



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](#)

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