

# Autism and Foster Care



# Learning Objectives

- Define autism and explain the signs/symptoms
- Understand how and what an autism diagnosis will mean to a child and their family
- Identify challenges children with an autism diagnosis may face in the foster care system
- Identify supports available for children with autism in foster care.

# What is Autism?

- Neurodevelopmental disorder (developmental disorder/disability)
  - Spectrum Disorder
- Deficits
  - Social interactions & social communication
- Restricted, repetitive patterns of behavior or interests
- 2-Minute Neuroscience: Autism

# *Social Communication / Social Interaction*

- *Eye contact (little/inconsistent)*
- *Facial expressions (no expression of happy, sad, angry...)*
- *No response to name*
- *Unusual tone/voice (flat, robot-like)*
- *Challenges with imaginative play*
- *Difficulty making friends*



# LET'S TALK.

*How do the following behaviors associated with autism differ from the average person? When would they be similar?*

- Little or inconsistent eye contact
- Facial expressions (no expression of happy, sad, angry...)
- Does not respond to name
- Has an unusual tone/voice (flat, robot-like)
- Does not like imaginative play
- Difficulty making friends or maintaining friendships

# Restricted/Repetitive Behaviors / Interests

- Repetition of words/phrases
  - [Echolalia](#) [2:49 minutes] – What is echolalia?
- Intense interest in specific topics
- Upset in routine changes & issues with transitions
- Sensitivity to sensory (sound, clothing, etc.)
  - Unusual reactions to how feel/smell/taste, etc
- Plays with same toys over and over and over

# Diagnosis

- No medical test for diagnosis
- Evaluation/Screening by autism and/or experienced specialist  
(Psychologist, psychiatrist, pediatric neurologist, etc)
  - Based on age
- Diagnosis includes severity specification

# Diagnosis – Young Children

- May not receive diagnosis until older
  - Potential delay of needed help



# Importance of Milestones

- Milestone Checklist
  - [Download from CDC](#)
    - This is NOT a substitute for screening.

# Diagnosis – Adolescents

- No medical test for diagnosis
- Evaluation/Screening by autism specialist (Psychologist, psychiatrist, pediatric neurologist, etc)
  - Based on age

# Explaining Autism

- Sesame Street: Meet Julia [10:07minutes]

# Now what?

- Treatment
  - *Seek to reduce interference with daily functioning*
  - *Improve quality of life*
  - *Specific to individual*

# Autism & Foster Care

- Children entering foster care
  - Often without established medical provider
  - Can have higher rates health issues
  - Children may lack continuity of caregiver
    - Medical history may be limited or incomplete



# Autism & Foster Care

- Number of children in foster care with a diagnosis of Autism is increasing
  - Services needed to assist these children & foster families
- Early diagnosis
  - Improve quality of life
  - Improve chance for successful permanency placement
- Diagnosis is key!




# LET'S TALK.

*What does a diagnosis mean for a child's future outcomes?*

*Does the diagnosis impact permanency planning?*

*What challenges would the child potentially face if they were to remain undiagnosed?*



# Risk Factors Associated with Autism & Foster Care

- Higher rates of self-harm & greater risk of suicidal behaviors
  - Added risk of being in foster care

# What do children with autism need from you?

- [How to Parent a Child with High-Functioning Autism](#) [1:00 of the 9:59 minute video and PAUSE]
  - What does every child need?
    - That includes children in foster care.

**LET'S  
TALK.**

What are the challenges in parenting a child in your care who may have special needs such as autism?

# What do children with autism need from you?

- [How to Parent a Child with High-Functioning Autism](#) [at 2:34 minutes – 5:45 minutes of the 9:59 minute video and PAUSE]



**LET'S  
TALK.**

*How would you change the way that you interact so that you can communicate better with a child with autism?*



# What do children with autism need from you?

- How to Parent a Child with High-Functioning Autism [at 5:55 minutes – 5:45 minutes of the 9:59 minute video and PAUSE]

**LET'S  
TALK.**

*How can you practice patience and control your emotions as a foster parent when your foster child is having a difficult moment due to autism behaviors?*

*How can you help set up a consistent routine while also promoting flexibility?*

# Uniqueness

- Love, friendship, & fun
  - [Autism](#) [0:32 minute]

# Supporting the Child

- *Be an advocate*
  - *Educational*
  - *Services*
  - *Societal expectations and fears*

# Person First Language

- Person First Language [1:34 minutes]
- Put person ahead of the disability identifier
  - People are NOT their disability
- Do not use disrespectful terms!




# LET'S TALK.

*Does our language matter?*

*How would disrespectful language impact the child?*

*How do you handle a situation where others may be using disrespectful language regarding the child, such as a teacher, a family member, etc?*





# Local & State Resources

- Community Autism Resources & Education Systems (CARES)
  - CARES Mission Video [4:56 minutes]
- Disability Rights
- West Virginia Autism Training Center at Marshall University
- West Virginia Developmental Disabilities Council
- West Virginia University Center for Excellence in Disabilities

# National Resources

- National Autism Center at MayInstitute
  - Autism Manual for Parents by the National Autism Center [5:22 minutes]
- Sesame Workshop

# References

Center for Disease Control and Prevention. (n.d.). *Milestone Checklist*. chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/actearly/pdf/LTSAE-Checklist\_COMPLIANT\_30MCorrection\_508.pdf

Cidav, Z., Xie, M., & Mandell, D.S. (2018). Foster Care Involvement Among Medicaid-Enrolled Children with Autism. *Journal of Autism & Developmental Disorders*, 48(1), 176-183. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/28929296/>

Community Autism Resources and Education Systems (CARES). (2023). *Community Autism Resources & Education Systems*. <https://wvcaresforautism.org/>

Community Autism Resources and Education Systems (CARES). (2020, February 12). *Community Autism Resources and Education Systems Mission Video*. [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zsK2XtOlXo&t=17s>

Live on Purpose TV. (2019, September 17). *How To Parent A Child With High-Functioning Autism*. [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9sW3pBUXlvE>

# References

Marshall University. (2023). *WV Autism Training Center*.  
<https://www.marshall.edu/atc/>

National Autism Center. (2022). *National Autism Center at MayInstitute: Autism Resources for Families*. <https://nationalautismcenter.org/resources/for-families/>

Neuroscientifically Challenged. (2021, December 20). *2-Minute Neuroscience: Autism*. [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tEBsTX2OVgl>

# References

Sesame Street. (2017, April 10). *Sesame Street: Meet Julia*. [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dKCdV2OzLMs&t=351s>

Sesame Workshop. (2023). *Autism*. <https://sesameworkshop.org/topics/autism/>

Sesame Workshop. (2016, November 8). *Autism*. [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BnFHEBMvAVA>

State of West Virginia. (2023). *West Virginia Developmental Disabilities Council: Resources for Children with Developmental Disabilities*. <https://ddc.wv.gov/resources/Pages/ForChildrenwithDevelopmentalDisabilities.aspx>



# References

Texas Center for Disability Studies. (2017, September 27). *Person First Language*. [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lz4Oq5lydnQ>

West Virginia Early Intervention Coordinating Council and West Virginia Birth to Three in the Office of Maternal, Child and Family Health, Bureau for Public Health, Department of Health and Human Resources. (2023). *West Virginia Birth to Three*. <http://www.wvdhhr.org/birth23/Default.asp>

West Virginia University. (2023). West Virginia University Center for Excellence in Disabilities. : *Autism Resources*. <https://cedwvu.org/resources/autism-resources/>

Widnall, E., Epstein, S., Polling, C., Veluphillai, S., Jewell, A., Dutta, R., simonoff, E., Stewart, R., Gilbert, R., Ford, T., Hotopf, M., Hayes, R.D., & Downs, J. (2022). Autism spectrum disorders as a risk factor for adolescent self-harm: a retrospective cohort study of 113,286 young people in the UK. *BMC Medicine*, 20(1), 1-14. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.uky.edu/10.1186/s12916-022-02329-w>