

Autism Spectrum Disorders

TIPS AND RESOURCES FOR LIBRARIANS



What is autism?

Autism is a neurodevelopmental disorder that affects the early brain development of 1 out of 150 children. The primary characteristics of an autism spectrum disorder (ASD) are:

- Impaired social relating and reciprocity. Impaired use of multiple nonverbal behaviors such as eye contact, facial expression, and gestures. Failure to develop peer relationships or to share enjoyment, interests, or achievements with others. Lack of social or emotional reciprocity.
- Disordered language and communication development. Delay in development of spoken language. Impaired ability to initiate or sustain a conversation. Repetitive use of language. Lack of varied, spontaneous, or social imaginative play.
- Restricted interests and repetitive activities. Preoccupation with restrictive patterns of interests. Rigid adherence to specific, nonfunctional routines and rituals and difficulty coping with transitions from one activity to the next. Repetitive motor mannerisms. Persistent preoccupation with parts of objects.

Although these are typical characteristics of ASDs, they will not manifest equally in all individuals. No two individuals with autism will be alike.

Challenges in the library and strategies to provide meaningful experiences

Remember that an individual with autism does not “act out” intentionally to make things difficult. There are underlying reasons why they may have challenges. It might be difficult for an individual with an autism spectrum disorder who is in a library to follow directions, to take turns, or to move between activities. Here are some strategies that may prove effective when working to include an individual with an ASD in library activities.

- Support verbal communication with visuals. Visual supports increase understanding, clarify expectations, and increase predictability. Visual supports include photos, clip art, print, etc. Consider the use of visual supports to increase understanding of verbal directions; clarify expected behaviors (for example, “quiet,” “sit on floor,” “listen.”) Use the visuals to prompt appropriate behaviors.
- Prepare for transitions. Individuals with autism prefer routine. Prepare the child for transitions by using a visual schedule. The schedule may be a written checklist or a series of photos/drawings indicating the sequence of events. Alert the child that a change is imminent by announcing how much time is left for the current activity (for example, “Five more minutes, then ____.”)
- Offer choices. When possible, offer the child choices.
- Reinforce appropriate behavior with rewards. Individuals with autism may need additional incentives to demonstrate expected behaviors. Consult with parents to identify a possible reward for the child to receive for appropriate behaviors. Use this reward with a “first/then” routine (for example, “first listen /then magazine.”) It is most effective to use visuals to clarify this first/then routine.
- Using visual supports to increase predictability, clarify behavioral expectations, and prepare a child for transitions will have a positive impact on the individual’s comfort in the library. Despite your best efforts, individuals with autism may become upset. If this happens, seek assistance from the child’s caregiver.

Please see reverse for resources.



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RESOURCES

Who We Are and Who We Serve

The **Vanderbilt Kennedy Center (VKC)** works with and for people with disabilities and their family members, service providers and advocates, researchers and policy makers. It is among only a few centers nationwide to be a University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities, a *Eunice Kennedy Shriver* Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Research Center, and a Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental and Related Disabilities Training Program. The following are some of the ways the Center's programs and staff can assist families, educators, and other service providers.

Vanderbilt Autism Resource Line

Free information and referral service for parents, teachers, and community professionals. Information is available about autism-specialized diagnostic evaluation services, school consultation, parent workshops, and professional training at Vanderbilt for children, adolescents, and adults with ASD. Contact autismclinic@vanderbilt.edu, or (615) 322-7565, or toll-free (877) 273-8862.

Treatment and Research Institute for Autism Spectrum Disorders (TRIAD)

TRIAD is a Vanderbilt Kennedy Center program dedicated to improving assessment and treatment services for children with autism spectrum disorders and their families while advancing knowledge and training. See <http://TRIAD.vanderbilt.edu> or call (615) 936-0267.

TRIAD Families First Program

This free training series provides parents of children with autism (ages 2-5) with techniques to enhance social and communication skills and to manage challenging behaviors. Contact familiesfirst@vanderbilt.edu or (615) 322-7565.

Tennessee Disability Pathfinder

Tennessee Disability Pathfinder is a free statewide phone, web, and print referral service in English and Spanish. It connects the Tennessee disability community with service providers and resources. Its website database has over 3,000 agencies searchable by Tennessee county and service. Pathfinder is a project of the VKC, TN Council on Developmental Disabilities, TN Department of Health, and the TN Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities. Contact www.familypathfinder.org, (615) 322-8529, toll-free (800) 640-4636.

Other web resources with visual supports

- **Do 2 Learn**
www.do2learn.com
- **Icon Talk**
www.icontalk.com/downloads.html
- **Health Library, Jr. League Family Resource Center, Monroe Carell Jr. Children's Hospital at Vanderbilt**
www.vanderbiltchildrens.com/healthlibrary
(615) 936-2558, toll-free (800) 288-0391

Tennessee Resources

- **Autism Society of East Tennessee**
www.asaetc.org
(865) 247-5082
Email: asaetc@gmail.com
- **Autism Tennessee**
www.autismtn.org
(615) 385-2077, (866) 508-4987
Email: admin@autismtn.org
- **Autism Society of the Mid-South**
www.autismsocietymidsouth.org
(901) 542-2767
Email: autismsocietymidsouth@yahoo.com
- **Tennessee Developmental Disabilities Network**
www.tennddnetwork.org
- **Tennessee Disability Coalition**
www.tndisability.org
(615) 383-9442, toll-free (888) 643-7811

National Resources

- **Autism Society of America**
www.autism-society.org
- **Autism Speaks**
www.autismspeaks.org
- **Administration on Developmental Disabilities, HHS**
www.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/add
(202) 690-6590
- **Association of University Centers for Disabilities**
www.aucd.org
(301) 588-8252
- **DisabilityInfo.Gov**
www.disabilityinfo.gov
- **KidsHealth** information for kids, teens, and parents,
www.kidshealth.org

**Contact the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center
Nashville (615) 322-8240
Toll-Free (866) 936-VUKC [8852]
Web: kc.vanderbilt.edu
Email: kc@vanderbilt.edu**

