

SCHOOL

 *Community Tool Kit*

*A tool kit to assist members of the school community
in understanding and supporting students with autism*



AUTISM SPEAKS™
It's time to listen.

Autism Speaks

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About this Kit

As the rate of autism diagnosis increases, many more public and private schools will include students with autism. Learners with autism may have some additional challenges in the school environment, but with the support of the school community – the teachers, administrators, aides, office staff, bus drivers, nurses, custodians, peers and parents -- students with autism can make great strides and become valued members of a student body. Just as students can learn from each member of the school community, the school staff and peers can learn that students with autism have a lot to offer in return. The purpose of this kit is to provide information about autism – the features, challenges and strengths -- as well as some of the tools and strategies that may result in more positive interactions for all members of a school community.

This tool kit is *not* intended to be a curriculum for special education for students on the autism spectrum, but rather a support for the general education and administrative school staff who interact with students with autism in various capacities. However, it is envisioned that this tool kit will provide valuable information and resources that can be employed by special education and administrative staff in their efforts to plan for and support students in general education environments and involvement in the school community as a whole.

The following information has been compiled to assist in staff training efforts, offering an introduction to autism and highlights of specific strategies that have been found to be helpful. It is important that support for students with autism employs a team approach, and that each student is considered on an individualized level, in addition to the general perspective that is provided here. School staff should enlist the resources of those who know the student well — experienced teachers, therapists and families — and try to always seek first to understand. Experience and further training will allow for broader skill development and the ability to provide students with greater access to communication, organization, sensory and motivational supports that will help to reap the rewards that come from interacting with this complex but rewarding population.

Autism Speaks does not provide medical or legal advice or services. Rather, Autism Speaks provides general information about autism as a service to the community. The information provided in this kit is not a recommendation, referral or endorsement of any resource, therapeutic method, or service provider and does not replace the advice of medical, legal or educational professionals. This kit is not intended as a tool for verifying the credentials, qualifications, or abilities of any organization, product or professional. Autism Speaks has not validated and is not responsible for any information or services provided by third parties. You are urged to use independent judgment and request references when considering any resource associated with the provision of services related to autism.



With gratitude, we thank the members of the Professional Advisory Committee for generously donating their time, experience and resources to this project.

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Autism Speaks would like to extend special thanks to the Parent Advisory Committee for the time and effort that these individuals put into reviewing the School Community Tool Kit.

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The School Community Tool Kit information was compiled and edited by Liz Bell



How to Use this Tool Kit

 The Autism Speaks School Community Tool Kit is a broadly based support, envisioned for use by staff in all areas of a school population, with learners from kindergarten through graduation, who present with the highly variable skills and challenges characteristic of the spectrum that represents autism. As such, some of this information will be more necessary—and more relevant—to some users than others.

It is anticipated that interdisciplinary school personnel, such as administrators, case managers and school psychologists, would become familiar with the breadth of the information included in this kit. Similarly, special education teachers, behavior specialists and autism consultants might find additional perspectives, resources and supports that might be used to implement strategies and programs for their students. Links to websites and lists of suggested reading are included in the [Resources](#) section at the end, offering access to further depth in particular areas of concern and additional opportunities for specific learning. In the [Appendix](#), downloadable examples, forms and handouts are included for further reference and distribution (with necessary permission, as noted.)

For others with more limited interactions with a student, such as bus drivers and cafeteria staff, key information on autism and Asperger's Syndrome and (mostly) universal strategies are set forth in two-page [Autism Basics](#) and [Asperger's Syndrome Basics](#) summaries. In addition, specific considerations that might be useful in preparing and supporting staff and peers are included in the [For Specific Members](#) section. If extended training opportunities are not available, it is anticipated that a brief introduction from a parent, special education teacher or behavior specialist about the child, coupled with the appropriate **Autism/Asperger's Syndrome Basics** summary, the relevant [For Specific Members](#) section and the [About Me](#) form completed by the student or his family should provide a start to building understanding and support. Ongoing training, trouble-shooting and increasing expectations will help to increase competence and success for everyone involved.

Sections have been broken into modules, so that they might be digested or delivered in short units, such as at a staff meeting or in-service. Examples and visual supports have been included, since we *all* benefit from the use of pictures. Links to additional training opportunities, websites, video clips and examples have been inserted, and it is envisioned that these will be added and updated over time. The [Appendix](#) includes forms and articles that can be used in training sessions or as handouts to reinforce or implement perspectives and strategies outlined in the tool kit.

Since learning is enhanced when it is applied, it is suggested that training with this tool kit be employed in a fashion as hands-on as possible: role play, create examples, apply a technique to a current student's needs, discuss and compare. In addition, the [Appendix](#) includes a section with brief assessments and case studies, and websites in [Resources](#) offer on-line training tools that can be used for reinforcement of learning principles.



While Autism Speaks has involved many perspectives in compiling this Tool Kit, it remains a work in progress. We would appreciate your contributions and feedback, including both successes and opportunities for improvement. Please email us at schooltoolkit@autismspeaks.org.

Table of Contents

What is autism?

- The core symptoms of autism
- How common is autism?
- What causes autism?
- What about those unique abilities that may accompany autism?
- What are specific features of Asperger's Syndrome?
- Are there other challenges that may accompany autism?
- What are possible physical and medical issues?

How might a child with special needs be a part of our school?

- What is a child's right to public education?
- What is free appropriate public education?
- What is least restrictive environment?
- What are special education services?
- What types of instructional methods are used in teaching students with autism?

General Strategies for Intervention

- Why a team approach?
- How can communication be supported?
- What can help improve social interaction and development?
- What strategies can be employed to promote socially-appropriate behavior?

For specific members of the School Community

- Bus Drivers and Transportation Supervisors
- Custodial Staff
- General Education and Special Area Teachers
- Lunch and Recess Aides
- Office Staff
- Paraprofessionals
- Peers
- School Administration, Principals, Interdisciplinary Team Members
- School Nurses
- School Security

Resources

- Books
- Websites
- Videos



Appendix

Autism Basics

Asperger's Syndrome Basics

About Me

Insights and Strategies—articles and guides

- *Ten Things Every Child with Autism Wishes You Knew*, by Ellen Notbohm
- *Ten Things Your Student with Autism Wishes You Knew*, by Ellen Notbohm
- *Presuming Intellect*, by William Stillman
- *Supporting Students With Autism: 10 Ideas for Inclusive Classrooms*, by Paula Kluth
- Organization for Autism Research's *6 Steps to Success for Autism*
- Organization for Autism Research's *Steps to Success for Asperger Syndrome*
- *What are Visual Strategies?* by Linda Hodgdon

Peer Supports

- How to be a Friend to Someone With Autism
- Ideas from The FRIEND Program about being a friend to a person with autism
- Strategies for Bullying
- Types of Relationship Circles

Organization, Sensory and Behavioral Strategies and Examples

- Classroom Checklist
- Positive Behavior Support
- Reinforcement Strategies
- Easy to Use Data Collection for School Personnel
- Examples of Sensory/Emotions Visual Supports
- Something Hurts
- Invisible Aide Game

Assessments

- Baseline Autism Quiz
- Sensory Processing Quiz
- Group Case Study Activities
- Autism/Aspergers Simulation Activity

The School Community Tool Kit can be found on the Autism Speaks website:

www.autismspeaks.org/school

Autism Speaks maintains the School Community Tool Kit as a service and a reference tool. Every effort is made to ensure listings are up-to-date. Autism Speaks does not endorse or claim to have personal knowledge of the abilities of those listed. The resources listed in these pages are not intended as a recommendation, referral, or endorsement of any resource or as a tool for verifying the credentials, qualifications, or abilities of any organization, product or professional. Users are urged to use independent judgment and request references when considering any resource associated with diagnosis or treatment of autism, or the provision of services related to autism.

