

Autism: Attacking Social Interaction Problems

**A Pre-Vocational
Training Manual for Ages 17+**

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Autism: The Label

It is important for students to become familiar with the exact nature of their disability. This knowledge fosters self-advocacy and increased awareness of their strengths, learning styles and challenges. It is equally important to understand that the term autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a label, but does not define or limit their dreams for the future.

OBJECTIVES

1. Participants will describe autism on a personal level.
2. Participants will identify three common characteristics associated with the disorder.
3. Participants will research notable individuals with ASD.
4. Participants will define autism.
5. Participants will develop a plan for their future.

LESSON 1: AUTISM THROUGH MY EYES

Activity A: The ASD Talk

Participants should be seated in a semicircle for a discussion to assess their understanding and awareness of ASD. Awareness and self-acceptance is critical to self-esteem and social emotional development. While many individuals at this age may be sophisticated in their understanding of the disorder, self-acceptance may be lacking.

Questions to stimulate the discussion of Autism Facts can include the following:

- What is autism?
- What are some causes of autism?
- How long does one have autism?
- What is the incidence of autism?
- Is there a difference in the number of boys with ASD than girls?
- What special supports are needed to develop certain skills and behaviors?
- What types of therapies are needed?
- Will a person outgrow autism?
- How can we tell if someone has ASD?
- What does spectrum mean?
- Do all individuals with ASD look the same?
- Do you have autism?
- Does autism limit what a person can do in life?
- Autism is a label and does not define your potential. What does this mean to you?

Activity B: Autism Myths

Instruct participants to discuss autism myths and unsubstantiated beliefs such as the following:

- Everybody has a little autism in them.
- You can be cured of autism.
- Mostly poor people have autism.
- You can never achieve in life.
- You will always be in special education classes.
- It will go away.
- But he's so cute. He doesn't look like he has autism.

Activity C: My Self-Portrait

A self-portrait is a reflection of what you see when you see yourself. Answer the following questions and be prepared to share your answers with the group.

1. What do you see when you see yourself? _____

2. What can you do well? _____

3. What do you like about yourself? _____

4. What makes you unique? _____

5. What is your favorite leisure activity? _____

6. Do you have autism? _____

Group leader should note common traits or features shared by group members.

LESSON 2: OVERCOMING THE ODDS**Activity A: Autism Achievers**

Participants can be paired together or can work independently to identify individuals who have achieved a goal or dream despite the diagnosis of autism. Examples: Temple Grandin (PhD), Albert Einstein, Carly Fleischer, JaVale McGee (NBA basketball player), and so forth. Instruct participants to write about the life of a notable individual with ASD and be prepared to become the expert as they present the information to the group. Participants should identify real or perceived challenges experienced by the individual, as well as personal traits or characteristics which potentially led to their success.

Activity B: Reflections on Achievers

Each participant is to write and present a reflection, drawing from their research, about the selected individual who overcame the odds. The following questions should be addressed in this reflection:

- What were the challenges faced by _____?
- How do you think this person felt about the challenges he or she encountered?
- Why do you think this person continued with his or her dreams?
- What did you learn from this individual?
- Sometimes things don't always work out even when you have done your best. Given what you know about your notable person with ASD, what else might this person have done if he or she had been unable to achieve his or her dream?
Example: *The NBA player might have become a high school, college, or basketball coach. Dr. Temple Grandin might have become a veterinarian.*
- What personal traits do you think led to his or her success?
- When I think of autism I think _____.