



Autism spectrum disorder

"If you have met one person with autism, you have met one person with autism."

- Dr. Stephen Shore

What is autism?

Autism is a developmental disability that affects how we experience the world around us. There is no one way to be autistic. Some autistic people can speak, and some autistic people need to communicate in other ways. Some autistic people also have intellectual disabilities, and some autistic people don't. Some autistic people need a lot of help in their day-to-day lives, and some autistic people only need a little help. Autism affects how we think, how we communicate, and how we interact with the world.

(From [Autistic Self Advocacy Network](#), accessed 7/19/24)

- Excellent memory skills
- Attention to detail
- Honest and direct
- Thrive with routine
- Rule-oriented
- Extensive knowledge about topics of interest
- Logical thinking
- Visual learners

Common Strengths



- Social interaction and understanding
- Language skills, including spoken words and unspoken communication
- Repetitive themes & behaviors
- Sensory Processing
- Desire for Routine
- Perspective-taking ability

Common Areas of Difference



To be a friend:

- Be patient, give the person time to answer. If not through words, ask someone who knows the person well (group home staff, a teacher, e.g.) the best way to communicate.
- Ask about favorite hobbies and try to find common interests. Once on a favorite topic, it can be difficult to focus on something else. You may need to use gentle prompting or redirection at some point.
- Offer clear choices or concise directions. Example: “Would you like to go ride bikes or go for a walk?” Open-ended choices can sometimes be confusing and give someone with ASD anxiety.
- Don’t be offended by a lack of eye contact or understanding of personal boundaries. These are common challenges for a person with ASD. If the individual is too close and you are feeling uncomfortable, be kind and direct. Example: “Johnny, could you please stand back a few feet?” (using your arm to show distance will help). Say “thank you” to acknowledge the adjustment.
- Understand that your interaction may be interrupting a daily routine, and that may cause behaviors in response.
- People with ASD tend to think literally, so may not understand slang or idioms. An example would be phrases like “break a leg,” “it will be a piece of cake” or “that is so cool.”

References

- “About Autism.” Autism Support of Kent County, autismsupportofkentcounty.org/about-autism
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- “Autism Statistics and Facts.” Autism Speaks, autismspeaks.org/autism-statistics-asd
- Sensory Processing Tips & Social Skills Tips, With Ministries: withministries.org/adapting-the-sessions-to-the-needs-of-your-group/