

Autism Vision

Creating Classroom Connections for
Adolescents With Autism



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Introduction

AutismVision: Creating Classroom Connections for Adolescents With Autism is a comprehensive resource for teachers, parents, counselors, and other concerned individuals who want to educate

A “socially inclusive” classroom fosters healthy interactions between teens with disabilities and those without disabilities. By educating teens about autism, you will not only increase student understanding of disabilities, but also create a positive, comfortable environment for students with this disorder.

typically developing adolescents about autism. This guide and its accompanying videotape/DVD are designed with you in mind. This *AutismVision* program will give you ways to educate teens about autism and increase social acceptance and understanding of adolescents with this disorder. By using these resources, you will help create a more accepting classroom environment for teens with autism.

With the increase in the number of children being diagnosed with autism in recent years, more of these students are being included in general education classrooms. Based on the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA, 2006), an education act to provide Federal funding to State and local school systems to provide special education services to eligible students with disabilities, teens with autism are included in general education classrooms and should receive the same benefits and services as their classmates. However, adolescents with autism have special needs, and this can create special challenges in the classroom. Many struggle to fit in and need understanding and help from their classmates. Research has found that educating students about differences—in this case, autism—can impact their attitudes toward and understanding of people affected by this disorder. This *AutismVision* program provides a structured intervention that can help typical peers learn about autism spectrum disorders and how to be good friends and classmates to people who have this disorder.

This *AutismVision* program is designed for use in classrooms that include teens whose symptoms fall within the moderate-to-severe range of the autism spectrum. The information in this guide and the related videotape/DVD may not be appropriate if the teen in your classroom has higher-functioning autism or Asperger syndrome. *AutismVision* consists of a series of four videos and facilitator's guides for different age groups and ability levels across the autism spectrum. Please see www.danya.com/autismvision.asp for information on other classroom resources.

This *AutismVision* program was developed to foster the social inclusion of adolescents with autism in general education classrooms. The program consists of a multimedia package designed to reach adolescents ages 12 to 15 in classrooms that include a teen with autism.

The goals of this *AutismVision* program are to:

- Increase typical peers' understanding of autism
- Foster empathy and positive attitudes toward adolescents with autism
- Promote positive social interactions between adolescents with autism and their typical peers

Program Elements

This *AutismVision* program consists of a videotape/DVD and this facilitator's guide.

The 14-minute videotape/DVD provides classmates with information about autism that is developmentally appropriate for adolescents ages 12 to 15. The videotape/DVD is designed to educate and promote empathy in classmates of teens with autism. It strives to build a stronger classroom community where students understand their similarities and differences. Specifically, the videotape/DVD features personal interviews with families and friends of teens with autism. It provides a real-life look at what it is like to have autism and creates a solid foundation for understanding and interacting with teens with this disorder.

This facilitator's guide is designed to support the efforts of teachers, parents, and other advocates as they conduct the videotape/DVD presentation. Step-by-step information is provided and includes:

- Suggestions for conducting the video presentation
- Pre- and postviewing activities
- Additional exercises and ideas for discussion
- Answers to frequently asked questions about autism
- Tips for creating a supportive classroom environment
- Specific information on teens with autism

Additional resources on autism are included on page 44 for your reference and information.

Guidelines for Program Facilitators

Who can facilitate the program? While teachers may be the most likely users of the program, any supportive or concerned adult can implement it. An informed parent, school counselor, or another advocate can conduct the presentation without receiving specialized education or training. All of the necessary information and procedures are explained and highlighted in this guide. It is designed to be easy to use!

The following are general guidelines for conducting an effective classroom presentation with this *AutismVision* program.

Be prepared and know the information. Before conducting the *AutismVision* program, it is important that you have a good knowledge base on the topic of autism. This guide provides you with answers to Frequently Asked Questions (page 34) as well as Additional Resources (page 44) for further reading.

To prepare to facilitate this *AutismVision* program, you should:

1. Skim through this guide to get an overall impression of the program and presentation components
2. Watch the *AutismVision* videotape/DVD
3. Read this guide thoroughly
4. Decide which pre- and postviewing activities you will use
5. Gather all materials needed to conduct the presentation and activities
6. Review additional resources from the list in the back of this guide

If you are not the classroom teacher, you will need to coordinate with the school administration and/or teacher in order to schedule a time to conduct the presentation in the classroom.

Promote a positive classroom environment. When conducting this presentation, it is important to promote an atmosphere of compassion, understanding, and mutual respect. Emphasize that everyone is different in some way and that we all must adjust to and respect differences. By explaining that teens with autism may have unique or different ways of doing things, you can also emphasize that everyone has his or her own way of relating to the world. Stress that it is important not to laugh at or make fun of teens with autism or any other condition and impress upon the class the importance of accepting all people—with or without autism.

Encourage creative thought and discussion. In order to facilitate a program that engages teens while emphasizing key learning points, ask open-ended questions that allow classmates to think about the question and answer in their own way. Simply asking “yes or no” questions will not generate lengthy discussion or give teens time to think about the issues at hand. For example, rather than ask: “Does anyone know what autism is?” you might ask: “What do you already know about autism?” More tips for engaging teens in a classroom presentation are offered on page 11.

Advocate for an accurate description of the disorders. Some students may have inaccurate or erroneous beliefs about autism. Help them correct such misconceptions by pointing out where they are mistaken. Reinforce important points and information about autism, making sure they understand how autism truly impacts people who have it.

Be prepared to address common erroneous beliefs such as:

- Teens with autism act weird.
- Everyone with autism acts the same.
- Teens with autism are dangerous.
- Teens with autism do not want any friends.
- Teens with autism did something to cause their disorder.

Other common myths or concerns about autism are addressed in “The Truth About Autism” section of this guide (page 41).

Throughout the presentation—and especially at the end—be sure to restate and emphasize the following take-home messages of this *AutismVision* program to the class:

- Teens with autism are first and foremost teenagers; they are like other teens in many ways.
- Teens with autism experience the world differently.
- Teens with autism need and want friends.
- Understanding autism is the key to creating connections.
- Autism is not contagious.
- No one should ever tease or make fun of someone with autism.
- We all benefit from having different kinds of friends; teens with autism can be great friends and enrich your life.

Should the Teen With Autism Be in the Classroom During the Presentation?

The primary goal of this *AutismVision* program is to educate typically developing peers about autism. Whether the teen with autism should be present in the classroom during the presentation should be carefully considered. Given that every teen with autism is unique and has different strengths and weaknesses, each case needs to be considered individually. Some teens with autism may benefit from being in the classroom and hearing the presentation and student questions. Some teens may even choose to answer student questions and contribute to the conversation to the extent that they are able; this process can be very empowering for them. However, being present during the presentation may cause other teens with autism undue stress or anxiety. For this reason, it is recommended that the determination of whether to include the teen during the presentation be made collaboratively by the teen with autism, his or her parents, the facilitator, and relevant school personnel. Permission to disclose an individual's disability should be received from the student and the student's parents or guardians.

Conducting the Presentation

This *AutismVision* program can be used in any general education classroom that includes a student with autism. A typical presentation will consist of a brief introduction to the program, pre-viewing activities, viewing of the *AutismVision* videotape/DVD, postviewing activities, and a conclusion. Use the following information to help you structure and prepare for the classroom presentation.

Introduction. At the start of the presentation, introduce yourself and briefly describe why you are in class. Highlight the agenda for the presentation. Suggested wording could include:

“Hello! My name is _____, and I’m here today to talk to you about autism. We are going to talk about what autism is, what it’s like for teens who have this disability, and how to be a friend to someone who has it. We’ll also do some activities together and watch a short video called ‘AutismVision.’ Then, I’m going to ask you some questions, and when I’m finished, you can ask me any questions you would like.”

Pre-Viewing Activities. Next, you will want to conduct one or more pre-viewing activities with the class. These activities are designed to get students thinking before watching the videotape/DVD. Decide in advance of the presentation which activities you would like to complete and be sure to bring any necessary materials. These activities can be found on pages 12–19.

Viewing the *AutismVision* Videotape/DVD. The next step is to present the *AutismVision* videotape/DVD to the class. You may want to introduce it by saying:

“Now we’re going to watch a video called ‘AutismVision.’ This video will show you what it’s like to have autism. After you watch it, we’ll talk about what you saw and do some more activities that will help you to better understand autism.”

Postviewing Activities. Following the presentation of the videotape/DVD, conduct one or more postviewing activities with the class. Postviewing activities are designed to help students process information in the videotape/DVD and build on skills acquired through the pre-viewing activities. These activities are located on pages 21–28.

Wrap-Up. Conclude your presentation by allowing students the opportunity to ask questions. At this time, be sure to reemphasize the key points of the videotape/DVD; these key points are specified on page 29. Then, thank the teens for their participation and remind them to always treat a classmate with autism with respect and kindness.

Customizing the Presentation to Your Specific Needs

This *AutismVision* program is designed to be flexible. You can choose and tailor the pre-viewing and postviewing activities to suit your own instructional style as well as the needs of the classroom. The table on the next page provides an overview of all the activities described in this guide, organized by name, with a brief description, amount of time needed to complete, and materials needed. Use the table to help you decide how to organize your presentation. A typical presentation—including activities and viewing the videotape/DVD—should take approximately 45 minutes.

Detailed Pre-Viewing and Postviewing Activities

The table below provides an overview of all the activities described in this guide, organized by name, description, amount of time they will take to complete, and materials needed. This table can help you decide how to organize your presentation and what activities will be useful during the presentation.

Overview of Pre-Viewing and Postviewing Activities

Activity Number	Activity Name	Description	Time to Complete	Necessary Materials
Pre-Viewing Activity 1	Differences Among People	Helps students think about how individuals differ from one another	10–15 minutes	Paper, pencils, markers, flipchart
Pre-Viewing Activity 2	What Would You Like to Know About Autism?	Students share what they know about autism and discuss what they would like to learn	10–15 minutes	Paper, pencils, markers, flipchart
Pre-Viewing Activity 3	Being an Advocate	Students discuss what it means to be a good advocate and how to become one	10–15 minutes	Paper, pencils, markers, flipchart
Pre-Viewing Activity 4	Switch It Up	An interactive activity for students to understand what it is like to feel confused in the classroom	10–15 minutes	Beverages, opaque containers, flipchart, markers
Postviewing Activity 1	Differences Among People	Students compare postviewing ideas about differences among people with their pre-viewing responses (<i>Corresponds with Pre-Viewing Activity 1</i>)	10–15 minutes	Responses from Pre-Viewing Activity 1, paper, pencils, markers, flipchart
Postviewing Activity 2	What Did You Learn About Autism?	Students discuss what they now know about autism (<i>Corresponds with Pre-Viewing Activity 2</i>)	10–15 minutes	Responses from Pre-Viewing Activity 2, paper, pencils, markers, flipchart
Postviewing Activity 3	Advocacy	After viewing the videotape/DVD, students discuss how to be a good advocate for someone with autism (<i>Corresponds with Pre-Viewing Activity 3</i>)	10–15 minutes	Responses from Pre-Viewing Activity 3, paper, pencils
Postviewing Activity 4	Strengths and Challenges, Likes and Dislikes	Students compare their strengths and challenges and likes and dislikes with those of someone with autism	10–15 minutes	Paper, pencils
Postviewing Activity 5	Sensory Overload	An interactive activity for students to understand what it feels like to be in an overwhelming “sensory overload” environment like the classroom	10–15 minutes	Paper, pencils, markers, flipchart

Tips for Engaging Adolescents

The following pages provide detailed instructions on conducting pre-viewing activities, presenting the videotape/DVD, and conducting postviewing activities. In addition, you may want to keep the following tips in mind for creating an engaging presentation for students ages 12 to 15.

- Create a relaxed, yet professional environment. Make your presentation conversational, direct, and positive.
- Be open and honest. Personal experience and insights make the presentation more interesting and help engage teens.
- Involve the students as much as possible. Ask questions and get everyone to participate and think about the topic.
- Include students in the presentation. Get volunteers to write responses on the board and divide the class into groups to conduct the activities.
- Use handouts and other visual material to aid in your presentation. The “Frequently Asked Questions” section on page 34 could be copied on colored paper, or you may want to put together a short PowerPoint presentation with important presentation points.
- Maintain your enthusiasm and energy throughout the presentation. Keep the presentation positive, yet informative.
- Encourage small-group work when doing the activities. Be sure that students stay on task and understand the important points from the presentation.
- Positively reinforce participation and discussion. Get students involved right at the beginning.

Pre-Viewing Activity 1: Differences Among People

Materials Needed



Flipchart and markers or chalkboard and chalk



Paper and pencils

Preparation

Write each of the following questions on the flipchart or chalkboard:

- What are some differences between you and others?
- How does being different make **YOU** feel?
- How can having friends who are different from you be a good thing?

Before asking participants to answer these questions, take a few moments to answer them for yourself. Think about your answers and the feelings they evoke. Cite an example. This will help you empathize with the student participants' feelings.

Procedure

1. Instruct students to write down their answers to the questions, individually or in small groups. Encourage them not to “think too much” about their responses; instead, they should write ideas freely as they come up. For students who have difficulty beginning this activity, you can offer the following sentence starters:

- “I am _____, but others are _____.”
- “Being different makes me feel _____.”
- “Having a friend who is different has helped me to _____.”

2. Allow students 5 minutes to respond to the questions. Then, facilitate a brief discussion on their answers. Write their responses on the flipchart/chalkboard.
3. Tell students to put their responses away in a safe place. Explain that they will need them for further discussion after they watch the videotape/DVD. Be sure to save the flipchart* on which you wrote their answers to use for Postviewing Activity 1.

*If using a chalkboard, be sure to write down students' responses on a sheet of paper for later use before erasing.

Pre-Viewing Activity 2: What Would You Like to Know About Autism?

Materials Needed

- ✍ Flipchart and markers or chalkboard and chalk
- ✍ Paper and pencils
- ✍ Strips of paper (Optional)

Preparation

To help spur conversation, prepare a list of questions about autism in advance of the presentation. Sample questions include:

- Can people with autism have friends?
- Will people with autism get better?
- Are people with autism ever happy?
- Can people with autism show affection?
- Can we do anything to help *[insert name of teen* with autism in your class]* feel better?

Questions could be written on strips of paper and placed in a bag or box for students to draw from during the activity. You could use the questions in the “Frequently Asked Questions” section of this guide to start the activity.

* Only if teen has disclosed status and parent has okayed using the student’s name



Procedure

1. Begin the lesson by asking students what they already know about autism. Write down their ideas on the flipchart. Depending on the experience level of your group, you may not get a lot of information at this point. If no one offers anything, try providing this definition of autism: *Autism is something some people are born with that changes the way they experience the world. They may see, hear, and feel things differently or behave in ways that seem unusual to us.*

Make sure you write down students' ideas. You will need them for other activities.

2. Now ask students what they would like to learn about autism. If they are having trouble thinking of questions, they can draw from the box that holds the questions you prepared in advance. Alternatively, you could have your students write down their questions and put them in a box that you can draw from.
3. Conclude the activity by asking students whether they have any final thoughts about autism before they see the videotape/DVD. Tell students they will revisit these questions after they watch the videotape/DVD.

Pre-Viewing Activity 3: Being an Advocate

-  Flipchart and marker or chalkboard and chalk
-  Paper and pencils

Preparation

The goal of this activity is for students to learn the qualities of an advocate and how to become a good advocate for students with differences.

Before conducting the activity, brainstorm a list of traits you have that make you a good advocate. Characteristics may include:

- Knowledge about a particular disorder or issue
- Caring about people
- Ability to talk to others about a disorder or difference and correct others' misconceptions

Procedure

1. Divide students into small groups. Ask each group to answer the following questions. (You may want to write the questions on the board or flipchart.):
 - What is an advocate?
 - What makes someone a good advocate?

Give the groups 5 minutes to answer the questions.

2. Bring the class back together and lead a group discussion based on the questions. Be sure to highlight the following:

An advocate is someone who is:




- **Familiar with the topic.** It is important to understand the basic information about a topic or issue in order to explain it to others.
- **Able to communicate clearly.** An advocate can explain information in easy-to-understand

language. He or she also presents the information in a supportive, positive way that explains it without insulting the receiver. Advocates merely want to inform others and understand any lack of knowledge they may have about an issue.

- **Supportive of people.** A good advocate lends encouragement and assistance to those with differences.
 - **Able to educate others.** By having knowledge about an issue or difference and sharing it with others, an advocate increases awareness of the topic while promoting knowledge and acceptance.
3. Tell students they are now going to watch a videotape/ DVD about teens with autism. Although these teens are just like them in many ways, they have some differences, and teens like these need good advocates at school and other places. Ask the students to think about being a good advocate for teens with these disorders as they view the videotape/DVD, paying attention to the main messages and descriptions the video provides.

Pre-Viewing Activity 4: Switch It Up

Materials Needed

-  Beverages in their opaque containers (soda, milk, juice, water)
-  Extra, empty opaque container
-  Flipchart and markers or chalkboard and chalk

Procedure

1. Set up the beverages (in the opaque containers).
2. Ask for 2 or 3 volunteers. Send the volunteers out of the room and into the hallway. No peeking allowed!
3. Instruct the rest of the class to switch the liquids in the containers. For instance, put milk in the soda can, soda in the juice container, water in the milk carton.
4. Explain to the group that when the volunteers come back into the classroom, they are to ask the returning students to predict what is in each container. They can try to explain to the volunteers what they've done, but without using any of the following words: *juice, beverage, drink, container, soda, milk, water, switch, move, or change*.
5. Bring the volunteers back in. Ask the group to encourage the volunteers to correctly guess what is in each container. Remember, the group cannot use any of the words on the list above.
6. Conclude the activity by recording volunteers' predictions and asking them to take a taste out of each container.
7. Ask the volunteers to talk about the experience. Were they confused about what the class was trying to get them to do? Were they surprised when they tasted what was in the containers? Were they frustrated when they could not understand what everyone else in the classroom knew? Did they feel left out?
8. Point out to the class that this activity gave them a small

experience of what it is like to have autism. Autism is a bit like having the world work in unexpected ways and not being able to communicate with people to find out the “rules.” This explains why some teens with autism like to know ahead of time what is going to happen during the school day.

9. Tell students that teens with autism often feel lonely and isolated. Point out that even though they sometimes seem to want to be left alone, it may be that they just do not know how to join in activities with their classmates. Their unusual behaviors are the ways in which they attempt to communicate with others or calm themselves down when the environment is too stressful for them.

Viewing the *AutismVision* Videotape/DVD

After conducting the pre-viewing activities, show the *AutismVision* videotape/DVD to the class. As an introduction to the video, you might say:

“Now we’re going to watch a video called ‘AutismVision.’ This video will demonstrate what it’s like to have autism. After you watch it, we’ll have a discussion and complete some more activities that will help us better understand this disorder.”

This *AutismVision* program videotape/DVD runs for 14 minutes and contains the following elements:

- Interviews with family and friends of teens with autism
- Real-life situations and examples highlighting the strengths of and challenges faced by teens with autism

Encourage your students to write down questions or comments that come to mind as they view the video.




We recommend that you reinforce learning immediately after the videotape/DVD by emphasizing its key points:

- Teens with autism are first and foremost teenagers; they are like other teens in many ways.
- Teens with autism experience the world differently.
- Teens with autism need and want friends.
- Understanding autism is the key to creating connections.
- Autism is not contagious.
- No one should ever bully, tease, or make fun of someone with autism.
- We all benefit from having different kinds of friends. Teens with autism can be great friends and enrich your life.

Then ask whether the students have any specific questions about the videotape/DVD and begin the postviewing activities.

Postviewing Activity 1: Differences Among People

Materials Needed

-  Responses from Pre-Viewing Activity 1
-  Paper and pencils
-  Flipchart and markers or chalkboard and chalk

Procedure

1. Ask students to take out their responses from the “Differences Among People” Pre-Viewing Activity. Also, post the flipchart with the answers you wrote on the board or rewrite your saved answers on the chalkboard.
2. Tell students something like the following:




“As you saw in the video, teens with autism do some things differently than you or I do. However, autism is just one way a person might be different from others. There are many differences among people. Can you give some examples of how people are different?”

(If necessary, give examples of differences, such as skin or eye color, athleticism, math abilities, etc.)
3. Break the class into smaller groups for the next discussion. Ask each group to think of at least three ways people can be different. Give the groups 5 to 10 minutes to complete their lists. They can use their ideas from the Pre-Viewing Activity. Suggest that they also discuss the following questions:
 - Have you ever felt different from others?
 - How did being different make you feel?
4. Bring the entire class back together. Ask the groups to share the results of their small-group discussions. On a page of the flipchart or on the chalkboard, list all the responses. Ask the students whether this activity helped them feel more empathy toward people with autism.

5. Conclude the activity by making a group list of recommendations on how to treat a classmate with autism. Suggestions might include:
 - Treat the student with autism the same way you treat everyone else.
 - Don't exclude the classmate with autism from any school activities.
 - Be polite and respectful. Don't tease or make fun of the student with autism.
 - Make an extra effort to invite and include a student with autism.

Postviewing Activity 2: What Did You Learn About Autism?

Materials Needed




-  Student questions from Pre-Viewing Activity 2
-  Flipchart and markers
-  Paper and pencils

Procedure

1. After showing the *AutismVision* videotape/DVD, ask students what they learned from it. Their ideas may include:
 - People with autism experience the world differently from most people.
 - Each person with autism is unique. Although they share certain characteristics, people with autism can be very different from each other.
 - People with autism may have difficulty communicating, which may explain any unusual behaviors.
 - People with autism like routines and do not like things to change from one day to the next.
2. Ask students whether they still have questions about autism and list them.
3. Answer students' questions if you can, and allow other students an opportunity to answer them. This guide's "Frequently Asked Questions" and "Additional Resources" sections may be helpful to you. If you do not know the answer to a question, it is all right to tell the class that you'll have to look up the answer and get back to them.

Postviewing Activity 3: Advocacy

Materials Needed




-  Responses to Pre-Viewing Activity 3
-  Paper and pencils
-  Flipchart and markers or chalkboard and chalk

Procedure

1. Refer students back to their answers to Pre-Viewing Activity 3. After viewing the videotape/DVD, how can they be good advocates for someone with autism?
2. Ask students to spend 5 minutes writing down ideas for how they can be good advocates for someone with autism.
3. Lead a group discussion based on students' answers. Generate a list of important advocacy qualities students can practice and write it on the board. This list may include:
 - Tell others about autism.
 - Explain the different characteristics of someone with autism.
 - Be a buddy to someone with autism. Sit with him or her at lunch or do something together after school.
 - Help a classmate who has autism. If he or she appears confused in class, ask whether he or she needs help.
 - If others tease a classmate with autism, let them know that it's not okay. Stick up for your classmate with autism.
4. Conclude the activity by asking students what else they need in order to become better advocates or friends. For example, they may need more detailed information. Provide ideas for where to go for more information on autism, such as those listed in the "Additional Resources" section of this guide. You or the teacher may also want to give a small assignment to the class to learn more about autism.

Postviewing Activity 4: Strengths and Challenges, Likes and Dislikes

Materials Needed

-  Paper and pencils
-  Answers to questions from the teen with autism
-  Flipchart and markers or chalkboard and chalk

Preparation

Prior to conducting this activity, it would be helpful to have the teen with autism (or his or her parents) complete the activity questions so that after the students have completed the first part of this activity, their responses can be compared with those of the student with autism. The goal of this activity is to show classmates that everyone has strengths and challenges, and anyone may need help and support along the way, including the teen with autism.

This activity should be used only in classrooms in which the teen with autism has disclosed the disorder to the class. Before conducting this activity, please consult with the teen's parents.

Procedure




1. Put these questions on the board or distribute copies to students. Give the students 5 to 10 minutes to answer on a piece of paper.
 - What subject in school do you like the best (or do the best in)?
 - What is your favorite activity or hobby?
 - What is your favorite food?
 - What accomplishment are you the most proud of?
 - What things (at school, home) are difficult for you?

- What would you like to do when you are an adult?
2. After the class has completed the questions, go through each and ask them to state their answers. As you go through each question, tell them the answers the teen with autism gave.
 3. After you have reviewed all the questions and answers, ask the following questions:
 - Were any of your answers similar to those given by _____ [*insert name of teen* with autism in your class*]?
 - If yes, what can you learn from this fact?
 - If no, would you expect to have everything in common with any classmate?
 - How can you use these strengths, challenges, likes, and dislikes to get to know _____ [*insert name of teen* with autism in your class*] better?
 4. Conclude this activity by emphasizing that all students have strengths and challenges; everyone has something he or she is good at and something that is more difficult. Teens with autism are the same way. Everyone needs support and encouragement along the way.

* Only if teen has disclosed status and parent has okayed using the student's name

Postviewing Activity 5: Sensory Overload

Materials Needed

-  Volunteers
-  Paper and pencils
-  Flipchart and marker or chalkboard and chalk

Procedure

1. Ask for three or four volunteers. Give each volunteer a different task to do during the activity. One will blink the lights; one will yell “hello” really loud; one will clap; and another will keep closing a book loudly.
2. Tell classmates that during this activity, they will be experience a little of what it is like to have autism.
3. Instruct the class to perform two tasks at the same time. They are going to sing “Row, Row, Row Your Boat” while simultaneously writing the words to the Pledge of Allegiance on a piece of paper. Have students take out a piece of paper and begin writing and singing.
4. While they are performing these tasks, ask the volunteers to begin their assigned jobs.
5. Sustain this activity for at least 5 minutes. Encourage the students to continue their tasks throughout. If anyone laughs, talks, or otherwise interrupts the activity, encourage everyone to continue; discourage any laughter.
6. Stop the activity and give students a few moments to relax. Ask how they felt during the activity. Were they able to complete their tasks? Did the experience make them feel nervous, jumpy, or confused? Write their responses on a sheet of the flipchart or on the chalkboard.
7. Tell the students that what they experienced is a little like the experience of many teens with autism. Being in a classroom with a lot of sights, smells, and sounds can

be overwhelming to someone with autism who is also trying to pay attention to the lesson or task. Explain that sometimes teens with autism engage in unusual behaviors (such as rocking or hand flapping) to calm themselves down.

- 8.** End the activity by asking students if the activity helped them develop a better understanding of what people with autism experience.

Wrap-Up

After you have completed the postviewing activities with the class, conclude your presentation by summarizing the main points of the presentation and videotape/DVD. These include:

- Teens with autism are first and foremost teenagers; they are like other teens in many ways.
- Teens with autism experience the world differently.
- Teens with autism need and want friends.
- Understanding autism is the key to creating connections.
- Autism is not contagious.
- No one should ever tease or make fun of someone with autism.
- We all benefit from having different kinds of friends; teens with autism can be great friends and enrich your life.

Also, you may want to conclude the presentation by asking students to generate a list of recommendations on how to treat a classmate with autism. Write responses on the board or flipchart. Suggestions may include:

- Treat the student with autism the same way you treat everyone else.
- Include the student with autism in all school activities.
- Be polite and respectful. Never bully, tease, or make fun of anyone, especially a student with autism.

End your presentation by asking students whether they have any final questions about autism or what it is like for teens with this disorder. Then, thank the students for their participation in the group discussions. Finally, remind students that while teens with autism may at times act differently, they are students—just like them in many ways!

If you are the parent of the teen with autism in this classroom, you may choose to lead a short discussion specifically about your teen. Determine in advance what information you will be sharing about your child and focus on information that will promote social acceptance by his or her peers. Examples of such topics may include:

- The teen’s interests and hobbies
- His or her personal strengths
- His or her favorite foods or clothes
- How to be a good friend to the teen
- What bothers the teen or what he or she does when upset or annoyed

You and your child may wish to create a small poster or visual display with pictures of your child’s interests, strengths, etc.

Extensions for Creating Socially Inclusive Classrooms

These extensions are designed to build on the lessons learned during this *AutismVision* program presentation. While they are not specifically connected to the videotape/DVD, they will help students apply the main points and lessons from the video in classroom or schoolwide activities. These extensions are not a requirement of the *AutismVision* program but are simply meant to supplement it. They can be completed as a follow-up to the presentation or as an additional activity. Some teachers may decide to use these activities as class assignments or opportunities for students to earn extra credit.

Extension 1: Conduct an Awareness Campaign

Building on what students learned about autism during the presentation, ask students to create a schoolwide awareness campaign about this disorder. (They may be interested in creating an awareness campaign about autism spectrum disorders in general; this is acceptable.) The purpose of an awareness campaign is to educate others about a particular disorder—in this case, autism—and increase understanding and acceptance of people with this disorder.

Ask students to create a campaign that will educate their peers about what autism is and how they can be good friends to peers with this disorder. The campaign may include posters, flyers, speakers, or special presentations. A week, such as Disability Awareness Week, or a specific day could be designated to focus on the campaign, and at the end, students could organize a concluding period where a speaker is brought in to talk more about the disorder. The ultimate goal is to increase others' awareness of autism in school.

Extension 2: Be a Buddy

A buddy system can give typically developing teens the opportunity to get to know their classmate with autism, as well as allow the teen with the disorder the chance to make

a new friend and get support in the classroom. This could be a schoolwide or an individual classroom activity. Be sure to discuss this activity with the teen with autism (and his or her parents) before implementing it.

After matching a typically developing teen with a teen with autism, ask each of them to do one or two activities together. The teens can decide on the activity and may need some input from the family of the teen with autism. After the activities have been completed, meet with each teen individually to see what he or she learned from the experience. The goal of the exercise is for teens to get to know their classmate with autism as well as to discover that while everyone may have different interests, they can all get along.

Extension 3: Educate Others

As a way for students to learn more about autism, as well as to educate others, give students an assignment to write a magazine article about autism. Ask them to include specific information in the article, such as what the disorder is, how it is diagnosed, how it affects the person with the disorder in the classroom, and how others can treat people with autism. To keep the assignment fun, add a creative component, such as requiring that they interview someone with autism (or his or her parents) and include photographs or drawings.

This could be presented as a writing competition with prizes awarded for the best articles. You may also want to copy the winning articles and distribute them to other classes in order to educate others about the disorder. Finally, the school newspaper could be asked to print the best article.

Extension 4: Get Involved

This extension could be part of a community service project. Ask students to research different autism organizations in the community. For example, the nationally run Autism Society of America has many local chapters in all 50 States, but many States also have local agencies that provide direct services to

those with autism spectrum disorders.

As part of this extension activity, ask students to volunteer or become involved with the community organization in some way. They may want to have a bake sale or car wash to raise money, or they could donate clothes to a residential facility that serves teens with developmental disabilities. The goal of this activity is to get students involved in the community in ways that will benefit people with autism as well as others across the autism spectrum.

Frequently Asked Questions

This section of the guide is designed to provide the facilitator with basic information about autism in a question-and-answer format. These pages can easily be photocopied and shared with colleagues and other interested individuals.

What is autism?

Autism is a developmental disorder that affects a person's ability to communicate and interact with other people. This disorder affects different people in different ways. Some individuals can function well on their own, while others need more assistance. Some people with autism have good verbal skills; others do not speak at all. Autism is characterized by difficulties with social relationships, communication, and an unusual attachment to objects or routines.

What are the symptoms of autism?

There are three major groupings of autism symptoms:

- Problems with social interactions, such as lack of eye contact and inability to maintain attention
- Problems with communication, such as infrequent use of language or odd language patterns
- Problems with changes in routine or repetitive behaviors, such as flapping arms or spinning around

While everyone with autism is different, common characteristics may include:

- Need for routine and resistance to change
- Difficulty using language to communicate needs
- Repetition of words or phrases instead of responding to what is said
- Laughing, crying, or appearing unhappy for reasons not clear to others
- Preference for being alone

- Acting-out behaviors, such as tantrums
- Difficulty socializing with others
- Resistance to physical contact with others
- Little or no eye contact
- Inappropriate attachment to objects
- Over- or undersensitivity to sensory input

It is important to note that these characteristics tend to vary greatly from day to day and from person to person.

What are high-functioning autism (HFA) and Asperger syndrome?

High-functioning autism (HFA) and Asperger syndrome are developmental disorders that affect a person's ability to communicate and interact with other people. People with HFA and Asperger syndrome may have trouble understanding social cues, cling to routines, move repetitively, have difficulty with fine motor skills and sensory integration, and become preoccupied with specific areas of interest.

How are high-functioning autism (HFA) and Asperger syndrome different from autism?

Asperger syndrome is one of five developmental disorders (Pervasive Developmental Disorders) that represent the autism spectrum. HFA falls at the "high" end of the autism spectrum, where people with this diagnosis may be able to communicate better socially, have more language skills, and exhibit fewer behavior problems than people at the lower end of the spectrum. The main difference between Asperger syndrome and autism is in the language and cognitive areas. Typically, people with Asperger syndrome do not experience delayed language development and may have average to above-average intelligence.

When do symptoms of autism appear?

Although the range can vary widely, parents of children with autism often begin to notice signs of the disorder when their children are 2 to 3 years old.

How many people have autism?

In a recent survey conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 5.6 children per 1,000 were reported to have an autism diagnosis. Boys were four times more likely to have a diagnosis of autism than girls.

Is autism contagious?

Autism, HFA, and Asperger syndrome are not contagious. You cannot “catch” autism from someone who has it. Researchers believe that autism is the result of a person’s genetic makeup and other, unknown factors that may trigger the onset of the symptoms.

Is there a cure?

At this time, no cure has been found for autism or any of the autism spectrum disorders. Many researchers and educators are currently studying these disorders and looking for ways to cure or treat people who have them. While there is no cure yet, we do know that the earlier the disorders are diagnosed and treated, the better the result for the person.

Many adults with autism see their disorder as a strength and view the idea of a “cure” as offensive. Individuals with autism and their peers should understand that disability is a natural part of the human condition.

How should teens with autism be treated?

Teens with autism should be treated the same as other teens. While they may have different ways of relating to and communicating with people, they also have many strengths and interesting qualities.

If they can speak, conversation should be encouraged. If they use other forms of communication, such as sign language, pictures, or communication devices, it is important to try to understand them.

Research shows that an effective way to reach teens with autism is through their individual interests. Thus, it is important in a classroom setting to find out what the teen with autism is interested in and create opportunities for interaction centered on those interests.

Challenges and Teens With Autism

As a teacher, parent, or other advocate, you likely know that children face difficult developmental challenges as they advance from elementary-school age into adolescence. Adolescence typically brings increased desire for independence from parents and increased importance and value placed on peer relationships, as well as the onset of many physical changes associated with puberty. These developmental changes are difficult for any teen to manage; they are even more challenging for teens with autism.

Below are some reasons the onset of adolescence brings added challenges to teens with autism.

Peers

- Adolescents with autism may have trouble connecting with peers and fitting in—or they may not have any friends at all.
- While peer relationships may be difficult for teens with autism to develop, this does not mean that they do not need or want friends.
- Teens with autism may face a significant amount of bullying and teasing by peers. Because they may not know how to approach a bully or combat teasing, it is important to give teens with autism constant support in this area and educate peers about autism in order to reduce occurrences of bullying.

Body

- Puberty is often a time of bodily changes. Sudden bodily changes can be confusing or even scary for some teens with autism. Change, especially personal change, is very difficult for some teens with autism.
- A maturing body with accompanying new and different feelings may create intense discomfort and confusion for teens with autism.

- Good hygiene is a lesson that becomes more important as teens with autism go through puberty.
- Sex education and lessons in appropriate behavior with peers of the opposite sex are important for teens with autism to learn at this time.

Behavior

- Most adolescents are taking this time in their lives to become more independent and test the waters of what is acceptable and learn how they can get what they want. Adolescents with autism are no different; however, their methods of obtaining what they want may be.
- Some teens with autism want and need more independence, but because they are unsure how to obtain it, they may resort to tantrums, aggression, or resistance.
- Because teens with autism may have trouble communicating or expressing what they need or want, they may exhibit misbehavior or emotional outbursts.

Sensory processing

- Adolescents in middle school experience an environment that is fast-paced and overwhelming. For teens with autism, a constantly changing environment in which they must go to different classes, be with different people, and hear many different sounds can be extremely overwhelming to their senses.
- Because teens with autism have difficulty processing so many sensory messages, they may react with anger, tantrums, or behavior problems because they can no longer handle the overwhelming nature of their environment. The new sights, sounds, and “feel” of their school environment are extremely challenging.

How to help

Understanding the problems and challenges teens with autism face is the first step in being able to help them. All teens need extra support and encouragement at this time—especially teens with autism. You can learn more about autism by reviewing the resources listed in the “Additional Resources” section at the end of this guide. Also, the teen with autism and his or her parents are excellent sources of information on how to help and support that teen in the classroom.

The Truth About Autism

Some people may have misperceptions of students with autism. Some of the common myths, as well as the truth about autism, are provided below. This page can be photocopied and shared with students and other interested individuals.

What are some common myths?

- *Myth: People with autism cannot feel love or show affection.*

Truth: People with autism can and do feel love and show affection, but they may express these emotions differently from others.

- *Myth: People with autism do not want to interact with other people.*

Truth: People with autism do want social interaction, and teens with autism want and need friends. They simply have a hard time knowing how to interact with other people and need help to learn how to do so.

- *Myth: People with autism are dangerous to others.*

Truth: Although some people with autism are prone to behavior outbursts, the vast majority of people with autism are not dangerous. With early intervention techniques, most challenging behaviors can be eliminated or reduced.

Tips for Creating a Supportive Classroom Environment

It is important to create a supportive environment for all students in the classroom. The following tips provide strategies that will help support a student with autism in a general classroom environment. Be sure to work with the teen's parents and Individual Education Plan (IEP) team to target the areas where the teen needs the most support in the classroom.

- **Create a classroom environment that is open, honest, and positive.** This will benefit all students in your classroom and create an environment for acceptance and understanding of a person with autism.
- **Try not to draw too much attention to the student with autism.** Have discussions with him or her in private for specific problems or solutions or to point out mistakes in a positive way.
- **Discuss with the teen with autism appropriate classroom accommodations that may help.** These may also be built into the student's IEP.
- **Arrange for a place for the teen to go if he or she needs a break.** This may benefit all students in the classroom and can provide them with some necessary quiet time during a busy school day.
- **Break tasks down into smaller steps.** Students with autism may have a difficult time understanding or following a complex set of directions, and they may become overwhelmed. By breaking assignments into smaller steps, you can enable the student to accomplish each task, receive feedback, and progress to the next step.
- **Implement a positive-reinforcement reward system.** A reward system based on good performance or behavior in the classroom will give students immediate feedback. Make certain any reinforcement plan for the student

with autism is consistent with the current IEP. Reward typically developing students for kind and helpful behaviors toward the teen with autism.

- ***Develop a routine or schedule of activities for the classroom.*** Teens with autism like routines, and they like to have time to prepare for lessons and events. Having a posted schedule or calendar will help. If there is a change in your normal classroom activities, prepare the student with autism in advance and help him or her understand the change and his or her role.
- ***Use clear language and instruction.*** Be as specific and to the point as possible and make sure the teen with autism understands your message or instructions.
- ***Provide immediate feedback to the teen with autism.*** This may apply to assignments or classroom activities. It will help the teens with autism know whether they are on the right (or wrong) track.
- ***Keep sounds, sights, and smells to a minimum.*** Teens with autism are often either hyper- or hyposensitive to environmental stimuli. Therefore, sounds, smells, and visual stimuli that seem ordinary to typical classmates can be intrusive and overwhelming for a teen with autism. Teachers who work with teens with autism often keeps lights low, play soothing background music, or provide headphones as a way to minimize stress.

Additional Resources

Resources for Facilitators

Books

Sicile-Kira, C., & Grandin, T. (2004). *Autism spectrum disorders: The complete guide to understanding autism, Asperger's syndrome, Pervasive Developmental Disorder, and other ASDs*. New York: Perigee Trade.

Sicile-Kira, C. (2006). *Adolescents on the autism spectrum: A parent's guide to the cognitive, social, physical, and transition needs of teenagers with autism spectrum disorders*. New York: Penguin Group.

Siff Exkorn, K. (2006). *The autism sourcebook: Everything you need to know about diagnosis, treatment, coping, and healing*. New York: Regan Books.

Wagner, S. (2001). *Inclusive programming for middle school students with autism/Asperger's syndrome*. Arlington, TX: Future Horizons.

Zysk, V., & Notbohm, E. (2004). *1001 great ideas for teaching and raising children with autism spectrum disorders*. Arlington, TX: Future Horizons.

Web Sites

ASA: Autism Society of America

www.autism-society.org

ASA provides detailed information on a wide range of autism-related topics for families and educators. It also provides a list of ASA chapters throughout the country for support and additional resources.

OAR: Organization for Autism Research

www.researchautism.org

OAR provides detailed information on applied research to the autism community. Its Web site contains monthly

newsletters, a comprehensive list of resources, and an overview of practical research underway in autism spectrum disorders.

NICHCY: National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities

www.nichcy.org

NICHCY is a national source of information on disabilities in children of all ages. It includes research-based information, law and policy information, and resources for autism spectrum disorders.

NIMH: National Institute of Mental Health

www.nimh.nih.gov

NIMH offers detailed information regarding autism spectrum disorders, including a printable booklet. Information can also be found about clinical trials, as well as research activities such as those of the Interagency Autism Coordinating Committee.

CDC: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism

CDC offers a wealth of educational information about autism spectrum disorders and includes an Autism Information Center on its Web site. In addition to this, information on other research activities and resources is provided.

Resources for Teens

Books

Grandin, T. (1996). *Thinking in pictures: My life with autism*. New York: Doubleday.

The author, Temple Grandin, is a scientist as well as someone who has autism. She has written many books, and this one in particular provides valuable insights into what life is like with autism.

Spillsbury, L. (2002). *What does it mean to have autism?* Oxford: Heinemann Library.

This is an informative book about autism for classmates and friends.

Web Sites

KidsHealth: TeensHealth: Autism

www.kidshealth.org/teen/school_jobs/school/autism.html

Written for teens, this Web site provides detailed information about what autism spectrum disorders are, how they are treated, and what it is like to live with these disorders.

Children, Youth and Women's Health Service

www.cyh.com/HealthTopics/HealthTopicDetails.aspx?p=243&np=293&id=2321

This Web site provides answers to common questions teens may have about autism.

The Geneva Centre for Autism

www.autism.net/cms/index.php?page=89

This Web site has a special section for teens with information about autism, links to other Web sites, and other resources.

