

Hello and welcome to this virtual webinar, Autism

101, hosted by the Kentucky Autism Training Center.

My name is Sarah Kaiser and I will be

sharing some information with you today that's general

about autism, what it is, what it isn't, and

how to best understand loved ones or those you

support who have autism spectrum disorder.

At the Kentucky Autism Training Center, we are committed

to improving the quality of life for those in

our state who are affected by autism spectrum disorder.

We do this by bridging research

to practice through training and collaboration.

For additional information on autism or resources either

throughout our state or other states, please visit

our website www.kyautism.org and you can also find

us on Facebook, YouTube and Twitter, where we share many different resources and lots of helpful information about autism.

So let's get started and talk about what is autism.

According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual, autism is a neurodevelopmental disorder that is typically diagnosed by the age of three.

Although we know some people are not diagnosed until later in life.

The symptoms of autism involve these three main areas of development social interactions with others, communication with others, and the range of activities or interests the person may have.

In order to receive a medical diagnosis of

autism, there have to be significant differences or

deficits in each of these three areas that

significantly affect a person's life.

This visual representation of the triad of characteristics

is helpful, but also a bit negative.

It focuses on what a person with

autism cannot or does not do.

Please keep in mind that people with autism

bring so much to our world and have

many different wonderful skills and abilities.

We all have different brains and that is beautiful.

Some additional information about autism is that it

will affect a person's use of language as

well as their understanding of language.

A person with autism may have a hard

time using language, or they may need to use things such as speech generating devices, gestures, sign language, handwritten or typed information instead of using spoken verbal language.

Autism is a lifelong and visible disability, meaning that a person is born with autism and they have autism their whole life and it's invisible because you cannot simply look at someone and know that they have autism.

Some disabilities do have physical characteristics associated with them, but autism is not one of those.

There are some gender differences in how males versus females are diagnosed with autism and the prevalence at which they are diagnosed, as well as how autism may look in males versus females.

A person may have autism and some other either medical or mental health condition.

Some common ones are that a person may have autism and epilepsy or ADHD or OCD or anxiety or sleep disorders or gastrointestinal disorders.

The current diagnosis of autism can be abbreviated ASD for Autism Spectrum Disorder, and at the time of diagnosis, a medical provider is going to identify the current level of support that person needs.

On a scale of one to three, the final piece to keep in mind is that autism does not determine intelligence.

A person with autism may have an average intelligence, they may have an incredibly high intelligence, and they may have autism and an intellectual disability.

So please do not assume just because someone

may communicate differently or act differently, do not

assume that you know their intelligence level.

According to the Centers for Disease Control

and the Autism and Developmental Disabilities Monitoring

Network, our most current prevalence rate, based

on data from 2021, is that one

in 44 children are diagnosed with autism.

This monitoring network looks at a variety

of states in the United States and

also is looking at younger children.

So we know this prevalence is not exact,

but this is how we get our national

average of the current prevalence rate for the

United States during our time together today.

It is important to keep in mind that

just as no two people are alike, no

two people with autism are exactly alike.

There are some core characteristics of autism or

things that you may see across people.

But please keep in mind that if you've met one

person with autism, you've met one person with autism.

And the more people with autism you meet,

the more you will learn about autism.

Information that you may hear today may

not be specific to just autism.

It may be shared with other

diagnoses, especially those that involve neurodiversity.

As I shared earlier, we all have

different brains, and that is beautiful.

For today, we will be focusing on a

few different learning style differences that folks with

autism may have, and these could be present

at any age, at any developmental level.

But these are some ways that you

may see people with autism learn and

interact with the world a bit differently.

The first learningstyle difference associated with autism

is in regard to social communication.

A person with autism may have a difficult time

navigating the back and forth aspect of conversations.

We see this at a young age with maybe a

difficulty sharing things, or having a difficult time asking or

answering questions of other people, understanding how much to say

in a conversation, either sharing too much or too little,
or knowing when it's okay to interrupt someone and when
it's not okay to interrupt someone.

Additionally, it can be hard for them to

either share their interests or emotions with others.

They may have a hard time identifying the words to

share or their interests may be very unique and specific.

It may be difficult for someone with autism to

understand or use gestures, body language, and vocal tone.

So much of what we say has nothing

to do with the words we say.

It's how we say them, or what we do with

our face and our body when we say them.

Folks with autism may have a hard time

deciphering all of those subtle, nonspoken cues.

Eye contact or a lack of eye contact is

often seen with folks on the autism spectrum, and

it's not because they're not listening or they're not

paying attention or they're being rude.

It's actually more distracting and sometimes even painful

for folks with autism to make eye contact.

Looking and listening are two very different skills.

They involve two different body parts, and it

can be really hard for someone to look

and listen at the exact same time.

So please be mindful of what's most important.

And if someone's not looking at you, that may

be the way that they are able to pay

attention and ask you questions, answer your questions, and

have a conversation without getting distracted by eye contact.

It may be hard for folks with autism to

adjust either their language or their behaviors to different

contexts of knowing when to be silly and when

to be serious, or who to share information with

versus not to share information with.

Again, these are all very subtle, often

nonspoken rules of communication, and the final

piece here is regarding sarcasm or idioms.

Sometimes a person with autism may have a

hard time understanding sarcasm or idioms, commonly used

expressions that don't really mean what they say.

So it's always important to focus on our words and

what we're saying, not exactly how we're saying them.

In regard to repetitive behaviors, people with

autism will likely have different ways of using their bodies, objects or speech, and repetitive ways often referred to as stemming.

They may also really thrive and need things to be the same, or for routines to be predictable and the same from day to day.

Their interests may be unusual, either in intensity or focus, meaning that they may know lots of specific details about a certain interest or hobby of theirs.

Or their interests may not be the same as those that are also their age, may be interested in, and also due to some repetitive behaviors.

A person with autism may have a hard time paying attention or controlling their impulses.

A learning style difference that will affect

a person with autism across many aspects

of their life is executive functioning.

People with autism may have a more difficult

time with time management, understanding how long tasks

take, or prioritizing or sequencing tasks, knowing what

to do first, initiating tasks, simply getting started

can be difficult, or completing tasks, especially when

they don't understand or they can't identify what

a concept of finished would look like.

How am I finished with this task?

What does that look like?

How will I know?

And they may need support

creating and using organizational strategies.

Most of the time, folks with autism or other executive function challenges will need visual supports, either written lists or pictures or other visual cues to show what to do and how to do it to avoid frustration.

Additionally, there are lots of sensory issues that come with having autism.

When processing senses, some people may be overstimulated.

They are getting too much sensory information at once and they have a hard time filtering and processing all of that information from the world around them.

That may trigger a meltdown.

Other folks may be under stimulated and they're not getting enough sensory input from the world around them.

So they're seeking out that sensory input.

They may be making noise, or moving their bodies,

or finding other ways to create sensory input, since

their world around them isn't giving that to them.

Filtering sensory input can be really difficult.

It's sometimes been called sensory bombardment, where a person

with autism experiences all of their senses at once

and they have a hard time filtering out what's

not important or what really needs to be paid

attention to in that one moment.

Dealing with open space can be

difficult for someone with autism.

It may be very overwhelming to them and

they may have a hard time knowing exactly

where their body should be in that space.

And with all of this comes a great deal of anxiety.

It can be really difficult and uncomfortable

experiencing all of these sensory processing differences.

So a person with autism may likely need some

coping strategies or more breaks to be able to

stop, filter and process through the sensory input.

Many people with autism would be considered visual learners,

meaning that they are more successful at learning from

what they see instead of what they hear.

So much of what we say is very abstract.

And a good rule of thumb when communicating

with a person who has autism or other

auditory processing delays is that if you can't

draw a picture of it, it's too abstract.

So think about the things we say to maybe young

learners with autism, such as behave yourself or be nice.

What in the world do those mean?

That is very vague and very abstract.

And if all we're giving to a person is

verbal information and verbal language, that's going to take

a lot more time and effort to process that

verbal information, channel it through their brains and then

store it where it needs to go.

So using visuals here again, is

always going to be helpful.

Some people with autism struggle

with what's called implicit learning.

They may not automatically pick up on

things by watching their peers or by

hearing different examples being given.

They will likely need explicit instruction, meaning they

need to be told directly and in the

moment what to do or not to do.

It could be hard for them to generalize skills

across different people or places or materials, or prompts.

If they learn a skill in one environment,

they may not necessarily automatically transfer that learning

into another environment or with another person.

Their specific memory may likely be

stronger than the integration of ideas.

And here's an example.

Take a quick look at this picture.

There is a lot going on here.

And if I were to ask a neurotypical

or a person who does not have autism.

What is this?

Think for a moment.

How would you answer that question?

What is this?

A person who doesn't have autism may likely say that this

is a park, or a summer camp, or a family reunion.

We have put all of those specific details together

and we are now looking at the bigger picture.

And if you show the same picture to a person who has

autism, they may say instead that this is a picnic, or this

is a canoe, or a sandbox or a skate ramp.

Their eyes first go to those specific details

and they may have a more difficult time

or need more time putting all of those
details together to make the bigger picture.

Transitions can be hard for all of us, but
they can especially be difficult for learners with autism.

They may have what could be called sticky attention,
where they have a hard time disengaging from a
task and shifting to a new task.

Many people with autism are very detail
oriented and want to see a task
through completion before moving to another task.

They again may have a hard time seeing
the bigger picture or the bigger meaning behind
those specific details and specific tasks.

This can make it difficult for people with autism

to multitask, to make choices or quick judgments.

Another learning style difference of having autism

is differences in understanding multiple perspectives.

One of the earliest signs that

we see is regarding joint attention.

When a young child is riding in the car,

they may be pointing out things from the window,

or when you're reading a book with them, they

may be pointing at the pictures in the book

and maybe even gently turning your face to look.

That is the first sign of

joint attention that they realize.

Other people have different views, beliefs and experiences, and

I want to share that attention with them.

A person with autism may not naturally

develop those skills from a young age.

It could also be difficult to understand and respond

to the many different ways that the people around

us and the people in our world have different

beliefs and desires and intentions and emotions.

It can be hard enough to identify their own

desires, intentions, emotions and beliefs, and even more difficult

to understand and recognize those in other people.

We'll talk in just a moment about theory of mind,

which is the concept that encompasses all of that.

Finally, with navigating multiple perspectives and

understanding other people's thoughts and processes,

that makes multitasking even more difficult.

And as I mentioned earlier, looking and listening are

two very different skills that folks with autism may

not be able to do at the same time.

Let's take a moment and take a quick look

at this illustration called the Sally Ann Test, and

this is a representation of theory of mind.

So at the top you have Sally in the

red dress and Anne in the blue dress.

Sally puts her ball in the

basket and then Sally goes away.

Now, while Sally is away, Anne moves

the ball over to her box.

So where will Sally look for her ball when she returns?

So, if your answer is that Sally will look

in the basket because that's where she left her

ball, you have a strong theory of mind.

You can take on Sally's experiences and perspective

and know that she was not in the

room when her ball was moved.

She did not know that that happened.

So Sally is going to look in

the last place she left her ball.

Some folks may see this example and they

think, well, Sally will look in the box

because that's where the ball is.

We all saw and move the ball.

The ball is in the box.

That's where Sally will look.

They have a weaker theory of mind, meaning they

cannot put themselves in Sally's shoes and understand her

perspective of being out of the room and returning.

So it's my hope that in this time,

watching this webinar, you have gained a bit

of information on how people with autism may

experience the world around them a bit differently.

And I want to share some really trusted, excellent resources

with you that you will have an electronic copy to

be able to click on all of these links to

be able to investigate and learn more about autism.

First, I have many different links here that

are geared towards helping understand autism and they're

presented by actual autistic self advocates.

These are excellent.

Some of them are an entire series on YouTube or different

ways that you can go and learn from people who have

autism, what it's like and what's helpful for them.

This I encourage you all to check out,

remembering that the more people with autism you

meet, the more you will learn about autism.

Additionally, the Organization for Autism Research, or Oar has a

great amount of free resources that you can either view

online or they will mail you up to two copies

of each of these guidebooks, free of charge.

They have a Teacher's Corner and Students Corner

for education settings, as well as kits for

kids to understand autism and resources for high

school age students to either get informed or

get involved about what autism is.

And there are many different resource guides shown there

at the bottom to help families or educators understand

autism and know how to best support their loved

ones or those they're supporting with autism.

On our YouTube channel, Kyautism Training, we have

a wide variety of recorded webinars or shorter

informational videos to go a bit more in

depth into autism or evidencebased practices or other

ways to help support people with autism.

And this is just a few of those topics that you

will find on our YouTube to take a deeper dive and

get a bit more information on some of the more specific

aspects of autism or different supports that they may need.

You will have access to a video by a young

man named George who, when he was in the fourth

grade, he created this video to teach his classmates about

autism and he is an excellent source of information and

he shares what it's been like growing up with autism.

You will have access to click this video and

watch George share about his life with autism.

Additionally.

You have links to two sensory overload simulations.

Although there are many more online.

And oftentimes they are created either with or by autistic

adults to help neurotypical or people who don't have autism

experience what the world around them is like.

Experiencing that sensory overload.

That sensory bombardment.

And it helps you get a better understanding as to

why it could be difficult to go to new environments.

Or why stemming may increase.

Or why certain behaviors may be

happening in some environments over others.

At the Kentucky Autism Training Center, we

have also gathered some of our favorite

resources and supports, especially for at home.

We created this about a year or two

ago, but these resources will be available forever.

You can either click here or visit that Bitly

link B-I-T at home, making sure you capitalize ASD,

and here you will have access to many different

free linked communication supports, social emotional supports, visual supports,

academic resources, and many more.

If you are interested in learning about the

researched evidencebased practices to support learners with autism,

you have some links here and you could

dive deeper into all of those evidence based

practices that you see on your screen.

They all come with free training

modules and printable resources to share.

The final trusted resource that I'd like to

share with you is out of the University

of North Carolina, the Teach Autism Program.

They have an excellent website with tips, caregiver,

information, assessment tools, and other resources for families

to explore and learn more about autism.

I thank you for your attention today and I

hope this was helpful and gave you some new

information about autism and how to support loved ones

or others you are supporting who have autism.

Remember, please check out our webinar, our social

media, and explore all of the resources that

have been linked in this presentation today. Thank you.