



# WEST VIRGINIA AUTISM TRAINING CENTER

AT MARSHALL UNIVERSITY

- I. **The Allies Supporting Autism Spectrum Diversity Mission**
  - A. The WV Autism Training Center's Allies Supporting Autism Spectrum Diversity project works to inform and educate individuals or groups who wish to provide a safe and accepting environment for individuals living with Autism Spectrum Disorder. Our mission is to advocate for diversity and promote understanding in order to support and develop awareness.
  - B. What is an ally supporting autism spectrum diversity?
    1. A person who provides an understanding, supportive, and safe environment toward individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder, while promoting their awareness and knowledge to peers and other professionals.
  
- II. **Who is behind the allies initiative?**
  - A. The West Virginia Autism Training Center (a statewide agency that supports individuals with autism from birth to adulthood).
  - B. The Marshall University College Program for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder
  
- III. **What should I expect in this training?**
  - A. A general discussion about Autism Spectrum Disorder, and how the common symptoms of those various conditions can affect the overall experience of a diagnosed individual.
  - B. A conversation to further our understanding of Autism Spectrum Disorder, so that we can ensure our capability to promote a safe and welcoming environment.
  - C. Recognize that non-specialized classrooms, higher education and full-time employment are becoming more and more likely for individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder, along with many other important milestones.
  
- IV. **The Autism Spectrum Disorder Diagnosis**
  - A. The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual 5 (DSM-5) lists the diagnosis as "Autism Spectrum Disorder," a complex developmental disorder with 3 tiers.
    1. Severity Level 1- "requiring support"
    2. Severity Level 2- "requiring substantial support"
    3. Severity Level 3- "requiring very substantial support"
    4. You may still hear the term "Asperger's Disorder" which is from the DSM 4; this disorder most closely resembles Autism Spectrum Disorder Severity Level 1.
  - B. Persistent deficits in social communication and social interaction
    1. Deficits in social-emotional reciprocity



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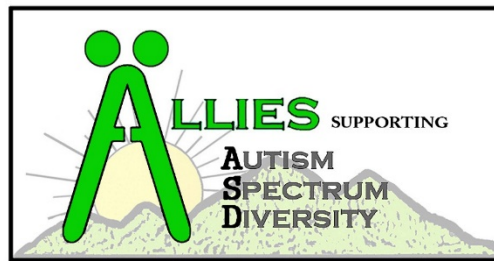
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2. Deficits in nonverbal communication used for social interaction
  3. Deficits in understanding relationships
  - C. Restricted, repetitive patterns of behavior, interests or activities.
    1. Stereotyped or repetitive motor movements, use of objects, and speech
    2. Insistence on sameness and adherence to routines
    3. Highly restricted, fixated interests with significant intensity or focus
    4. Hyper or hypo reactivity to sensory input or unusual interests in sensory aspects of the environment
  - D. Tidbits to Remember
    1. Despite commonalities that exist within the condition, those with Autism Spectrum Disorder experience life with individual perspectives.
    2. There are significant myths about Autism Spectrum Disorder that we as allies must help to diminish.
    3. Techniques exist to help establish relationships so individuals feel understood and supported.
- V. How to be an Ally Supporting Autism Spectrum Diversity**
- A. Consider Theory of Mind- a.k.a. mind blindness
    1. Substantial difficulty in developing an awareness of what's in the mind of someone else
    2. *How to help:* be clear with questions or instructions, recognize that what may be seen as rude in some social situations is not intended by the individual with autism.
  - B. Break stereotypes
    1. Autism Spectrum Disorder is a very broad diagnosis; no one experience of the diagnosis is the same.
    2. *How to help:* Never make assumptions about behaviors or characteristics of an individual with Autism Spectrum Disorder. Dispel negative or incorrect information about autism to peers if given the opportunity.
  - C. Be aware of sensory overload
    1. Sensory challenges can be very impairing, turning a normally comfortable environment into a struggle for individuals with ASD. The severity of discomfort can range widely.
    2. *How to help:* assist in reducing an environmental sensitivity, or help the person remove themselves from the situation.
  - D. Be mindful of behaviors
    1. Self-stimulatory behaviors (stimming – such as: pacing, flapping, rocking):
      - a. Relieve anxiety/ tension and calm the individual
      - b. Deal with sensory overload or too little stimulation



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- c. *How to help:* Be thoughtful of overstimulation or lack of stimulation. If distracting or harmful, work together with individual to help substitute or reduce behavior.
- E. Show patience with processing speed
  1. Individuals with ASD have difficulty with communication in several ways
  2. *How to help:* Be patient and wait for response, be clear with what you are asking, and do not ask several questions at once.
- F. Communicate clearly and effectively
  1. Individuals with ASD often assign concrete meanings to words. Literal interpretation of words can result in miscommunication.
    - a. Idioms and Hyperboles may be difficult: "The apple doesn't fall far from the tree" or "If I have to write one more paper, I might die"
  2. *How to help:* Avoid idioms, hyperboles, and symbolic language, use concrete/clear language, and be thoughtful of laughter when realizing you've used figurative language. Explain the meaning to create a learning opportunity.
- G. Consider the backstory
  1. Due to difficulty in communication, individuals with ASD may not be able to find the correct words to explain how they feel
  2. *How to help:* Ask questions to attempt finding the source of stress.
- H. What more can I do to be a good Ally Supporting Autism Spectrum Diversity?
  1. Minimize Transitions- prepare for changes in routine in advance.
  2. Maintain predictability.
  3. Be thoughtful of sensory overload.
  4. Written or visual instructions can be helpful.
  5. Many individuals with ASD feel empowered by discussions of how they experience their diagnosis...invite the conversation.



WV Autism Training Center