ask that at least 10 people attend the complementary Autism 101 presentation. For more information on how to get an Autism 101 presentation at your organization, please contact Erica deDufour, Programs Manager at erica@autismcolorado.org or call (720) 214-0794.

Please note that Autism 101 is a general overview of autism presented by ASC to provide organizations with a basic understanding of the disorder. If you are interested in learning more about autism or developing a relationship with the Autism Society of Colorado beyond the Autism 101 training, please contact Erica deDufour about ASC's Opening Doors™ program.

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What is autism?

Autism is a neurodevelopmental condition characterized by difficulty in communicating, difficulty with social interactions, repetitive behaviors and restrictive interests.

There are similarities found across the spectrum including:

- Difficulty in communicating
- Deficits in social functioning
- Restricted interests
- Repetitive behaviors

Autism is a SPECTRUM disorder, meaning every individual with autism is unique. Some individuals are less affected and are able to function well in their everyday life. Other individuals are more affected and may need help with basic functions and the support of a caregiver.



NOTE: According to the DSM-V, individuals who were diagnosed under the DSM-IV as having autistic disorder, Asperger's disorder, or pervasive developmental disorder not otherwise specified now have the diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

What is autism? - Fast Facts

Fast Facts about autism:

- Autism is a lifelong developmental disorder.
- Autism is the fastest growing serious developmental disability in the US.
- Autism is nearly five times more common in boys than girls.
- Autism can cost a family \$60,000 a year on average.
- Autism frequently occurs with other diagnoses. This is called co-morbidity.
- Autism looks different at different ages.
- Children and adults diagnosed with autism CAN learn and improve.
- Early intervention services, before age three, are critical for improving future outcomes.
- Not everyone agrees on what causes autism.
- Research indicates that there are multiple causes for autism including partly genetic and partly environmental factors.
- Autism can run in families.



What is autism? - Prevalence

Over time, the prevalence of autism has increased significantly. Check out these statistics from the Center for Disease Control (CDC):

1990: 1 in 2,500

2000: 1 in 250

2005: 1 in 166

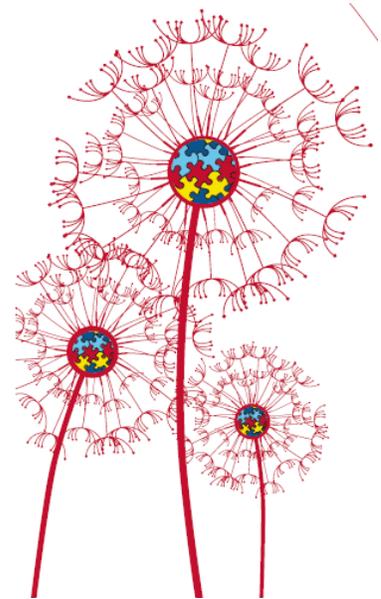
2010: 1 in 110

2012: 1 in 88

2014: 1 in 68

It is unknown why autism is becoming more and more prevalent. The following are some theories behind why we are seeing more individuals diagnosed with autism:

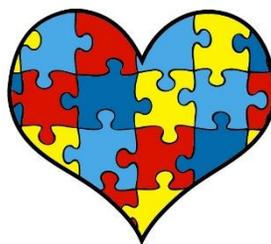
- Better awareness of autism and other developmental disorders?
- Better diagnostic tools for diagnosing children and adults with autism?
- Misdiagnosis in the past that is now being diagnosed correctly?
- Over-diagnosis of autism?
- Autism is actually occurring more often, but we do not know why or how?



What does autism look like? - Common Characteristics

Every individual with autism is UNIQUE. No two people with autism are the same. Autism is often called an invisible disability because many people with autism do not have any distinguishing physical traits. However, there are some common characteristics that individuals with autism may possess. Some examples include:

- Avoiding eye contact
- Not smiling back when someone smiles at them
- Staring at lights, ceiling fans, or their hands
- Playing alone instead of with other people
- Performing repetitive body movements such as spinning or arm flapping
- Making unusual vocalizations such as moaning or giggling
- Feeling agitated, anxious, withdrawn, or depressed
- Displaying aggressiveness or rage
- Causing self-injury or harm
- Having sleep problems
- Showing extreme giftedness or identifying as a savant
- Appearing socially awkward and not picking up on social cues
- Not responding to their name and possibly appearing deaf
- Having no fear of danger or dangerous situations
- Experiencing meltdowns
- Having sensory sensitivities



What does autism look like? - Sensory Sensitivities

Many individuals with autism experience sensitivities to various sensory inputs. Some individuals with autism may be diagnosed with Sensory Processing Disorder (SPD) or may just be sensitive to certain sensory inputs. Sensory inputs are anything that we can sense – sound, taste, touch, vision, temperature, etc. Some individuals with autism may be sensory seeking and actively seek out things that heighten their senses. Other individuals with autism may be sensory avoidant and actively avoid anything that may cause a sensory overload. Below are some examples of sensory sensitivities.

- Billy wears noise cancelling headphones in loud settings because too much noise at once makes him very uncomfortable.
- Susan wears a weighted vest because the extra weight helps sooth her and keeps her focused.
- Zack likes to carry around small objects called fidgets to keep his hands occupied and his mind in the present.
- Jen wears sunglasses almost all the time, even inside, because bright lights cause her to get very agitated and upset.
- Conner uses a wiggle seat because without it, he can't sit still or focus in class.



What does autism look like? - Meltdowns

Individuals with autism may experience meltdowns. A meltdown may look like a tantrum, but it is very different. While a tantrum is a manipulative ploy, a meltdown is a total loss of behavioral control.

Tantrum	Meltdown
Power play	Total loss of behavioral control
Aware and in control	Not a manipulative ploy
Looks to see if people are watching	Does not look around to see who's watching
Makes sure they are safe and moves away from danger	Does not consider their own safety or the safety of others
Ends once they get what they want	Nothing may appease them

If you witness a meltdown, here are some steps you can take to keep you, the person having the meltdown, and any bystanders safe:

- Top priority is to avoid injury.
- Clear the area if necessary.
- Be calm and give the person space.
- Seek out a parent or caregiver.
- Redirect the person if and when you are able to.
- Rule out medical concerns, such as migraines.



How do I support an individual with autism? - Person First Language

Use person first language. By using person first language, you are focusing on the PERSON first, not one of their many characteristics. Person first language puts the person before the disability, and describes what a person *has*, not who a person *is*. For example, would you say a “person is cancerous” or a “person has cancer”? Here are some examples of person first language:

Say:	Instead of:
Children/adults with disabilities	Handicapped, disabled, special needs person
She has autism	She is autistic
People without disabilities	Normal people
He uses a wheelchair	He is wheelchair bound

Individuals with autism or other disabilities may choose to self-identify. An individual with autism may identify as being “autistic”. Another individual with autism may identify as having Asperger’s Syndrome or as an “aspie” even though the DSM-V no longer uses this diagnosis. However a person chooses to self-identify is their choice. From an outside perspective, it is respectful and correct to always use person first language.



How do I support an individual with autism? - Create an Inclusive Environment

Creating an inclusive environment can help support individuals with autism as well as individuals without autism. Simple accommodations can make an environment much more accessible and comfortable for everyone.

Here are some steps you can take to ensure you are creating an inclusive environment:

- Allow individuals to self-identify what accommodations they may need
 - Modify environment accordingly
- Create a “safe place” if someone needs to refocus or calm down
- START with explaining expectations and norms instead of correcting behavior later
- Be aware of sensory triggers and adjust as needed
 - Lower sound levels, especially for loud or startling sounds
 - Turn down lights, especially florescent lighting
 - Turn off flashing lights including strobe lights
 - Provide a designated quiet area that is easily accessible
 - Reduce large crowds and provide ample space
 - Provide sensory fidgets – both sensory seeking and sensory reducing
- Remove social stigmas and promote acceptance

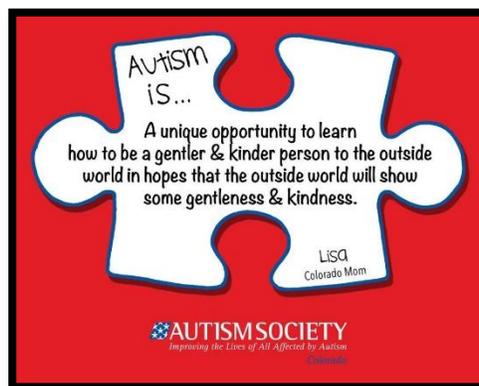


How do I support an individual with autism? - Helpful Tips

Here are some helpful tips to keep in mind:

- **Anxiety or Trauma**
 - Individuals with autism may have experienced trauma that causes anxiety in certain situations. Do your best to be empathetic and adjust the environment as needed.
- **Visual Supports**
 - Visual supports such as story boards can be very helpful for individuals with autism to keep track of their schedule and to better understand their surroundings.
- **Literal Language**
 - Individuals with autism may not understand expressions or sarcasm. Use direct, literal language to avoid offending or confusing someone.
- **Behavior is Communication**
 - An individual with autism may be non-verbal or may have difficulty communicating with words. Look for other ways an individual with autism may be communicating with you, such as body language.
- **Transition Points**
 - Sudden changes in schedule may trigger anxiety or discomfort for an individual with autism. When possible, provide structured notices about when transitions will be taking place.
- **Won't vs. Can't**
 - Be aware that there is a significant difference between "won't" and "can't". Be flexible when someone "can't" do something. Trying to force an individual to do something they "can't" do could be very unsettling for them and may trigger a meltdown.

- Time For Breaks
 - Breaks are important for individuals with autism, and for you. If you find yourself becoming frustrated or overwhelmed, take some time to yourself to refocus. Allow individuals with autism to take breaks as needed.
- Choice = Empowerment
 - An individual with autism may need to do things differently, but this doesn't mean they don't have a voice. Allow for individuals with autism to make their own decisions and empower them by presuming competence.
- Be Patient
 - Just like individuals without autism, individuals with autism have their quirks. Remember to be patient and have some grace!
- If you don't know, ask!
 - Learning about autism and creating awareness about developmental disabilities is the first step to ending negative stigmas. Instead of assuming, just ask! The more we know about autism and other developmental disabilities, the closer we will be to a stigma-free world.



About ASC

The mission of the Autism Society of Colorado is to improve the lives of all affected by autism. We do this by providing resource information through our Autism Navigation Center, providing sensory friendly and inclusive events through our Opening Doors™ program, advocating through Public Policy and our Educational Advocacy program, and hosting fundraising events throughout the year. Check out our programs, events, and volunteer and sponsorship opportunities by visiting our website or Facebook page.

Programs

Opening Doors™
Connecting Families with Autism (CFA)
Caregiver Connections Support Group
Educational Advocacy
Public Policy
Autism Navigation Resource Center
Community Connections



Events

Rocky Mountain Autism Summit – 4.19.16
Walk with Autism – Denver 6.12.16 & Colorado Springs 6.25.16
Hope Gala – 11.5.16
Ride with Autism – Summer 2016

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