Autism: Bus Drivers and Bus Attendants

The Specialized Programs Team

DIAL: Division of Inclusive and Accessible Learning

Fall 2024







AGENDA

- 1. What is Autism?
- 2. Communication
- 3. Sensory Processing
- 4. Behavior Considerations
- 5. Bus Strategies





Before we begin ...

Who has someone in their lives with autism?





Why are we here today?

Understanding autism, as well as the strengths and needs of a specific student with autism, is important for the transportation department when planning, as well as the drivers and aides who may transport them.

Becoming aware of characteristics of autism as well as student's specific needs can be helpful in avoiding or managing upsetting situations.







Autistic People...

Think differently

Process sensory information differently

Communicate and socialize differently

Might need help with activities of daily living









What is Autism?

Autism:

- is a developmental disability
- affects the parts of the brain that impact social, communication skills and cognitive functions

Students with autism have unique abilities and needs which require special considerations in designing, implementing and evaluating their educational programs. This includes busing!



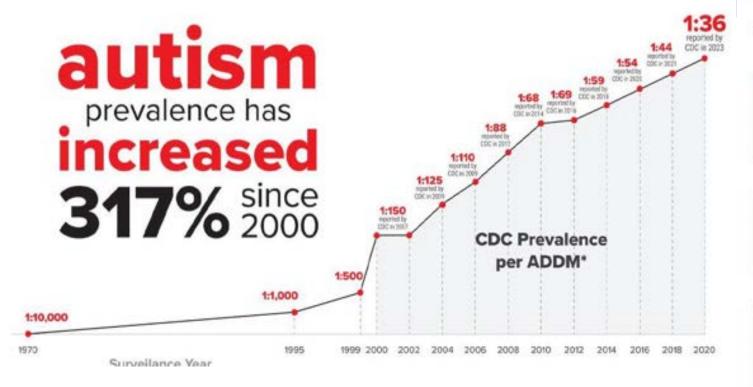








Autism Statistics



AUTISM QUICK STATS



1 in 36 kids identified with autism

241%

higher than baseline stats in 2000



BOYS are 4X more likely to be diagnosed than GIRLS

Some areas have higher than average prevalence rates: California 1/26 South Korea 1/38



Although autism can be diagnosed before a child reaches the age of two, most kids are diagnosed only after the age of

40% are nonverbal 44% Have average or above average intellectual ability 31% have an intellectual disability



https://tacanow.org/press-release/autism-prevalence-is-now-1-in-36/



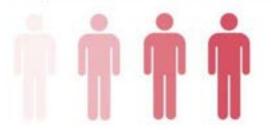




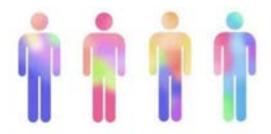




the spectrum doesn't look like this.



we are far more.





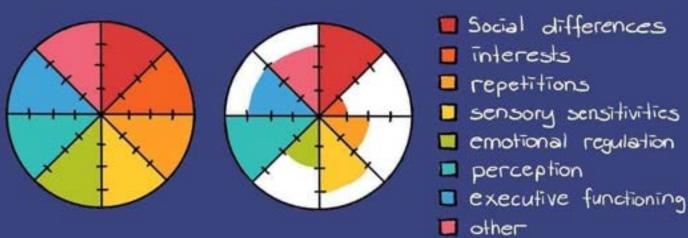
Autism Spectrum

The Autism Spectrum is Not linear

less autistic

very autistic

The Autism Spectrum looks more like:



Terms like "high functioning", "low functioning" and "Asperger" are harmful and outdated.

Autism_sketches

Building Our Understanding

- Autistic children often have difficulty in accessing community activities, leisure facilities, and other services.
- Everyone having a better understanding of autism has the power to change lives.
- The following information is provided to help you to gain a better understanding of autism and suggests ways in which you can support autistic students in your role as bus drivers and bus attendants.





"If you've met one person with autism, you've met one person with autism."

- Dr. Stephen Shore

Overview





Autism is a neurodevelopmental disorder that impacts social interaction, communication (nonverbal and verbal), sensory processing, and behavior (strong interests and repetitive behaviors).



Social

Communication

Sensory

Behavior

 Not greeting you when entering the bus



 Info-dumping, telling you all about a special interest



 Hand flapping, clapping loudly, wearing noise cancelling headphones













Possible Characteristics of Autistic Students Include...

- Preference for structure and routines
- Clear sense of rules and right and wrong
- Differences in communication
- Different responses to sensory input or sensory seeking behaviors
- Dislike of small talk
 prefer to connect over shared interests and deep dives into topics
- Strong attention to detail
- Drive to know everything about an interesting topic
- Challenges with auditory processing (listening) and preference for visual processing (visual aids)





Areas where our students may experience differences and may need support

Communication Skills

Sensory Processing

Emotional Regulation

Frustration Tolerance







5-minute break!







What is Autism to Me? - https://youtu.be/wcHfRVJVIqc





Autistic individuals may need support with:

Receptive Language (Understanding)

Expressive Language
(Verbal and NonVerbal
Communication)

Pragmatic Language
(Social
Communication
Skills)





The difficulty with expressing feelings, needs, and wants

May result in	Which means the student
Not being able to tell you what they want/ need	May feel upset, frustrated, or misunderstood, etc.
Not knowing how or when to ask for help	May feel confused or scared, etc.
Expressing fear or worry in inappropriate ways	May feel embarrassed, guilty, sad
Not letting the adult know that they don't understand what is expected	May feel embarrassed, wanting to shut down, may disconnected, etc.



The difficulty with understanding what people say

May result in	Which means the student
A misunderstanding	Could look they are not following school bus rules
Fear of a change in routine	May feel confused, scared
Confusion in general	May not know what to do
Not understanding what people want	May seem to ignore you because they're confused
Not understanding why a request was made	May ask you why, ignore you, feel confused
Struggle with following multi-step directions	May only seem to follow part of what you asked



The difficulty with interpreting body language

May result in	Which means the student
Not understanding when you are joking or when you are being serious	Doesn't respond the way we expect (laughing at the joke or following the serious direction)
Not understanding social cues from other students on the bus	May not be included in conversations or seek attention in ways others don't understand
Not recognizing a threat from another student	May not respond in a way to protect their safety
Not recognizing when adults are frustrated	May keep engaging in the same behaviors

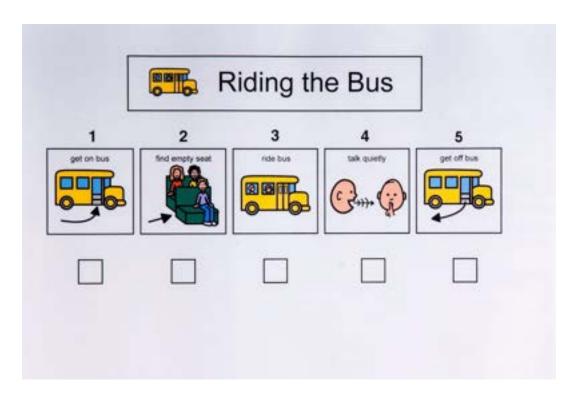




Receptive language is the understanding of language.

What are Receptive Language Skills?	What does it look like?
Learning and remembering new words or vocabulary	Students may not remember new instructions, need to practice new routines
Following directions	Students may not know how to answer your questions
Answering or responding to "wh" questions (who, what, where, when, and why)	Student may not be able to understand what you are trying to covey
Understanding non-verbal langauge (facial expressions, body language, personal space, and gestures)	They may need picture cues to understand directions

Supporting Receptive Language



Receptive Language Challenges might look like:

- Does not follow directions correctly
- Needs a lot of support when following multi-step directions while getting on the bus
- Needs to have directions restated or repeated
- Following multi-step directions to ride the bus

Strategies that can support:

- Only one adult should give directions at a time
- Use clear and simple language
- Show students visuals to increase their understanding
- Give one or two directions at a time
- Allow extra time for students to process/understand the verbal directions
- Check for understanding





Expressive Language is the ability to communicate your thoughts and feelings through words/writing, gestures, sign language and symbols or pictures.

What are Expressive Language Skills?	What does it look like?
The ability to communicate thoughts or ideas through verbal and non-verbal communication	Students may struggle telling you their feelings and wants/needs
Putting your thoughts into words or sentences	Students may have varied language abilities to respond to "WH" questions or have limited answers
Label objects, describe actions or events, answer "WH" questions and retell stories	Some students might struggle to tell an adult "What happened" verbally. If they a student does not have access to their communication device, they may not be able to communicate with you
Because a person is non-speaking, it does not mean that they lack intellectual skills	Please remember that students can understand you, even if they many are not able to communicate verbally

Supporting Expressive Language



Expressive Language Challenges might look like:

- Difficulty telling the bus staff how they feel; i.e., I feel sick, I need to go to the bathroom
- Difficulty explaining a problem they are having on the bus; i.e., Someone is touching me
- Difficulty retelling a situation that happened on the bus

Strategies that can support:

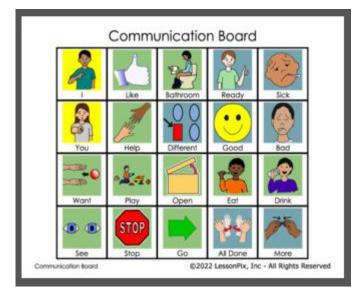
- Speak clearly and avoid complicated language
- Allow time for the student to express themselves
- Remain calm
- Use pictures to support communication
- Seek support from the student's family or school team if unable to understand student's expressive language

Expressive Language:Different Forms of Communication

Individuals with autism may communicate in a variety of ways

Vocal Language, Augmentative Communication, Sign language or Gestures













Pragmatic Language or Social Communication

- Pragmatic language refers to social language.
- It involves understanding body language, interpreting sarcasm, and using appropriate body language.
- It also includes saying hello/goodbye, requesting help, asking questions, understanding jokes, showing concern, understanding jokes- ex: "they're picking on me", etc.







Supporting Pragmatic Language or Social Communication



Pragmatic language/Social Communication challenges might look like:

- Difficulty turn-taking when talking
- Not understanding how close to sit to another student
- Taking over the conversation
- Difficulty understanding social "rules" and expectations

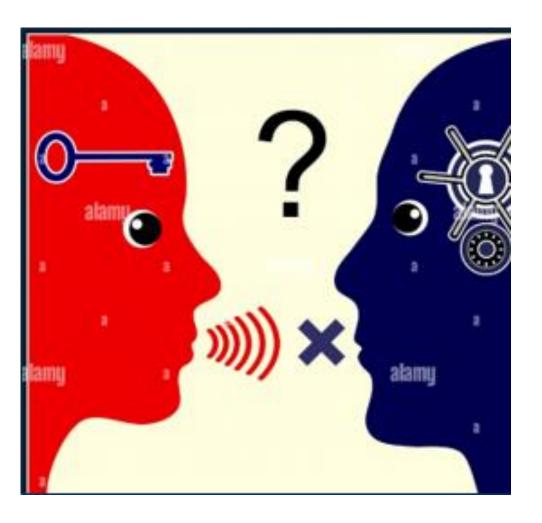
Strategies to support:

- Talk about what the rules or expectations
- Giving students the "why"
- Seek support from school team or families when student needs additional support



Remember ...

Communication Considerations – Autistic students may:



- Benefit from visual supports and simplified language
- Not be able to access verbal communication when stressed
- Prefer to talk about limited topics
- Have difficulties with the back and forth of conversation
- Need extra processing time to understand and respond to verbal directions or questions
- Experience sensory overload and have difficulties understanding when multiple people are talking at the same time or there is competing background noise







SENSORY PROCESSING





What is Sensory Processing

Autistic individuals process sensory input differently than their neurotypical peers do. Students can be hyper- or hypo-sensitive to stimuli that seems normal to others.

Sensory processing is our ability to:

- 1. Take in information through our senses
- 2. Organize and interpret that information
- 3. Make a meaningful response







Sensory Processing Challenges on a School Bus - https://youtu.be/G72f3aT0k_w











Sensory Processing

Hyposensitivity might look like:

- Seeking out strong smell or tastes, or loud, repetitive sounds
- Being fidgety, jumpy, or unable to sit still
- Having a hard time modulating voice volume

Hypersensitivity might look like:

- Avoiding sensory input like strong smells, touching new textures, or looking at bright colors or patterns
- Finds louds or unexpected noises upsetting
- Preferring clothes with specific fabrics or no tags





Sensory Experiences – Some Examples

Sensory Experiences

Loose tags on clothing

Motion Sickness

Strong perfumes and food odors

Fluorescent lighting

Motor running

Sticky fingers

Roller coaster rides

Preference for colors

Loud noises





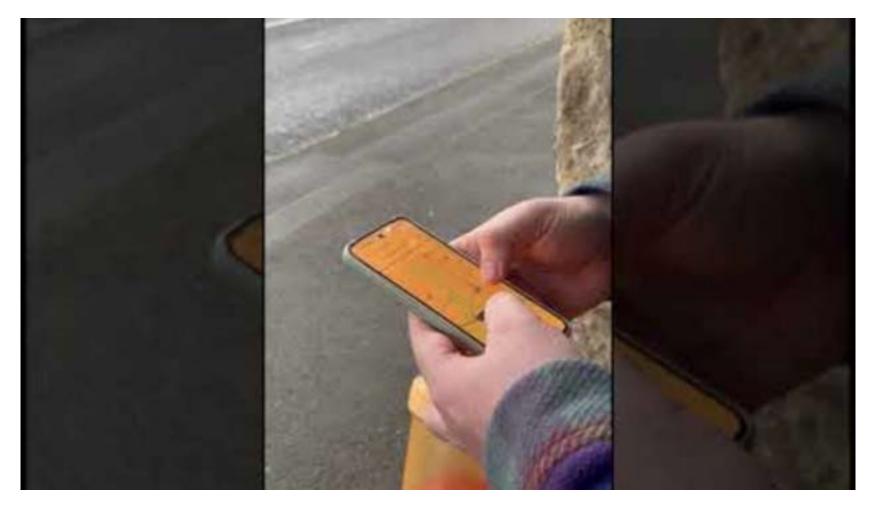








Let's find out more...



I'm autistic – here are the difficulties I have with the bus travel https://youtu.be/PehJGLgbiyA





Sensory considerations on the bus

Autistic Students will demonstrate difficulties with these key areas when traveling on the bus.

Visual Stimulation

Auditory Sensitivities Movement Needs





Sensory considerations on the bus

Visual Stimulation

- Some students might really like to look out the window, while some students may not.
- Ask the student, parent, or caregiver what the student will prefer.
- Some students might be bothered by excess visual stimulation, think about strategic seating on the bus.
- Some students might be sensitive to sunlight (ex: needing sunglasses, wearing a baseball cap, etc.)





Sensory considerations on the bus

Auditory Stimulation

- Many students and adults can be hyper-sensitive to sound and have a difficult time tolerating loud noises on the bus.
- Ideally, the bus ride should be a calm and quiet experience.
- It can be hard to filter out traffic sounds like horns honking or sirens blaring.
- Some students might need to wear noise cancelling headphones or listen to calming music to tolerate being on the bus.





Sensory considerations on the bus

Movement Needs

- Allow for fidgeting and movement while sitting and staying safe
- Talk to students about ways to regulate themselves while staying seated with seat belt.
- Student may experience motion sickness, consider where the student should sit (front of the bus vs. back of the bus)
- Discuss and model safe seated movements: taking deep breaths, stretching while seated, etc...







4 minute break

What does music do to the senses?

Metallica – Enter sandman https://youtu.be/nV16UC noMT8





EMOTIONAL REGULATION





Emotional Regulation

What is Emotional Regulation?

Emotional Regulation is the ability to cope with situations that cause emotions like stress, anxiety or frustration.

For autistic students, understanding their emotions and feelings can be challenging.



How would you feel if you were on this bus?

Emotional Regulation and the BUS

Autistic students might get on the bus already anxious. They might be worried about...

- Getting to school late and missing classwork
- Worried about loud noises on the bus
- Feeling sad that they left their parent at home
- Anxious about sitting next to someone they do not know or who doesn't go to their school
- Scared about having a bathroom accident on the bus





How to Support Emotional Regulation?

Bus Driver and Bus Attendant

Remember, if you are stressed out and feeling emotionally drained, autistic students will pick up on your emotions and potentially mirror your feelings.

It is important for the adults to "self-monitor" their own feelings and emotions.

Remember that your stress levels will increase students' stress levels.

Share your calm like an ice cube cooling down a warm drink.

Student

Riding the bus can overload a student's sensory system which leads to increased stress, anxiety and meltdowns.

Supports can include:

- Sensory tools
- Visuals
- Calming techniques
- Understanding communication challenges

The most important support is for adults to be understanding!





FRUSTRATION TOLERANCE







What is Frustration Tolerance?

Frustration tolerance is the ability for everyone to manage feelings of frustration when faced with challenges.

Autistic students can have low frustration tolerance.

When faced with challenges, they might not be able to identify or manage their emotions, which increases their anxiety and irritability.

Frustration Tolerance

Going to School

- Student didn't finish their breakfast
- Student misses their parents
- Parent made them put on their jacket to go to school
- The bus was early/late
- May be afraid of something at school
- There was a conflict on the bus yesterday on the route home

Coming home from School

- The day ended with a gym period
- The student had a substitute teacher
- There was a difficult test
- The bus is late.
- They could not sit next to their friend while waiting for the bus
- Excited to get home and play on iPad





RIDING THE BUS

Many autistic students start and end their day on the bus.

Routing issues are important, but accommodations for the child's sensory, behavioral, medical, or organizational needs should also be considered.

If the student is riding on a full bus, other supports may be necessary such as:

- Noise cancelling headphones
- Fidgets
- Transition items



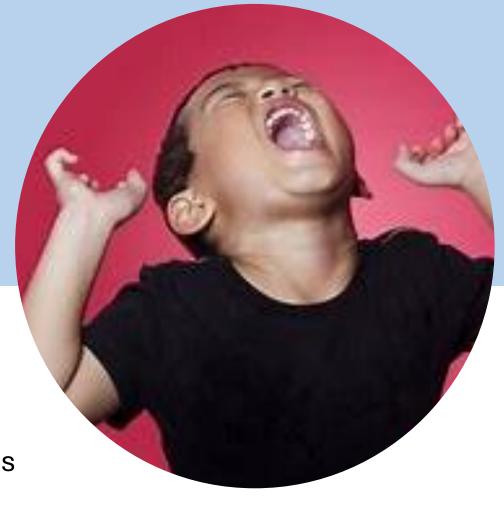




Behavior as a form of Communication

 Students who may not have access language and communication may be communicating through behavior.

 Remember students who may present with more challenging behaviors (crying, tantrums, difficulties transitioning) often need various levels of support.

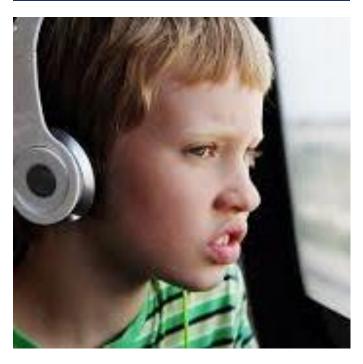






Some Possible Why's Around Behavior

Sensory Processing



Some Why's

- Students may not have "Access" to communication to express themselves.
- Students may want to "Escape or Avoid" an activity or situation.
- Students may want "Access" to something.
- Sensory Stimulation, Dysregulation.

Communication Access









Questions To Ask Schools and Caregivers. How Can You Help?

How can I support communication with your child on the bus?

How can I assist your child with transitions on/ off the bus?

What sensory supports does your child need on the bus?

Did your child sleep last night/ have a good start the morning?

What are some strategies used at school or home that we can use on the bus?





STRATEGIES TO SUPPORT AUTISTIC STUDENTS ON THE BUS





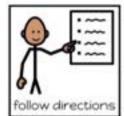
Starting in September

- 1. Get to know the students on your bus
 - Start each bus ride with a smile and a greeting.
 "Good morning, Jaiden! Today is going to be a great day!
 - O What do they like?
 - Are there peers they should be next to on the bus?

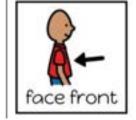
2. Communicate regularly with families











3. Establish expectations and review them regularly







Modeling Calm Behavior – Be the Ice Cube!

- Be calm and positive.
- Model appropriate behavior all students by greeting them, saying goodbye, etc.
- Reinforce the behaviors you wish to see with behavior-specific praise (e.g. "I like the way you went straight to your seat and buckled up!")











Positively Framed Language

Positively frame directions, rather than using language that calls attention to what the student is doing "wrong"



Tell a student **what to do** instead of what not to do

Instead of	Say this
No running	Walk
Stop rushing	You have plenty of time, slow down and try your best
Stop talking	It's time to listen. Mouths are quiet.
Stop touching people	Hands in your lap.
Do you want a sticker?	First seatbelt, then sticker.





Visual Supports are often more effective than verbal instructions

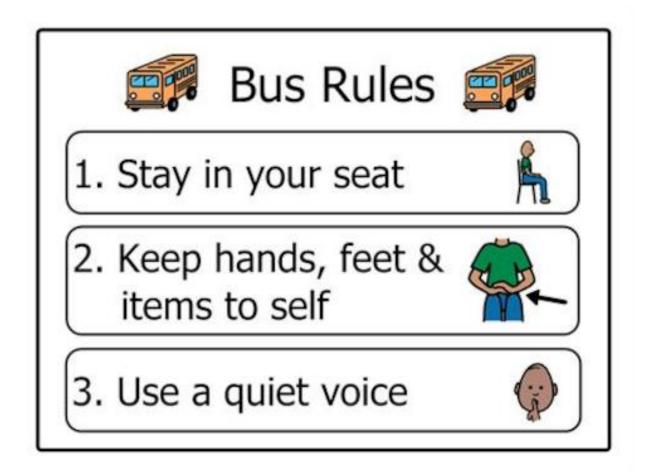
- Driver/Attendant and route changes
- Transition schedules home > bus > school
- Bus rules loading, unloading, in seat
- Task Analysis steps required to complete the task such as buckling a seat belt including how to know when the task is finished.
- Picture examples of kids displaying safe bus-riding behavior.
- Pictures of familiar adults such (parents or teachers, bus driver or attendant) who are happy when the student follows the rules

When you ride the bus	
Keep your seat belt on	
Until the bus stops at the school	





Visual Supports to Promote Success



Visual Schedules

First-Then Boards

5-Point Scales

Task Analysis and Checklists







First/Then Board

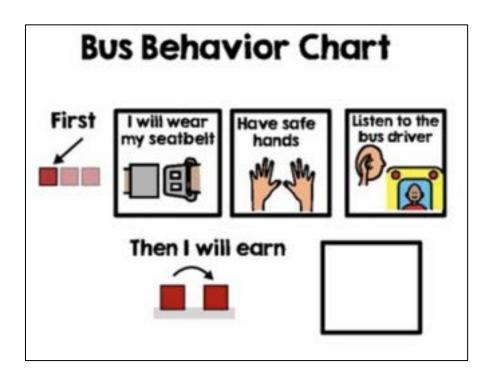
- Most effective when used proactively
- Simplest form of a schedule

First:

Present task student will complete now

Then:

Present either the next task or a reinforcer



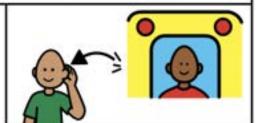




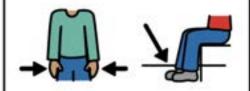


SCHOOL BUS RULES

Listen to your Driver and Attendant



Keep your hands and feet to yourself



Stay in your seat with your seatbelt on



Use a talking voice





Things to remember:

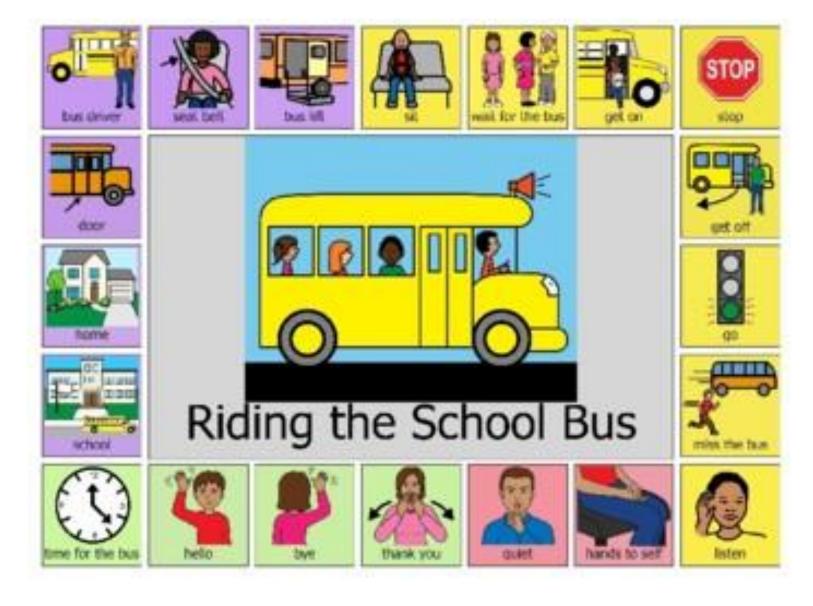
- Be calm
- Be positive
- Be consistent

Flexibility of Thinking

The difficulty with	May result in
SENSORY PROCESSING	Feeling overwhelmed: when the bus gets too noisy, hot, or bumpy when hearing loud instructions from the school bus attendant by touch or tactile input, such as a seatbelt (i.e.: removing the seatbelt) with the feeling of vinyl seats, smells, or bright sunlight streaming in the window
ROUTINE CHANGES	The student becoming upset when: the bus is late an alternate bus is used (i.e. the number on the bus is different, the seats are not the usual color) there is a substitute driver or substitute attendant there is an evacuation drill there is a sudden change to the typical routine (i.e. has to take an alternate route, there is a field trip)
REPETITIVE PATTERNS OF PLAY	Needing to hold or play with a comforting item during the bus ride Needing to sit in the same seat every day
STRONG PREFERENCES AND INTERESTS	The student getting upset if someone is in his seat Needing to sit near a particular bus-mate Needing the transportation staff to use the same greeting each day
IMAGINATION	Not predicting the consequences of refusing to click the seat belt of following directions Not predicting the reaction of others













feet down



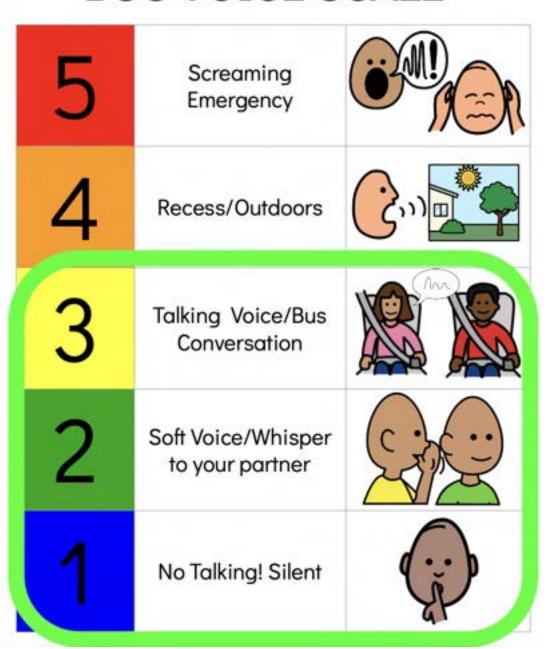








BUS VOICE SCALE



5-Point Volume Scale Visual for Bus

A 5-Point Voice Scale is a visual tool that helps students learn how to control their voice volume.

It can be used in the classroom to help students understand what voice level is appropriate for different activities.

Visual Cues for Priming



BUS SAFETY

Sometimes I ride to school in a school bus. When it's time to go to school, I wait for the bus to pick me up.





I stand on the sidewalk to make sure the bus can safely drive on the street. When the bus arrives, I wait on the sidewalk until the bus stops.

Once the doors open, I will not run onto the bus. I will use the handrails to get on so I can keep myself and my friends safe.





Once I find my seat, I will sit down and put on my seat belt. If I need help, someone will be there to help me. To be safe on the bus, I need to stay in my seat and keep my hands to myself.

When the school bus arrives at school, I will wait until the bus driver parks the bus and for someone to help me unbuckle my seat belt.





To exit the bus, I will wait my turn and use the handrails to exit. When I get off the bus, I can say "Goodbye!" to the bus driver.









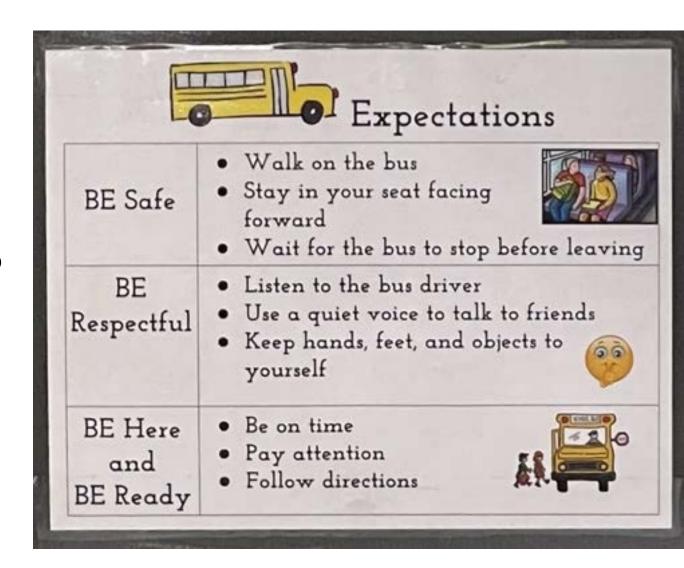






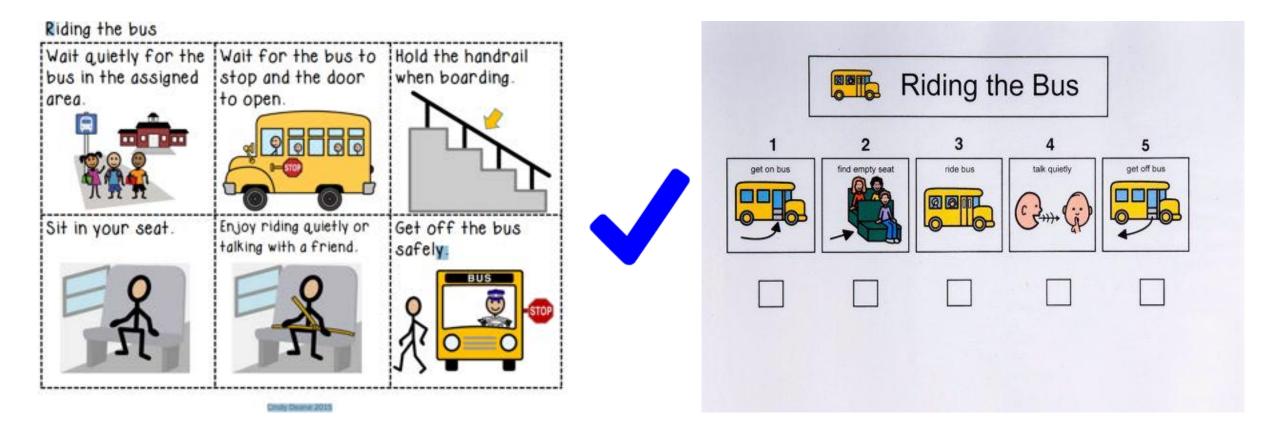
Examples of Rules and Expectations

- 1. Provide written rules and pictures of expectations of bus behavior for the student, the school staff, and parents so they can provide additional support.
- 2. For example, if there is no eating on the bus, the student's family needs to know that the student should not be eating on the bus.





Task Analysis and Checklists







Riding the Bus

In the morning, Hattle rides the bus with Sophie and all of her friends to Green school.



It is very important that Hattie follows the rules on the bus.

Rules on the Bus

Stay in your seat

Face forward



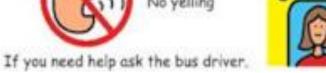
Do not touch the windows

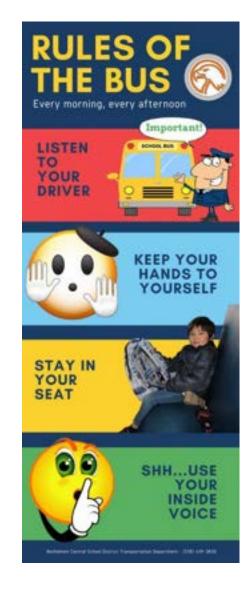


Sit quietly



No yelling





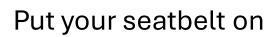


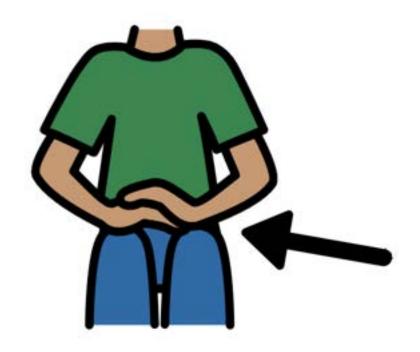




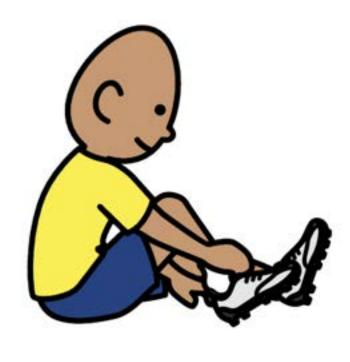








Keep your hand to yourself



Keep your shoes on



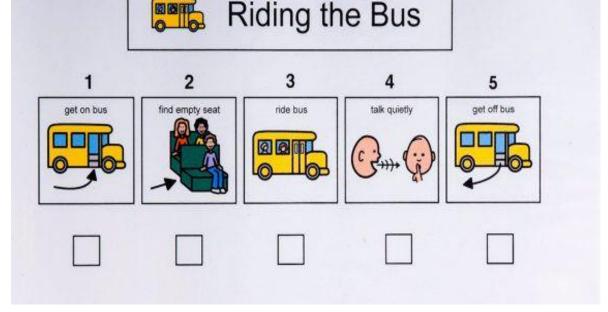


Visual Schedules

Visual schedules can be helpful for helping the student establish a routine and managing his behavior. Here is an example of a schedule.

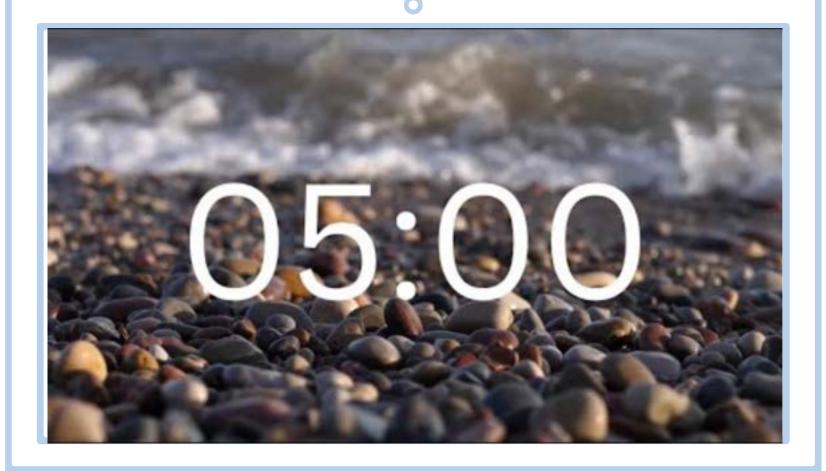
It is easy to create a custom schedule by using a digital camera to take a picture of each step or action.

- 1. Wait at the bus stop
- 2. Get on the bus
- 3. Sit down
- 4. Buckle my seat belt
- 5. Ride quietly to school
- 6. Get off the bus









5-Minute **Break**





Resources from the School

Remember, the school staff are available to help develop supports that

students can use on the bus.

 For students who are having difficulty on the bus, the bus team should let the school know as soon as possible.

The school staff are there to support you!







Social Narratives

- Work with the school team to suggest social narratives or rule cards that might help a student understand a rule or expectation (for example, why sitting too close is annoying to another rider, why a bus may be late, or what traffic is).
- For a student with particularly challenging behavior, work with the school team to develop a positive behavior support plan specific to behavior on the bus.





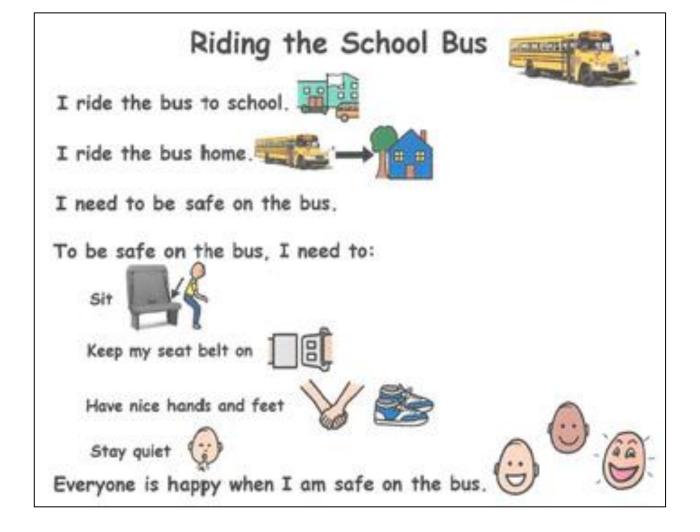


Social Stories

Social Stories are written in the first person and contain information to increase students' understanding of problematic situations.

Begin with the child's understanding, develop the story by describing what is happening and why, how people feel and think. If you do no other strategies suggested in this manual, use Social Stories.

They have been effective for many students with autism.







Power Cards

Power Cards connect desired responses with student's interest.

Create a card that has a picture of the student's favorite item or interest, so he is likely to carry it around and look at it often.

Write the bus rules, or desired behaviors, on the card.



M.J.'s bus rules.

- 1. Use the bathroom before riding the bus.
- 2. Click the seat belt until the bus stops.
 - Have a quiet mouth.
 - 4. Keep my hands in my space.





Sensory Strategies for Success



 Allow a student who may be overwhelmed by noise on the bus to use noise cancelling headphone or listening to music through headphones.





 Allow the student to use hands on sensory items, such as a squeeze toy.







Eye Spy Activity







THINGS TO REMEMBER FROM TODAY'S TRAINING





Autistic Characteristics: True or False

- Individuals with autism are often extremely passionate about what interests them
- They can be straightforward, direct and honest
- Individuals with autism tend to perceive the world differently and process information in unique ways
- They tend to be detail-oriented and often pay attention to the finer details that others often miss
- They often love routines and will happily maintain those routines with great success
- Individuals with autism often have a great memory and an amazing ability to recall facts
- Individuals with autism also tend to be visual thinkers





Autistic Characteristics:

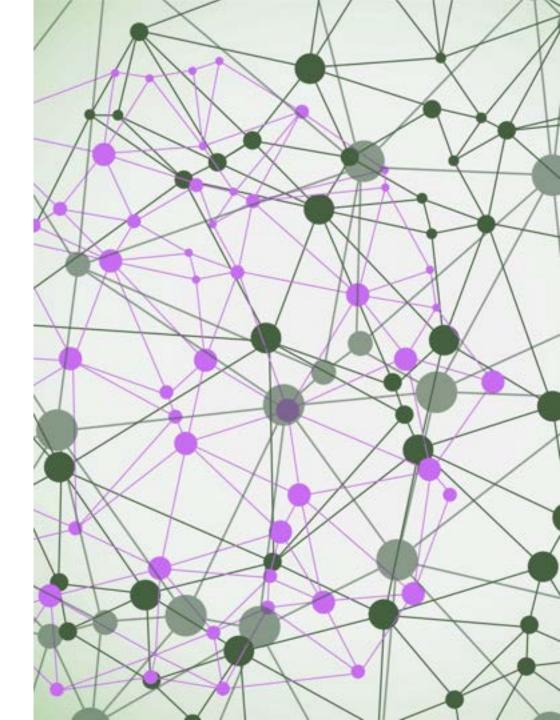
They usually follow their own unique set of social rules.

 When supporting students' social communication, we want to make sure what we are highlighting social exchanges that are authentic and genuine.

Individuals with autism usually aren't afraid to be themselves.

- They're unique and quirky, and don't get bothered by what other people think of them.
- They just continue to be the unique individual they are by embracing and sharing their passions with the world.





The key take ...

How to Create a Sensory-Friendly **School Bus**



Accommodate all students physical, emotional and sensory needs.



Create specialized sensory-friendly training programs for transportation employees.



Have an attendant to help provide students with individualized support.



Maintain ongoing communication between students, caregivers, and educators and transportation employees.

Sensory Friendly Solutions











5 Questions About Autism

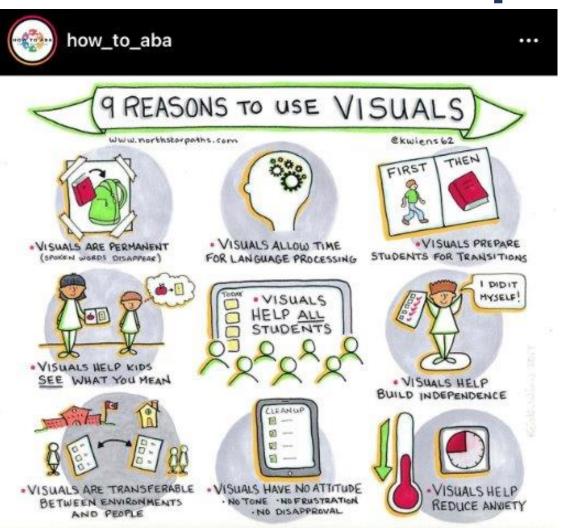
What are 1-2 important points that you learned from this video?

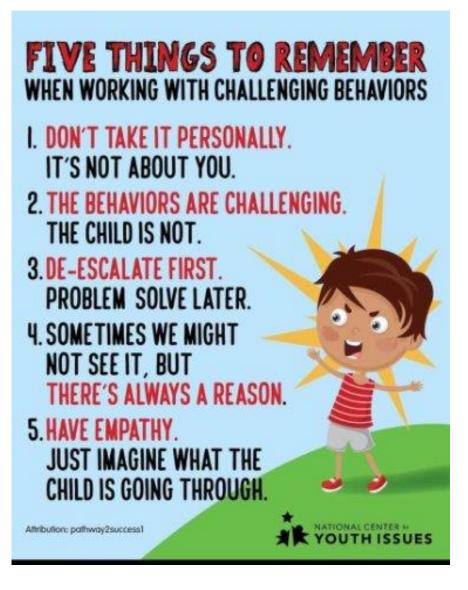
Five Questions about Autism - https://www.youtube.com/wat ch?v=IApo5TBR7jc





Helpful Tips











87

Thank You

Autism Overview: Bus Driver and Attendant





