



PROJECT ACCESS FACT SHEET #4



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ABOUT AUTISM

Autism IS...

- **a developmental disability.** It begins during early development either prenatal or by the age of 3.
- **a life-long difference.** While most individuals with autism improve with training/instruction, many aspects of autism remain.
- **a neurophysiological difference .** It is a physical difference in the brain. It's likely that genetics is also involved.
- **treated through good educational programs.** Active engagement in instructional programs at school can be an effective strategy for students with ASD. (National Research Council (2001, p.6).
- **behaviorally defined.** Autism is identified by the presence of significant characteristic behaviors.
- **variable in its severity across individuals.** Individuals range from severely affected and having co-occurring conditions to having mild symptoms.
- **a communication and sensory and interactional disability.**

Autism IS NOT...

- **a mental or emotional illness.** Autism is not caused by poor parenting, trauma, abuse or neglect .
- **simply a behavior disorder.** While individuals with autism may demonstrate many inappropriate behaviors, there is often a different reason for the behavior than would be typical of a child with an emotional disorder. Because the reason or the function of the behavior is different, the approach to changing the behavior may also be different.
- **curable.** Autism may be co-morbid with biological conditions that may respond to biological treatments. Good educational treatments may help individuals to learn to control behaviors and to learn how to function in the environment. However, the basic neurological difference that is autism usually remains.
- **the same set of behaviors in all individuals.** If you have met one individual with autism, you have seen one face of autism. While some behaviors are common in autism, no

individual has all those characteristics and each individual expresses his characteristics uniquely.

- **diagnosable by any type of medical procedure.** While research is improving, diagnosis and eligibility are still based on whether the individual has significant behaviors that fit the medical or educational criteria for autism.
- The main goals of education for persons with autism are EMPLOYABILITY and INDEPENDENCE. These goals can best be met through heterogeneous educational settings, i.e. significant integration of persons with autism into settings with neurotypical peers.

Instruction centers around four life domains:

- Domestic
- Recreation/Leisure
- Vocational/Academic
- Community Integration

The following skills are embedded within the four life domains:

- Social interaction skills
- Communication skills
- work behaviors
- problem-solving/critical thinking skills
- self-monitoring/self-management coping skills
- generalization skills
- domestic skills
- social/leisure activity skills
- nontraditional academics (functional life skills)

According to a 2014 report by the CDC, autism occurs in approximately 1 out of 68 live births. It occurs in approximately 1 in 42 male births. Four to five males are identified with autism for every one female. However, there is current interest in considering if females with autism present differently and might need a slightly different diagnostic criteria. Current statistics estimate that about 46% of children identified with ASD has average to above average intellectual ability. Approximately 40% of persons with autism are functionally nonverbal. This means that even if the person has speech, the speech is not used in a meaningful way. When this occurs, other means of communication than verbal language should be taught.

References:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2019). Autism Spectrum Disorder.
<http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism/data.html>

Missouri's educational leader in autism support

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