



# **Understanding Autism Spectrum Disorders: Journey through the lifespan**



# Pathfinders for Autism

*A parent sponsored, Maryland nonprofit organization dedicated to improving the lives of individuals with autism and their families.*



# Why Should You Care?

- About **1 in 59** children has been identified with an autism spectrum disorder (ASD) according to estimates from the CDC.
  - **1 in 38** boys
  - **1 in 50** children in Maryland
  - **1 in 31** boys in Maryland
  - **About 4 times** more common in boys



Please put your right hand in the air

# What is Autism?

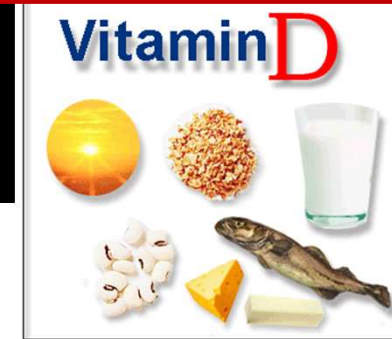
Autism is a neurological development disorder affecting multiple areas of the brain and body. It is NOT a mental or psychological disorder.

No known cause.

No known cure.

# Treating Autism

- Early Intervention
- Therapies
  - Physical
  - Occupational
  - Speech
  - Behavioral interventions
  - Medications
  - Biomedical
  - Special diets
- Some people may need services and supports their entire lives





This is Dev





This is Grant



# Autism Spectrum Disorder

- **CLASSIC  
AUTISM**

PDD-NOS

- **ASPERGER'S  
SYNDROME**



- Severe
- More supports needed

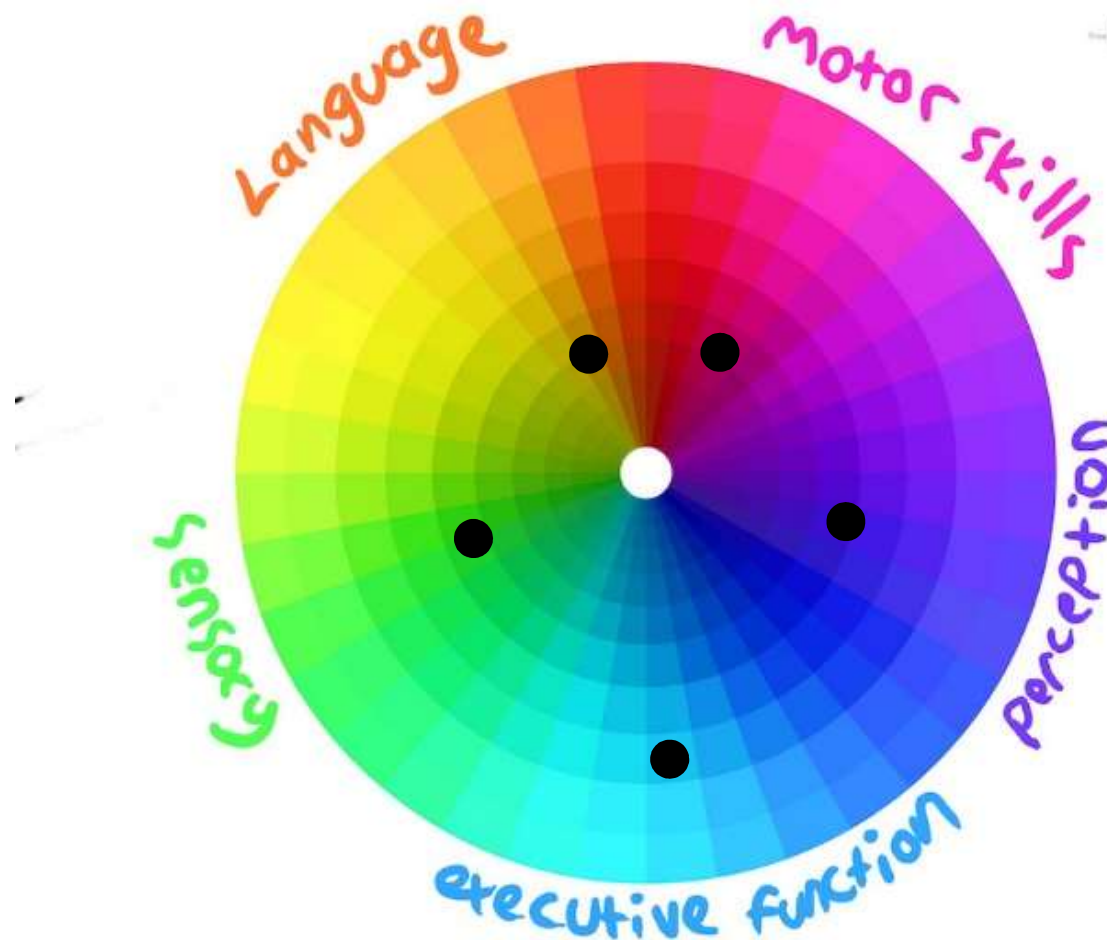
- Mild
- High IQ
- Fewer supports needed



# Providing Assistance to a Person with Autism

## PRESUME INTELLECT

# The Autism Spectrum Looks More Like This



Spectrum design by Rebecca Burgess

# When Interacting with a Person with Autism. . .



**ANXIETY**



**PROCESSING**



**BEHAVIOR**

# Individuals with Autism MAY Demonstrate Difficulty with:

- Communication
- Sensory processing
- Social interaction
- Behavior

# Exercise Time

# Communication

- Both verbal and non verbal
- May be verbal, but unable to sustain a conversation
- May only cite scripts or use echolalia
- May use repetitive or idiosyncratic language
- May use alternative mode of communication – iPad or other assistive technology, gestures, sign language, PECS

# PECS Symbols

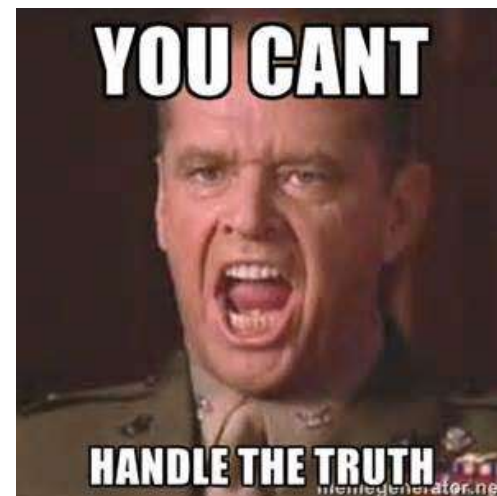
## Picture Exchange Communication Symbols



Courtesy of [www.speakingofspeech.com](http://www.speakingofspeech.com)

# Communication

- May only understand direct language
  - May be able to speak but answers may seem blunt or tactless
  - Unable to understand sarcasm, metaphors





# Communication/Language Processing Disorder



# Communication/Language Processing Disorder

- May appear deaf and may not respond to verbal cues
- Receptive and Expressive Language may require additional processing time



# Communication/Language Processing Disorder





# Sensory Processing

- ▶ sensitivity to sound, light and touch
- ▶ easily over-stimulated
- ▶ under-stimulated
- ▶ difficulty with body awareness and balance

# When Interacting with a Person with a Developmental Disability . . .

- Be patient and give the person space
- Be alert to signs of increased frustration and try to eliminate the source if possible as behavior may escalate
- Avoid quick movements and loud noises
- Do not touch the person unless absolutely necessary



# Social Interaction

- May not make eye contact
- May not pick up on social cues or body language
- May not understand personal space
- May be huggers or kissers

# Social Interaction

- May lack social or emotional reciprocity
- May not respond “appropriately” – may laugh or giggle at inappropriate times
- May not develop peer relationships



# “Bad Behaviors”

- All behaviors should be seen as communication
  - RULE OUT PAIN
- Obsessive tendencies and impulsive acts
  - REDEFINED

# Behavioral Effects

- May have obsessive tendencies
- May act impulsively
- Anxiety creates repetition
- Medication effects

# Lifespan Considerations

- Puberty/Sexuality
- Seizures
- Healthcare Transition
- DDA/SSI
- Safety/Wandering and Elopement

# Things to Remember

- Remember the “20 second rule”
- Sit Down; Not take your seat
- Anxiety UP; Processing DOWN; Behavior UP
- More than one way to present information
- Minimize sensory distractions
- Behavior is communication
- Be flexible

# What Does Autism Look Like?



# Providing Assistance to a Person with Autism

## PRESUME INTELLECT



HELPLINE NUMBER: (443) 330-5341

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## Autism by Age

Explore resources for individuals with autism at any age.

LEARN MORE

[www.pathfindersforautism.org](http://www.pathfindersforautism.org)



FOR MORE INFORMATION



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