Autism 101 for Librarians

What is Autism Spectrum Disorder and How Can We Help Students and Families At the Library?

Presented by:
Dr. Mary O’Brien
“A child with autism is not ignoring you; they are waiting for you to enter their world.”

Unknown
Agenda

- Introduction
- Basic facts about autism spectrum disorders
- Tips for working with children with disabilities
- Parents’ perspectives
- Considering environmental supports
- Questions
How Common Are Autism Spectrum Disorders?

1 in 68

5 to 1
Three Areas of Difficulty

- Social Interaction
- Communication
- Restrictive Behaviors
Social Interaction

- Limited social interaction
- Difficulty interpreting social cues
Communication

• Difficulty initiating conversation
• Limited ability to maintain conversation
Restrictive Behaviors

- Narrowed interests
- Repetitive behaviors
- Unusual responses
How Can We Help?
Tools for Addressing Individuals with Disabilities

People-first Language
Social Interaction

Tools for Addressing Individuals with Disabilities

- Approach quietly
- Accept limited/no eye contact
- Watch for understanding of social cues
Tools for Addressing Individuals with Disabilities

Use concrete language
Use individual’s name
Use toys or “props” for those who are nonverbal

Communication
Tools for Addressing Individuals with Disabilities

Restrictive behavior

- Ensure safety
- Keep sensory stimuli to a minimum
- Provide prompts for expected behavior
- Ignore inappropriate behavior
What Families Say

“Autism is a large spectrum and individuals may have very different needs based on their level of functioning.”
What Families Say
“Be understanding that children with autism do not always understand how to act in a library. More copies of books related to autism and sensory issues [are needed].”
What Families Say
“I wish they knew that autism is not just the definition they see on Google... My child gets frustrated when he hears some sounds like, ‘shhh.’ I wish they knew more about what sensory issues are like, some children are bothered by certain sounds and that they will react differently before judging the parent.”
What Families Say

• I would like to see more books to help increase interest for children with autism such as books related to maybe some odd interests that children with autism often like. I would also like to see more books with pictures instead of words to help increase their interest in reading.”

• “More copies of books related to autism and sensory issues.”
What Families Say

• “Having sensory toys, section of books dealing with autism with different resources.”

• “…it would be nice to have a section where we [families of people with autism] would not feel like we were bothering other[s] who are studying.”
Considering the Environment

• Provide an area that can be used for quiet time
• Provide sensory toys
• Get to know families
• Get to know individual’s interests
• Provide different seating options
• Know potential dangers of environment
"We have got to work on keeping these children engaged with the world."

- Temple Grandin, Ph.D.
Questions?