

News from Psychological Services

AUTISM AWARENESS

AUTISM awareness

What is Autism?

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a developmental disability that can cause significant social, communication and behavioral challenges. According to the Centers for Disease Control, autism affects an estimated 1 in 54 children in the United States today. ASD is more than 4 times more common among boys than among girls. ASD is also reported to occur in all racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups.

There is often nothing about how people with ASD look that sets them apart from other people, but people with ASD may communicate, interact, behave, and learn in ways that are different from most other people. Because autism is a spectrum disorder, each person with autism has a distinct set of strengths and challenges. The ways in which people with autism learn, think and problem-solve can range from highly skilled to severely challenged. Some people with ASD may require significant

support in their daily lives, while others may need less support and, in some cases, live entirely independently.

Characteristics of ASD usually appear by 18 months and a reliable diagnosis can often be made by 2 years of age. Research shows that early intervention leads to positive outcomes later in life. School Psychologists, as part of a team, are qualified to identify and support students with ASD within the school setting.

DID YOU KNOW?

In 2013, the American Psychiatric Association merged four distinct autism diagnoses into one umbrella diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder (ASD). They included autistic disorder, childhood disintegrative disorder, pervasive developmental disorder-not otherwise specified (PDD-NOS) and Asperger syndrome.

April is Autism Awareness Month

Joined by the international community, hundreds of thousands of landmarks, buildings, homes and communities around the world came together on April 2, Autism Awareness Day, in recognition of people with autism and those who love and support them.

Autism-Friendly events and educational activities take place throughout the month of April, aiming to increase understanding and acceptance of people with autism, foster worldwide support and inspire a kinder, more inclusive world.



Autism Organizations

Autism Society of North Carolina
<https://www.autismsociety-nc.org/>

TEACCH Autism Program
<https://teacch.com/>

Autism Speaks
<https://www.autismspeaks.org/>

Autism Unbound
<https://autismunbound.org/>

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GCS Psychological Services



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List of Social Stories to Help in Explaining COVID-19 to Children with Autism

[Don't Share Your Germs!](#) from Autism Society of NC

[What is Coronavirus?](#) from Autism Society of NC

[No School Today](#) from Autism Society of NC

[Day Program is Closed Today](#) from Autism Society of NC

[We Have to Stay Home](#) from Autism Society of NC

[Handwashing Steps from the CDC](#) from the CDC

[Carol Gray Social Story About Pandemics and Coronavirus](#) from Carol Gray

[COVID-19 Information by and For People with Disabilities](#) from Autism Society of NC

[Informacion de COVID-19 Por y Para Personas con Discapacida](#) – Spanish from Autism Society of NC

[My Coronavirus Story Flipbook](#) from Easterseals

[Everyone Gets Sick Sometimes](#) from Autism Speaks

[What is the Coronavirus?](#) from The Autism Educator

WEBSITES/ORGANIZATIONS FOR STUDENTS AND FAMILIES WITH AUTISM COPING WITH COVID-19

Autism Speaks

COVID-19 Information and Resources

This is a centralized hub of resources for parents and teachers, including:

- Answers to common questions about the coronavirus and how it impacts the Autism community.
 - Tips on how to manage disruptions to school-based services, and how to continue clinical care while social distancing.
 - Teaching stories to help kids understand our current environment and adapt to changes in routine.
 - Links to resources for educators and healthcare professionals.
 - Links to translated resources where available.
 - Autism Speaks has a page with information on their Autism Response Team (ART), which is an information line for people with autism, or parents, grandparents, friends, teachers, social workers, and everyone in between. Call the English Toll-Free number at: 1-888-AUTISM2 (1-888-288-4762) or call the Spanish Toll-Free number at: 1-888-772-9050. The line is open from 9am-5pm. Or email the ART at help@autismspeaks.org
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Autism Society

- The Autism Society Toolkit is filled with information and resources for the Autism community on such topics as mental health, routines, lifestyle support, education, and public policy.
 - The Autism Society of NC has a COVID-19 resource page with local hotlines and resources.
 - Covid19 By and For People with Disabilities is a visual handout developed by the Autism Society with information for individuals with Autism on COVID-19.
 - The article Autism Society Staying Structured and Engaged in Challenging Times has tips and tricks on how families can help maintain routines or individuals with Autism while we are at home.
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UNC Franklin Porter Graham Child Development Institute – AFIRM Modules

<https://afirm.fpg.unc.edu/supporting-individuals-autism-through-uncertain-times>

This toolkit contains information, examples, and ready-made resources to implement 7 support strategies designed to meet the unique needs of individuals with autism during this period of uncertainty. This information has been condensed into a Supporting Individuals with Autism Through Uncertain Times Packet.

National Autism Association

National Autism Association COVID-19

This page links to a variety of resources and articles for parents as well as teaching tools for kids (handwashing tips, socially distancing tips, etc.).

Changes to NC Eligibility Requirements for Autism (January 2020)

Previous Criteria:

New Criteria:

Must demonstrate 3 out of 4:

- A) Impairments in communication
- B) Impairments in social interaction

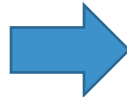


Persistent Deficits in **ALL** three

- 1) social-emotional reciprocity
- 2) nonverbal communicative behaviors
- 3) developing, maintaining and understanding relationships



- C) Unusual Response to sensory information
- D) Restricted, repetitive, or stereotypic patterns of behavior, interests and/or activities.



Restricted, repetitive behaviors, interests, or activities, manifested by **ONE OR MORE** of the following:

- 1) Stereotyped or repetitive motor movements, use of objects, or speech
- 2) Insistence of sameness, inflexible adherence to routines, or ritualized patterns of verbal or nonverbal behavior
- 3) Highly restricted, fixated interests that are abnormal in intensity or focus
- 4) Atypical responses to sensory input or atypical interests in sensory aspects of the environment.

GENERAL STRATEGIES WHEN WORKING WITH CHILDREN WITH AUTISM

Strategies for Change and Transition:

- ✓ Provide a consistent and predictable daily routine for classroom activities.
- ✓ Provide a written schedule of the day's activities.
- ✓ Minimize the number of transitions for the day—especially those involving out-of-classroom changes.
- ✓ Prepare the child in advance of specific activities or altered schedules.
- ✓ Consider an assigned seat in the cafeteria or on the school bus.

Ideas for Additional Structure:

- ✓ Provide verbal description of expected behavior and give frequent verbal/nonverbal prompts as needed for redirection.
- ✓ Become sensitive to the intensity of sensory input or to the events or situations in which the child may become over stimulated.
- ✓ Recognize the hierarchy of escalation of behavior in order to intervene at an early level and to provide a socially appropriate way for child to “withdraw” for a short time and then to rejoin the activity—this could be managed by using the things that provide comfort (i.e., reduce anxiety/stress) to the child—e.g., favorite toy, a book, listening to a taped story/music, etc., or engaging in physical activity (short walk, jump or trampoline, etc.), use of a second desk in a quiet area, etc; aggressive actions should continue to be handled immediately with removal from the situation.

Work Activity Strategies

- ✓ Help the student organize work tasks to have a clear beginning and end.
- ✓ Set up a “finished” basket or folder; work left (to do) to right (finished).
- ✓ Alternate group and individual activities.
- ✓ Alternate easy and difficult tasks.
- ✓ Provide academic assignments at his level of achievement and organized to stimulate his interests.
- ✓ Provide frequent breaks from “seat” work and/or written work; establish a routine of “work, then break”.
- ✓ Structure “free” time by allowing a choice of two activities.
- ✓ Use a timer to delineate activities and establish control.

Communication Strategies

- ✓ Provide simple and concise verbal explanation.
- ✓ Avoid lengthy verbiage.
- ✓ Provide visual stimuli with verbal directions.
- ✓ Do not assume understanding by the child’s “echoing” what was said to him or her.
- ✓ Continue to encourage use of words to ask for help or express needs/wants; praise child for asking for what he/she wants.
- ✓ Teach reciprocity of social conversation, even though the response may seem “practiced” at first.
- ✓ Be accepting of the response style in processing language and in retrieving information.

Social Skills Strategies

- ✓ Social interaction with others may need to be encouraged and structured-perhaps with one other student, then building to small and large groups.
- ✓ Teach the child what to say and how to say it to build his repertoire of response to various social situations.
- ✓ Attempt to determine the signs of escalating agitation and intervene at an early level.
- ✓ Help the child to develop a list of specific concrete steps to follow when he becomes upset (e.g., put hands in pocket so as not to strike out or hit; close eyes and breathe deeply, etc.).
- ✓ Teach other response choices to becoming upset (e.g., ask for help).
- ✓ Aggressive actions should continue to be handled immediately with removal from the situation.

Sensory Strategies

- ✓ Provide hand-held fidgets - think dollar store or party favors. Examples include stress balls, rubber squish toys, Velcro under desk, piece of yarn with beads, fabrics of different textures.
- ✓ Designate a “calming area” in classroom with pillows, blankets, stuffed toys, bean bag chairs, headphones, drawing paper and crayons.
- ✓ Hand compressions (student holds hands together as if praying, pushes hands together)
- ✓ Firm pressure/ “squishing” with pillows, blankets, and bean bag chairs, etc.
- ✓ Use of weight – back pack with books, weighted vests, blankets, pillows, balls, 2-liter bottles (filled with water, baby oil, food coloring, and glitter; seal lid with duct tape), etc.
- ✓ Wear a weighted backpack or hold a small basket with materials placed in them along with a text book or other weighted item).
- ✓ Have students carry heavy loads in backpack or be the “door opener” during transitions.

Strategies for Perfectionistic Students

- ✓ Help the student set reasonable goals. For example, if reading is tough, a reasonable goal may be to expect a B instead of an A. Help the student celebrate goals attained.
- ✓ Focus and talk about the student’s strengths. Help recognize various strengths and encourage him to rely on them. Help him understand that no one excels at everything.
- ✓ Notice and talk about what the student is doing without judgment. A child with perfectionist tendencies is usually overly self-critical.
- ✓ Encourage the student to think of several possible answers to questions. You want child to realize that there are often many solutions to problems and not just one right answer.
- ✓ Help the student view past mistakes as learning experiences. Perfectionists often dwell on goof-ups. Explain that you understand the disappointment in performance but help child to realize that it is over. Encourage child to look to the future and see what he/she might do differently. Help child to see that there will just be days when he/she won’t do as well as hoped.
- ✓ Encourage the student to take up a hobby. Hobbies are a source of enjoyment and are things she can do alone without being compared to others. There is no pressure involved and the hobby can release stress. Any creative outlet that is not graded will do.
- ✓ Focus on what the student is learning and doing in school and not just the grade received. This focus will help the student enjoy the learning process rather than being obsessed about getting straight A’s.