



REMEMBER

- Autistic teens process the world in a neurodivergent way, compared to the neurotypical (majority) population. This is not a disease to be cured - it's a way of being in the world.
- Seeking to understand how the teen sees the world and creating space for their strengths is the beginning of inviting an ASD youth to belong.
- ASD teens often have specialized supports in their school and homelife, empowering them with tools to help them navigate a world that thinks and sees things differently than they do. Ask the caregiver which existing strategies you can employ and what to avoid so you can best support the teen in your setting.
- Challenging behaviours are a form of communication, telling you something is not working. When this happens it is not a teaching time but a time to remove all demands and support the teen in getting themselves back on track.
- God's heart is overflowing with compassion for everyone. Scripture shows us again and again how Jesus makes space for those on the margins. Let's follow his lead.



RECOGNIZE

- Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a developmental disability caused by differences in brain processing. It affects the way a person interprets and interacts with the world.
- People with ASD don't all look, think and act the same. Autism is viewed on a spectrum because of the differences in the way it presents.
- Some of the challenges autistic teens live with include misinterpretation of social cues, poor eye contact, black and white thinking, and difficulties understanding/expressing emotions and sensing how others are feeling. As a result, many may struggle to fit in at a time they crave acceptance most.
- ASD teens often feel high levels of anxiety from constantly trying to interpret the world around them. This can result in behavioural outbursts from frustration. Seeing this can remind us to watch for what safety or support needs are feeling challenged. Your calm, non-reactive presence will allow you to redirect ASD teens from the information overload they are experiencing toward one simple next step.
- The strengths of autism are many but often overshadowed by the things that don't fit people's ideas of "normal". Autistic individuals are often exceptional in their logical thinking ability, memory, precision, honesty and reliability. There is a freshness in the way they see things and a capability for solving problems in unique ways.



RESPOND

- **Educate yourself.** Spend some time learning foundational information about ASD. How does it impact your friend's life? What does it look and sound like? What challenges or triggers can you watch for? What can you expect to encounter relationally?
 - **Pave the way.** If the youth is joining your group, arrange for a "meet and greet" with a couple of selected kids beforehand. Invite each of the teens to come ready to share a list of 4 things that could help others know and understand them best.
 - **Get a head start.** Ask the teen what would be helpful for them to thrive. If they are joining in with a group, invite them to come early before the rest of the group arrives. Give them a tour of the space and a schedule of what to expect from the evening as well as a clear list of the behaviour expectations so they won't need to worry about missing cues.
 - **Think about the space.** Noise, crowds, lighting and touch can all be incredibly challenging. Designate a quiet area for those with sensory issues to help a neurodivergent teen find calm and feel cared for.
- **Give instructions clearly.** Instruct don't request. Directions need to be concise, straightforward, and literal. Leave time for processing the instruction and then repeat if necessary. When giving choices, limit the number to 2. Give transition warnings before the next thing begins.
 - **Watch your words.** Autistic youth prefer literal thinking and speaking. Idioms and sarcastic joking are confusing. Say what you mean in concrete ways and listen to what they have to say in return.



AUTISM

lifeteams
resources



RESOURCES

www.ambitiousaboutautism.org.uk/what-we-do/connecting-young-people/youth-led-toolkits/include-autism - This toolkit for youth groups will give you everything you need to plan for and welcome ASD teens to your group.

www.canucksautism.ca/drive/uploads/2022/09/Conversation-Toolkit-for-Coaches.pdf - A great list of questions to ask a caregiver to help you best support and include their teen.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D4Hapmm9YiY&ab_channel=SpecialBooksbySpecialKids - A short and warm-hearted interview helping us better understand the inside world of one ADS teen.