

MODULE 4

Autism Spectrum Disorder Ref.: © 2006 Possibilities, Inc.

The following activities have been taken from ***Activities and Resources for Teaching Students About Disabilities*** by Bev Adcock and Michael L. Remus.

Autism is a developmental disability that usually appears during the first three years of life. The cause is unknown. It affects how a person's brain works, but not all people with autism are affected the same way.

When a person has autism, they may have difficulty:

- letting you know what they want;
- thinking;
- understanding what other people say or want;
- ignoring sounds;
- ignoring things or people that are moving;
- ignoring lights;
- being touched;
- understanding social rules;
- showing affection;
- controlling their feelings;
- knowing how to play with other kids; and
- dealing with changes.

Autism is a "spectrum disorder." That means that not everyone with autism has all of the above. One person may have three of the difficulties listed while another person has only one. Some people with autism struggle to learn. Other people with autism are very smart and can do complicated math when they are 3 years old. Some people with autism have trouble being touched while others like to hug etc.

Many people with autism like to do things in the same order all the time and have things arranged the same way. This helps them stay calm.

Other people with autism have a very hard time ignoring noises, especially if they are upset or in a new situation. They may try to calm themselves by rocking, moaning, talking loudly or even screaming. The moaning, talking or screaming helps them drown out the other noises so they can calm down. They may also try to go under a desk or in a small, dark place where they feel safer.

Activity

This activity is designed to show how people with autism are bothered by things most people don't notice. People with autism are often extra sensitive to noise, movement and even things like background noises most of us don't notice. Remember, not everyone with autism will react to all of these.

Divide the class into groups of 5. Explain that they will each have a job to do. Go over their jobs and tell them they will start when you give the signal.

One student in each group will play the part of someone with autism. The other 4 people each have different jobs:

Person #1 - You will play the part of a person with autism. Your job is to try and listen to what Person #5 is reading to you so you can take a test on the material. Try to ignore everyone else.

Person #2 - Stand behind the student playing the part of someone with autism. Rub the edge of an index card (or piece of cardboard) against the back of their neck. You do not need to rub hard, but keep doing it over and over.

Person #3 - Grab a book (any book will do), lean close to Person #1 and read in a loud voice the entire time.

Person #4 - Pat Person #1 on the head and shoulder the entire time.

Person #5 - Using a normal voice, read a paragraph to Person #1 then ask them questions about what you read. Do NOT try to drown out the other noises.

Have all the students take a turn being Person #1 before you discuss it. How did it feel to be have so much commotion going on? Did it make them want to scream or get away? Were they able to concentrate on the paragraph being read? What might have helped?

Useful websites

Autism Awareness Australia

www.autismawareness.com.au

Ted.com

[www.ted.com/talks/rosie king how autism freed me to be myself](http://www.ted.com/talks/rosie_king_how_autism_freed_me_to_be_myself)