


Autism 101

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Autism Society
Central Virginia

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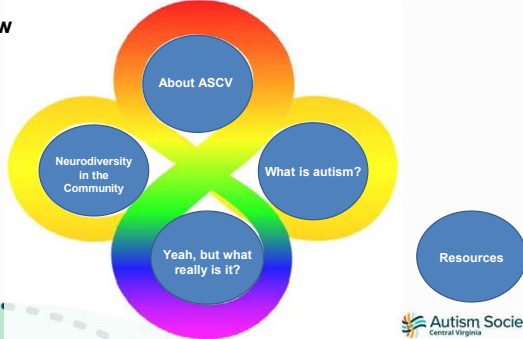
Learning Objectives:

- Define autism as a neurological difference that affects how people think, communicate, move, interact, and perceive the world.
- Describe how autism can affect each person differently.
- Identify several common characteristics of autistic people.
- Challenge some myths and misconceptions about autism with facts outlined in the presentation.
- Discuss strategies for allying with the autism community.

Autism Society
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Overview



Autism Society
Central Virginia

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About ASCV



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Autism Society of Central Virginia

For over 40 years, the ASCV has served as one of the region's premier sources of education, advocacy, services and support for individuals with autism, their families and friends, and professionals.

Our mission is to create connections, empowering everyone in the autism community with the resources needed to live fully.

We believe all autistic individuals and their families deserve access to high-quality programs, support services, and community-based activities.




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ASCV: Services & Supports

We provide services and supports at any age, and any stage, from diagnosis throughout the lifespan.

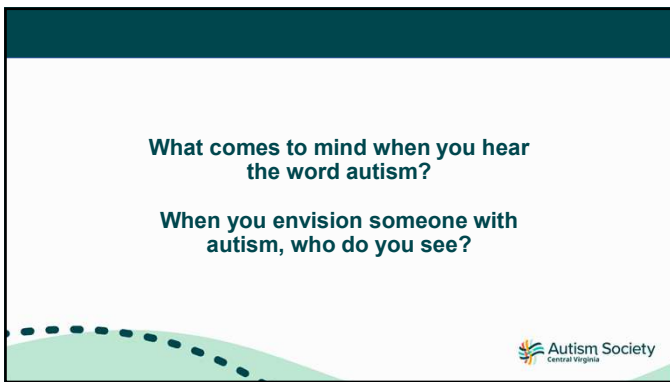
- Social & Recreational Activities
- Family & Caregiver Support Groups
- Educational Workshops
- Information & Referral Services
- Scholarships & Financial Assistance Programs
- Advocacy Initiatives



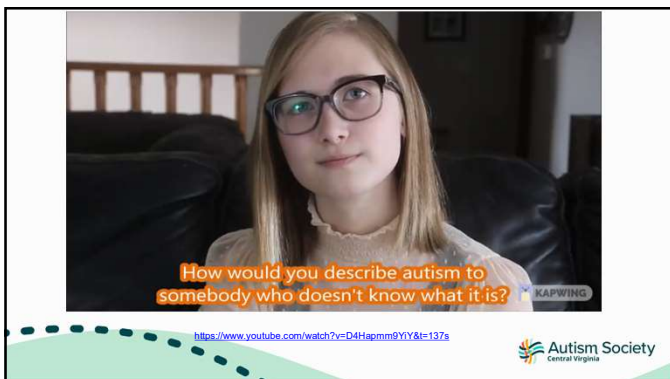

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Autism

Autism is a lifelong brain difference that impacts the way a person thinks, communicates, interacts with others, moves, and interprets the world around them.

1 in 44 children in the United States are identified as being autistic (CDC 2022).

- Some people get diagnosed in adulthood or do not get formally diagnosed.





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Each Autistic Person is Unique

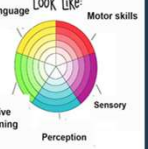
“If you’ve met one person with autism, you’ve met one person with autism.”
– Dr. Stephen Shore


WHAT PEOPLE THINK the AUTISM SPECTRUM LOOKS LIKE:



Less autistic More autistic



WHAT IT CAN ACTUALLY LOOK LIKE:





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- Invisible disability
- **PRESUME COMPETENCE**
 - Every autistic individual has the ability to learn, think, and understand

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Talking About Autism

- **Person-First vs. Identity-First Language**
 - Person with autism
 - Autistic person
- Pay attention to personal preferences, and when in doubt- ask!
- **Support Needs vs. Functioning Labels**
 - Requires substantial support to _____, minimal support to _____
- "Everyone is a little autistic."

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Gender

Autism, as diagnosed, is 4x more prevalent in boys than those assigned female at birth.

- Presents differently across genders
 - Masking/camouflaging
- Gender identity tends to be more diverse in autistics than in the general population
- Differences in evaluation, diagnosis, and services

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As well as how they interact with me so that I can simulate that with other people when I'm trying to communicate

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kAImKqW1kM&t=61s>

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Race & SES

Autism occurs in all racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds.

- White children are about 19% more likely than Black children and 65% more likely than Latinx children to be diagnosed with autism
- White children and those of higher socioeconomic status are more likely to be both identified and diagnosed earlier compared with Black, Latinx, and Asian children, as well as children from low-income families



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Culture

Autistic experiences differ across cultures.

- Understanding, interpretation, acceptance
- Access to and utilization of supports and services
- Expression



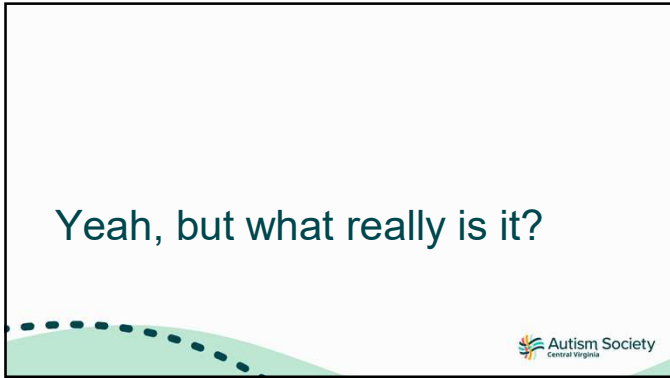
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Characteristics

- Characteristics of autism are typically present before the age of 3
- Co-occurring medical and psychological conditions are common
 - Auditory processing disorder, ADHD, Tourette's, OCD, epilepsy
- Autism is not classified as a mental illness
- There is no known cause for autism
 - Combination of genetic and environmental influences
- Therapies are designed to support skill development on the individualized level



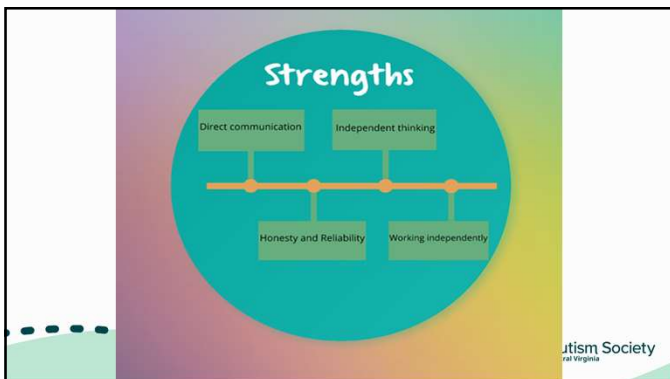
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Social Differences

- Developing and maintaining relationships
- Might not show* anticipatory behaviors
- Might not see* shared enjoyment and/or interests with others
- Might not display* shared interest through joint attention

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Empathy

Myth: Autistic people do not feel empathy.

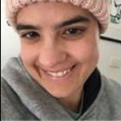
May have delays or challenges with:

- Guessing how someone is feeling
- Understanding/being able to adhere to unspoken social rules
 - What to do when someone feels _____
 - Being quiet in a museum
 - Staying seated in class




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Communication Differences



SiennaWrites
<https://neuroplastic.com/autistic-listening-you-cannot-tell-if-i-am-paying-attention/>


Most of the time, you cannot tell if I am paying attention.

I might be looking the wrong way...I might appear to be focused on something else...I might even be playing a game on my iPad.

But that doesn't mean I'm not listening; in fact, most of the above things *help* me listen.

...if I am trying to make eye contact, words go out the window. They make no sense. Ditto if there's a lot of background noise, or if I'm busily trying to type out a response on my AAC.



But it's easier for me to understand you when I'm doing something that takes a small amount of my concentration.



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Communication Differences

- **Challenges with using/interpreting nonverbal behaviors**
 - Eye gaze, gestures, body language, etc.
- **Limited or exaggerated facial expressions**
- **Avoiding eye contact and looking at people**
- **Unique tone and/or intonation when speaking**
 - "Robotic," "singsong"

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True or False:
Most autistic people speak to communicate.




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True: About 1/3 of autistics are believed to be non-speaking or minimally speaking.

- **Some children learn to speak at a later than average age**
- **Some people remain non-speaking, minimally speaking, or unable to express their ideas accurately through speech**
 - Apraxia
- **Assistive Augmentative Communication (AAC)**
 - Pictures
 - Letterboards
 - Typing
 - ASL

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“Listen”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H7dca7U7G8>



The slide features a dark teal header with the word "Listen" in white. Below the header is a white area with a URL. At the bottom, there is a green decorative wave and the Autism Society Central Virginia logo.

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Restricted and Repetitive Patterning Characteristics



STRENGTHS

COMMUNICATION DIFFERENCES

INTERESTS & BEHAVIORS

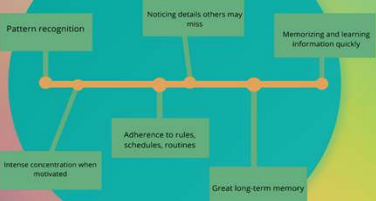
SENSORY DIFFERENCES

Prezi Creativity

The slide has a colorful background with a central dark teal circle containing the title and a photo of a person walking. Surrounding the circle are four teal circles with labels: STRENGTHS, COMMUNICATION DIFFERENCES, INTERESTS & BEHAVIORS, and SENSORY DIFFERENCES. Logos for Prezi and Creativity are at the bottom.

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Strengths



Pattern recognition

Noticing details others may miss

Memorizing and learning information quickly

Adherence to rules, schedules, routines

Intense concentration when motivated

Great long-term memory

Society

The slide features a central teal circle with the word "Strengths" and a diagram of six interconnected boxes listing various strengths. The Society logo is at the bottom right.

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Communication Differences

- Difficulty with back-and-forth conversations
- Difficulty with talking spontaneously without a script
 - Social Story
- Echolalia

1. Jamie hears a knock on the door.
 2. Before opening the door, she asks who it is and looks out the window. Jamie would never unlock the door.
 3. The person behind the door provides an answer.
 4. Jamie repeats the door's locked and goes to get an adult, who will open the door.

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Interests and Behaviors

- Repetitive movements and activities
 - "Stimming"
 - Hand flapping, clapping, finger flicking, rocking, grimacing, etc.
 - Repetitive and/or "odd" use of language
 - Listening to or watching something repetitively
- Distress with transitions or changes in routine
- Established rituals
 - Strong preference or insistence on following routines in precise detail
- Focus on small details rather than the big picture
- Special interests

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LyeJEmEKVU&t=331s>


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Sensory Differences


- Marked distress over changes in seemingly trivial aspects of the environment
- Attraction to certain tastes, textures, smells, colors, movements, etc.
 - "Picky eater"


YOUR 8 SENSES



VISUAL



AUDITORY



OLFACTORY



TACTILE


VESTIBULAR


PROPRIOCEPTION


INTEROCEPTION






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Thinking in Pictures, or Other Characteristics of Autistic Minds


STRENGTHS



COMMUNICATION DIFFERENCES

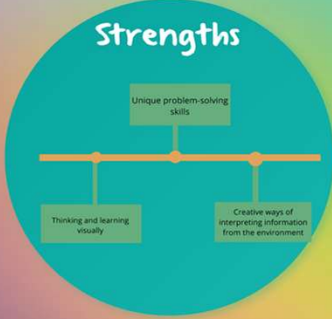
INTERESTS & BEHAVIORS


SENSORY DIFFERENCES



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Strengths







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Communication Differences

- Can recite information but has challenges applying it
- Challenges with executive functioning
 - Planning and completing tasks


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Interests and Behaviors



Trevor Byrd (Trevor Types)
<https://neuroclassic.com/intographics/>




I spend a lot of time thinking about how my brain and body are operating on different platforms. It's like my body is a Mac, and my brain is an Android. The two can work together, but it takes a lot of effort... and it is not intuitive.



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Interests and Behaviors

- **Motor differences**
 - Dyspraxia
 - Apparent "clumsiness": bumping into things, tripping, dropping items
 - Walking on toes
 - Messy handwriting
 - Moves very slowly, quickly, or seemingly without control
 - Difficulty walking long distances

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Sensory Differences

- **Over- or under-reactivity to sensory stimulation**
 - Differences with filtering and processing input
 - Sensory Processing Disorder
 - Sensory seekers and sensory avoiders
- **Synesthesia**

Processing language from more than one person adds to the struggle.

Speak with me! Speak with me! Speak with me!

Ugh! I can't hear it any more!

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True or False:

Autistic children (and adults) tend to have more temper tantrums than non-autistic people.

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False: Autistic people do not have more tantrums than non-autistics.

[@SupernovaMamma](#)

Tantrum		Meltdown
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has a goal Because they want or don't want to do something Needs attention Ends when they get what they want Can be regulated 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hitting Stomping Screaming Self-harming Kicking Throwing Biting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No goal Sensory, emotional, or social overload Does not need attention Unconscious reaction/involuntary response Inability to think Unlimited time frame Overwhelming and draining

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False: Autistic people do not have more tantrums than non-autistics.

Shutdown

No goal


Sensory, emotional, or social overload

Does not need attention

Unconscious reaction/involuntary response

Inability to think, move, respond

Unlimited time frame



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False: Autistic people do not have more tantrums than non-autistics.

Meltdown Response

Affirm safety

Provide calming sounds

Give person some space, but be close enough to respond to harming stimuli if needed

Let person come to you when ready

Shutdown Response

Dark, quiet space


Alone time to recuperate


Compassion

Patience

Minimize sensory input

Ask beforehand what a person needs for support





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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K2P4Ed6G3gw>



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Some behavior is communication.

- **Exchange of messages socially**
 - "For you"
- **Disinhibition- inability to control behavior due to brain differences**
 - Meltdowns, tics, and other behaviors are not "for you"
 - Words and actions may be the opposite message of what a person wants to express
- **Misunderstanding**
 - Accusations of attention-seeking
 - Gaslighting
 - Discipline
 - Exclusion





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Neurodiversity in the Community



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Tim Chan
<https://reframingautism.org.au/tim-chan-flourishing-after-school/>

Awareness to Acceptance and Inclusion


Two kinds of acceptance
 - Acceptance by others "You're ok"
 - Self-acceptance - "I'm ok" involves choice

Authenticity is to be able to show our inner selves without fear.
 Authenticity follows acceptance
 We can be authentic when we are accepted as ourselves.
 For People with CCN, added issues with acceptance.
 Acceptance is deeply felt.
 Acceptance means we are don't have to hide our autistic "isms".

I am situated? Authenticity means being true to ourselves, and to be able to show the


KAPWING



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How to be an Ally

- **Listen to autistic people, whether they speak or not**
 - It's not about you
 - Be patient
- **Respect**
 - Privacy, bodies, communication
 - Autonomy
 - "How can I help?"
- **Talk about autism respectfully**
 - Different, not less
 - No blaming or shaming
 - Be a Mythbuster!




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How to be an Ally

- **Don't make assumptions**
- **Partner with autistic people**
- **Learn from mistakes**
 - Ask for feedback





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Sabrina Guerra
Nonspeaking Advocate for Change
<https://neuroclastic.com/arresting-ableism-insight-and-experiences-of-a-nonspeaking-autistic/>

Anything and everything depends on writing and speaking one's truth and others being willing to listen. People fail disabled folk when they refuse to accept all ways of being human. In a more perfect world agency would be respected, disability rights honored, and brave hearts exalted. I and others have wisdom for a deprived and hostile world. Skilled allies wanted.



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Resources



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Autism Society of America Affiliates

- Get connected to affiliates in your area!
- 57 affiliates


<https://autismsociety.org/contact-us/#affiliate-list>




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Additional Resources

- Autism Society of Central Virginia (ASCV) - www.ascv.org
- VCU Autism Center for Excellence (VCU-ACE) - <https://vcuautismcenter.org/>
- Autistic Self Advocacy Network - <https://autisticadvocacy.org/>
- Autistic Women & Nonbinary Network (AWN) - <https://awnnetwork.org/>
- Neuroclastic- <https://neuroclastic.com>
- Ask Me, I'm an AAC User!- <https://www.facebook.com/groups/456220758119314/about/>
- Employer Assistance and Resource Network on Disability Inclusion (EARN) – Neurodiversity in the Workplace Toolkit - <https://askearn.org/page/neurodiversity-in-the-workplace>



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