ASD and Me
Group Facilitation Manual
Introduction

A 2008 study in the Journal of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities found that a gap of several years typically exists between the time a child is diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder, and the time their diagnosis is disclosed and explained to them. When participants in the study discovered that parents, relatives, and teachers knew of their diagnosis long before they did, they often experienced feelings of shock, disappointment, and disbelief (Huws, & Jones, 2008). However, when individuals with ASD are aware of their diagnosis, their perceptions of the diagnosis are often misinformed or extremely negative, such as feeling as though they are “not normal” or “have a bad brain” (Humphrey & Lewis, 2008). Research has shown that having a clear understanding of the ASD diagnosis aids in the development of a positive self-concept and self-identity (Huws, & Jones, 2008). What the diagnosis means to each individual, and to what extent this understanding is part of their developing identity, is likely to influence the way in which they make sense of their life experiences.

It is often difficult for, even experienced, individuals to explain the concept of Autism Spectrum Disorders in a way that children can understand. This curriculum aims to teach children with ASD about their diagnosis in developmentally appropriate terms. The accompanying parent and teacher manuals are intended to help parents and teachers do the same. This manual is intended to be used by psychologists, social workers, and counselors who are working with children on the autism spectrum.

About the Authors

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Cathryn Lehman is a Licensed Psychologist and Certified School Psychologist at the Center for Autism and Developmental Disorders at the John Merck Child and Adolescent Outpatient Clinic of UPMC. She completed her doctoral degree at Duquesne University and specialized in the treatment of children with developmental disabilities, including autism spectrum disorders. She completed her internship at The Watson Institute and her postdoctoral fellowship at the Center for Autism and Developmental Disorders at the John Merck Child and Adolescent Outpatient Clinic of UPMC. Currently, Cathryn provides assessment and treatment to children and families with Autism Spectrum Disorders and other developmental disabilities. She conducts diagnostic assessment and provides individual, family, and group treatment. Areas of specialization include the diagnosis of females on the autism spectrum, helping individuals to better understand their autism spectrum diagnosis, and the treatment of co-morbid Obsessive Compulsive Disorder.

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Jodi Toscolani is a Psych Specialty Counselor II at the Center for Autism and Developmental Disorders at Western Psychiatric, UPMC. She completed her masters’ degree at the University of Pittsburgh and specialized in early intervention with a focus on the treatment of children with
autism spectrum disorder. Currently, Jodi is the Lead Clinician and program coordinator for the Merck Summer Therapeutic Inclusion Program. She also provides group treatment and consultative services.

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Cassandra Wong is a Licensed Psychologist at the Center for Autism and Developmental Disorders at the John Merck Child and Adolescent Outpatient Clinic of UPMC. She completed her doctoral degree at Oklahoma State University and specialized in the treatment of families and children with developmental disabilities and disruptive behavior disorders. She completed her internship with the University of Tennessee Health Science Center and her postdoctoral fellowship at Deer Creek School District. Both of these positions focused on the treatment of children with developmental disabilities and disruptive behavior disorders. Currently, she provides assessment and treatment to children and families with Autism Spectrum Disorders and developmental disabilities. She provides individual, family and group treatment.

**Supporting Organizations**

This manual was produced using funding from a 2012 Autism Speaks Community Grant. Autism Speaks is the nation's largest autism science and advocacy organization, dedicated to funding research into the causes, prevention, treatments and a cure for autism; increasing awareness of autism spectrum disorders; and advocating for the needs of individuals with autism and their families.

Dr. Lehman, Dr. Wong, and Ms. Toscolani are part of the Center for Autism and Developmental Disorders within the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center, Presbyterian Shadyside and Western Psychiatric Institute and Clinic. The Center for Autism and Developmental Disorders provides state-of-the art service to individuals and families, conducts quality research related to the assessment and treatment of autism spectrum disorders, and offers extensive training opportunities to health care professionals. The care through the center includes family, group, and individual therapy, inpatient services, diagnostic services, and early intervention programs.

**Commonly Asked Questions**

**Who would benefit from this curriculum?**

This curriculum is intended to be used with children, adolescents, and young adults ages 8-21, who have conversational language abilities. The participants should grouped by chronological age, level of receptive and expressive language, and cognitive abilities.
How should this curriculum be used?

The Level 1 curriculum is intended for children with a mental age and/or language abilities of approximately 8-12 years. The Level 2 curriculum is intended for children with a mental age and/or language abilities of approximately 13-15 years. The Level 3 curriculum is intended for young adults with a mental age and/or language abilities of approximately 16-21 years.
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ASD and Me Level 1
Session 1

1. Introductions and rapport building
2. Establish group rules
3. Discuss confidentiality
4. Introduce to the concept of strengths and weaknesses

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<td>Markers</td>
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- Note that the parents will NOT participate in this week’s group with their child.

1. Introductions and Rapport Building

Introductions and rapport building are vital to the success of the overall program, as individuals will be asked to share a great deal of personal information with the group, and therefore need to feel comfortable with one another.

*Action Item:* As each individual enters the room, have them find a seat at a table that is large enough to fit the entire group comfortably. Ask each member to write their name on and decorate a name tag. If possible, do not start the group until all members are present, as it is extremely important that no one misses out on the description of the group or getting to know the other group members.

*Group leader says:* Welcome, everyone. Thank you for joining us. We’re excited that you’re all here. Let me first begin by explaining what we are all doing here. (It is important that you do not ask the group members why they are participating in group. Some group members may be
aware that they are going to be “talking about their autism,” while other group members may be unfamiliar with this term.) Over the next six weeks, we are going to be getting together to learn about ourselves. We will be talking about things we are good at, things we like, and things that are hard for us. In the process, we may become friends with the other people in this group, and we may see that we have a lot in common with one another. Does anyone have any questions about what is going to happen in this group? (Give the group members time to ask questions)

**Action Item:** Write the agenda on a wall-mounted marker board or large hanging paper

**Group Leader:** Today we are going to do four things. The first thing will be to get to know each other. The second thing will do is talk about the rules for the group. The third thing we will do is talk about something called confidentiality. The last thing we will do is talk about strengths and weaknesses. Does anyone have any questions about what we are going to do today? (Give the group members time to ask questions)

**Group Leader:** We are going to start with introductions. We are going to go in a circle around the table, so everyone will get a chance to speak. Each person should say their name, how old they are, and one fact about themselves. I will go first to give you an example. (Provide the group with your name, age if willing, and a fact about yourself)

**Group Leader:** The next thing we will do is an activity to get to know one another a little better. Do you know how to play BINGO? (Allow group members to respond). In this game, you win by filling in all of the boxes. This will help us to learn about our friends. A box is completed by filling in the name of one friend who answers the question in the box. For example, if I ask Jake “Is your favorite ice cream strawberry?” and he answers “Yes,” I would write his name in that box. The first person to fill in all of their bingo boxes is the winner. When you win, you yell “Bingo!”

**Action Item:** Distribute Appendix 1-A, Human Bingo.

2. **Establish group rules**

It is important that group members are involved in the creation of rules so that they are invested in following the rules.
**Group Leader:** The next thing we are going to do is create rules for the group. These are the rules that we are all going to be responsible for following each week in group, so it is important that we agree on what they will be. I have a few ideas, but let’s see what you all think the rules should be (allow the group members to give ideas)

**Action Item:** Write “Group Rules” on a piece of paper on the wall and write each rule that is agreed upon by the group. It is important that the rules are clearly visible to all group members during each group. By using paper rather than the board, you will be able to keep the rules from week to week. Be sure to write the rules in terms of the behavior that is expected rather than the behavior that is not desired. For example, “listen to the person who is speaking” gives the group members more direction than simply saying, “Don’t talk while others are talking.” Also, be specific. Rules such as, “Be good,” or “Be respectful of others,” are too general and do not provide information as to what is acceptable behavior.

3. **Discuss Confidentiality**

**Group Leader:** Has anyone heard of the word confidentiality? What is confidentiality? (Allow the group members to discuss their ideas)

**Group Leader:** Those are all great ideas. Confidentiality means group is meant to be a safe place where you can talk about whatever you want to talk about. But, in order to feel safe everyone needs to know that what they say in group will stay in group. (Facilitators further explain this to mean that when they leave the group, they should not tell anyone else about personal, private things another child has shared.) This also means that group leaders will not tell anyone what group members share without permission. However, there are two exceptions. If someone says they want to hurt themselves or someone else, then we have to tell your parents in order to keep you safe. Also, if a group member says that someone is hurting them in some way, we would have to tell someone in order to make sure that you are safe. Does anyone have any questions about confidentiality, or why it is important to us? (Allow the group members to ask questions)

4. **Strengths and Weaknesses**

The group members’ understanding of strengths and weaknesses will vary greatly based on their chronological age, language level, and cognitive abilities. Individuals on the autism spectrum typically interpret language in a literal way. As a result, when asked to describe the meaning of “strengths and weaknesses,” individuals will often say “how strong/weak a person is,” or “how
Group Leader: The last thing we are going to do today is talk about strengths and weaknesses. What is a strength? What does it mean to be strong? Is that the same thing as a strength? What is a weakness? What does it mean to be weak? Is that the same thing as a weakness? (Allow the group members to provide their ideas and discuss each question with one another)

Action Item: Provide and review the handout on strengths and weaknesses (Appendix 1-B). Ask each group member to insert it into their binder behind the introduction page.

Group Leader: Your home assignment for this week is to use this sheet to make a list of people or characters who you think have a lot of strengths. Your list can be characters from television, friends or family members, people that you know, or anyone else in your life. Be prepared to share your ideas next week.
Session 2

1. Introduce the parents
2. Understand that everyone has strengths and weaknesses
3. Understand the child/adolescent’s individual strengths and weaknesses

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<th>Required Materials</th>
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<td>Markers</td>
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<td>Large paper hung on the wall</td>
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<td>White board mounted to the wall (or use the large paper)</td>
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<td>Pens</td>
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<td>Appendix 1-C</td>
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<td>Appendix 1-D</td>
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<td>Appendix 1-E</td>
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<tr>
<td>Butcher block paper (optional)</td>
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<td>Craft supplies such as feathers, pom poms, sequence, etc. (optional)</td>
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- Note that the parents will participate in this week’s group with their child.

*Action Item:* Write the agenda on a wall-mounted marker board or large hanging paper

*Group Leader:* Hello everyone! Today we have three things on our agenda. The first thing we are going to do is introduce one another to our parents. The second thing we are going to do is talk more about the idea of strengths and weaknesses. The third thing we will do is an activity with your parents to learn about our own strengths and weaknesses. Does anyone have any questions about what we are going to do today? (Give the group members time to ask questions)

1. Introduce the parents
**Group Leader:** We are going to start with introducing one another to our parents. We are going to go in a circle around the table, so everyone will get a chance to speak. Each person should say their name, like they did last week, but then you are going to introduce your parent or grandparent who is here with you. If it is necessary, based on the group’s age or cognitive ability, to provide an example of how to make an introduction the group leader could say: *For example, if my parents were here I would say, “Hi, my name is __________. This is my mother, Ms. __________.”*

**Action Item:** Hang the rules created in the previous week on the wall so that they are clearly visible to each group member. Review the rules before getting started with the session content.

2. Understand that everyone has strengths and weaknesses

**Group Leader:** The second thing on our agenda is to continue talking about strengths and weaknesses. Last week we started to talk about strengths and weaknesses. What is a strength? What is a weakness? (Allow the group members to respond)

**Group Leader:** Excellent. Your home practice for last week was to make a list of characters who you believe to have a lot of strengths. It can be someone from real life, TV, or maybe a movie. Does anyone have any ideas that they can share with the group? To really create a challenge, is there anyone you can think of who you think is perfect? (Allow the group members to brainstorm characters or people they would like to discuss. It may be helpful to write the ideas on the board)

**Action Item:** Of the characters/individuals listed by the group members, help the group to determine which ones would be best to discuss as a group by taking a vote of how many group members are familiar with the responses given and circling the responses with whom the majority of the group is familiar.

**Group Leader:** The first character/individual we have circled is ______. What are some of the strengths in this character/individual? (Allow the group members to brainstorm the individual’s strengths and record them for the group to see. Allow parents to provide responses as well, if the group members become stuck)

**Group Leader:** Good. But it is important to remember that no one is perfect. Even individuals that have so many strengths also have weaknesses. What are some of the weaknesses you can think of for this character/individual? (Allow the group members to brainstorm the individual’s
weaknesses and record them for the group to see. Allow parents to provide responses as well, if the group members become stuck) If may be useful to list the strengths and weaknesses in a chart format with one column being strengths and one column being weaknesses. For example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sponge Bob</th>
<th>Super Man</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strengths</td>
<td>Strengths</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weaknesses</td>
<td>Weaknesses</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Group Leader: As you can see, there are strengths and weaknesses in everyone, even people that you might admire or look up to.

3. Understand the child/adolescent’s individual strengths and weaknesses

Group Leader: The third thing on our agenda is to talk about our own strengths and weaknesses.

Action Item: Choose from one of the following two activities.

Provided paper cutout

Action Item: Provide the child with the paper cutout of a human figure (Appendix 1-C) Have the parents and children work together to decorate the image and write in the child’s personal strengths and weaknesses. Encourage creativity in this activity and prompt the children to think hard and critically about their own strengths and weaknesses. Provide the parents with the “idea list” (Appendix 1-D) of strengths and weaknesses often associated with ASD.

Or

Life size images

Action Item: Help each child to cut a piece of butcher block paper slightly longer than the length of the child’s height. Have the child lie down on the paper while the parent traces
their outline. Have the parents and children work together to decorate the image and write in the child’s personal strengths and weaknesses. Allow the children to use craft supplies to decorate their images. Encourage creativity in this activity and prompt the children to think hard and critically about their own strengths and weaknesses. Provide the parents with the “idea list” (Appendix 1-D) of strengths and weaknesses often associated with ASD.

**Group Leader:** Great job everyone. It can be really difficult to talk about yourself, especially your weaknesses and you all did a great job. We are going to collect everyone’s work so that we can use these again next week.

**Action Item:** Collect the projects for use in next week’s session. It is likely that several of the group members, especially younger children, will want to take their projects home. Explain that they will able to take them home in a few weeks when we are done using them in the group. Reassure them that they will be stored in a safe location.

**Group Leader:** For your home assignment this week your job is to interview a family member about their strengths and weaknesses and record the information on this worksheet.

**Action Item:** Provide the handout for the home assignment (Appendix 1-E). Ask each group member to insert it into their binder behind last session’s home assignment.
Session 3

1. Review of home assignment
2. Review of individual strengths and weaknesses from Session 2
3. Discussion of what our strengths and weaknesses mean about us

Required Materials

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<th>Markers</th>
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<td>Pencils</td>
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<td>Appendix 1-I</td>
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<td>Appendix 1-J</td>
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- Note that the parents will participate in this week’s group with their child.

Action Item: Write the agenda on a wall-mounted marker board or large hanging paper

Group Leader: Good evening everyone! Today we have three things on our agenda. The first thing we are going to do is review the homework assignment from last week. The second thing we are going to do is review our own strengths and weaknesses from our activity last week. The third thing we are going to do is discuss what our strengths and weaknesses mean about us. Does anyone have any questions about what we are going to do today? (Give the group members time to ask questions)

1. Review of homework assignment

Group Leader: Last week our home assignment was to interview a family member about their strengths and weaknesses and record the information on this worksheet. Does anyone feel
comfortable sharing what they found out with the group? Is there is anything that you learned about this person that you did not know before? (Give the group members time to share their homework.)

2. Review of individual strengths and weaknesses from session 2

*Action Item:* Distribute the assignments from last week.

*Group Leader:* Last week we worked on identifying our own strengths and weaknesses. It can be very hard to discuss, or even admit to our own weaknesses. You all did a great job last week. This week we are going to take a look at our own strengths and weaknesses and see if we have much in common with the other people in this group.

*Action Item:* Create a chart on the board similar to those used in past groups. It should look something like this:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Weaknesses</th>
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*Group Leader:* Who is willing to share the strengths that they listed for themselves? (Give the group members time to share their strengths and write them into the chart as they are listed. When there are duplications, put a star next to the characteristic. It may be helpful to group characteristics together. For example, if one child says “talking to others” and another child says “staying on topic while talking,” it may be helpful to group these as, “conversation skills” and then put a star next to “conversation skills,” as two people had this characteristic. This will help to highlight that there are similarities within the group.)

*Group Leader:* It looks like we have a fair amount in common with one another. Now, who is willing to share the weaknesses that they listed for themselves? (Give the group members time to share their weaknesses and write them into the chart as they are listed. When there are duplications, put a star next to the characteristic. As indicated above, it may be helpful to group characteristics together. This will help to highlight that there are similarities within the group.)
3. Discussion of what our strengths and weaknesses mean about us

Group Leader: Everyone has things that are unique or special about them, but it’s clear from this chart that the people in this room have a lot in common with one another. There happens to be a name for this type of profile. When people have strengths and weaknesses that look like this, it is call an Autism Spectrum Disorder. Raise your hand if you have ever heard of an Autism Spectrum Disorder (Give the group members time to say whether or not they have heard the term, but discourage them from discussing what they believe it means.)

Group Leader: Before we talk about what Autism Spectrum Disorder means, we are all going to do a little worksheet to see what we know about Autism Spectrum Disorders. If you don’t know anything and this is the first time you have ever heard those words, that’s ok. If you know lots about Autism Spectrum Disorders, that’s ok too. Just answer the questions the best you can.

Action Item: Distribute the pre-test on Autism Spectrum Disorders (Appendix 1-F) as well as pencils. Have the group members complete the pretest without consulting their parents or one another. If there is stress related to completing the assignment, remind the group that there are no grades associated with this task and it is simply to get an idea of what they know about Autism Spectrum Disorders. When all group members are finished, collect the pre tests and put them aside.

Group Leader: You may have heard the words Autism, Asperger’s, or PDD. Those are words that are sometimes used to describe Autism Spectrum Disorders. In this group we are going to use the words Autism Spectrum Disorder instead of all of those other words. What is an Autism Spectrum Disorder? Who wants to share their thoughts? (Allow the group members to share their perceptions of Autism Spectrum Disorders. It may be helpful to write their ideas on the board with the title “Ideas about Autism”)

Group Leader: There are many, many characteristics that make up who you are. For example, you may be funny, artistic, like sports, or hate sports. You might love to sing, or hate to sing. You might love seeing new places or prefer staying home. An Autism Spectrum Disorder is a label for a specific set of things about you. For the most part those things fit into 3 categories: Social skills, communication, and behaviors.

Action Item: Either hang 3 large pieces of paper on the wall, or create 3 columns on the board; and title them “social skills, communication,” and “behaviors.”
- Note that this portion of the group will differ significantly based on the age and cognitive abilities of the group. The explanation of diagnosis must be delivered in developmentally appropriate terms. ***This portion of the group may need to be extended or concluded in session 4.

**Group Leader:** The first one says “social skills.” When people have an autism spectrum disorder, one thing about them is that they usually have trouble with social skills. What are social skills? (Give the group time to share their understanding of the term “social skills” and write them on the paper)

**Group Leader:** Social skills are the skills that you use to make friends and play with others (choose explanation based on the developmental level of the group). Let’s see if we can fit some of the characteristics from our list of group strengths and weaknesses into the social skills column.

**Action Item:** Go through the list of group strengths and weaknesses, pull out the characteristics that relate to social skills and add them to the “social skills” column.

**Group Leader:** This is a really good start. We are going to go over a list of other things that can be called “social skills” that we might not have thought of. As we go over the list, put a star next to any of the things that sound like you. Parents, you are encouraged to put a star next to things you notice about your child as well. Some of the things that people with Autism Spectrum Disorders have trouble with are: (provide and review Appendix 1-G)

**Group Leader:** The second one says “communication.” When people have an autism spectrum disorder, they sometimes have trouble with communication, or communicate differently than other people. What is communication? (Give the group time to share their understanding of the term “communication” and write them on the paper)

**Group Leader:** Communication means the way you use words, facial expressions, and body language to express yourself. Let’s see if we can fit some of the characteristics from our list of group strengths and weaknesses into the social skills column.

**Action Item:** Go through the list of group strengths and weaknesses, pull out the characteristics that relate to communication and add them to the “communication” column.
Group Leader: This is a really good start. We are going to go over a list of other things that can be called “communication” that we might not have thought of. As we go over the list, put a star next to any of the things that sound like things you have trouble with. Parents, you are encouraged to put a star next to things you notice about your child as well. Some of the things that people with Autism Spectrum Disorders have trouble with are: (provide and review Appendix 1-H)

Group Leader: The third one is “behaviors.” This does not mean if you have good behavior or bad behavior. When kids have an autism spectrum disorder, they often do certain things over- and- over again; have really “intense” interests in certain topics that most other kids aren’t interested in or know much about; or like things or do things in a certain way. Let’s see if we can fit some of the characteristics from our list of group strengths and weaknesses into the “behaviors” category.

Action Item: Go through the list of group strengths and weaknesses, pull out the characteristics that relate to communication and add them to the “Communication” column.

Group Leader: This is a really good start. Other behaviors that are often different in people with Autism Spectrum Disorders are: (provide and review Appendix 1-I)

Group Leader: Why do you think we use the word “disorder?” What does “disorder” mean? (Allow the group members to respond). It is called a “disorder” because it is something that is different about you than most other people. That does not mean there is something wrong with you. It means that there is something different about you. Does anyone have any questions about that? (Allow group members time to ask questions)

Group Leader: This was a lot of information to go over in one day! Everyone did a great job. Does anyone want to share their feelings about what we talked about today? (Encourage group members to share their emotions and provide support as needed)

Group Leader: Until we meet again, the topic of Autism Spectrum Disorders may be something that you are thinking about. Just to help you remember everything that we talked about today, put today’s handouts into your binder to remind you about this conversation. It would probably be helpful if you and your parents looked over these pages at home. (Give the group members time to put the paper away)
**Group Leader:** I bet everyone has a lot of questions about what all of this means, and we are going to do a home assignment this week that will give everyone some time to think about and write down those questions. Next week will spend the whole session talking about your questions and learning more about Autism Spectrum Disorders. We are also going to talk about how to tell other people about your Autism and how to explain what it means. So until we have a chance to talk about those things, it might be a good idea to keep your conversations about Autism private with your parents. Does anyone have a question or comment about that? (Give group members time to talk about privacy)

**Group Leader:** For your home assignment this week your job is to write down five questions that you have about Autism Spectrum Disorders. You are going to write your questions on this handout.

**Action Item:** Provide the handout for the home assignment (Appendix 1-J). Ask each group member to insert it into their binder behind last session’s home assignment.
Session 4

1. Review the concept of Autism Spectrum Disorders
2. Answer questions related to Autism Spectrum Disorders
3. Discuss other symptoms commonly associated with Autism Spectrum Disorders

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- Note that the parents will participate in this week’s group with their child.

**Action Item:** Prior to the start of group remove and review Appendix 1-K

**Action Item:** Prior to the start of group remove Appendix 1-L from the group manual and cut the questions into strips. Fold the strips and place them into a bowl or basket.

**Action Item:** Write the agenda on a wall-mounted marker board or large hanging paper

**Group Leader:** Today we have three things on our agenda. Because we went over so much information last week, we are going to review the things we talked about last session. After that, we are going to answer the questions that you wrote down about Autism Spectrum Disorders for your home assignment. The last things we are going to do is talk about other
characteristics/qualities that are common in people with Autism Spectrum Disorders. Does anyone have any questions about what we are going to do today? (Give the group members time to ask questions)

1. Review the concept of Autism Spectrum Disorders

Group Leader: Last week we talked about the term “Autism Spectrum Disorder.” For many of you, that may have been the first time you had ever heard those words. Without looking in your binder, who can explain: What is an Autism Spectrum Disorder? (Allow the group members to have time to respond)

Action Item: Hang the chart or 3 pages of characteristics on the wall.

Group Leader: Great job. Last week we said that an Autism Spectrum Disorder is a label for a specific set of things about you. For the most part, those things fit into 3 categories: Social skills, communication, and behaviors. What kinds of things go under social skills? (Allow the group members time to respond) What kinds of things go under communication? (Allow the group members time to respond) What kinds of things go under behaviors? (Allow the group members time to respond)

Group Leader: Raise your hand if you thought about Autism Spectrum Disorders since our last group. What kinds of things did you think about? Some kids feel happy when they learn about their Autism Spectrum Disorders because it helps them to understand why they might think differently than other kids. Other kids might feel sad or angry because it makes them feel different. What are you feeling? (Encourage group members to share their emotions and provide support as needed)

2. Answer questions related to Autism Spectrum Disorders

Group Leader: We are going to talk more about what this all means today. Did everyone think of 5 questions you have about Autism Spectrum Disorders? Tonight we’re going to answer every single one of them! Don’t worry if you don’t want other people to know what your questions are. We are not going to give your name when we read the question. If you do not like one of the questions that we read, or think it is silly, please remember to keep that opinion to yourself. It is important that everyone feels comfortable talking about their thoughts and feelings and if someone hears that you think their idea is silly, it might hurt their feelings.
Everyone please take your home assignment from last week out of your binder. (Name of group leader) is going to collect them.

**Action Item:** Collect and make photo copies of each group member’s questions and return the original document to each individual. Using the photocopied pages, cut each question into its own strip of paper. If the group members are developmentally able, it may be helpful to have them cut apart their own questions. Fold the strips, and place them into the bowl or basket. If there are duplicates of the same question, it may be time effective to remove some (but not all) of the duplicates from the bowl/basket.

**Group Leader:** As (Name of group leader) gives you your original questions back, please put them back into your binder. You’ll see that we are putting copies of all of the questions into this bowl/basket. You might also have noticed that there were already some questions in the bowl/basket. The reason for this is that this group has been run with other kids in the past and we have kept some of the questions from those kids. We are going to pull out one question at a time, read it, and try our best to answer it.

**Action Item:** Choose a group member to pick a question out of the bowl/basket. Have the group member (or their parent if the child is not able) read the question aloud.

**Group Leader:** (If it is a question that is new to the group) Does anyone feel that they know the answer to this question? (Give group members time to attempt to answer the question before providing an answer to promote critical thinking)

**Group Leader:** (If it is a question that is similar to a question that has already been read) This is something that we have already talked a bit about. What have we already said that would answer this question? (Give group members time to attempt to answer the question before briefly reviewing the answer)

**Action Item:** Continue through each question, allowing different group members to read and answer each question in order to help sustain attention and ensure that all group members understand the material. Use the answers to the “Commonly Asked Questions” in Appendix 1-K to provide answers to the questions. If you are unsure how to answer a question, be honest and commit to finding the answer and getting back to the group in the next session.
**Group Leader:** To help everyone remember the answers to all of these questions, here is a sheet of paper with many of the questions on it that you can keep. Please place this in your binder behind everything we have done so far. (Distribute Appendix 1-K)

3. Discuss other symptoms commonly associated with Autism Spectrum Disorders

**Group Leader:** We have talked about the most common things about people with Autism Spectrum Disorders, and we have answered a lot of questions about what having an Autism Spectrum Disorder means. But there are other things that we also often see in people who have Autism Spectrum Disorders. Let’s take another look at our original list of group strengths and weaknesses.

**Action Item:** Re-hang the list of group strengths and weaknesses.

**Group Leader:** Some of the things on our list may be unique to one or two people in our group, but some of them are common among people with autism spectrum disorders, even though they don’t fit into our 3 categories. (Discuss the outstanding items on the list and discuss with the group whether or not they are common among individuals with ASD, or unique to someone in the group. Remind group members that everyone is unique so some of the things on the list may not necessarily be characteristic of an individual with ASD)

**Action Item:** Provide the list of other common characteristics among individuals with ASD (Appendix 1-M)

**Group Leader:** Here is a list of some of the other characteristics that are common in people with Autism Spectrum Disorders. Together with your mom or dad/grandparent, circle any of the things that describe you. (Give the group members a few minutes to complete this activity)

**Group Leader:** Does anyone feel comfortable sharing the things they have circled? (Allow the group members time to share the items they circled and encourage others to comment if they have circled common items)

**Group Leader:** So what does this all mean for your life? What kinds of situations may be impacted by your Autism Spectrum Disorder? For example, going to school; what kinds of things might be harder for you than other kids when you’re in school? What might be easier? (Allow group members to respond and then continue the discussions with other situations.)
**Group Leader:** OK, please put this new list of characteristics in the back of your binder behind your home assignment from last week. Next week we are going to talk about who we should tell about our Autism Spectrum Disorder and good ways to do that. Your home assignment for the week is to make a list of people you would like to know about your Autism Spectrum Disorder and a list of people you do not want to know about your Autism Spectrum Disorder. You should also write why you do or do not want them to know. You are going to write your questions on this handout.

**Action Item:** Provide the handout for the home assignment (Appendix 1-N)
Session 5
Explaining to others what it means to have ASD

1. Answer questions related to Autism Spectrum Disorders
2. Review of homework assignment
3. Introduce the concepts of disclosure and self-advocacy
4. Discuss how to explain ASD to others

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- Note that the parents will NOT participate in this week’s group with their child.

**Action Item:** Write the agenda on a wall-mounted marker board or large hanging paper

**Group Leader:** Today we have four things on our agenda. First, we are going to have some time to answer any questions that might have come up over the last week related to autism spectrum disorders. After that, we are going to talk about your homework assignments. The third thing we are going to do is talk about who should know about your ASD and when you should tell them. Last, we are going to talk about how to explain ASD to someone else, like a friend, classmate, or even an adult that is important to you. Does anyone have any questions about what we are going to do today? (Give the group members time to ask questions)
1. Answer questions about Autism Spectrum Disorders

*Group Leader*: The first thing we are going to do is answer any questions that you thought of over the past week about autism spectrum disorders. Does anyone have any questions? (Give the group members time to ask questions)

2. Review of homework assignment

*Group Leader*: Last week your home assignment was to make a list of people you would like to know about your Autism Spectrum Disorder and a list of people you do not want to know about your Autism Spectrum Disorder. Today we are going to spend some time sharing those ideas. Some group members might want everyone close to them to know about their ASD, while other people might not want anyone to know. Other people might be in the middle and want some people to know but not other people. This is a personal choice, meaning there is no right or wrong answer for who to tell and who not to tell. As we share our homework assignments, please keep this in mind and be respectful of one another’s feelings and ideas. Could someone please share their homework assignment with the group? (Encourage each member of the group to share their assignment. While doing so, take mental note of who each group member does and does not want to tell. Ask probing questions as to why the group members do or do not want certain people to know about their diagnosis)

*Group Leader*: Thanks you for sharing your ideas. Did everyone do this homework assignment with their parents? If so, did your parents agree or disagree with your decisions? Why or why not? If you did not do the assignment with your parents, do you think your parents would agree or disagree with your decisions? Why or why not? (Allow each group member to respond)

3. Introduce the concept of disclosure and self advocacy

*Group Leader*: There are two main reasons why you would choose to tell someone about your Autism Spectrum Disorder. Here is a handout that tells you those reasons.

*Action Item*: Provide and review Appendix 1-O

*Group Leader*: The first reason is because you want them to know more about you. How many of you have someone on your list who you want to tell about your Autism Spectrum Disorder because you want them to know more about you? Write the names of those people under
number one. Why would it be helpful for them to know about your ASD? (Allow group members to respond)

**Group Leader:** The second reason to tell people about your Autism Spectrum Disorder is because you need help with something and you need that person to understand why you need help. But, this is a tricky one. You do NOT need to tell someone you have an Autism Spectrum Disorder EVERY time you need help. For example, if you need help with a math problem in class, should you tell the teacher you don’t know the answer because you have an Autism Spectrum Disorder? The answer is, no. Having trouble in math one day is something that happens to everyone and is probably not related to your Autism Spectrum Disorder. However, what if your teacher walks up behind you and grabs your shoulder and you are a person with ASD who is sensitive to touch? That is a situation when it might be a good idea to explain your Autism Spectrum Disorder to your teacher. Write the names of people you might tell about your Autism Spectrum Disorder because you might need their help under number two. What are some examples of times when you might need to tell someone about your Autism Spectrum Disorder in order to get help? (Allow group members to respond)

4. **How to Explain ASD to Others**

**Group Leader:** The last thing we are going to do today is talk about how to explain your Autism Spectrum Disorder to others people. What would you say to someone if you were telling them about your ASD? (Allow group members to respond)

**Group Leader:** Remember what we have learned in this group. Here is a sheet that can help you to think of what to say when you want to tell someone about our Autism Spectrum Disorder.

**Action Item:** Provide and review Appendix 1-P

**Group Leader:** Let’s practice. (Conduct role plays allowing each group member to explain their diagnosis)

**Group Leader:** Great job today, everyone. Next week is our last week of group and we are going to do two things. First, we are going to do a short quiz to see how much you have learned about Autism Spectrum Disorders. You might want to go through your binder this week to keep everything fresh in your mind. The other thing we are going to do is have a party to celebrate the strengths and talents of everyone in the group. Everyone will have up to (x) minutes (5 minutes is recommended) to share their talent with the group. That means your talent could take less than (x) minutes, but it cannot take more than (x) minutes. Your
Homework this week is to plan what you are going to do, and practice. Please insert this handout into the back of your binder to remind you about this assignment.

Action Item: Provide the handout for the home assignment (Distribute Appendix 1-Q)
Session 6

Celebrating strengths by exploring the many talents of individuals with ASD

1. Test How Much Was Learned
2. Celebrate Group Strengths

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- Note that the parents will participate in this week’s group with their child.

1. Test How Much Was Learned

*Group Leader:* Just like we did a few weeks ago, we are all going to do a little worksheet to see what we know about autism spectrum disorders. Just like you did the first time, answer the questions as best you can. This time while you complete your worksheet, your parents are going to complete a worksheet as well.

*Action Item:* Distribute the post-test on Autism Spectrum Disorders (Appendix 1-R) as well as pencils. Have the group members complete the posttest without consulting their parents or one another. If there is stress related to completing the assignment, remind the group that there are no grades associated with this task and it is simply to get an idea of what they know about Autism Spectrum Disorders. When all group members are finished, collect the post tests and put them aside.

*Action Item:* Distribute the Parent Feedback Form (Appendix 1-S) as well as pencils. When all parents are finished, collect the post tests and put them aside.
### 2. Celebrate Group Strengths

**Group Leader:** Great job everyone. For the rest of the evening, we are going to have fun and share our talents with one another. Everyone is going to get a turn to go and you will have up to (x) minutes to share your talent with the group. So that there is no confusion about what order you are going to go in, we are going to go in alphabetical order by first name. That means the order will look like this.

**Action Item:** Write on the board the list of group member names in alphabetical order

**Group Leader:** Please remember to be kind and cheer for the other group members when they are done. If you do not particularly like what someone chooses to do, please be polite and keep that comment to yourself. It is not OK to hurt someone else’s feelings.

**Action Item:** Facilitate each group member’s time to share.

**Group Leader:** Those were all great talents. You all have a lot to be proud of. We’re about done for the evening. Before you leave, please remember to say goodbye to all the great friends you have made in this group.
ASD and Me Level 2
Session 1

1. Introductions and rapport building
2. Establish group rules
3. Discuss confidentiality
4. Introduce to the concept of strengths and weaknesses

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<td>Optional: Prizes</td>
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- Note that the parents will NOT participate in this week’s group with their child.

5. Introductions and Rapport Building

Introductions and rapport building are vital to the success of the overall program, as individuals will be asked to share a great deal of personal information with the group, and therefore need to feel comfortable with one another.

*Action Item:* As each individual enters the room, have them find a seat at a table that is large enough to fit the entire group comfortably. Ask each member to write their name on and decorate a name tag. If possible, do not start the group until all members are present, as it is extremely important that no one misses out on the description of the group or getting to know the other group members.

*Group leader says:* Welcome, everyone. Thank you for joining us. We’re excited that you’re all here. Let me first begin by explaining what we are all doing here. (It is important that you do not ask the group members why they are participating in group. Some group members may be
Level 2

aware that they are going to be “talking about their autism,” while other group members may be unfamiliar with this term.) Over the next six weeks, we are going to be getting together to learn about ourselves. We will be talking about things we are good at, things we like, and things that are hard for us. In the process, we may become friends with the other people in this group, and we may see that we have a lot in common with one another. Does anyone have any questions about what is going to happen in this group? (Give the group members time to ask questions)

**Action Item:** Write the agenda on a wall-mounted marker board or large hanging paper

**Group Leader:** Today we are going to do four things. The first thing will be to get to know each other. The second thing will do is talk about the rules for the group. The third thing we will do is talk about something called confidentiality. The last thing we will do is talk about strengths and weaknesses. Does anyone have any questions about what we are going to do today? (Give the group members time to ask questions)

**Group Leader:** We are going to start with introductions. We are going to go in a circle around the table, so everyone will get a chance to speak. Each person should say their name, how old they are, and one fact about themselves. I will go first to give you an example. (Provide the group with your name, age if willing, and a fact about yourself)

**Group Leader:** The next thing we will do is an activity to get to know one another a little better. Do you know how to play BINGO? (Allow group members to respond). In this game, you win by filling in all of the boxes. This will help us to learn about our friends. A box is completed by filling in the name of one friend who answers the question in the box. For example, if I ask Jake “Is your favorite ice cream strawberry?” and he answers “Yes,” I would write his name in that box. The first person to fill in all of their bingo boxes is the winner. When you win, you yell “Bingo!”

**Action Item:** Distribute Appendix 2-A, Human Bingo.

6. Establish group rules

It is important that group members are involved in the creation of rules so that they are invested in following the rules.
**Group Leader:** The next thing we are going to do is create rules for the group. These are the rules that we are all going to be responsible for following each week in group, so it is important that we agree on what they will be. *I have a few idea, but let’s see what you all think the rules should be* (allow the group members to give ideas)

**Action Item:** Write “Group Rules” on a piece of paper on the wall and write each rule that is agreed upon by the group. It is important that the rules are clearly visible to all group members during each group. By using paper rather than the board, you will be able to keep the rules from week to week. Be sure to write the rules in terms of the behavior that is expected rather than the behavior that is not desired. For example, “listen to the person who is speaking” gives the group members more direction than simply saying, “Don’t talk while others are talking.” Also, be specific. Rules such as, “Be good,” or “Be respectful of others,” are too general and do not provide information as to what is acceptable behavior.

7. **Discuss Confidentiality**

**Group Leader:** Has anyone heard of the word confidentiality? What is confidentiality? (Allow the group members to discuss their ideas)

**Group Leader:** Those are all great ideas. Confidentiality means group is meant to be a safe place where you can talk about whatever you want to talk about. But, in order to feel safe everyone needs to know that what they say in group will stay in group. (Facilitators further explain this to mean that when they leave the group, they should not tell anyone else about personal, private things another child has shared.) *This also means that group leaders will not tell anyone what group members share without permission. However, there are two exceptions. If someone says they want to hurt themselves or someone else, then we have to tell your parents in order to keep you safe. Also, if a group member says that someone is hurting them in some way, we would have to tell someone in order to make sure that you are safe.* Does anyone have any questions about confidentiality, or why it is important to us? (Allow the group members to ask questions)

8. **Strengths and Weaknesses**

The group members’ understanding of strengths and weaknesses will vary greatly based on their chronological age, language level, and cognitive abilities. Individuals on the autism spectrum typically interpret language in a literal way. As a result, when asked to describe the meaning of “strengths and weaknesses,” individuals will often say “how strong/weak a person is,” or “how
much weight a person can lift.” It is therefore often necessary to teach the concept of strengths and weaknesses to the group.

*Group Leader:* The last thing we are going to do today is talk about strengths and weaknesses. What is a strength? What does it mean to be strong? Is that the same thing as a strength? What is a weakness? What does it mean to be weak? Is that the same thing as a weakness? (Allow the group members to provide their ideas and discuss each question with one another)

*Action Item:* Provide and review the handout on strengths and weaknesses (Appendix 2-B). Ask each group member to insert it into their binder behind the introduction page.

*Group Leader:* Your home assignment for this week is to use this sheet to make a list of people or characters who you think have a lot of strengths. Your list can be characters from television, friends or family members, people that you know, or anyone else in your life. Be prepared to share your ideas next week.
Session 2

1. Introduce the parents
2. Understand that everyone has strengths and weaknesses
3. Understand the child/adolescent’s individual strengths and weaknesses

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- Note that the parents will participate in this week’s group with their child.

*Action Item:* Write the agenda on a wall-mounted marker board or large hanging paper

*Group Leader:* Hello everyone! Today we have three things on our agenda. The first thing we are going to do is introduce one another to our parents. The second thing we are going to do is talk more about the idea of strengths and weaknesses. The third thing we will do is an activity with your parents to learn about our own strengths and weaknesses. Does anyone have any questions about what we are going to do today? (Give the group members time to ask questions)

4. Introduce the parents

*Group Leader:* We are going to start with introducing one another to our parents. We are going to go in a circle around the table, so everyone will get a chance to speak. Each person should say their name, like they did last week, but then you are going to introduce your parent
or grandparent who is here with you.. If it is necessary, based on the group’s age or cognitive ability, to provide an example of how to make an introduction the group leader could say: *For example, if my parents were here I would say, “Hi, my name is ___________. This is my mother, Ms. __________.”*

**Action Item:** Hang the rules created in the previous week on the wall so that they are clearly visible to each group member. Review the rules before getting started with the session content.

5. Understand that everyone has strengths and weaknesses

**Group Leader:** The second thing on our agenda is to continue talking about strengths and weaknesses. Last week we started to talk about strengths and weaknesses. What is a strength? What is a weakness? (Allow the group members to respond)

**Group Leader:** Excellent. Your home practice for last week was to make a list of characters who you believe to have a lot of strengths. It can be someone from real life, TV, or maybe a movie. Does anyone have any ideas that they can share with the group? To really create a challenge, is there anyone you can think of who you think is perfect? (Allow the group members to brainstorm characters or people they would like to discuss. It may be helpful to write the ideas on the board)

**Action Item:** Of the characters/individuals listed by the group members, help the group to determine which ones would be best to discuss as a group by taking a vote of how many group members are familiar with the responses given and circling the responses with whom the majority of the group is familiar.

**Group Leader:** The first character/individual we have circled is _______. What are some of the strengths in this character/individual? (Allow the group members to brainstorm the individual’s strengths and record them for the group to see. Allow parents to provide responses as well, if the group members become stuck)

**Group Leader:** Good. But it is important to remember that no one is perfect. Even individuals that have so many strengths also have weaknesses. What are some of the weaknesses you can thing of for this character/individual? (Allow the group members to brainstorm the individual’s weaknesses and record them for the group to see. Allow parents to provide responses as well, if the group members become stuck) If may be useful to list the strengths and weaknesses in a chart format with one column being strengths and one column being weaknesses. For example:
Group Leader: As you can see, there are strengths and weaknesses in everyone, even people that you might admire or look up to.

6. Understand the child/adolescent’s individual strengths and weaknesses

Group Leader: The third thing on our agenda is to talk about our own strengths and weaknesses.

Action Item: Present materials for the following activity:

Provided paper cutout

Action Item: Provide the child with the paper cutout of a human figure (Appendix 2-C). Have the parents and children work together to decorate the image and write in the child’s personal strengths and weaknesses. Encourage creativity in this activity and prompt the children to think hard and critically about their own strengths and weaknesses. Provide the parents with the “idea list” (Appendix 2-D) of strengths and weaknesses often associated with ASD.

Group Leader: Great job everyone. It can be really difficult to talk about yourself, especially your weaknesses and you all did a great job. We are going to collect everyone’s work so that we can use these again next week.

Action Item: Collect the projects for use in next week’s session. It is likely that several of the group members, especially younger children, will want to take their projects home. Explain that they will able to take them home in a few weeks when we are done using them in the group. Reassure them that they will be stored in a safe location.
Group Leader: For your home assignment this week your job is to interview a family member about their strengths and weaknesses and record the information on this worksheet.

Action Item: Provide the handout for the home assignment (Appendix 2-E). Ask each group member to insert it into their binder behind last session’s home assignment.
Session 3

1. Review of home assignment
2. Review of individual strengths and weaknesses from Session 2
3. Discussion of what our strengths and weaknesses mean about us

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<td>Appendix 2-I</td>
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<td>Appendix 2-J</td>
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- Note that the parents will participate in this week’s group with their child.

Action Item: Write the agenda on a wall-mounted marker board or large hanging paper

Group Leader: Good evening everyone! Today we have three things on our agenda. The first thing we are going to do is review the homework assignment from last week. The second thing we are going to do is review our own strengths and weaknesses from our activity last week. The third thing we are going to do is discuss what our strengths and weaknesses mean about us. Does anyone have any questions about what we are going to do today? (Give the group members time to ask questions)

4. Review of homework assignment

Group Leader: Last week our home assignment was to interview a family member about their strengths and weaknesses and record the information on this worksheet. Does anyone feel
comfortable sharing what they found out with the group? Is there anything that you learned about this person that you did not know before? (Give the group members time to share their homework.)

5. Review of individual strengths and weaknesses from session 2

Action Item: Distribute the assignments from last week.

Group Leader: Last week we worked on identifying our own strengths and weaknesses. It can be very hard to discuss, or even admit to our own weaknesses. You all did a great job last week. This week we are going to take a look at our own strengths and weaknesses and see if we have much in common with the other people in this group.

Action Item: Create a chart on the board similar to those used in past groups. It should look something like this:

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<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Weaknesses</th>
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Group Leader: Who is willing to share some of the strengths that they listed for themselves? (Give the group members time to share their strengths and write them into the chart as they are listed. When there are duplications, put a star next to the characteristic. It may be helpful to group characteristics together. For example, if one child says “talking to others” and another child says “staying on topic while talking,” it may be helpful to group these as, “conversation skills” and then put a star next to “conversation skills,” as two people had this characteristic. This will help to highlight that there are similarities within the group.)

Group Leader: It looks like we have a fair amount in common with one another. Now, who is willing to share some of the weaknesses that they listed for themselves? (Give the group members time to share their weaknesses and write them into the chart as they are listed. When there are duplications, put a star next to the characteristic. As indicated above, it may be helpful to group characteristics together. This will help to highlight that there are similarities within the group.)
6. Discussion of what our strengths and weaknesses mean about us

*Group Leader:* Everyone has things that are unique about them, but it’s clear from this chart that the people in this room have a lot in common with one another. There happens to be a name for this type of profile. When people have strengths and weaknesses that look like this, it is called an Autism Spectrum Disorder. Raise your hand if you have ever heard of an Autism Spectrum Disorder (Give the group members time to say whether or not they have heard the term, but discourage them from discussing what they believe it means.)

*Group Leader:* Before we talk about what Autism Spectrum Disorder means, we are all going to do a little worksheet to see what we know about Autism Spectrum Disorders. If you don’t know anything and this is the first time you have ever heard this term, that’s ok. If you know lots about Autism Spectrum Disorders, that’s ok too. Just answer the questions the best you can.

*Action Item:* Distribute the pre-test on Autism Spectrum Disorders (Appendix 2-F) as well as pencils. Have the group members complete the pretest without consulting their parents or one another. If there is stress related to completing the assignment, remind the group that there are no grades associated with this task and it is simply to get an idea of what they know about Autism Spectrum Disorders. When all group members are finished, collect the pre tests and put them aside.

*Group Leader:* You may have heard the words Autism, Asperger’s, or PDD. Those are words that are sometimes used to describe Autism Spectrum Disorders. In this group we are going to use the words Autism Spectrum Disorder instead of all of those other words. What is an Autism Spectrum Disorder? Who wants to share their thoughts? (Allow the group members to share their perceptions of Autism Spectrum Disorders. It may be helpful to write their ideas on the board with the title “Ideas about Autism”)

*Group Leader:* There are many, many characteristics that make up who you are. For example, you may be funny, artistic, like sports, or hate sports. You might love to sing, or hate to sing. You might love seeing new places or prefer staying home. An Autism Spectrum Disorder is a label for a specific set of things about you. For the most part those things fit into 3 categories: Social skills, communication, and behaviors.

*Action Item:* Either hang 3 large pieces of paper on the wall, or create 3 columns on the board; and title them “social skills, communication,” and “behaviors.”
Note that this portion of the group will differ significantly based on the age and cognitive abilities of the group. The explanation of diagnosis must be delivered in developmentally appropriate terms.

**Group Leader:** The first one says “social skills.” When people have an autism spectrum disorder, one thing about them is that they usually have trouble with social skills. What are social skills? (Give the group time to share their understanding of the term “social skills” and write them on the paper)

**Group Leader:** Social skills are the skills that you use to make friends and interact with or hang out with others (choose explanation based on the developmental level of the group). Let’s see if we can fit some of the characteristics from our list of group strengths and weaknesses into the social skills column.

**Action Item:** Go through the list of group strengths and weaknesses, pull out the characteristics that relate to social skills and add them to the “social skills” column.

**Group Leader:** This is a really good start. We are going to go over a list of other things that can be called “social skills” that we might not have thought of. As we go over the list, put a star next to any of the things that sound like you. Parents, you are encouraged to put a star next to things you notice about your child as well. Some of the things that people with Autism Spectrum Disorders have trouble with are: (provide and review Appendix 2-G)

**Group Leader:** The second one says “communication.” When people have an autism spectrum disorder, they sometimes have trouble with communication, or communicate differently than other people. What is communication? (Give the group time to share their understanding of the term “communication” and write them on the paper)

**Group Leader:** Communication means the way you use words, facial expressions, and body language to express yourself. Let's see if we can fit some of the characteristics from our list of group strengths and weaknesses into the social skills column.

**Action Item:** Go through the list of group strengths and weaknesses, pull out the characteristics that relate to communication and add them to the “communication” column.
**Group Leader:** This is a really good start. We are going to go over a list of other things that can be called “communication” that we might not have thought of. As we go over the list, put a star next to any of the things that sound like things you have trouble with. Parents, you are encouraged to put a star next to things you notice about your child as well. Some of the things that people with Autism Spectrum Disorders have trouble with are: (provide and review Appendix 2-H)

**Group Leader:** The third one is “behaviors.” This does not mean if you have good behavior or bad behavior. When people have an autism spectrum disorder, they often do certain things over and over again; have really intense interests in certain topics that most other people aren’t quite so interested in or know quite so much about; or like things to be a certain way. Let’s see if we can fit some of the characteristics from our list of group strengths and weaknesses into the “behaviors” category.

**Action Item:** Go through the list of group strengths and weaknesses, pull out the characteristics that relate to communication and add them to the “Communication” column.

**Group Leader:** This is a really good start. Other behaviors that are often different in people with Autism Spectrum Disorders are: (provide and review Appendix 2-I)

**Group Leader:** Why do you think we use the word “disorder?” What does “disorder” mean? (Allow the group members to respond). It is called a “disorder” because it is something that is different about you than most other people. That does not mean there is something wrong with you. It means it is something different about you. Does anyone have any questions about that? (Allow group members time to ask questions)

**Group Leader:** This was a lot of information to go over in one day! Everyone did a great job. Does anyone want to share their feelings about what we talked about today? (Encourage group members to share their emotions and provide support as needed)

**Group Leader:** Until we meet again, the topic of Autism Spectrum Disorders may be something that you are thinking about. Just to help you remember everything that we talked about today, put today’s handouts into your binder to remind you about this conversation. It would probably be helpful if you and your parents looked over these pages at home. (Give the group members time to put the paper away)

**Group Leader:** I bet everyone has a lot of questions about what all of this means, and we are going to do a home assignment this week that will give everyone some time to think about and
write down those questions. Next week will spend the whole session talking about your questions and learning more about Autism Spectrum Disorders. We are also going to talk about how to tell other people about your Autism and how to explain what it means. So until we have a chance to talk about those things, it might be a good idea to keep your conversations about Autism private with your parents. Does anyone have a question or comment about that? (Give group members time to talk about privacy)

Group Leader: For your home assignment this week your job is to write down five questions that you have about Autism Spectrum Disorders. You are going to write your questions on this handout.

Action Item: Provide the handout for the home assignment (Appendix 2-J). Ask each group member to insert it into their binder behind last session’s home assignment.
Session 4

1. Review the concept of Autism Spectrum Disorders
2. Answer questions related to Autism Spectrum Disorders
3. Discuss other symptoms commonly associated with Autism Spectrum Disorders

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<td>Markers</td>
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<td>Large paper hung on the wall</td>
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<td>White board mounted to the wall (or use the large paper)</td>
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<td>Scissors</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bowl or basket</td>
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<td>Appendix 2-K</td>
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<td>Appendix 2-L</td>
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<td>Appendix 2-M</td>
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- Note that the parents will participate in this week’s group with their child.

**Action Item:** Prior to the start of group remove and review Appendix 2-K

**Action Item:** Prior to the start of group remove Appendix 2-L from the group manual and cut the questions into strips. Fold the strips and place them into a bowl or basket.

**Action Item:** Write the agenda on a wall-mounted marker board or large hanging paper

**Group Leader:** Today we have three things on our agenda. Because we went over so much information last week, we are going to review the things we talked about last session. After that, we are going to answer the questions that you wrote down about Autism Spectrum Disorders for your home assignment. The last things we are going to do is talk about other
characteristics that are common in people with Autism Spectrum Disorders. Does anyone have any questions about what we are going to do today? (Give the group members time to ask questions)

1. Review the concept of Autism Spectrum Disorders

*Group Leader: Last week we talked about the term “Autism Spectrum Disorder.” For many of you, that may have been the first time you had ever heard those words. Without looking in your binder, who can explain: What is an Autism Spectrum Disorder?* (Allow the group members to have time to respond)

*Action Item: Hang the chart or 3 pages of characteristics on the wall.*

*Group Leader: Great job. Last week we said that an Autism Spectrum Disorder is a label for a specific set of characteristics about you. For the most part, those things fit into 3 categories: Social skills, communication, and behaviors. What kinds of things go under social skills?* (Allow the group members time to respond) *What kinds of things go under communication?* (Allow the group members time to respond) *What kinds of things go under behaviors?* (Allow the group members time to respond)

*Group Leader: Raise your hand if you thought about Autism Spectrum Disorders since our last group. What kinds of things did you think about? Some people feel happy when they learn about their Autism Spectrum Disorders because it helps them to understand why they might think differently than other kids. Other people might feel sad or angry because it makes them feel different. What are you feeling?* (Encourage group members to share their emotions and provide support as needed)

2. Answer questions related to Autism Spectrum Disorders

*Group Leader: We are going to talk more about what this all means today. Did everyone think of 5 questions you have about Autism Spectrum Disorders? Tonight we’re going to answer all of them. Don’t worry if you feel embarrassed about your questions. We are not going to give your name when we read the question. If you do not like one of the questions that we read, or you think it is silly, please remember to keep that opinion to yourself. It is important that everyone feels comfortable talking about their thoughts and feelings and if someone hears that you think their idea is silly, it might hurt their feelings. Everyone please take your home assignment from last week out of your binder. (Name of group leader) is going to collect them.*
**Action Item:** Collect and make photo copies of each group member’s questions and return the original document to each individual. Using the photocopied pages, have the teens cut each question into its own strip of paper. Fold the strips, and place them into the bowl or basket. If there are noticeable duplicates of the same question, it may be time effective to remove some of the duplicates from the bowl/basket.

**Group Leader:** As (Name of group leader) gives you your original questions back, please put them back into your binder. We are putting copies of all of the questions into this bowl/basket. You might also have noticed that there were already some questions in the bowl/basket. The reason for this is that this group has been run with other teens in the past and we have kept some of the questions from those people. We are going to pull out one question at a time, read it, and try our best to answer it.

**Action Item:** Choose a group member to pick a question out of the bowl/basket. Have the group member (or their parent if the child is not able) read the question aloud.

**Group Leader:** (If it is a question that is new to the group) Does anyone feel that they know the answer to this question? (Give group members time to attempt to answer the question before providing an answer to promote critical thinking)

**Group Leader:** (If it is a question that is similar to a question that has already been read) This is something that we have already talked a bit about. What have we already said that would answer this question? (Give group members time to attempt to answer the question before briefly reviewing the answer)

**Action Item:** Continue through each question, allowing different group members to read and answer each question in order to help sustain attention and ensure that all group members understand the material. Use the answers to the “Commonly Asked Questions” in Appendix 2-J to provide answers to the questions. If you are unsure how to answer a question, be honest and commit to finding the answer and getting back to the group in the next session.

**Group Leader:** To help everyone remember the answers to all of these questions, here is a sheet of paper with many of the questions on it that you can keep. Please place this in your binder behind everything we have done so far. (Distribute Appendix 2-K)

3. Discuss other symptoms commonly associated with Autism Spectrum Disorders
**Group Leader:** We have talked about the most common things about people with Autism Spectrum Disorders, and we have answered a lot of questions about what having an Autism Spectrum Disorder means. But there are other things that we also often see in people who have Autism Spectrum Disorders. Let’s take another look at our original list of group strengths and weaknesses.

**Action Item:** Re-hang the list of group strengths and weaknesses.

**Group Leader:** Some of the things on our list may be unique to one or two people in our group, but some of them are common among people with autism spectrum disorders, even though they don’t fit into our 3 categories. (Discuss the outstanding items on the list and discuss with the group whether or not they are common among individuals with ASD, or unique to someone in the group. Remind group members that everyone is unique so some of the things on the list may not necessarily be characteristic of an individual with ASD)

**Action Item:** Provide the list of other common characteristics among individuals with ASD (Appendix 2-M)

**Group Leader:** Here is a list of some of the other characteristics that are common in people with Autism Spectrum Disorders. Together with your mom or dad/grandparent, circle any of the things that you think describe you. (Give the group members a few minutes to complete this activity)

**Group Leader:** Does anyone feel comfortable sharing the things they have circled? (Allow the group members time to share the items they circled and encourage others to comment if they have circled common items)

**Group Leader:** OK, please put this new list of characteristics in the back of your binder behind your home assignment from last week. Next week we are going to talk about who we should tell about our Autism Spectrum Disorder and good ways to do that. Your home assignment for the week is to make a list of people you would like to know about your Autism Spectrum Disorder and a list of people you do not want to know about your Autism Spectrum Disorder. You should also write why you do or do not want them to know. You are going to write your questions on this handout.

**Action Item:** Provide the handout for the home assignment (Appendix 2-N)
Session 5
Explaining to others what it means to have ASD

5. Answer questions related to Autism Spectrum Disorders
6. Review of homework assignment
7. Introduce the concepts of disclosure and self-advocacy
8. Discuss how to explain ASD to others

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<td>Appendix 2-P</td>
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<td>Appendix 2-Q</td>
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- Note that the parents will NOT participate in this week’s group with their child.

Action Item: Write the agenda on a wall-mounted marker board or large hanging paper

Group Leader: Today we have four things on our agenda. First, we are going to have some time to answer any questions that might have come up over the last week related to autism spectrum disorders. After that, we are going to talk about your homework assignments. The third thing we are going to do is talk about who should know about your ASD and when you should tell them. Last, we are going to talk about how to explain ASD to someone else, like a
friend, classmate, or even an adult that is important to you. Does anyone have any questions about what we are going to do today? (Give the group members time to ask questions)

5. Answer questions about Autism Spectrum Disorders

**Group Leader:** The first thing we are going to do is answer any questions that you thought of over the past week about autism spectrum disorders. Does anyone have any questions? (Give the group members time to ask questions)

6. Review of homework assignment

**Group Leader:** Last week your home assignment was to make a list of people you would like to know about your Autism Spectrum Disorder and a list of people you do not want to know about your Autism Spectrum Disorder. Today we are going to spend some time sharing those ideas. Some group members might want everyone close to them to know about their ASD, while other people might not want anyone to know. Other people might be in the middle and want some people to know but not other people. This is a personal choice, meaning there is no right or wrong answer for who to tell and who not to tell. As we share our homework assignments, please keep this in mind and be respectful of one another’s feelings and ideas. Could someone please share their homework assignment with the group? (Encourage each member of the group to share their assignment. While doing so, take mental note of who each group member does and does not want to tell. Ask probing questions as to why the group members do or do not want certain people to know about their diagnosis)

**Group Leader:** Thanks you for sharing your ideas. Did everyone do this homework assignment with their parents? If so, did your parents agree or disagree with your decisions? Why or why not? If you did not do the assignment with your parents, do you think your parents would agree or disagree with your decisions? Why or why not? (Allow each group member to respond)

7. Introduce the concept of disclosure and self advocacy

**Group Leader:** There are two main reasons why you would choose to tell someone about your Autism Spectrum Disorder. Here is a handout that tells you those reasons.

**Action Item:** Provide and review Appendix 2-O
Group Leader: The first reason is because you want them to know more about you. How many of you have someone on your list who you want to tell about your Autism Spectrum Disorder because you want them to know more about you? Write the names of those people under number one. Why would it be helpful for them to know about your ASD? (Allow group members to respond)

Group Leader: The second reason to tell people about your Autism Spectrum Disorder is because you need help with something and you need that person to understand why you need help. But, this is a tricky one. You do NOT need to tell someone you have an Autism Spectrum Disorder EVERY time you need help. For example, if you need help with a math problem in class, should you tell the teacher you don’t know the answer because you have an Autism Spectrum Disorder? The answer is, no. Having trouble in math one day is something that happens to everyone and is probably not related to your Autism Spectrum Disorder. However, what if your teacher walks up behind you and grabs your shoulder and you are a person with ASD who is sensitive to touch? That is a situation when it might be a good idea to explain your Autism Spectrum Disorder to your teacher. Write the names of people you might tell about your Autism Spectrum Disorder because you might need their help under number two. What are some examples of times when you might need to tell someone about your Autism Spectrum Disorder in order to get help? (Allow group members to respond)

8. How to Explain ASD to Others

Group Leader: The last thing we are going to do today is talk about how to explain your Autism Spectrum Disorder to others people. What would you say to someone if you were telling them about your ASD? (Allow group members to respond)

Group Leader: Remember what we have learned in this group. Here is a sheet that can help you to think of what to say when you want to tell someone about our Autism Spectrum Disorder.

Action Item: Provide and review Appendix 2-P

Group Leader: Let’s practice. (Conduct role plays allowing each group member to explain their diagnosis)

Group Leader: Great job today, everyone. Next week is our last week of group and we are going to do two things. First, we are going to do a short quiz to see how much you have
learned about Autism Spectrum Disorders. You might want to go through your binder this week to keep everything fresh in your mind. The other thing we are going to do is have a party to celebrate the strengths and talents of everyone in the group. Everyone will have up to (x) minutes (5 minutes is recommended) to share their talent with the group. That means your talent could take less than (x) minutes, but it cannot take more than (x) minutes. Your homework this week is to plan what you are going to do, and practice. Please insert this handout into the back of your binder to remind you about this assignment.

Action Item: Provide the handout for the home assignment (Distribute Appendix 2-Q)
Session 6
Celebrating strengths by exploring the many talents of individuals with ASD

3. Test How Much Was Learned
4. Celebrate Group Strengths

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- Note that the parents will participate in this week’s group with their child.

3. Test How Much Was Learned

*Group Leader: Just like we did a few weeks ago, we are all going to do a little worksheet to see what we know about autism spectrum disorders. Just like you did the first time, answer the questions as best you can. This time while you complete your worksheet, your parents are going to complete a worksheet as well.*

*Action Item:* Distribute the post-test on Autism Spectrum Disorders (Appendix 2-R) as well as pencils. Have the group members complete the posttest without consulting their parents or one another. If there is stress related to completing the assignment, remind the group that there are no grades associated with this task and it is simply to get an idea of what they know about Autism Spectrum Disorders. When all group members are finished, collect the post tests and put them aside.

*Action Item:* Distribute the Parent Feedback Form (Appendix 2-S) as well as pencils. When all parents are finished, collect the post tests and put them aside.
4. Celebrate Group Strengths

**Group Leader:** Great job everyone. For the rest of the evening, we are going to have fun and share our talents with one another. Everyone is going to get a turn to go and you will have up to (x) minutes to share your talent with the group. So that there is no confusion about what order you are going to go in, we are going to go in alphabetical order by first name. That means the order will look like this.

**Action Item:** Write on the board the list of group member names in alphabetical order

**Group Leader:** Please remember to be kind and cheer for the other group members when they are done. If you do not particularly like what someone chooses to do, please be polite and keep that comment to yourself. It is not OK to hurt someone else’s feelings.

**Action Item:** Facilitate each group member’s time to share.

**Group Leader:** Those were all great talents. You all have a lot to be proud of. We’re about done for the evening. Before you leave, please remember to say goodbye to all the great friends you have made in this group.
ASD and Me Level 3
Session 1

1. Introductions and rapport building
2. Establish group rules
3. Discuss confidentiality
4. Introduce to the concept of strengths and weaknesses

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<td>Appendix 3-A</td>
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<td>Appendix 3-B</td>
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- Note that the parents will NOT participate in this week’s group with their child.

4. Introductions and Rapport Building

Introductions and rapport building are vital to the success of the overall program, as individuals will be asked to share a great deal of personal information with the group, and therefore need to feel comfortable with one another.

Action Item: As each individual enters the room, have them find a seat at a table that is large enough to fit the entire group comfortably. Ask each member to write their name on and decorate a name tag. If possible, do not start the group until all members are present, as it is extremely important that no one misses out on the description of the group or getting to know the other group members.

Group leader says: Welcome, everyone. Thank you for joining us. We’re excited that you’re all here. Let me first begin by explaining the reason for this group. (It is important that you do not ask the group members why they are participating in group. Some group members may be aware that they are going to be “talking about their autism,” while other group members may be
unfamiliar with this term.) *Over the next six weeks, we are going to be getting together to learn about ourselves. We will be talking about things we are good at, things we like, and things that are hard for us. In the process, we may become friends with the other people in this group, and we may see that we have a lot in common with one another. Does anyone have any questions about what is going to happen in this group?* (Give the group members time to ask questions)

**Action Item:** Write the agenda on a wall-mounted marker board or large hanging paper

**Group Leader:** Today we are going to do four things. The first thing will be to get to know each other. The second thing will do is talk about the rules for the group. The third thing we will do is talk about confidentiality. The last thing we will do is begin a conversation that we will continue next week about strengths and weaknesses. Does anyone have any questions about what we are going to do today? (Give the group members time to ask questions)

**Group Leader:** We are going to start with introductions. We are going to go in a circle around the table, so everyone will get a chance to speak. Each person should say their name, how old they are, and one fact about themselves. I will go first. (Provide the group with your name, age if willing, and a fact about yourself)

**Group Leader:** The next thing we will do is an activity to get to know one another better. Does everyone know how to make a bubble map?

**Action Item:** Distribute the interest inventory (Appendix 3-A)

*The first thing you are going to write three of your favorite things in the middle circle. Then, your job will be to ask the other people in the room if they like any of the same things that are in your circle. When you find someone that does, put their name in one of the outer circles and write the common interest underneath. Then ask that person for two others things that they like. Repeat this procedure for two other circles.*

**Group Leader:** Great job everyone. Is anyone willing to share what you learned about the other group members? (Allow the group time to discuss)

5. Establish group rules
It is important that group members are involved in the creation of rules so that they are invested in following the rules.

**Group Leader:** The next thing we are going to do is create rules for the group. These are the rules that we are all going to be responsible for following each week in group, so it is important that we agree on what they will be. I have a few ideas, but let’s see what you all think the rules should be (allow the group members to give ideas)

**Action Item:** Write “Group Rules” on a piece of paper on the wall and write each rule that is agreed upon by the group. It is important that the rules are clearly visible to all group members during each group. By using paper rather than the board, you will be able to keep the rules from week to week. Be sure to write the rules in terms of the behavior that is expected rather than the behavior that is not desired. For example, “listen to the person who is speaking” gives the group members more direction than simply saying, “Don’t talk while others are talking.” Also, be specific. Rules such as, “Be good,” or “Be respectful of others,” are too general and do not provide information as to what is acceptable behavior.

6. Discuss Confidentiality

**Group Leader:** The next thing we need to discuss is confidentiality. What is confidentiality? (Allow the group members to discuss their ideas)

**Group Leader:** Confidentiality means group is meant to be a safe place where you can talk about whatever you want to talk about. But, in order to feel safe everyone needs to know that what they say in group will stay in group. (Facilitators further explain this to mean that when they leave the group, they should not tell anyone else about personal, private things another child has shared.) This also means that group leaders will not tell anyone what group members share without permission. However, there are two exceptions. If someone says they want to hurt themselves or someone else, then we have to tell your parents in order to keep you safe. Also, if a group member says that someone is hurting them in some way, we would have to tell someone in order to make sure that you are safe. Does anyone have any questions about confidentiality, or why it is important to us? (Allow the group members to ask questions)

7. Strengths and Weaknesses

The group members’ understanding of strengths and weaknesses will vary greatly based on their chronological age, language level, and cognitive abilities. Individuals on the autism spectrum typically interpret language in a literal way. As a result, when asked to describe the meaning of
“strengths and weaknesses,” individuals will often say “how strong/weak a person is,” or “how much weight a person can lift.” It is therefore often necessary to teach the concept of strengths and weaknesses to the group.

**Group Leader:** The last thing we are going to do today is talk about strengths and weaknesses. What is a strength? What does it mean to be strong? Is that the same thing as a strength? What is a weakness? What does it mean to be weak? Is that the same thing as a weakness? (Allow the group members to provide their ideas and discuss each question with one another)

**Action Item:** Provide and review the handout on strengths and weaknesses (Appendix 3-B). Ask each group member to insert it into their binder behind the introduction page.

**Group Leader:** Your home assignment for this week is to use this sheet to make a list of people or characters who you think have a lot of strengths. Your list can be characters from television, friends or family members, people that you know, or anyone else in your life. Be prepared to share your ideas next week.
Session 2

1. Introduce the parents
2. Understand that everyone has strengths and weaknesses
3. Understand the child/adolescent’s individual strengths and weaknesses

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<td>White board mounted to the wall (or use the large paper)</td>
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<td>Appendix 3-D</td>
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<td>Appendix 3-E</td>
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- Note that the parents will participate in this week’s group with their child.

**Action Item:** Write the agenda on a wall-mounted marker board or large hanging paper

**Group Leader:** Good evening everyone! Today we have three things on our agenda. The first thing we are going to do is introduce one another to our parents. The second thing we are going to do is talk more about the idea of strengths and weaknesses. The third thing we will do is an activity with your parents to think critically about our own strengths and weaknesses. Does anyone have any questions about what we are going to do today? (Give the group members time to ask questions)

4. Introduce the parents

**Group Leader:** We are going to start with introducing one another to our parents. Just like last week, we are going to go in a circle around the table, so everyone will get a chance to speak. Each person should say their name, like they did last week, but then you are going to
introduce your parent or grandparent who is here with you. (Allow each adolescent to introduce their parent)

Action Item: Hang the rules created in the previous week on the wall so that they are clearly visible to each group member. Review the rules before getting started with the session content.

5. Understand that everyone has strengths and weaknesses

Group Leader: The second thing on our agenda is to continue our discussion about strengths and weaknesses. Last week we started to talk about strengths and weaknesses. What is a strength? What is a weakness? (Allow the group members to respond)

Group Leader: Excellent. Your home practice for last week was to make a list of characters who you believe to have many strengths. It can be someone from real life, TV, or maybe a movie. Does anyone have any ideas that they can share with the group? To really create a challenge, is there anyone you can think of who you think is perfect? (Allow the group members to brainstorm characters or people they would like to discuss. It may be helpful to write the ideas on the board)

Action Item: Of the characters/individuals listed by the group members, help the group to determine which ones would be best to discuss as a group by taking a vote of how many group members are familiar with the responses given and circling the responses with whom the majority of the group is familiar. Try to avoid potentially controversial individuals such as political figures.

Group Leader: The first character/individual with whom most of you are familiar is _______. What are some of this person’s strengths? (Allow the group members to brainstorm the individual’s strengths and record them for the group to see. Allow parents to provide responses as well)

Group Leader: Good. But it is important to remember that no one is perfect. Even individuals that we view as having a lot of strengths also have weaknesses. What are some of the weaknesses you can think of for this character/individual? (Allow the group members to brainstorm the individual’s weaknesses and record them for the group to see. Allow parents to provide responses as well) It may be useful to list the strengths and weaknesses in a chart format with one column being strengths and one column being weaknesses. For example:
Group Leader: So what we see is that there are strengths and weaknesses in everyone, even individuals that you might admire or look up to.

6. Understand the adolescent’s individual strengths and weaknesses

Group Leader: The third thing on our agenda is to talk about our own strengths and weaknesses. Just like we did for the famous people above, we are going to create a profile of strengths and weaknesses for ourselves. Provide the parents with an “idea list” (Appendix 3-D) and distribute the activity sheet to the adolescents (Appendix 3-C).

Group Leader: Put your strengths in the appropriate column and your weaknesses in the other column. Really think critically about yourself and try to come up with as many different things as possible. Work with your parents to see what you think versus what they think. (Allow a period of time for the group members to work with their parent. Allow them to spread out into other areas for privacy and conversation, if necessary. Encourage deep thought and self reflection)

Group Leader: Great job everyone. It can be really difficult to talk about yourself, especially your weaknesses, and you all did a great job. Please place these sheets in the back of your binder behind last session’s materials.

Action Item: Collect the assignments for use in next week’s session.

Group Leader: For your home assignment this week your job is to interview a family member about their strengths and weaknesses and record the information on this sheet.

Action Item: Provide the handout for the home assignment (Appendix 3-E). Ask each group member to insert it into their binder behind today’s activity.
Session 3

7. Review of home assignment
8. Review of individual strengths and weaknesses from Session 2
9. Discussion of what our strengths and weaknesses mean about us

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<td>Markers</td>
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<td>Appendix 3-I</td>
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<td>Appendix 3-J</td>
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- Note that the parents will participate in this week’s group with their child.

Action Item: Write the agenda on a wall-mounted marker board or large hanging paper

Group Leader: Good evening everyone! Today we have three things on our agenda. The first thing we are going to do is review the homework assignment from last week. The second thing we are going to do is review and talk more about our own strengths and weaknesses from the activity last week. The third thing we are going to do is discuss what our strengths and weaknesses mean about us. Does anyone have any questions about what we are going to do today? (Give the group members time to ask questions)

4. Review of homework assignment

Group Leader: Last week our home assignment was to interview a family member about their strengths and weaknesses and record the information on this worksheet. Does anyone feel
comfortable sharing what they found out with the group? Is there anything that you learned about this person that you did not know before? (Give the group members time to share their homework.)

5. Review of individual strengths and weaknesses from session 2

Action Item: Distribute the assignments from last week.

Group Leader: Last week we worked on identifying our own strengths and weaknesses. It can be very hard to discuss, or even admit to our own weaknesses. You all did a great job last week. This week we are going to take a look at our own strengths and weaknesses and talk about them as a group.

Action Item: Create a chart on the board similar to those used in past groups. It should look something like this:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
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<tr>
<td>Strengths</td>
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<tr>
<td>Weaknesses</td>
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Group Leader: Who is willing to share some of the strengths that they listed for themselves? (Give the group members time to share their strengths and write them into the chart as they are listed. When there are duplications, put a star next to the characteristic. It may be helpful to group characteristics together. For example, if one child says “talking to others” and another child says “staying on topic while talking,” it may be helpful to group these as, “conversation skills” and then put a star next to “conversation skills,” as two people had this characteristic. This will help to highlight that there are similarities within the group.)

Group Leader: It looks like we have a fair amount in common with one another. Now, who is willing to share some of the weaknesses that they listed for themselves? (Give the group members time to share their weaknesses and write them into the chart as they are listed. When there are duplications, put a star next to the characteristic. As indicated above, it may be helpful to group characteristics together. This will help to highlight that there are similarities within the group.)
6. Discussion of what our strengths and weaknesses mean about us

**Group Leader:** Everyone has things that are unique about them, but it’s clear from this chart that the people in this room have a lot in common with one another. There happens to be a name for this type of profile. When people have strengths and weaknesses that look like this, it is call an Autism Spectrum Disorder. Has anyone in the room heard of an Autism Spectrum Disorder? (Give the group members time to say whether or not they have heard the term, but discourage them from discussing what they believe it means.)

**Group Leader:** Before we talk about what Autism Spectrum Disorder means, we are all going to do a short worksheet to assess what you already know. If you don’t know anything and this is the first time you have ever heard this term, that’s ok. If you know lots about Autism Spectrum Disorders, that’s ok too. Just answer the questions the best you can.

**Action Item:** Distribute the pre-test on Autism Spectrum Disorders (Appendix 3-F) as well as pencils. Have the group members complete the pretest without consulting their parents or one another. If there is stress related to completing the assignment, remind the group that there are no grades associated with this task and it is simply to get an idea of what they know about Autism Spectrum Disorders. When all group members are finished, collect the pre tests and put them aside.

**Group Leader:** You may have heard the words Autism, Asperger’s Disorder, or PDD. Those are words that are sometimes used to describe Autism Spectrum Disorders. In this group we are going to use the words Autism Spectrum Disorder instead of all of those other words. What is an Autism Spectrum Disorder? Who wants to share their thoughts? (Allow the group members to share their perceptions of Autism Spectrum Disorders. It may be helpful to write their ideas on the board with the title “Ideas about Autism”)

**Group Leader:** There are many, many characteristics that make up who you are. For example, you may be funny, artistic, like sports, or hate sports. You might love to sing, or hate to sing. You might love seeing new places or prefer staying home. An Autism Spectrum Disorder is a label for a specific set of things about you. For the most part, those things fit into 3 categories: Social skills, communication, and behaviors.

**Action Item:** Either hang 3 large pieces of paper on the wall, or create 3 columns on the board; and title them “social skills, communication,” and “behaviors.”
• Note that this portion of the group will differ significantly based on the age and cognitive abilities of the group. The explanation of diagnosis must be delivered in developmentally appropriate terms.

**Group Leader:** The first one says “social skills.” When people have an autism spectrum disorder, one thing about them is that they usually have trouble with social skills. How would you define social skills? (Give the group time to share their understanding of the term “social skills” and write them on the paper)

**Group Leader:** Social skills are the skills that you use to interact with others (choose explanation based on the developmental level of the group). Let’s see if we can fit some of the characteristics from our list of group strengths and weaknesses into the social skills column.

**Action Item:** Go through the list of group strengths and weaknesses, pull out the characteristics that relate to social skills and add them to the “social skills” column.

**Group Leader:** This is a really good start. We are going to go over a list of other things that are related to “social skills” that we might not have thought of. As we go over the list, put a star next to any of the things that sound like you. Parents, you are encouraged to put a star next to things you notice about your child as well. Feel free to note if you agree or disagree. We can talk about that. Some of the things that people with Autism Spectrum Disorders have trouble with are: (provide and review Appendix 3-G)

**Group Leader:** The second one says “communication.” When people have an autism spectrum disorder, they sometimes have trouble with communication, or communicate differently than other people. How would you define communication? (Give the group time to share their understanding of the term “communication” and write them on the paper)

**Group Leader:** Communication means the way you use words, facial expressions, and body language to express yourself. Let’s see if we can fit some of the characteristics from our list of group strengths and weaknesses into the social skills column.

**Action Item:** Go through the list of group strengths and weaknesses, pull out the characteristics that relate to communication and add them to the “communication” column.

**Group Leader:** This is a really good start. We are going to go over a list of other things that people on the Autism Spectrum often have trouble with that can be part of the
“communication” category. As we go over the list, put a star next to any of the things that sound like things you have trouble with. Parents, you are encouraged to put a star next to things you notice about your child as well. Again, if you disagree with one another, feel free to note that. Some of the things that people with Autism Spectrum Disorders have trouble with are: (provide and review Appendix 3-H)

**Group Leader:** The third one is “behaviors.” This does not mean if you have good behavior or bad behavior. When people have an autism spectrum disorder, they often do certain things over and over again; have really intense interests in certain topics that most other people aren’t quite as interested in or know quite as much about; or like things to be a certain way. Let’s see if we can fit some of the characteristics from our list of group strengths and weaknesses into the “behaviors” category.

**Action Item:** Go through the list of group strengths and weaknesses, pull out the characteristics that relate to communication and add them to the “Communication” column.

**Group Leader:** This is a really good start. Other behaviors that are often different in people with Autism Spectrum Disorders are: (provide and review Appendix 3-I)

**Group Leader:** Why do you think we use the word “disorder?” What does “disorder” mean? (Allow the group members to respond).

**Group Leader:** It is called a “disorder” because it is something that is different about you than most other people. That does not mean there is something wrong with you. It means it is something different about you. Does anyone have any comments or questions about that? (Allow group members time to ask questions)

**Group Leader:** This was a lot of information to absorb in one day. Does anyone want to share comments or feelings about what we talked about today? (Encourage group members to share their emotions and provide support as needed)

**Group Leader:** Until we meet again, the topic of Autism Spectrum Disorders may be something that you are thinking about. Put today’s handouts into your binder to remind you about this conversation. It would probably be helpful if you and your parents looked over these pages at home. (Give the group members time to put the paper away)
**Group Leader:** I bet everyone has a lot of questions about what all of this means in relation to the rest of your life, and we are going to do a home assignment this week that will give everyone some time to think about and write down those questions. Next week will spend the whole session talking about your questions and learning more about Autism Spectrum Disorders. We are also going to talk about how to tell other people about your Autism Spectrum Disorder and how to explain what it means. So until we have a chance to talk about those things, it might be a good idea to keep your conversations about Autism private with your parents. Does anyone have a question or comment about that? (Give group members time to talk about privacy)

**Group Leader:** For your home assignment this week your job is to write down five questions that you have about Autism Spectrum Disorders. You are going to write your questions on this handout.

**Action Item:** Provide the handout for the home assignment (Appendix 3-J). Ask each group member to insert it into their binder behind last session’s home assignment.
Session 4

4. Review the concept of Autism Spectrum Disorders
5. Answer questions related to Autism Spectrum Disorders
6. Discuss other symptoms commonly associated with Autism Spectrum Disorders

Required Materials

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<td>Large paper hung on the wall</td>
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<td>White board mounted to the wall (or use the large paper)</td>
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<td>Scissors</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bowl or basket</td>
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<td>Appendix 3-K</td>
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<td>Appendix 3-L</td>
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<td>Appendix 3-M</td>
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- Note that the parents will participate in this week’s group with their child.

**Action Item:** Prior to the start of group remove and review Appendix 3-K

**Action Item:** Prior to the start of group remove Appendix 3-L from the group manual and cut the questions into strips. Fold the strips and place them into a bowl or basket.

**Action Item:** Write the agenda on a wall-mounted marker board or large hanging paper

**Group Leader:** Today we have three things on our agenda. Because we went over so much information last week, we are going to review the things we talked about last session. After that, we are going to answer the questions that you wrote down about Autism Spectrum Disorders for your home assignment. The last things we are going to do is talk about other
characteristics that are common in people with Autism Spectrum Disorders. Does anyone have any questions about what we are going to do today? (Give the group members time to ask questions)

7. Review the concept of Autism Spectrum Disorders

*Group Leader*: Last week we talked about the term “Autism Spectrum Disorder.” For many of you, that may have been the first time you had ever heard those words. Without looking in your binder, who can explain: What is an Autism Spectrum Disorder? (Allow the group members to have time to respond)

*Action Item*: Hang the chart or 3 pages of characteristics on the wall.

*Group Leader*: Great job. Last week we said that an Autism Spectrum Disorder is a label for a specific set of characteristics about you. For the most part, those things fit into 3 categories: Social skills, communication, and behaviors. What kinds of things go under social skills? (Allow the group members time to respond) What kinds of things go under communication? (Allow the group members time to respond) What kinds of things go under behaviors? (Allow the group members time to respond)

*Group Leader*: Who in this room thought about Autism Spectrum Disorders since our last group? What kinds of things did you think about? Some people feel happy when they learn about their Autism Spectrum Disorders because it helps them to understand why they might think differently than other kids. Other people might feel sad or angry because it makes them feel different. What are you feeling? (Encourage group members to share their emotions and provide support as needed)

8. Answer questions related to Autism Spectrum Disorders

*Group Leader*: We are going to talk more about what this all means today. Did everyone think of 5 questions you have about Autism Spectrum Disorders? Tonight we’re going to answer all of them. Don’t worry if you feel embarrassed about your questions. We are not going to give your name when we read the question. If you do not like one of the questions that we read, or you think it is silly, please remember to keep that opinion to yourself. It is important that everyone feels comfortable talking about their thoughts and feelings and if someone hears that you think their idea is silly, it might hurt their feelings. Everyone please take your home assignment from last week out of your binder. (Name of group leader) is going to collect them.
**Action Item:** Collect and make photo copies of each group member’s questions and return the original document to each individual. Using the photocopied pages, have the teens cut each question into its own strip of paper. Fold the strips, and place them into the bowl or basket. If there are noticeable duplicates of the same question, it may be time effective to remove some of the duplicates from the bowl/basket.

**Group Leader:** As (Name of group leader) gives you your original questions back, please put them back into your binder. We are putting copies of all of the questions into this bowl/basket. You might also have noticed that there were already some questions in the bowl/basket. The reason for this is that this group has been run with other teens in the past and we have kept some of the questions from those people. We are going to pull out one question at a time, read it, and try our best to answer it.

**Action Item:** Choose a group member to pick a question out of the bowl/basket. Have the group member (or their parent if the child is not able) read the question aloud.

**Group Leader:** (If it is a question that is new to the group) Does anyone feel that they know the answer to this question? (Give group members time to attempt to answer the question before providing an answer to promote critical thinking)

**Group Leader:** (If it is a question that is similar to a question that has already been read) This is something that we have already talked a bit about. What have we already said that would answer this question? (Give group members time to attempt to answer the question before briefly reviewing the answer)

**Action Item:** Continue through each question, allowing different group members to read and answer each question in order to help sustain attention and ensure that all group members understand the material. Use the answers to the “Commonly Asked Questions” in Appendix 2-J to provide answers to the questions. If you are unsure how to answer a question, be honest and commit to finding the answer and getting back to the group in the next session.

**Group Leader:** To help everyone remember the answers to all of these questions, here is a sheet of paper with many of the questions on it that you can keep. Please place this in your binder. (Distribute Appendix 3-J)

9. Discuss other symptoms commonly associated with Autism Spectrum Disorders
**Group Leader:** We have talked about the most common things about people with Autism Spectrum Disorders, and we have answered a lot of questions about what having an Autism Spectrum Disorder means. But there are other things that we also often see in people who have Autism Spectrum Disorders. Let’s take another look at our original list of group strengths and weaknesses.

**Action Item:** Re-hang the list of group strengths and weaknesses.

**Group Leader:** Some of the things on our list may be unique to one or two people in our group, but some of them are common among people with autism spectrum disorders, even though they don’t fit into our 3 categories. (Discuss the outstanding items on the list and discuss with the group whether or not they are common among individuals with ASD, or unique to someone in the group. Remind group members that everyone is unique so some of the things on the list may not necessarily be characteristic of an individual with ASD)

**Action Item:** Provide the list of other common characteristics among individuals with ASD (Appendix 3-M)

**Group Leader:** Here is a list of some of the other characteristics that are common in people with Autism Spectrum Disorders. Together with your mom or dad/grandparent, circle any of the things that you think describe you. (Give the group members a few minutes to complete this activity)

**Group Leader:** Does anyone feel comfortable sharing the things they have circled? (Allow the group members time to share the items they circled and encourage others to comment if they have circled common items)

**Group Leader:** OK, please put this new list of characteristics in the back of your binder behind your home assignment from last week. Next week we are going to talk about who we should tell about our Autism Spectrum Disorder and good ways to do that. Your home assignment for the week is to make a list of people you would like to know about your Autism Spectrum Disorder and a list of people you do not want to know about your Autism Spectrum Disorder. You should also write why you do or do not want them to know. You are going to write your questions on this handout.

**Action Item:** Provide the handout for the home assignment (Appendix 3-N)
Session 5
Explaining to others what it means to have ASD

9. Answer questions related to Autism Spectrum Disorders
10. Review of homework assignment
11. Introduce the concepts of disclosure and self-advocacy
12. Discuss how to explain ASD to others

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- Note that the parents will NOT participate in this week’s group with their child.

Action Item: Write the agenda on a wall-mounted marker board or large hanging paper

Group Leader: Today we have four things on our agenda. First, we are going to have some time to answer any questions that might have come up over the last week related to autism spectrum disorders. After that, we are going to talk about your homework assignments. The third thing we are going to do is talk about who should know about your ASD and when you should tell them. Last, we are going to talk about how to explain ASD to someone else, like a friend, classmate, or even an adult that is important to you. Does anyone have any questions about what we are going to do today? (Give the group members time to ask questions)
9. Answer questions about Autism Spectrum Disorders

**Group Leader:** The first thing we are going to do is answer any questions that you thought of over the past week about autism spectrum disorders. Does anyone have any questions? (Give the group members time to ask questions)

10. Review of homework assignment

**Group Leader:** Last week your homework assignment was to make a list of people you would like to know about your Autism Spectrum Disorder and a list of people you do not want to know about your Autism Spectrum Disorder. Today we are going to spend some time sharing those ideas. Some group members might want everyone close to them to know about their ASD, while other people might not want anyone to know. Other people might be in the middle and want some people to know but not other people. This is a personal choice, meaning there is no right or wrong answer for who to tell and who not to tell. As we share our homework assignments, please keep this in mind and be respectful of one another’s feelings and ideas. Could someone please share their homework assignment with the group? (Encourage each member of the group to share their assignment. While doing so, take mental note of who each group member does and does not want to tell. Ask probing questions as to why the group members do or do not want certain people to know about their diagnosis)

**Group Leader:** Thanks you for sharing your ideas. Did everyone do this homework assignment with their parents? If so, did your parents agree or disagree with your decisions? Why or why not? If you did not do the assignment with your parents, do you think your parents would agree or disagree with your decisions? Why or why not? (Allow each group member to respond)

11. Introduce the concept of disclosure and self advocacy

**Group Leader:** There are two main reasons why you would choose to tell someone about your Autism Spectrum Disorder. Here is a handout that tells you those reasons.

**Action Item:** Provide and review Appendix 3-O

**Group Leader:** The first reason is because you want them to know more about you. How many of you have someone on your list who you want to tell about your Autism Spectrum Disorder because you want them to know more about you? Write the names of those people under
Group Leader: The second reason to tell people about your Autism Spectrum Disorder is because you need help with something and you need that person to understand why you need help. But, this is a tricky one. You do NOT need to tell someone you have an Autism Spectrum Disorder EVERY time you need help. For example, if you need help with a math problem in class, should you tell the teacher you don’t know the answer because you have an Autism Spectrum Disorder? The answer is, no. Having trouble in math one day is something that happens to everyone and is probably not related to your Autism Spectrum Disorder. However, what if your teacher walks up behind you and grabs your shoulder and you are a person with ASD who is sensitive to touch? That is a situation when it might be a good idea to explain your Autism Spectrum Disorder to your teacher. Write the names of people you might tell about your Autism Spectrum Disorder because you might need their help under number two. What are some examples of times when you might need to tell someone about your Autism Spectrum Disorder in order to get help? (Allow group members to respond)

12. How to Explain ASD to Others

Group Leader: The last thing we are going to do today is talk about how to explain your Autism Spectrum Disorder to others people. What would you say to someone if you were telling them about your ASD? (Allow group members to respond)

Group Leader: Remember what we have learned in this group. Here is a sheet that can help you to think of what to say when you want to tell someone about our Autism Spectrum Disorder.

Action Item: Provide and review Appendix 3-P

Group Leader: Let’s practice. (Conduct role plays allowing each group member to explain their diagnosis)

Group Leader: Great job today, everyone. Next week is our last week of group and we are going to do two things. First, we are going to do a short quiz to see how much you have learned about Autism Spectrum Disorders. You might want to go through your binder this week to keep everything fresh in your mind. The other thing we are going to do is have a party to celebrate the strengths and talents of everyone in the group. Everyone will have up to (x) minutes (5 minutes is recommended) to share their talent with the group. That means your talent could take less than (x) minutes, but it cannot take more than (x) minutes. Your
Homework this week is to plan what you are going to do, and practice. Please insert this handout into the back of your binder to remind you about this assignment.

Action Item: Provide the handout for the home assignment (Distribute Appendix 3-Q)
Session 6

Celebrating strengths by exploring the many talents of individuals with ASD

5. Test How Much Was Learned

6. Celebrate Group Strengths

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Required Materials</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Markers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large paper hung on the wall</td>
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<tr>
<td>White board mounted to the wall (or use the large paper)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Appendix 3-R</td>
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<tr>
<td>Appendix 3-S</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

- Note that the parents will participate in this week’s group with their child.

5. Test How Much Was Learned

*Group Leader: Just like we did a few weeks ago, we are all going to do a little worksheet to see what we know about autism spectrum disorders. Just like you did the first time, answer the questions as best you can. This time while you complete your worksheet, your parents are going to complete a worksheet as well.*

*Action Item:* Distribute the post-test on Autism Spectrum Disorders (Appendix 3-R) as well as pencils. Have the group members complete the posttest without consulting their parents or one another. If there is stress related to completing the assignment, remind the group that there are no grades associated with this task and it is simply to get an idea of what they know about Autism Spectrum Disorders. When all group members are finished, collect the post tests and put them aside.

*Action Item:* Distribute the Parent Feedback Form (Appendix 3-S) as well as pencils. When all parents are finished, collect the post tests and put them aside.
6. Celebrate Group Strengths

**Group Leader:** Great job everyone. For the rest of the evening, we are going to have fun and share our talents with one another. Everyone is going to get a turn to go and you will have up to (x) minutes to share your talent with the group. So that there is no confusion about what order you are going to go in, we are going to go in alphabetical order by first name. That means the order will look like this.

**Action Item:** Write on the board the list of group member names in alphabetical order

**Group Leader:** Please remember to be kind and cheer for the other group members when they are done. If you do not particularly like what someone chooses to do, please be polite and keep that comment to yourself. It is not OK to hurt someone else’s feelings.

**Action Item:** Facilitate each group member’s time to share.

**Group Leader:** Those were all great talents. You all have a lot to be proud of. We’re about done for the evening. Before you leave, please remember to say goodbye to all of the great friends you have made in this group.
## Appendix 1-A

### Human Bingo

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<th>B</th>
<th>I</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>G</th>
<th>O</th>
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<td>Has a birthday in August</td>
<td>Likes strawberry ice cream</td>
<td>Has been to another state</td>
<td>Has an older sister</td>
<td>Plays a musical instrument</td>
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<td>Walks to school</td>
<td>Has a dog</td>
<td>Favorite food is pizza</td>
<td>Has flown in an airplane</td>
<td>Favorite class is math</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Likes to sing</td>
<td>Is left handed</td>
<td>Likes to play soccer</td>
<td>Likes to draw</td>
<td>Shares a bedroom with a sibling</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Has green eyes</td>
<td>Has a younger brother</td>
<td>Is an only child</td>
<td>Favorite color is green</td>
<td>Has a cat</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 1-B

Understanding Strengths and Weaknesses

**Strength:** Something you are good at, is easy for you, or is a good thing about you.

**Weakness:** Something that is hard for you, you are not good at, or you do not like about yourself.

People or characters who I think have a lot of strengths are:

1. ____________________________________________

2. ____________________________________________

3. ____________________________________________

4. ____________________________________________

5. ____________________________________________
Appendix 1-C

Paper Cutout
Appendix 1-D

Below are some ideas of strengths and weaknesses you may want to suggest to your child:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sports</th>
<th>Reading body language</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Getting jokes</td>
<td>Starting conversations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting new people</td>
<td>Reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Math</td>
<td>Spelling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making eye contact</td>
<td>Knowing a lot about __________</td>
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<tr>
<td>Video games</td>
<td>Talking in front of others</td>
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<tr>
<td>Puzzles</td>
<td>Playing pretend</td>
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<tr>
<td>Art</td>
<td>Building</td>
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<tr>
<td>Running</td>
<td>Swimming</td>
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<tr>
<td>Being part of team</td>
<td>Following directions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Completing school work</td>
<td>Controlling my anger</td>
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<tr>
<td>Taking turns</td>
<td>Brushing my teeth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making new friends</td>
<td>Taking a bath/shower</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dealing with mistakes</td>
<td>Dealing with teasing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Expressing feelings</td>
<td>Completing homework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being flexible in the way I think</td>
<td>Sharing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking responsibility for my actions</td>
<td>Following rules</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having things in common with people my age</td>
<td>Listening to other people during conversations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having a lot of friends</td>
<td>Science</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharing personal information with others</td>
<td>Knowing what to say in conversations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding other people’s tone of voice</td>
<td>Understanding other people’s facial expressions</td>
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</table>
Appendix 1-E

Strengths and Weakness Interview

The person I interviewed was __________________________________________.

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<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Weaknesses</th>
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Appendix 1-F
Pretest

Name:__________________________

How Much Do You Know About Autism Spectrum Disorders?

Multiple Choice – Choose the best answer from the questions below:

1. An Autism Spectrum Disorder is:
   a. Something you are born with
   b. Something you catch from someone else
   c. Something you can give to someone else
   d. All of the above

2. When you have an Autism Spectrum Disorder you:
   a. Have trouble with conversations
   b. Have trouble making friends or relating to other kids your age
   c. Know a lot more about one particular subject than most other people
   OR do certain things over and over again
   d. All of the above

3. When you have an Autism Spectrum Disorder you have:
   a. More strengths than most other people your age
   b. More weaknesses than most other people your age
   c. Strengths and weaknesses, just like other people your age
   d. All of the above

4. When you have an autism spectrum disorder, it effects your
   a. Heart
   b. Brain
   c. Lungs
   d. All of the above
Circle True or False

5. Having an Autism Spectrum Disorder means that there is something wrong with you.
   a. True
   b. False

6. An Autism Spectrum Disorder has to do with how smart you are.
   a. True
   b. False

7. An Autism Spectrum Disorder is something that you have forever.
   a. True
   b. False

8. Many people with Autism Spectrum Disorders go to college and/or have jobs when they grow up.
   a. True
   b. False
Appendix 1-G
Social Skills

**Social skills** are the skills that you use to make friends and play with others.

People with Autism Spectrum Disorders sometimes have:

- Trouble making eye contact
- Trouble reading other people’s facial expressions
- Trouble knowing how to join in during group activities
- Trouble with make-believe games
- A preference for playing alone most of the time
- Trouble taking turns in conversations
- Trouble understanding social cues such as facial expressions and tone of voice
- Trouble relating to kids your own age (Not feeling like you have things in common with them)
- Trouble understanding emotions
- Trouble telling people how you feel
- Trouble keeping friends
- Get too close to people or touching people too often
- Trouble remembering to show concern when other people are upset
- Trouble remembering to smile back when someone smiles at them
- Trouble sharing
- Trouble imitating others (this may have happened when you were younger – ask your parents)
- Trouble knowing when someone is teasing them
- Trouble being teased a lot
Appendix 1-H
Communication

**Communication** means the way you use words, facial expressions, and body language to express yourself.

People with Autism Spectrum Disorders sometimes have:

- Trouble starting a conversation
- Trouble keeping a conversation going (especially topics that aren’t interesting to you)
- Frustration that other people aren’t “getting” what you’re trying to say
- Confusion about pronouns like “he” and “she” (this may have happened when you were younger – ask your parents)
- Trouble communicating your feelings to others
- Trouble answering questions directly
- Trouble understanding what people are trying to say to you
- Started talking later than other kids (your parents would know this)

If you’re a person with an Autism Spectrum Disorder you also might:

- Make up your own words
- Repeat the same words or sentences over and over again
- Repeat things you hear people say (in real life or TV) over and over again
- Use gestures less often than most other people
- Talk about the same topic all the time
- Speak in a different tone of voice than most other people
- Speak either too loudly or too quietly
Appendix 1-I
Behaviors

When people have an autism spectrum disorder, they have certain behaviors, or ways of doing things, that are different than most other people.

People with Autism Spectrum Disorders sometimes:

- Know more than almost anyone else about a certain subject
- Have a strong interest in something that other kids your age are not really interested in
- Want things to be a certain way
- Want to tell other people the rules or correcting them when they are wrong
- Flap their hands over and over again
- Wiggle their fingers over and over again
- Spin in circles
- Jump up and down over and over again
- Bang their head (this may have happened when you were younger – ask your parents)
- Want to know what to expect before something happens
- Want things to always be the same
- Like taking things apart or learning how things work
- Like to watch the same shows/movies or parts of the same shows/movies over and over again
- Want to do the same activities almost all the time
Appendix 1-J

Home Assignment – Questions

It is normal to have all kinds of questions when you learn something new, especially something new about yourself. Write down five questions you would like to know the answer to about Autism Spectrum Disorders.

1. __________________________________________________________________________

2. __________________________________________________________________________

3. __________________________________________________________________________

4. __________________________________________________________________________

5. __________________________________________________________________________
Commonly Asked Questions and Answers

**Question: Is there something wrong with me?**

Answer: There is nothing wrong with you and you are not sick. You are different, just like all people are different. You have strengths and weaknesses, just like all of the other people you know. Certain things about you happen to have a name, and that name is Autism Spectrum Disorder. The things that you struggle with can be worked on so that they get easier for you.

**Question: How did I get my Autism Spectrum Disorder?**

Answer: We do not yet know the answers to this question. There are some people that feel that it has a lot to do with biology, just like your eye color or the shape of your nose, while people believe that Autism Spectrum Disorders have a lot to do with the environment or the world around you and your experiences. Many people agree that there are factors from both biology and environment that contributes to Autism Spectrum Disorders.

**Question: Why do I have an Autism Spectrum Disorder?**

Answer: We do not know why some people have an Autism Spectrum Disorder and some do not. We do know some things about Autism Spectrum Disorders. We know that it is not a disease, and it does not mean that there is something wrong with you. We also know that it is not anyone’s fault.

**Question: Why do I have an Autism Spectrum Disorder and my brother, sister, or friend doesn’t?**

Answer: We do not know why some children have an Autism Spectrum Disorder and some do not.

**Question: Is it contagious?**
Answer: Autism Spectrum Disorders are not contagious. It is not a disease or sickness, but rather a collection of symptoms that have a name. Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders can participate in all of the same activities as other children their age.

**Question: Will I “grow out” of Autism?**

Answer: Autism Spectrum Disorders are considered to be lifetime disorders and people do not “grow out” of them. However, with help from people who love you and with lots of hard work, people with Autism often decrease the trouble they have in particular areas.

**Question: Why do I need the diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder? How does it help?**

Answer: Having an autism spectrum disorder diagnosis is important because it helps your teachers and other people who care about you to better understand you. If they understand what you are good at what is hard for you, then they can help you to do your best.

**Question: Am I retarded?**

Answer: Many children with Autism Spectrum Disorders have intellectual disabilities and many do not. Some people call a person with intellectual disabilities “retarded,” which means “slow.” “Retarded” is a mean word and should not be used. Since many children with and without Autism have intellectual disabilities, it is important to know what this means. Intellectual disability means that a person may learn things more slowly than most other people. It also means that they may have trouble taking care of themselves without help.

**Question: Will I be able to go to college?**

Answer: Many children with ASD attend college and have career goals just like everyone else.
**Question: Does having an Autism Spectrum Disorder mean I’m stupid?**

Answer: Being diagnosed with an Autism Spectrum Disorder does not mean that you are stupid. It means that your brain works differently than most other people and that makes you very interesting and unique. It means that there are some things that you are good at and some things that you struggle with. With some help, you can work on those things that you struggle with and they will become easier for you.
Appendix 1-L

Commonly Asked Questions

Is there something wrong with me?

How did I get my Autism Spectrum Disorder?

Why do I have an Autism Spectrum Disorder?

Why do I have an Autism Spectrum Disorder and my brother, sister, or friend doesn’t?

Is it contagious?

Will I “grow out” of my Autism Spectrum Disorder?

Why do I need the diagnosis of Autism? How does it help?

Am I retarded?

Will I be able to go to college?

Does having an Autism Spectrum Disorder mean I’m stupid?
Appendix 1-M

Other Common Characteristics of Kids with ASD

There are other things we know to be common in kids with Autism Spectrum Disorders that are not part of social skills, communication, or behaviors. Some of those things are:

- Trouble paying attention
- Trouble dealing with anger without “losing your cool”
- Enjoying smelling, tasting, or feeling certain things
- Being a picky eater (only eating certain foods)
- Disliking being touched or being close to other people
Appendix 1-N

Who to tell about my Autism Spectrum Disorder

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>People I want to tell about my ASD</th>
<th>Why they should know about my ASD</th>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>People I do not want to tell about my ASD</th>
<th>Why they do not need to know about my ASD</th>
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Appendix 1-O

When to Tell Someone about Your ASD

There are two main reasons why you would tell someone about your Autism Spectrum Disorder. They are:

1. **You want them to know more about you.**

   The people I want to know more about me are:

   __________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________

2. **You need help with something and you need that person to understand why you need help.**

   Remember, you do NOT need to tell someone you have an Autism Spectrum Disorder EVERY time you need help. For example, if you need help with a math problem in class, you do not need to tell the teacher you don’t know the answer because you have an Autism Spectrum Disorder. Having trouble in math one day is something that happens to everyone and is probably not related to your Autism Spectrum Disorder. But, if your teacher walks up behind you and grabs your shoulder and you are a person with ASD who is sensitive to touch, that might be a good time to explain your Autism Spectrum Disorder to your teacher.

   The people you might tell about your Autism Spectrum Disorder because you might need their help are:

   __________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________
How to Explain Your Diagnosis to Others

It’s hard to know exactly what to say when telling someone about your Autism Spectrum Disorder. Here are some ideas for what you could say:

I have an Autism Spectrum Disorder. That means I am really good at certain things like ______________________________________, but I have trouble with other things like making friends with kids my own age, keeping a conversation going, and making eye contact when I’m talking. I have things that I’m good at and things that are hard for me, just like everyone else.
Appendix 1-Q
Celebrating Strengths

As we have talked about for the last 5 weeks, everyone has things they are good at and things that are hard for them. Next week, we will be celebrating the wonderful strengths of our group members. You will have up to 5 minutes to share one of your talents with the group. Your talent can be anything you would like. For example, you might share the information you know about a certain topic, playing a musical instrument, or do a magic show. Nothing is off limit, as long as it is safe and can be done in our group room.
Appendix 1-R

Post test

Name:__________________________

How Much Do You Know About Autism Spectrum Disorders?

Multiple Choice – Choose the best answer from the questions below:

9. An Autism Spectrum Disorder is:
   e. Something you are born with
   f. Something you catch from someone else
   g. Something you can give to someone else
   h. All of the above

10. When you have an Autism Spectrum Disorder you:
    e. Have trouble with conversations
    f. Have trouble making friends or relating to other kids your age
    g. Know a lot more about one particular subject than most other people
        OR do certain things over and over again
    h. All of the above

11. When you have an Autism Spectrum Disorder you have:
    a. More strengths than most other people your age
    b. More weaknesses than most other people your age
    c. Strengths and weaknesses, just like other people your age
    d. All of the above

12. When you have an autism spectrum disorder, it effects your
    a. Heart
    b. Brain
    c. Lungs
    d. All of the above
Circle True or False

13. Having an Autism Spectrum Disorder means that there is something wrong with you.
   a. True
   b. False

14. An Autism Spectrum Disorder has to do with how smart you are.
   a. True
   b. False

15. An Autism Spectrum Disorder is something that you have forever.
   a. True
   b. False

16. Many people with Autism Spectrum Disorders go to college and/or have jobs when they grow up.
   a. True
   b. False
Appendix 1-S

Parent Feedback Form
Appendix 2-A

Human Bingo

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<th>B</th>
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<th>N</th>
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<td>Has a birthday in</td>
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<td>Has an older</td>
<td>Plays a musical</td>
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<td>August</td>
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<td>Has flown in an</td>
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<td>Has green eyes</td>
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<td>Is an only child</td>
<td>Favorite color is</td>
<td>Has a cat</td>
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Appendix 2-B

Understanding Strengths and Weaknesses

**Strength:** A positive quality about a person

**Weakness:** A negative quality about a person

People or characters who I think have a lot of strengths are:

1. ____________________________________________

2. ____________________________________________

3. ____________________________________________

4. ____________________________________________

5. ____________________________________________
Appendix 2-C

Paper Cutout
Appendix 2-D

Below are some ideas of strengths and weaknesses you may want to suggest to your child:

Sports
Getting jokes
Meeting new people
Math
Science
Video games
Puzzles
Art
Running
Being part of team
Completing school work
Taking turns
Making new friends
Dealing with mistakes
Expressing feelings
Being flexible
Taking responsibility for my actions
Following rules

Reading body language
Starting conversations
Reading
Spelling
Knowing a lot about _______
Talking in front of others
Pretend play
Building
Swimming
Following directions
Understanding conversations
Brushing my teeth
Taking a bath
Dealing with teasing
Completing homework
Sharing

Listening to other people during conversations
Appendix 2-E

Strengths and Weakness Interview

Name of person interviewed: __________________________________________.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Weaknesses</th>
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How Much Do You Know About Autism Spectrum Disorders?

Multiple Choice – Choose the best answer from the questions below:

17. An Autism Spectrum Disorder is:
   i. Something you are born with
   j. Something you catch from someone else
   k. Something you can give to someone else
   l. All of the above

18. When you have an Autism Spectrum Disorder you:
   i. Have trouble with conversations
   j. Have trouble making friends or relating to other kids your age
   k. Know a lot more about one particular subject than most other people OR do certain things over and over again
   l. All of the above

19. When you have an Autism Spectrum Disorder you have:
   a. More strengths than most other people your age
   b. More weaknesses than most other people your age
   c. Strengths and weaknesses, just like other people your age
   d. All of the above

20. When you have an autism spectrum disorder, it effects your
   a. Heart
   b. Brain
   c. Lungs
   d. All of the above
Circle True or False

21. Having an Autism Spectrum Disorder means that there is something wrong with you.
   a. True
   b. False

22. An Autism Spectrum Disorder has to do with how smart you are.
   a. True
   b. False

23. An Autism Spectrum Disorder is something that you have forever.
   a. True
   b. False

24. Many people with Autism Spectrum Disorders go to college and/or have jobs when they grow up.
   a. True
   b. False
Appendix 2-G
Social Skills

Social skills are the skills that you use to make friends and interact with/hang out with others.

People with Autism Spectrum Disorders sometimes have:

- Trouble making eye contact
- Trouble reading other people’s facial expressions
- Trouble knowing how to join in during group activities
- Trouble with make-believe games
- A preference for playing alone most of the time
- Trouble taking turns in conversations
- Trouble understanding social cues such as facial expressions and tone of voice
- Trouble relating to people your own age (Not feeling like you have things in common with them)
- Trouble understanding emotions
- Trouble telling people how you feel
- Trouble keeping friends
- Trouble remembering to show concern when others are upset
- Trouble remembering to smile back when someone smiles at them
- Trouble sharing
- Trouble imitating others (this may have happened when you were younger – ask your parents)
- Trouble knowing when someone is teasing them
- Trouble being teased a lot
Appendix 2-H
Communication

**Communication** means the way you use words, facial expressions, and body language to express yourself.

People with Autism Spectrum Disorders sometimes have:

- Trouble starting a conversation
- Trouble keeping a conversation going (especially topics that aren’t interesting to you)
- Frustration that other people aren’t “getting” what you’re trying to say
- Confusion about pronouns like “he” and “she” (this may have happened when you were younger – ask your parents)
- Trouble communicating your feelings to others
- Trouble answering questions directly
- Trouble understanding what people are trying to say to you
- Started talking later than other kids (your parents would know this)

If you’re a person with an Autism Spectrum Disorder you also might:

- Make up your own words
- Repeat the same words or sentences over and over again
- Repeat things you hear people say (in real life or TV) over and over again
- Use hand gestures less often than most other people
- Talk about the same topic all the time
- Speak in a different tone of voice than most other people
- Speak either too loudly or too quietly
Appendix 2-I
Behaviors

When people have an autism spectrum disorder, they have certain behaviors, or ways of doing things, that are different than most other people.

People with Autism Spectrum Disorders sometimes:

- Know more than almost anyone else about a certain subject
- Have a strong interest in something that other people your age are not really interested in
- Want things to be a certain way
- Want to tell other people the rules or correcting them when they are wrong
- Flap their hands over and over again
- Wiggle their fingers over and over again
- Spin in circles
- Bounce up and down
- Bang their head (this may have happened when you were younger – ask your parents)
- Smell, taste, or feel lots of things
- Get too close to people or touching people too often without realizing it
- Dislike being touched or close to other people
- Are picky eaters (only eating certain foods)
- Prefer to know what to expect before something happens
- Prefer things to always be the same
- Enjoy taking things apart or learning how things work
- Enjoy watching the same shows/movies or parts of the same shows/movies over and over again
- Want to do the same activities almost all the time
It is normal to have all kinds of questions when you learn something new, especially something new about yourself. Write down five questions you would like to know the answer to about Autism Spectrum Disorders.

1. ______________________________________________________________________

2. ______________________________________________________________________

3. ______________________________________________________________________

4. ______________________________________________________________________

5. ______________________________________________________________________
Appendix 2-K

Commonly Asked Questions and Answers

*Question: Is there something wrong with me?*

Answer: There is nothing wrong with you and you are not sick. You are different just like all people are different. You have strengths and weaknesses, just like all people you know. You do have a collection of characteristics that happen to have a name, and that name is Autism Spectrum Disorder. There are some things that you are good at and some things that you struggle with. Those areas that you struggle with can be worked on so that they get easier for you.

*Question: How did I get my Autism Spectrum Disorder?*

Answer: We do not yet know the answers to this question. There are some people that feel that it has a lot to do with biology and genetics, just like your eye color or the shape of your nose, while others feel that Autism Spectrum Disorders have a lot to do with the environment in which you live. Many people agree that there are factors from both biology and environment that contributes to Autism Spectrum Disorders. Often times we do not know why a person is susceptible to this disorder. There are over 100 genes or gene changes (mutations) that increase the risk that a child will have an autism spectrum disorder. As already mentioned there are environmental factors that have also been associated with a diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder including parents being older when they have a baby, and a baby being born prematurely with very low birth weight. Other possible environmental risk factors are mothers that have diabetes or an infection during their pregnancy, and certain birth complications, particularly those that may involve a loss of oxygen to the baby’s brain.

*Question: Why do I have an Autism Spectrum Disorder?*

Answer: We do not know why some people have an Autism Spectrum Disorder and some do not. We do know some things about Autism Spectrum Disorders. We know that it is not a disease, and it does not mean that there is something wrong with you. We also know that it is not anyone’s fault.

*Question: Why do I have an Autism Spectrum Disorder and my brother, sister, or friend doesn’t?*

Answer: We do not know why some children have an Autism Spectrum Disorder and some do not. There are several factors that are associated with Autism Spectrum Disorders but a child or parent experiencing one of these factors does not in itself mean that they will meet criteria for Autism Spectrum Disorder.
**Question: Is it contagious?**

Answer: Autism Spectrum Disorders are not contagious. It is not a disease or sickness, but rather a collection of symptoms that are classified as a disorder. Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders do not have any restrictions on their ability to engage in the same activities as other children their age.

**Question: Will I “grow out” of Autism?**

Answer: Autism Spectrum Disorders are considered to be lifetime disorders and people do not “grow out” of them. However, the goal is to provide appropriate treatment to individuals that are diagnosed as soon as possible in order to decrease the difficulties they have. Therefore with appropriate treatment and lots of hard work, individuals with Autism often decrease the level of difficulty they have in particular areas.

**Question: Why do I need the diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder? How does it help?**

Answer: There are several reasons having a diagnosis is important for you. This diagnosis can provide important information about your behavior and development to the people who interact with you throughout your life. It can help determine appropriate treatments for you by helping others to understand your specific strengths and challenges. It is this same reason why a diagnosis can be helpful at school, so that your school can develop help you to learn in the best way possible.

**Question: Am I retarded?**

Answer: Many children with Autism Spectrum Disorders have intellectual disabilities and many do not. Some people call a person with intellectual disabilities “retarded,” which means “slow.” “Retarded” is a derogatory term that is mean and does not provide information. Since many children with and without Autism have intellectual disabilities, it is important to briefly know what this means. Intellectual disability means that this person may learn things more slowly than most other people and need to be taught in different ways. It also means that they may struggle with some daily living skills such as self care, socialization, and adapting to change.

**Question: Will I be able to go to college?**

Answer: Many children with ASD attend college and have career goals just like everyone else.

**Question: Does having Autism mean I’m stupid?**
Answer: Being diagnosed with an Autism Spectrum Disorder does not mean that you are stupid. It means that your brain works differently than most other people and that makes you very interesting and unique. It means that there are some things that you are good at and some things that you struggle with. With some help, you can work on those things that you struggle with and they will become easier for you.
Appendix 2-L

Commonly Asked Questions

Is there something wrong with me?

How did I get my Autism Spectrum Disorder?

Why do I have an Autism Spectrum Disorder?

Why do I have an Autism Spectrum Disorder and my brother, sister, or friend doesn’t?

Is it contagious?

Will I “grow out” of my Autism Spectrum Disorder?

Why do I need the diagnosis of Autism? How does it help?

Am I retarded?

Will I be able to go to college?

Does having an Autism Spectrum Disorder mean I’m stupid?
Appendix 2-M

Other Common Characteristics of Teenagers with ASD

There are other things we know to be common in teenagers with Autism Spectrum Disorders that are not part of social skills, communication, or behaviors. Some of those things are:

- Trouble paying attention
- Trouble controlling anger
- Enjoying smelling, tasting, or feeling certain things
- Being a picky eater (only eating certain foods)
- Disliking being touched or being close to other people
Appendix 2-N

Who to tell about my Autism Spectrum Disorder

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<th>People I want to tell about my ASD</th>
<th>Why they should know about my ASD</th>
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<th>People I do not want to tell about my ASD</th>
<th>Why they do not need to know about my ASD</th>
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When to Tell Someone about Your ASD

There are two main reasons why you would tell someone about your Autism Spectrum Disorder. They are:

1. **You want them to know more about you.**
   
The people I want to know more about me are:

   __________________________________________
   __________________________________________
   __________________________________________

2. **You need help with something and you need that person to understand why you need help.**
   
   Remember, you do NOT need to tell someone you have an Autism Spectrum Disorder EVERY time you need help. For example, if you need help with a math problem in class, you do not need to tell the teacher you don’t know the answer because you have an Autism Spectrum Disorder. Having trouble in math one day is something that happens to everyone and is probably not related to your Autism Spectrum Disorder. But, if your teacher walks up behind you and grabs your shoulder and you are a person with ASD who is sensitive to touch, that might be a good time to explain your Autism Spectrum Disorder to your teacher.

   The people you might tell about your Autism Spectrum Disorder because you might need their help are:

   __________________________________________
   __________________________________________
Appendix 2-P

How to Explain Your Diagnosis to Others

It’s hard to know exactly what to say when telling someone about your Autism Spectrum Disorder. Here are some ideas for what you could say:

I have an Autism Spectrum Disorder. That means I am really good at certain things like __________________________________________________________, but I have trouble with other things like making friends with kids my own age, keeping a conversation going, and making eye contact when I’m talking. I have strengths and weaknesses, just like everyone else. I have things that I’m good at and things that are hard for me, just like everyone else.
Appendix 2-Q

Celebrating Strengths

As we have talked about for the last 5 weeks, everyone has things they are good at and things that are hard for them. Next week, we will be celebrating the wonderful strengths of our group members. You will have up to 5 minutes to share one of your talents with the group. Your talent can be anything you would like. For example, you might share the information you know about a certain topic, playing a musical instrument, or do a magic show. Nothing is off limit, as long as it is safe and can be done in our group room.
Appendix 2-R
Post test

Name:__________________________

How Much Do You Know About Autism Spectrum Disorders?

Multiple Choice – Choose the best answer from the questions below:

25. An Autism Spectrum Disorder is:
   m. Something you are born with
   n. Something you catch from someone else
   o. Something you can give to someone else
   p. All of the above

26. When you have an Autism Spectrum Disorder you:
   m. Have trouble with conversations
   n. Have trouble making friends or relating to other kids your age
   o. Know a lot more about one particular subject than most other people OR do certain things over and over again
   p. All of the above

27. When you have an Autism Spectrum Disorder you have:
   a. More strengths than most other people your age
   b. More weaknesses than most other people your age
   c. Strengths and weaknesses, just like other people your age
   d. All of the above

28. When you have an autism spectrum disorder, it effects your
   a. Heart
   b. Brain
   c. Lungs
   d. All of the above
Circle True or False

29. Having an Autism Spectrum Disorder means that there is something wrong with you.
   a. True
   b. False

30. An Autism Spectrum Disorder has to do with how smart you are.
   a. True
   b. False

31. An Autism Spectrum Disorder is something that you have forever.
   a. True
   b. False

32. Many people with Autism Spectrum Disorders go to college and/or have jobs when they grow up.
   a. True
   b. False
Appendix 2-S

Parent Feedback Form
Appendix 3-A

Interest Inventory
Appendix 3-B

Understanding Strengths and Weaknesses

**Strength:** A positive quality about a person

**Weakness:** A negative quality about a person

People or characters who I think have a lot of strengths are:

1. __________________________________________
2. __________________________________________
3. __________________________________________
4. __________________________________________
5. __________________________________________
Appendix 3-C

Personal Strengths and Weakness

Name______________________________

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Appendix 3-D

Below are some ideas of strengths and weaknesses you may want to suggest to your child:

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<th>Weaknesses</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Sports</td>
<td>Reading body language</td>
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<tr>
<td>Getting jokes</td>
<td>Starting conversations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Meeting new people</td>
<td>Reading</td>
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<tr>
<td>Math</td>
<td>Spelling</td>
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<td>Science</td>
<td>Knowing a lot about _______</td>
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<td>Video games</td>
<td>Talking in front of others</td>
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<tr>
<td>Puzzles</td>
<td>Pretend play</td>
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<tr>
<td>Art</td>
<td>Building</td>
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<tr>
<td>Running</td>
<td>Swimming has</td>
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<tr>
<td>Being part of team</td>
<td>Following directions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Completing school work</td>
<td>Understanding conversations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking turns</td>
<td>Standing up for myself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making new friends</td>
<td>Personal hygiene</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dealing with mistakes</td>
<td>Dealing with teasing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Expressing feelings</td>
<td>Completing homework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being flexible</td>
<td>Sharing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Taking responsibility for my actions</td>
<td>Listening to other people during conversations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Following rules</td>
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</table>
Appendix 3-E

Strengths and Weakness Interview

The person I interviewed was ________________________________.

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<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Weaknesses</th>
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Pretest

How Much Do You Know About Autism Spectrum Disorders?

Multiple Choice – Choose the best answer from the questions below:

33. An Autism Spectrum Disorder is:
   q. Something you are born with
   r. Something you catch from someone else
   s. Something you can give to someone else
   t. All of the above

34. When you have an Autism Spectrum Disorder you:
   q. Have trouble with conversations
   r. Have trouble making friends or relating to other kids your age
   s. Know a lot more about one particular subject than most other people OR do certain things over and over again
   t. All of the above

35. When you have an Autism Spectrum Disorder you have:
   a. More strengths than most other people your age
   b. More weaknesses than most other people your age
   c. Strengths and weaknesses, just like other people your age
   d. All of the above

36. When you have an autism spectrum disorder, it effects your
   a. Heart
   b. Brain
   c. Lungs
   d. All of the above
Circle True or False

37. Having an Autism Spectrum Disorder means that there is something wrong with you.
   a. True
   b. False

38. An Autism Spectrum Disorder has to do with how smart you are.
   a. True
   b. False

39. An Autism Spectrum Disorder is something that you have forever.
   a. True
   b. False

40. Many people with Autism Spectrum Disorders go to college and/or have jobs when they grow up.
   a. True
   b. False
Appendix 3-G

Social Skills

**Social skills** are the skills that you use to interact with others.

People with Autism Spectrum Disorders sometimes have:

- Difficulty making eye contact
- Difficulty reading other people’s facial expressions
- Difficulty knowing how to join in during group activities
- Difficulty with pretend play or using your imagination
- A preference for playing alone most of the time
- Difficulty taking turns in conversations
- Difficulty understanding social cues such as facial expressions and tone of voice
- Difficulty relating to people your own age (Not feeling like you have things in common with them)
- Difficulty understanding emotions
- Difficulty telling people how you feel
- Difficulty keeping friends
- Difficulty remembering to show concern when others are upset
- Difficulty remembering to smile back when someone smiles at them
- Difficulty sharing
- Difficulty imitating others (this may have happened when you were younger – ask your parents)
- Difficulty knowing when someone is teasing them
- Difficulty being teased a lot
Appendix 3-H
Communication

**Communication** means the way you use words, facial expressions, and body language to express yourself.

People with Autism Spectrum Disorders sometimes have:

- Difficulty starting a conversation
- Difficulty keeping a conversation going (especially topics that aren’t interesting to you)
- Frustration that other people aren’t “getting” what you’re trying to say
- Confusion about pronouns like “he” and “she” (this may have happened when you were younger – ask your parents)
- Difficulty communicating your feelings to others
- Difficulty answering questions directly
- Difficulty understanding what people are trying to say to you
- Started talking later than other kids (your parents would know this)

If you’re a person with an Autism Spectrum Disorder you also might:

- Make up your own words
- Repeat the same words or sentences over and over again
- Repeat things you hear people say (in real life or TV) over and over again
- Use hand gestures less often than most other people
- Talk about the same topic all the time
- Speak in a different tone of voice than most other people
- Speak either too loudly or too quietly
Appendix 3-I
Behaviors

When people have an autism spectrum disorder, they have certain behaviors, or ways of doing things, that are different than most other people.

People with Autism Spectrum Disorders sometimes:

- Know more than almost anyone else about a certain subject
- Have a strong interest in something that other people your age are not really interested in
- Want things to be a certain way
- Want to tell other people the rules or correcting them when they are wrong
- Flap their hands repetitively
- Wiggle their fingers repetitively
- Spin in circles
- Bounce up and down
- Bang their head (this may have happened when you were younger – ask your parents)
- Smell, taste, or feel lots of things
- Get too close to people or touching people too often without realizing it
- Dislike being touched or being close to other people
- Are picky eaters (only eating certain foods)
- Prefer to know what to expect before something happens
- Prefer things to always be the same
- Enjoy taking things apart or learning how things work
- Enjoy watching the same shows/movies or parts of the same shows/movies over and over again
- Want to do the same activities almost all the time
Appendix 3-J
Appendix 3-K

Commonly Asked Questions and Answers

**Question: Is there something wrong with me?**

Answer: There is nothing wrong with you and you are not sick. You are different just like all people are different. You have strengths and weaknesses, just like all people you know. You do have a collection of characteristics that happen to have a name, and that name is Autism Spectrum Disorder. There are some things that you are good at and some things that you struggle with. Those areas that you struggle with can be worked on so that they get easier for you.

**Question: How did I get my Autism Spectrum Disorder?**

Answer: We do not yet know the answers to this question. There are some people that feel that it has a lot to do with biology and genetics, just like your eye color or the shape of your nose, while others feel that Autism Spectrum Disorders have a lot to do with the environment in which you live. Many people agree that there are factors from both biology and environment that contributes to Autism Spectrum Disorders. Often times we do not know why a person is susceptible to this disorder. There are over 100 genes or gene changes (mutations) that increase the risk that a child will have an autism spectrum disorder. As already mentioned there are environmental factors that have also been associated with a diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder including parents being older when they have a baby, and a baby being born prematurely with very low birth weight. Other possible environmental risk factors are mothers that have diabetes or an infection during their pregnancy, and certain birth complications, particularly those that may involve a loss of oxygen to the baby’s brain.

**Question: Why do I have an Autism Spectrum Disorder?**

Answer: We do not know why some people have an Autism Spectrum Disorder and some do not. We do know some things about Autism Spectrum Disorders. We know that it is not a disease, and it does not mean that there is something wrong with you. We also know that it is not anyone’s fault.

**Question: Why do I have an Autism Spectrum Disorder and my brother, sister, or friend doesn’t?**

Answer: We do not know why some children have an Autism Spectrum Disorder and some do not. There are several factors that are associated with Autism Spectrum Disorders but a child or parent experiencing one of these factors does not in itself mean that they will meet criteria for Autism Spectrum Disorder.
**Question: Is it contagious?**

Answer: Autism Spectrum Disorders are not contagious. It is not a disease or sickness, but rather a collection of symptoms that are classified as a disorder. Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders do not have any restrictions on their ability to engage in the same activities as other children their age.

**Question: Will I “grow out” of Autism?**

Answer: Autism Spectrum Disorders are considered to be lifetime disorders and people do not “grow out” of them. However, the goal is to provide appropriate treatment to individuals that are diagnosed as soon as possible in order to decrease the difficulties they have. Therefore with appropriate treatment and lots of hard work, individuals with Autism often decrease the level of difficulty they have in particular areas.

**Question: Why do I need the diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder? How does it help?**

Answer: There are several reasons having a diagnosis is important for you. This diagnosis can provide important information about your behavior and development to the people who interact with you throughout your life. It can help determine appropriate treatments for you by helping others to understand your specific strengths and challenges. It is this same reason why a diagnosis can be helpful at school, so that your school can develop help you to learn in the best way possible.

**Question: Am I retarded?**

Answer: Many children with Autism Spectrum Disorders have intellectual disabilities and many do not. Some people call a person with intellectual disabilities “retarded,” which means “slow.” “Retarded” is a derogatory term that is mean and does not provide information. Since many children with and without Autism have intellectual disabilities, it is important to briefly know what this means. Intellectual disability means that this person may learn things more slowly than most other people and need to be taught in different ways. It also means that they may struggle with some daily living skills such as self care, socialization, and adapting to change.

**Question: Will I be able to go to college?**

Answer: Many children with ASD attend college and have career goals just like everyone else.

**Question: Does having Autism mean I’m stupid?**
Answer: Being diagnosed with an Autism Spectrum Disorder does not mean that you are stupid. It means that your brain works differently than most other people and that makes you very interesting and unique. It means that there are some things that you are good at and some things that you struggle with. With some help, you can work on those things that you struggle with and they will become easier for you.
Appendix 3-L

Commonly Asked Questions

Is there something wrong with me?

How did I get my Autism Spectrum Disorder?

Why do I have an Autism Spectrum Disorder?

Why do I have an Autism Spectrum Disorder and my brother, sister, or friend doesn’t?

Is it contagious?

Will I “grow out” of my Autism Spectrum Disorder?

Why do I need the diagnosis of Autism? How does it help?

Am I retarded?

Will I be able to go to college?

Does having an Autism Spectrum Disorder mean I’m stupid?
Appendix 2-M

Other Common Characteristics of People with ASD

There are other things we know to be common in people with Autism Spectrum Disorders that are not part of social skills, communication, or behaviors. Some of those things are:

- Trouble paying attention
- Trouble controlling anger
- Enjoying smelling, tasting, or feeling certain things
- Being a picky eater (only eating certain foods)
- Disliking being touched or being close to other people
Appendix 3-N

Who to tell about my Autism Spectrum Disorder

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Appendix 3-O

When to Tell Someone about Your ASD

There are two main reasons why you would tell someone about your Autism Spectrum Disorder. They are:

1. **You want them to know more about you.**

   The people I want to know more about me are:

   ____________________________________________
   ____________________________________________
   ____________________________________________

2. **You need help with something and you need that person to understand why you need help.**

   Remember, you do NOT need to tell someone you have an Autism Spectrum Disorder EVERY time you need help. For example, if you need help with a math problem in class, you do not need to tell the teacher you don’t know the answer because you have an Autism Spectrum Disorder. Having trouble in math one day is something that happens to everyone and is probably not related to your Autism Spectrum Disorder. But, if your teacher walks up behind you and grabs your shoulder and you are a person with ASD who is sensitive to touch, that might be a good time to explain your Autism Spectrum Disorder to your teacher.

   The people you might tell about your Autism Spectrum Disorder because you might need their help are:

   ____________________________________________
   ____________________________________________
Appendix 3-P

How to Explain Your Diagnosis to Others

It’s hard to know exactly what to say when telling someone about your Autism Spectrum Disorder. Here are some ideas for what you could say:

I have an Autism Spectrum Disorder. That means I am really good at certain things like ________________________________, but I have trouble with other things like making friends with kids my own age, keeping a conversation going, and making eye contact when I’m talking. I have strengths and weaknesses, just like everyone else. I have strengths and weaknesses, just like everyone else.
Appendix 3-Q

Celebrating Strengths

As we have talked about for the last 5 weeks, everyone has things they are good at and things that are hard for them. Next week, we will be celebrating the wonderful strengths of our group members. You will have up to 5 minutes to share one of your talents with the group. Your talent can be anything you would like. For example, you might share the information you know about a certain topic, playing a musical instrument, or do a magic show. Nothing is off limit, as long as it is safe and can be done in our group room.
How Much Do You Know About Autism Spectrum Disorders?

Multiple Choice – Choose the best answer from the questions below:

41. An Autism Spectrum Disorder is:
   u. Something you are born with
   v. Something you catch from someone else
   w. Something you can give to someone else
   x. All of the above

42. When you have an Autism Spectrum Disorder you:
   u. Have trouble with conversations
   v. Have trouble making friends or relating to other kids your age
   w. Know a lot more about one particular subject than most other people OR do certain things over and over again
   x. All of the above

43. When you have an Autism Spectrum Disorder you have:
   a. More strengths than most other people your age
   b. More weaknesses than most other people your age
   c. Strengths and weaknesses, just like other people your age
   d. All of the above

44. When you have an autism spectrum disorder, it effects your
   a. Heart
   b. Brain
   c. Lungs
   d. All of the above
Circle True or False

45. Having an Autism Spectrum Disorder means that there is something wrong with you.
   a. True
   b. False

46. An Autism Spectrum Disorder has to do with how smart you are.
   a. True
   b. False

47. An Autism Spectrum Disorder is something that you have forever.
   a. True
   b. False

48. Many people with Autism Spectrum Disorders go to college and/or have jobs when they grow up.
   a. True
   b. False
Appendix 3-S

Parent Feedback Form