# Adapting to the Needs of Diverse Learners: A Closer Look at Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

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What to expect today:

- Definition and Prevalence of ASD

- Strengths & Interests versus Challenges & Differences

- Six Areas of Support for Students with ASD

- Accommodation Recommendations

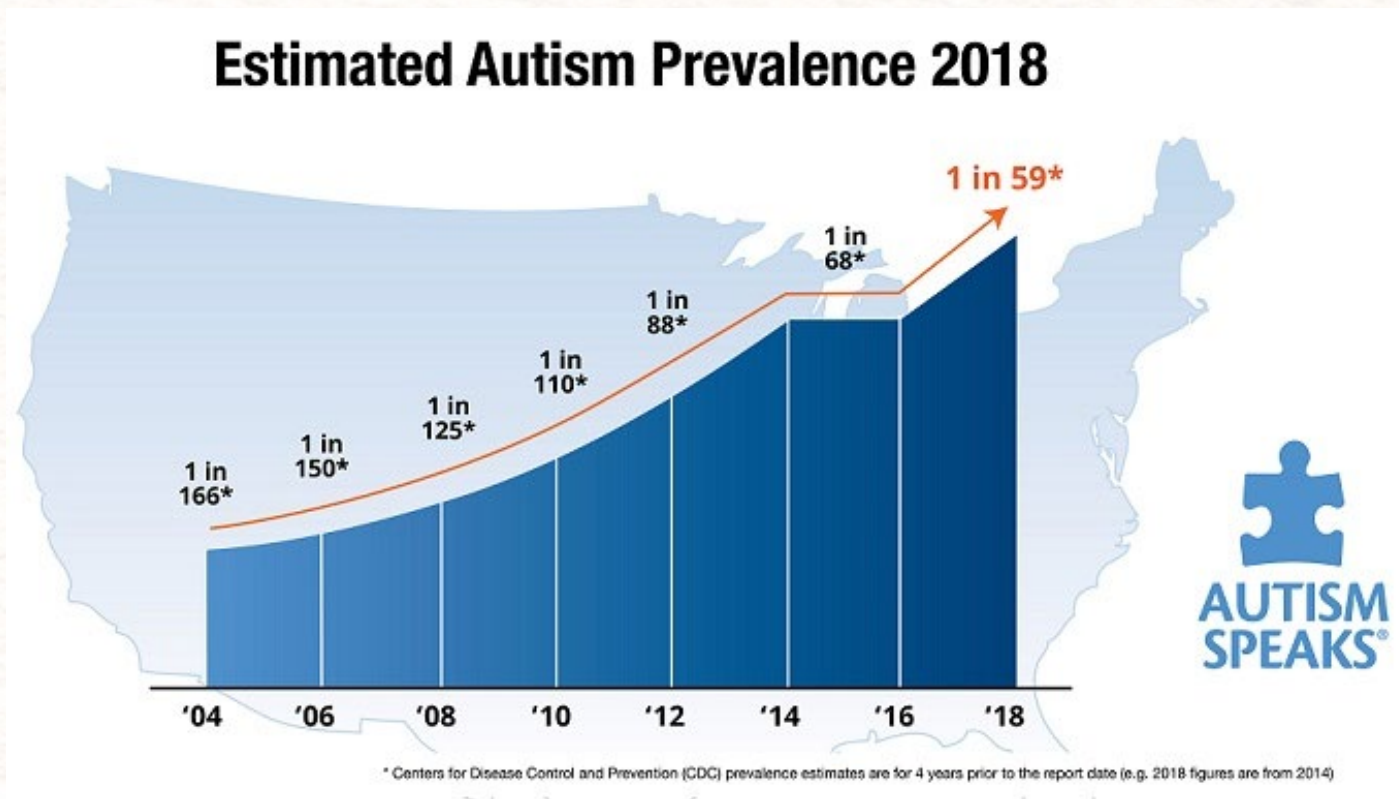- Help for Faculty & Staff

- Additional Resources
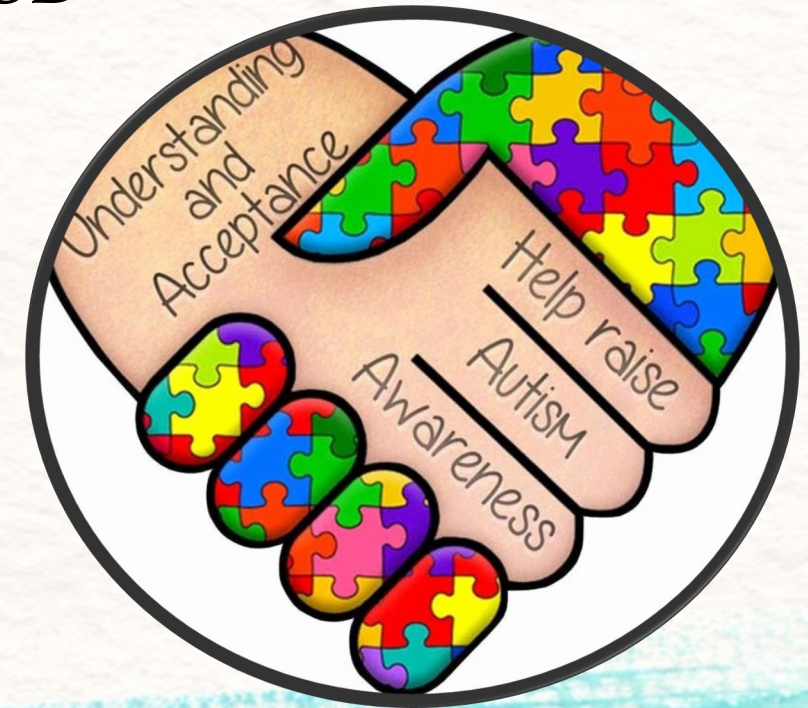
Autism-Society.org

- Autism is a complex, lifelong developmental disability that typically appears during early childhood and can impact a person's social skills, communication, relationships, and self-regulation. Autism is defined by a certain set of behaviors and is a "spectrum condition" that affects people differently and to varying degrees.

Estimate Autism Prevalence

Estimated Autism Prevalence 2018

1 in 166* ('04)
1 in 150* ('06)
1 in 125* ('08)
1 in 110* ('10)
1 in 88* ('12)
1 in 68* ('14)
1 in 59* ('18)

'04 '06 '08 '10 '12 '14 '16 '18

* Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) prevalence estimates are for 4 years prior to the report date (e.g. 2018 figures are from 2014)

AUTISM SPEAKS®

- CDC – 15% increase since 2012

- Boys 4 times more likely than girls to be diagnosed

Strengths and Interests

- Strong visual learners

- Detail-oriented (ability to find patterns)

- Unique problem-solvers

- Can hyper-focus on one area of study, which may lead to subject mastery

- Almost twice as likely to major in a STEM-related field

- Memory skills are strong

- Less involved in social 'drama'

- Relied upon to follow-through and follow-up
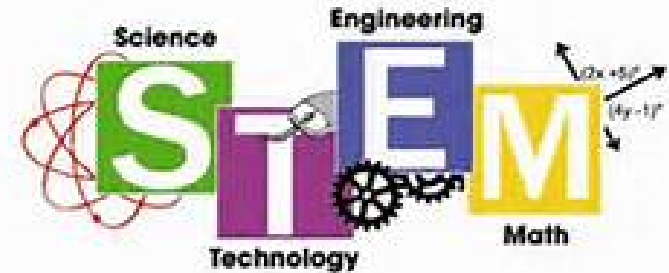
Challenges and Differences

Social Challenges

- Loneliness and Isolation

- Adult Living Skills

- Prioritizing Daily Tasks

- Challenges with Others' Perspectives

- Behavior and Emotion Regulation

Learning Differences

- Expressive Language (Speaking and Writing)

- Abstract Thinking – "What Ifs"

- Generating Alternate Solutions

Friendships and Group Work

- Friendships can help to alleviate stress.

- Two-way Interaction

- Social rules and expectations

Online Learning

Pros

- Less stimulating than face to face

- Less social anxiety

- Improved attendance

Cons

- Student with ASD may not know when a line has been crossed during online interactions.

- Lack of equity and accessibility to technology

- Digital-based online programs assume students can navigate that content

Six Areas of Support for College Students with ASD

Social and Class Interactions

- Allow short breaks or to have a "social buffering" object.

- Honoring the lack of eye contact without judgement.

- Instructor assists to form and monitor groups.

- Assign roles within groups with explicit instructions.

- Provide written rules for classroom

  etiquette and logistics.

Sensory Concerns

- Allow hats, sunglasses, ear plugs, etc. in class

- Preferential Seating

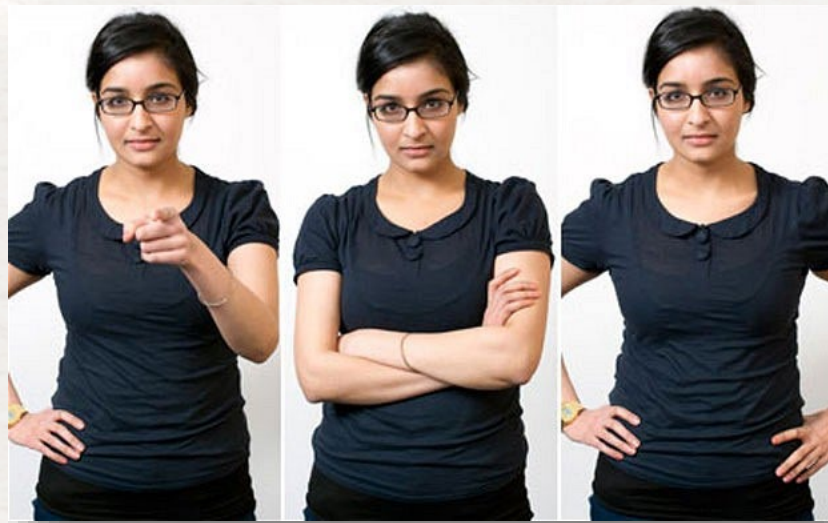- Alternative writing instrument and/or computer use

- Sensory item for comfort

Bubble Fidget Toy

Liquid Timer

Fidget Cube

Communication

- Instructors' notes, note-taker, and study guides

- Allow extra time for verbal response

- Don't assume they understand – Ask for clarification

Motor Skills

• Allow computer use in class

• Provide a note-taker or other technology

• Provide a model and/or step-by-step instructions

• Consideration for physical education requirements

Learning Style Differences

- Visual Learners

- Modeling vs. Haptic Modeling

- Organization & Categorization

- Present Ideas Literally

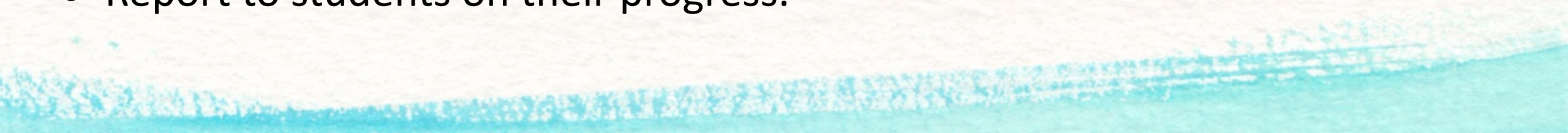- Structured Support

- Offer Choices

Coping Skills

- Discretely ask the student if something is overwhelming. Offer them a break.

- Do not discourage the behavior unless truly disruptive/conduct concerns.

- Allow sensory/comfort items.

- Student may not realize they are being disruptive. Have a signal/cue for student to know that it is okay to take a break.

- Hyper vs. Hypo-Sensitivities

Helpful Tips for Faculty & Staff

- Stick to the schedule.
- Acknowledge and reinforce acceptable behaviors.
- Provide concrete examples for abstract or complex topics.
- Communicate via multiple modes.
- Give regular feedback.
- Assist student in assigning priority to assignments.
- Allow time for verbal responses.
- Don't take it personally.
- Provide outlines for studying and exam preparation.
- Report to students on their progress.

Additional Resources

- <u>RESOURCES</u>

- Local organizations (Autism Society of NC, ABC of NC, TEACCH, Arc, Easter Seals, and many more)

- Autism Resource Specialist in every county in NC

- AutismSpeaks.org

- College Autism Network

Thank you!!