

Autism Spectrum Disorders

TIPS AND RESOURCES FOR LIBRARIANS



What is autism?

Autism is a neurodevelopmental disorder that affects the early brain development of 1 out of 31 children. The primary characteristics of an autism spectrum disorder (ASD) are:

- Impaired social relating and reciprocity. Impaired use of multiple nonverbal behaviors such as eye contact, facial expression, and gestures. Failure to develop peer relationships or to share enjoyment, interests, or achievements with others. Lack of social or emotional reciprocity.
- Disordered language and communication development. Delay in development of spoken language. Impaired ability to initiate or sustain a conversation. Repetitive use of language. Lack of varied, spontaneous, or social imaginative play.
- Restricted interests and repetitive activities. Preoccupation with restrictive patterns of interests. Rigid adherence to specific, nonfunctional routines and rituals and difficulty coping with transitions from one activity to the next. Repetitive motor mannerisms. Persistent preoccupation with parts of objects.

Although these are typical characteristics of ASD, they will not manifest equally in all individuals. No two individuals with autism will be alike.

Challenges in the library and strategies to provide meaningful experiences

Remember that an individual with autism does not “act out” intentionally to make things difficult. There are underlying reasons why they may have challenges. It might be difficult for an individual with an autism spectrum disorder who is in a library to follow directions, to take turns, or to move between activities. Here are some strategies that may prove effective when working to include an individual with an ASD in library activities.

- Support verbal communication with visuals. Visual supports increase understanding, clarify expectations, and increase predictability. Visual supports include photos, clip art, print, etc. Consider the use of visual supports to increase understanding of verbal directions; clarify expected behaviors (for example, “quiet,” “sit on floor,” “listen.”) Use the visuals to prompt appropriate behaviors.
- Prepare for transitions. Individuals with autism prefer routine. Prepare the child for transitions by using a visual schedule. The schedule may be a written checklist or a series of photos/drawings indicating the sequence of events. Alert the child that a change is imminent by announcing how much time is left for the current activity (for example, “Five more minutes, then ____.”)
- Offer choices. When possible, offer the child choices.
- Reinforce appropriate behavior with rewards. Individuals with autism may need additional incentives to demonstrate expected behaviors. Consult with parents to identify a possible reward for the child to receive for appropriate behaviors. Use this reward with a “first/then” routine (for example, “first listen /then magazine.”) It is most effective to use visuals to clarify this first/then routine.
- Using visual supports to increase predictability, clarify behavioral expectations, and prepare a child for transitions will have a positive impact on the individual’s comfort in the library. Despite your best efforts, individuals with autism may become upset. If this happens, seek assistance from the child’s caregiver.

Please see reverse for resources.



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RESOURCES

Who We Are and Who We Serve

The **Vanderbilt Kennedy Center (VKC)** works with and for people with disabilities and their family members, educators and service providers, researchers, students, and policy makers. Faculty and staff engage in interdisciplinary research, training, service, and information dissemination and work in collaboration with local, state and national networks and partners. (615) 322-8240, toll-free (866) 936-8852, vkc.vumc.org

Treatment and Research Institute for Autism Spectrum Disorders (TRIAD)

TRIAD is a VKC program dedicated to improving assessment and treatment services for children with autism spectrum disorders and their families while advancing knowledge and training. See TRIAD.vumc.org.

TRIAD Families First Program

This free training series provides parents of children with autism (ages 2-7) with techniques to enhance social and communication skills and to manage challenging behaviors. triad.vumc.org/ffp

Tennessee Disability Pathfinder

Provides free information, referral sources, and help with navigating services via phone, email, and website. Assistance is available to individuals of all ages, all types of disabilities, and all languages spoken. Its website includes a directory of more than 3,000 agencies searchable by Tennessee county, topic of interest, and other filters. Pathfinder is a project of the VKC and is partially funded by Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities and other state agencies. (615) 322-8529, toll-free (800) 640-4636, TNPathfinder.org

Other web resources with visual supports

- **Do 2 Learn**
do2learn.com
- **Icon Talk**
autismawarenesscentre.com/resources/icon-talk/
- **Junior League Family Resource Center, Monroe Carell Jr. Children's Hospital at Vanderbilt**
childrenshospitalvanderbilt.org/information/family-resource-center

Tennessee Resources

- **Autism Society of East Tennessee**
asaetc.org
- **Autism Tennessee**
autismtn.org
- **Autism Society of the Mid-South**
autismresourcesmidsouth.org
- **Tennessee Developmental Disabilities Network**
TNDDnetwork.org
- **Tennessee Disability Coalition**
tndisability.org

National Resources

- **Autism Society of America**
autism-society.org
- **Autism Speaks**
autismspeaks.org
- **Administration for Community Living**
acl.gov/about-acl/administration-disabilities
- **Association of University Centers for Disabilities**
aucd.org
- **KidsHealth**
kidshealth.org

