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& RELATED DISORDERS

# Understanding Autism

**A Toolkit for Teachers**



# Objectives

- ▶ Define Autism
- ▶ How to effectively communicate with people with special needs
- ▶ Identify how to address safety concerns
- ▶ Identify deficits in daily living skills
- ▶ Identify how to teach social skills
- ▶ Identify how to manage challenging behaviors



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# Autism

## DSM-5 Diagnostic Descriptors: ASD

- Must meet the following criteria:
  - Persistent deficits in social communication/social interaction across multiple contexts
    - Ex: deficits in nonverbal communication, deficits in developing, maintaining, and understanding relationships, deficits in social-emotional reciprocity
  - Restricted, repetitive patterns of behavior, interests, activities manifested by at least two specific examples
    - Ex. stereotyped/repetitive movements OR rituals OR fixated, restrictive interests OR hyper-or hyporeactivity to sensory input
  - Symptoms must be present in early developmental period
  - Symptoms limit and impair everyday functioning
  - Disturbances are not explained by intellectual disability
- Severity is based upon:
  - Social communication impairments and restrictive, repetitive patterns of behavior.



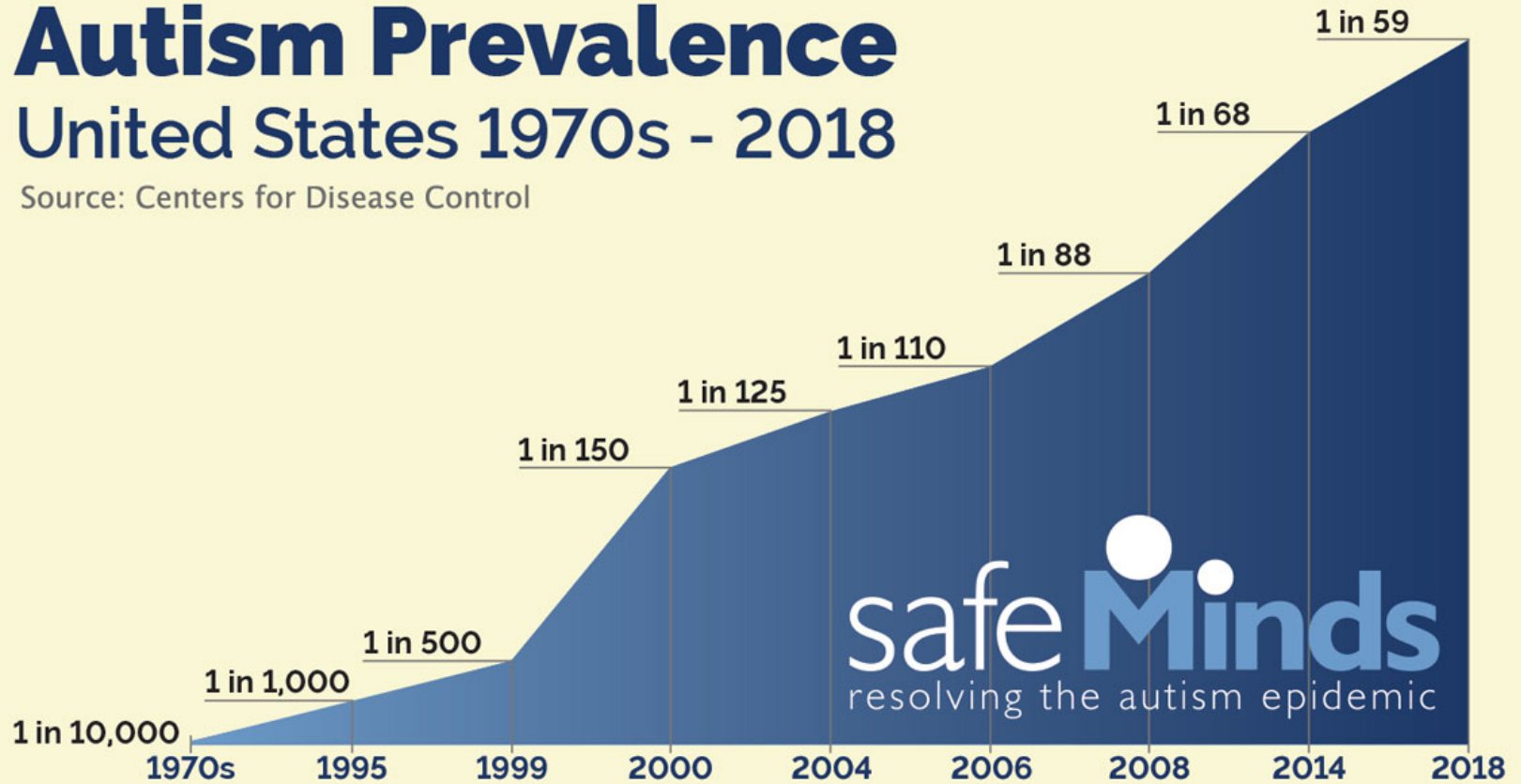


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# Current Data

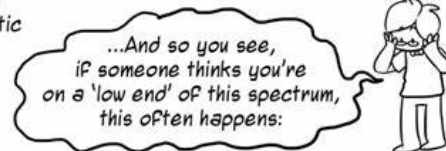
## Autism Prevalence United States 1970s - 2018

Source: Centers for Disease Control

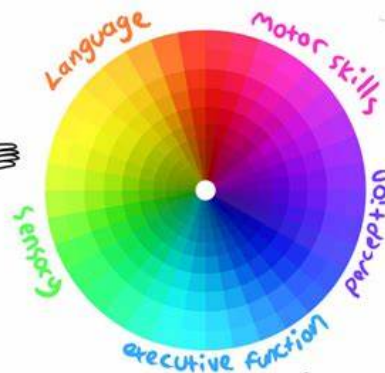




Not autistic  Very autistic



The truth is though, someone who is neurodiverse in some areas of their brain, will also be no different to your average person in other areas of their brain.



You see, the autistic spectrum looks something more like this.



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# Communication

- ▶ Children with autism have varied language abilities with both receptive and expressive language.
  - Receptive language is the ability to understand information. It involves understanding the words, sentences and meaning of what others say or what is read.
  - Expressive language means being able to put thoughts into words and sentences, in a way that makes sense and is grammatically accurate.



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# Communication

- ▶ Provide simple and clear instructions.
  - Example– “Come here” instead of “Hey buddy, why don’t you come on over here.”
  - “Walk with me.” instead of “give me your hand so we can walk together.”





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# Communication

- ▶ Tell them what you want them to do as opposed to what not to do.
  - This will help the child understand what you want them to do while providing clear instructions.
  - Example– “Feet on the floor” instead of “We don’t stand on the chair”
  - “Hands down” instead of “Stop flapping your hands.”



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# Communication

- ▶ **Ways to prompt**
  - Model prompting– show them how to do something
  - Physical prompting– physically guide a child to do something
  - Gesture prompting– doing things such as pointing to the object they need to get.



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# Safety

- ▶ Lack of safety awareness
  - Run away from caregivers
  - Running in streets or parking lots
  - Lack of understanding of kitchen safety



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# Safety

- ▶ Lack of “stranger danger”
  - Physical contact with strangers
  - Providing too much information to strangers



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# Safety

- ▶ Stay close to the child at all times
- ▶ Be aware of surroundings to ensure the environment is safe
- ▶ Stay 1 step ahead
- ▶ Position yourself to prevent behaviors



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# Daily Living

- ▶ Delays in
  - Toilet training
  - Picky eating habits
  - Fine motor delays which could make dressing/fasteners more difficult
    - Arts and crafts can be non-preferred due to fine motor delays
    - Writing and typing skills can be difficult



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# Daily Living

- ▶ Keep instructions simple and break down into steps.
  - Example– instead of telling a child “wash your hands”, they may need step by step instructions– “turn the water on. Get your hands wet. Get soap. Scrub the soap on your hands...etc.”



# Behavior Management

- ▶ **ALL behavior is COMMUNICATION**
  - The things we want / need → motivate us to engage in behaviors to meet those needs
  - The consequence of our behaviors → increase or decrease our likelihood of engaging in that behavior again in the future





# Behavior Management

- ▶ Aggression (hitting, biting, throwing things, etc)
- ▶ Tantrums (crying, yelling, screaming)
- ▶ Whining
- ▶ Self-Injurious behaviors (banging head, biting self, etc.)
- ▶ Non-compliance (refusing to respond or refusing requests)
- ▶ Eloping (getting up and leaving, escaping, etc.)
- ▶ Spitting
- ▶ Pica
- ▶ Stereotypy or Self-Stimulatory behavior



# Behavior Management

- ▶ **Stereotypy or Self-Stimulatory behavior**
  - Self-talk, pacing, jumping, hand-flapping
  - This is often used to self-soothe and can help calm a child in stressful situations
  - If in a new setting or following a different routine, it may help a child cope with the changes.



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# Behavior Management

- ▶ **Motivation is broken into four categories:**
  - “Functions of Behaviors”
    - **Escape**– to get out of doing something they don’t want to do.
    - **Attention**– doing something to get a reaction from others– can be both positive or negative attention.
    - **Tangible**– because they want something.
    - **Automatic**– the behavior itself feels good or serves a purpose.



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# Behavior Management

- ▶ Tips to dealing with behaviors
  - Try to stop a behavior before it occurs
    - Catch the child doing the ‘good stuff’
      - Point out the things that they are doing well or that you want them to do again, no matter how small it is.
- Examples–
  - Thank you for walking so nicely!
  - Great job putting your lunch away!



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# Behavior Management

## ► Ignore the behavior

- Because kids can do things to get attention from adults, we try to ignore the behavior.
  - Be sure that you ignore the behavior, not the child
  - If a child is crying, don't say 'stop crying'. Instead tell them what you want him to do. Such as 'sit down'.
  - If a child is hitting, don't say 'No hitting'. Instead say 'finish your arts and crafts'.
  - If a child is ignoring you, don't say 'Stop ignoring me'. Instead say 'Look at me.'
- **TIP: Try not to show an emotional response when managing behavior – keep your game face on!**



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# Behavior Management

- ▶ Effective ways to communicate
  - Use a neutral and calm tone of voice when addressing behaviors
  - Using a 'sing-song' voice may be helpful
  - Explaining your own behavior.
    - Ex. "I'm going to hold your hand so we can walk to the playground."



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# Behavior Management

## ► Other helpful information

- Be patient
  - Providing extra time for a child to respond to instructions
- Use visuals such as a picture schedule of activities for the day
- Provide the child with choices
- Explain your own behaviors so the child knows what to expect
  - Ex. “I’m going to hold your hand while we walk to the playground.”



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# Teaching New Skills in the Classroom

- ▶ Keep instructions simple
  - When the child is a new learner, use as few words and possible to ensure they understand what is being asked.
    - Ex. “Touch red.” “Wash hands.” “Sit.”
  
- ▶ Group instructions
  - Make sure you have the child’s attention before giving group instructions.
  - Get down on the child’s level and check for understanding of the instruction.





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# Teaching New Skills in the Classroom

- ▶ **Provide consequences**
  - It is important to let the child know if their response was correct or not.
    - For a correct response, provide praise, high fives, etc.
    - For an incorrect response, provide neutral corrective feedback such as “No, try again.”



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# Teaching New Skills in the Classroom

## ► Provide Visuals

- Use visual schedules to show what is expected
- Use calendars to show the kids what will happen each day
- Label work centers that correspond with the schedule



# Promoting Social Skills

- ▶ Individuals with autism often have deficits in social skills
  - This **does not** mean that don't want social interaction, attention, and relationships! It simply means they don't always know how to go about it.
  - Examples:
    - *Children may not remember to greet adults and peers*
    - *Children may not know how to approach peers and initiate play*
    - *Children may not know how to share toys*
    - *Children may not know how to ask for help from adults*



# Promoting Social Skills

- ▶ Model acceptance and celebrate differences!
  - Praise all children and point out their individual strengths
    - E.g., “Logan is so good at puzzles!”
  - Pair kids up and teach them how to give their peers simple instructions
    - Encourage them to be helpers and praise them for being nice! Public recognition goes a long way!



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# ■ Questions