



**AUTISM VISION:**  
**Creating Autism Awareness**  
in Elementary School Staff

# Paraeducator Workbook





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Lexie student with autism

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# TRAINING AGENDA

## Welcome

### Knowledge and Experience: Pre-Training Questions

- ▶ Experience
- ▶ Discussion

### Overview of Autism

- ▶ DVD
- ▶ Experience
- ▶ Discussion

### Paraeducator DVD

- ▶ Discussion

### Autism in the Classroom—Repetition and Predictability

- ▶ Practical strategies
- ▶ Change Activity
- ▶ Handouts

### Autism in the Classroom—Communication

- ▶ Practical strategies
- ▶ Abstract Concrete activity
- ▶ Handouts

### Autism in the Classroom—Social

- ▶ Practical strategies
- ▶ Speaking in Social Rules activity
- ▶ Handouts

### Autism in the Classroom—Senses

- ▶ Practical strategies
- ▶ Welcoming Classroom activity
- ▶ Handouts

### Custom Child-Specific Information

### Summary of Key Points

- ▶ Discussion

### Knowledge and Experience—Post-Training Questions

- ▶ Experience
- ▶ Discussion

### Conclusion

- ▶ Questions

### Satisfaction Survey

### Thank you



# KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCE QUESTIONS

## Knowledge

Please take a few moments to complete these next questions. This is not a test that will be graded or shared with others. It will simply help to review the information you will learn in this training.

1. Autism affects approximately
  - A. 1 out of 110 kids
  - B. 1 out of 210 kids
  - C. 1 out of 310 kids
  - D. 1 out of 410 kids
2. Some children with autism cover their ears when they hear a bell or PA announcement because:
  - A. They are used to being in quiet places.
  - B. Some noises can seem loud and overwhelming to them.
  - C. They like to ignore things.
  - D. They want to focus on what they are doing.
3. Autism is called a “spectrum” disorder because:
  - A. Children with autism see the spectrum of light differently.
  - B. Children with autism may be diagnosed at different points of the spectrum.
  - C. There is a range of autism symptoms.
  - D. B and C
4. Children with autism may communicate by:
  - A. Talking
  - B. Writing
  - C. Pointing
  - D. All of the above

For the next set of statements, please circle the number under each that best describes your agreement or disagreement with the statement.

5. Students with autism want to have friends but are unsure of how to make them.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

6. Students with autism cannot learn as well as other students.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

7. Students with autism make the school experience for other students more difficult.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

8. Students with autism are interested in a lot of things.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree



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## Experience

In the space below, write down an experience that you have had recently involving a student with autism.

- If positive, share your success story and how you helped the situation become successful? What happened? What was it like for you?
- If you had a difficult experience, what was it? What happened? How was it resolved? What was it like for you? What made the experience positive and/or negative?

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## Characteristics of Repetition and Predictability in Students with Autism

One set of characteristics of autism is the need for repetition, the need for predictability (or the resistance to change).

**These characteristics may include:**

### Repetition of movement

Examples: Moving hands, rocking in a chair, spinning

### Creating order

Examples: Lining toys up in a row, organizing books

### Wanting sameness

Examples: Sticking to same schedule, wanting furniture to stay in same location

### Resistance to change

Examples: Becoming anxious when transitioning to new activities, finding it difficult to change a common routine

### Attachment to certain items, objects, or topics

Examples: Being very interested in one topic and only talking about it, carrying a certain book around all of the time



Eli & Jessica (paraeducator)

## Tips for Creating Activity Schedules

Activity schedules for students with autism can be very helpful to help them prepare for the structure of their day and understand the steps to completing a task. There are a number of methods for creating an activity schedule.

**Below are some tips for designing a schedule with a student with autism in mind.**

### Pictures/Icons/Words

- The presentation of the schedule will depend on the way the student learns best.
- Pictures or icons giving a visual representation of each step can be a great technique for students with autism.
- Some students with autism may like schedules using words.
- Some students may like a combination of pictures and words on their schedule.
- The key is to determine the best method for each individual student.

### Steps

- An activity schedule should break an activity, day, or task into steps.
- The student can complete one step then move on to the next with the help of their activity schedule.
- The activity schedule may have an option to check off or mark when each step is completed.

### Types of Schedules

- An activity schedule can be made for anything.
- A student may have a schedule for a whole day, and within that day, have different activity schedules for different tasks.
- For example, a student may have a schedule for the day, then when he goes to do his classroom chore, he has a specific schedule that breaks that task into steps for him.

### Change in Schedule

- Because students with autism need to be prepared for changes in their schedule or unplanned events, having a way to indicate a change on their activity schedule can be very helpful.
- A change in schedule may be indicated by a specific picture or icon that can be placed on their schedule, or a picture shown to them prior to the change.
- This is also a method for helping students prepare for what's next in their day.

### Customize

- Activity schedules should be specific to the individual student.
- These schedules will be developed with the learning needs and daily tasks of each student in mind.
- The schedule may map out the whole day and include common tasks.
- It can also start with the beginning of the school day, when the student leaves home, etc.

# ACTIVITY



## Abstract Concrete

On the left are a few examples of clichés, slang terms, or metaphors students with autism might hear at school. The column on the right has examples of rephrasing the cliché into something easier for a student with autism to understand.

Take a few minutes to write down a few more common clichés, slang, or metaphors that you hear or use at school. Then, think of a more straightforward way of saying the same thing. We will discuss your ideas as a group when you are done.

<b>ABSTRACT</b> Cliché/slang/metaphor	<b>CONCRETE</b> Simpler way of saying it
Don't put all of your eggs in one basket	Sample: Have a variety of options
You crack me up	Sample: You make me laugh
In a minute	Sample: I need a little more time
Give me your 2 cents	Sample: Give me your opinion

## Communication and Students with Autism

Communication challenges are another key characteristic of students with autism. Remember, because autism is a spectrum disorder, some students may be more challenged with communication than others. Listed below are some characteristics of the communication challenges in students with autism.

- Some students may be nonverbal and not speak at all.
- Students may communicate in different ways, including using gestures, pointing, pictures, behaviors, a voice-output device, or other methods.
- Students with autism have a literal interpretation of language. Slang words, clichés, or sayings are interpreted exactly how they sound.
- If students lack the ability to communicate their desires, frustration can lead to behaviors that may be seen as challenging (grunting, pointing, anger, tantrums).
- Some students may speak in one tone or place emphasis on different syllables that make their speech sound unusual.
- Students may talk about one or similar topics over and over again.
- Students with autism may need longer periods of time to process instructions or communication. Giving them a few extra seconds to respond can help.
- Beginning, maintaining, and ending conversations is challenging for students with autism.
- Students may repeat words or phrases or echo back something that you say.
- Students with autism may use pronouns incorrectly. For example, they may say “you” when referring to themselves.



Eli & Kelsey (paraeducator)





## Communication Tips for Students with Autism

When working with students with autism:

### Use specific words

- Be very specific and descriptive when talking with a student with autism.
- For example, say “good spelling” rather than “good job.” Help the student understand what or how to do something rather than just saying “yes” or “no.”

### Avoid slang

- Slang, metaphors, clichés, and sayings are difficult for students with autism to understand.
- Students with autism interpret words and ideas very literally and concretely. Concrete words and language should always be used.
- For example, instead of saying, “You made that look as easy as pie,” say “You finished this homework very quickly—good job answering these questions.” You can point to the homework as you give the compliment, too.

### Use statements

- Statements, rather than questions, are more easily understood by students with autism.
- For example, say, “Time to go to recess” instead of “Do you want to go to recess?”

### Simplify language

- By keeping the words and statements that you use short, concise, and specific, you can better help students with autism understand what you mean, the instructions to an activity, or what might be coming next in their day.

### Model appropriate communication

- Show students the communication technique, word, or action you want, or you can show them how to say a particular request.
- By modeling appropriate ways of communicating, students can understand expectations more clearly.

### Praise positive communication

- Let students know when they have done well. Students who receive positive and specific feedback tend to reuse the skills that earned them the good feedback more frequently.

### Engage all students

- Although a student with autism may be nonverbal or unable to communicate in a traditional way, it does not mean that he or she cannot understand language or does not want to be talked to.
- Students with autism want to be included and want to interact with their peers.

# ACTIVITY

## Observing Social Skills

Two short peer scenarios are presented below. For a few moments in your group, get creative and add to the story of each scenario. What are the students talking about, how are they acting, what else is happening? Then, write down at least five social skills that the students in the scenarios are practicing (see the Scenario example).

A social skill might be related to body language (personal space, arms crossed, leaning in to listen, eye contact), communication (speaking clearly, compliments, speaking quietly, asking questions), peer norms (talking about common music, movies), or gender (girls talking to girls, boys teasing each other). Use your imagination given the information provided and your ideas about the story.

After you have written down the social skills the students are practicing, then discuss (or write down), as a group, which of these social skills might be difficult for a student with autism.

**Scenario Example:** Devonte and Michael have both brought their collection of baseball cards to look at during recess. They are sitting on a bench talking to one another.

**Add on to story:** *Devonte and Michael always meet up at recess to share their cards. They often swap cards, talk about books they like about baseball cards, and even talk about baseball games they've recently seen.*

**Social skills:** *Sharing common interests, sharing information, talking one at a time, respecting physical space between people in a conversation, making eye contact*

**Challenges for a student with autism:** *Eye contact, understanding another person's interests, giving another person time to talk, understanding personal space*

**Scenario 1:** Rosalie, Erin, and Pam are working together on an art project and are having trouble figuring out who will do which part. They all are talking at once.

**Social skills:**

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

**Scenario 2:** Cam has been teasing Zora all day about her outfit. Zora is getting upset and voicing her opinion, and Cam's friends are egging him on.

**Social skills:**

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

## Social Challenges for Students with Autism

### Peers

Students with autism may have trouble interacting with peers.

- They want to have friends, yet because of communication difficulties, lack of understanding of give-and-take in relationships, or other challenges, students with autism interact with peers differently.

### Social Rules

Students with autism have a hard time understanding or interpreting social rules.

- Social rules that other students pick up from their interpersonal experiences are much more challenging to students with autism.
- For example, a student with autism may not comfort or ask what is wrong when another student is crying.
- In addition, a student with autism may talk a lot about one topic (e.g., the French Revolution) and not talk about other topics that peers are interested in.
- Students with autism may talk about socially inappropriate things. For example, a student may tell a peer that her hair looks funny or talk about something their brother told them in confidence. Students with autism can seem blunt and straightforward, sometimes more so than is socially acceptable.

### Perspectives

It is difficult for students with autism to understand another person’s perspective. If another student has a different opinion, a student with autism might not understand or not believe the student’s differing opinion.

### Nonverbal Communication

Students with autism are unsure of body-language cues or facial expressions.

- It can be challenging for a student to understand that when a peer is angry, he frowns or folds his arms across his chest.
- Eye contact is especially hard for students with autism to maintain.



Callie (paraeducator) & Lexie



## Talking to Peers About Autism

Helping peers and classmates understand autism helps to create a positive, inclusive experience for students with autism. A classroom that embraces differences and works together can be rewarding for all students and teachers.

### Tips to talking to peers about autism:

#### Respect differences

Help to create a classroom environment where students understand that everyone is different in some way and that differences make us all special.

#### Encourage questions

Allow peers to ask questions about autism. Give explanations that are appropriate for the peer's age. If you are unsure of the reason behind a question, try to probe to see what information the peer is really interested in.

#### Point out similarities

Students with autism are similar to their classmates in many ways. Point out these similarities and encourage these connections.

#### Not contagious

Some peers can be concerned that they can catch autism in the same way they can catch a cold. Emphasize that autism is not contagious.

#### Friendships

Everyone likes having friends, including students with autism, yet it can be more difficult for students with autism to make or keep friends. Help peers learn ways to interact with students with autism.

#### Ways of communicating

Students with autism may not talk or act like other classmates. Help peers to understand new ways of interacting with a student with autism.

#### Treated the same

Students with autism want to be treated the same as everyone else. Peers can interact and collaborate with students with autism the same as they would with other friends.

#### A starting-off point for explaining autism may be:

*Students with autism experience the world in a different way. They may see, hear, taste, or feel things in a way that makes them more or less sensitive. Everyone has traits that make them different—and different is good! Let's take the time to get to know our classmate with autism and see what we have in common with him or her.*

# ACTIVITY

## Welcoming Classroom

Using the drawing provided, *circle and label* items, areas, or ideas that could present a challenge to students with autism. For instance, you might circle a space on the board where a calendar could be. In this circle, you would explain that without a calendar, planning for the week would be difficult for the student.

Once you've identified at least 5–7 items or ideas that could be unwelcoming to students with autism, think of ways to make the classroom more welcoming. How would you change or modify the items or ideas you circled?

**TIP:** The handouts *Sensory Experiences and Practical Sensory Tips* on pages 13 and 14 can be helpful for this activity.



## Sensory Experiences

Students with autism experience sights, smells, sounds, tastes, and touch differently. Sensory experiences may be experienced to different extremes.

A student may be *hypersensitive* to difference experiences.

Hypersensitive—students are very sensitive to a sense.

*For example, fluorescent lights can seem as bright as looking into a spotlight.*

A student may be *hyposensitive* to another sense.

Hyposensitive—students crave a sense.

*For example, a student may love deep hugs, spinning, loud music, or the taste of certain foods.*

Other examples of things students with autism may be hypersensitive or hyposensitive to:

- The feel of certain food textures in the mouth
- The feel of certain surfaces or textures
- The taste of certain foods
- Patterns, logos, or shapes
- Pressure on the skin
- Air blowing on the skin
- A tag rubbing on the skin
- Feeling of cold or hot
- Pain
- Lights
- Sounds
- Smell of foods
- Sudden sounds
- Crowds



Lexie

## Practical Sensory Tips for Students with Autism

There are some practical sensory things that you can do to help students with autism in the classroom.

### Desk location

Place the desk in an optimal location for the student. This will depend on the student. For example, he or she may need to be closer to the teacher or at the back of the room.

### Keep your distance

There is no need to sit right next to a student all of the time. Give him or her some space to complete a task and to have some quiet time or break times throughout the day.

### Understand touching preference

Touch—such as pats on the back or a high five—can be extremely uncomfortable or upsetting to a student with autism. On the other hand, some students with autism enjoy the sensory input of a touch. It is best to learn the student’s preference to touch and to understand whether or not he or she is sensitive to it. You can always use other ways of expressing yourself that the student responds to, such as positive words, positive gestures, or talking about their interests.

### Avoid perfume or cologne

Smells can be overwhelming and distracting. Avoid wearing strong perfumes, lighting candles in class, or eating fragrant things (like garlic) for lunch.

### Minimize noise

Noise in the classroom may be difficult to contain or maintain. For some students, headphones or noise-blocking headgear can help filter out noise.

### Adjust lighting

Fluorescent lights can make an annoying buzzing sound and be extremely bright to students with autism. Perhaps see if the school can use floor lamps in your classroom, or find ways to incorporate natural light, like opening up blinds or curtains.

Remember, every student with autism is different. Students with different sensory needs may need to sit in different parts of the classroom. For instance, one student may need to sit away from a radio because he is sensitive to sound, while another may find the music relaxing.

# KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCE

## Knowledge

Please take a few moments to complete these questions. This is not a test, it is simply a way to review the information you have learned in this training.

1. Autism affects approximately
  - A. 1 out of 110 kids
  - B. 1 out of 210 kids
  - C. 1 out of 310 kids
  - D. 1 out of 410 kids
2. Some children with autism cover their ears when they hear a bell or PA announcement because:
  - A. They are used to being in quiet places.
  - B. Some noises can seem loud and overwhelming to them.
  - C. They like to ignore things.
  - D. They want to focus on what they are doing.
3. Autism is called a “spectrum” disorder because:
  - A. Children with autism see the spectrum of light differently.
  - B. Children with autism may be diagnosed at different points of the spectrum.
  - C. There is a range of autism symptoms.
  - D. B and C
4. Children with autism may communicate by:
  - A. Talking
  - B. Writing
  - C. Pointing
  - D. All of the above

For the next set of statements, please circle the number under each that best describes your agreement or disagreement with the statement.

5. Students with autism want to have friends but are unsure of how to make them.

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

6. Students with autism cannot learn as well as other students.

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

7. Students with autism make the school experience for other students more difficult.

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

8. Students with autism are interested in a lot of things.

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

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# Experience

Look back at the experience that you wrote about on page 2 of your workbook for the Knowledge and Experience Questions.

From what you learned today, name three ideas or understandings that you would incorporate into this situation if it were to happen again.

1. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

After using these three new ideas or bits of information, do you think the outcome of the situation would:

Stay the Same

Improve

Worsen



Eli & Jessica



# HANDOUT



## Additional Resources about Autism

To learn more about autism and students with autism, please see the following Web sites.

AutismOnline

[www.autisonline.com](http://www.autisonline.com)

Organization for Autism Research (OAR)

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

Autism Society of America (ASA)

[www.autism-society.org](http://www.autism-society.org)

Autism Speaks

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

Indiana Resource Center for Autism (IRCA)

[www.iidc.indiana.edu/irca](http://www.iidc.indiana.edu/irca)





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For more educational products and programs, visit [www.autisonline.com](http://www.autisonline.com). AutismOnline is the only Web site of its kind devoted to providing research-based, effective, high-quality resources, products, and information on autism across the lifespan. The mission of AutismOnline is to provide helpful products for all individuals affected by autism including individuals with autism, caregivers, advocates, teachers, and professionals. AutismOnline is a unique and extensive resource for the autism community.

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Danya International, Inc.'s mission is to have an impact on global public health and education through development and implementation of breakthrough health communications, research, and technology programs. The company provides breakthrough solutions in the areas of public health communication, research and evaluation, information technology, education and training, program management support, and health product development. Danya is based in Silver Spring, Maryland, with offices in Atlanta, Georgia, and Nairobi, Kenya.



To learn more about Danya, visit [www.danya.com](http://www.danya.com).