



AUTISM



2025 KAFCE Education Program Year

Written by Jennine Marrone, Kansas FCE State Education Program Committee

Leader's Guide is the National FCE Hearth Fire Series booklet #50:
"Woman to Woman . . . How Do We Talk about Autism?"

Educational Goals - At the end of this session, the participants will be able to understand:

What is Autism Spectrum Disorder

How is Autism Spectrum Disorder screened and diagnosed

What services of screening, diagnosis, treatment and intervention are available to person with ASD and their family

Community Awareness Activities:

Sponsor, volunteer and/or participate in the fundraiser, Autism Speaks Walk

Spread kindness

Have a craft event, making sensory toys to distribute

Watch a movie or television show on autism, such as the biographic film, "*Temple Grandin*"

Some of the most well-known famous people with autism include: Dan Aykroyd, Temple Grandin, Albert Einstein, Elon Musk, Emily Dickinson, Bobby Fischer, Bill Gates, and Tim Burton.

All have reached the top of their respective fields. They are examples of people with autism who don't let their diagnosis hinder their accomplishments.

Explore the work of autistic creators. These creators have a vast range of expression, making their marks in music, visual arts, media arts, and science.

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a neurological and development disorder that affects how a person interacts with others, communicates, learns and behaves. Although autism can be diagnosed at any age, it is described as a "developmental disorder" because symptoms generally appear in the first 2 years of life. In the nation, one out of forty-two children who are 5-12 year olds have been diagnosis as autistic, while in Crawford County, KS, it is one out of twenty-seven.

The range and severity of symptoms include difficulty with communication, difficulty with social interactions, obsessive interests, and repetitive behaviors. Early recognition, as well as behavioral, educational and family therapies may reduce symptoms and support developmental learning.

There are three main characteristics of autism: 1) poorly developed social skills, 2) difficulty with expressive and receptive communication, and 3) the presence of restrictive and repetitive behaviors. People with ASD may also have different ways of learning, moving and paying attention. Three learning styles or teaching methods for ASD are visual, auditory and tactile or kinesthetic.

There is no one known cause of ASD. There are many different factors that have been identified that may be involved including environmental, biologic, and genetic factors. More research needs to be done on specific causes but evidence suggests a child may be at greater risk if:

- Having a sibling with ASD
- Certain genetic or chromosomal conditions, such as fragile X syndrome or tuberous sclerosis
- Experiencing complications at birth
- Being born to older parents

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is conducting follow up studies on older children as well as studying causes for ASD.

This neurological and developmental disorder occurs in all racial, ethnic and social economic groups. It is more likely to be seen in boys than girls.

Signs and Symptoms of ASD:

- Not keeping eye contact
- Not responding to name by 9 months
- Not showing facial expressions by 9 months
- Not playing interactive games by 12 months
- Gets upset by minor changes

Has obsessive interests
Flaps hands, rocks body or spins in circles
Unusual eating and sleeping habits
Anxiety, stress or excessive worry
Lack of fear or more fearful

It is important to note that children with ASD may not have all or any of these behaviors.

SCREENING AND DIAGNOSIS OF AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER

Diagnosing Autism Spectrum Disorder can be difficult because there is no medical test, no blood test to diagnose the disorder. Doctors look at the child's developmental history and behavior to make a diagnosis.

Parents, grandparents, early childhood educators and other caregivers can participate in monitoring development. When you take a child to a well-child visit, the doctor or nurse might ask about developmental milestones and talk about play with the child. Be sure to let them know if the family has a history of learning disorders, intellectual disability or attention deficit or hyperactivity.

Developmental screening is more formal than monitoring at well-child visits. These screenings can be done by developmental pediatricians, child neurologists or child psychologists or psychiatrists. At the same time, call your state's public early childhood system to request a free evaluation. You do not have to wait for a doctor's referral or medical diagnosis to call.

If the child is under 3 years, call the local early intervention system. If the child is 3 years or older, call the local public school system. Early intervention services can greatly improve a child's development.

TREATMENT AND INTERVENTION SERVICES FOR AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER

Current treatments seek to reduce symptoms that interfere with daily function and quality of life. Autism Spectrum Disorder affects each person differently so treatment plans are catered to the individual.

Treatments can be given in education, health, community or home settings. It is important that all providers communicate with each other, the person with ASD and their family. This is to ensure that treatment goals and progress are meeting expectations. As individuals with ASD leave high school and grow to adulthood, other services can help improve daily function. For some, this will be support to continue education, complete job training, finding employment and securing housing, transportation and other life skills.

BEHAVIORAL APPROACHES: Focus on changing behaviors by understanding what happens after the behavior. This has become the accepted approach by educators and healthcare workers.

DEVELOPMENTAL APPROACHES: This is used to improve specific developmental skills; like language or physical skills.

EDUCATIONAL APPROACHES: This is given in a classroom setting, giving consistency and visual learning.

SOCIAL-RELATIONAL APPROACHES: Focus is given to improving social skills and building emotional bonds. This involves parents and other peer groups.

PHARMACOLOGICAL APPROACHES: There are no medications that treat the core symptoms of ASD but there are medications that might help with high energy levels, problems focusing, or self-harming habits.

PSYCHOLOGICAL APPROACHES: This can help with depression, anxiety, and other mental health issues.

REVIEWED by Julie Laverask, parent of an autistic child. Julie also provided the author content and research ideas and sources.

RESOURCES:

Autism Speaks, <http://www.autismspeaks.org>

Center for Disease Control (CDC) - 800-232-4636;

<https://www.cdc.gov/autism/index.html> and the booklet “Milestone Moments”,
https://www.cdc.gov/autism/media/pdfs/milestone-moments-booklet21_eng_sng_fnl-508.pdf.

OTHER RESOURCES AVAILABLE:

“A Parent’s Guide To Autism” was developed as part of Autism Speaks’ series of Family Support Tool Kits. Autism Speaks, <http://www.autismspeaks.org>

“Life Journey Through Autism: A Parent’s Guide To Assessment”, by Organization for Autism Research. 2008. Arlington, VA. <https://paautism.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/A-Parents-Guide-to-Assessment.pdf>

Department of Education: <https://www.ed.gov/> and search for Autism

Association for Science in Autism Treatment (ASAT) is a not-for-profit organization of parents and professionals committed to improving the education, treatment, and care of people with autism.

Autism Society of America, The Autism Society is a national organization that supports and advocates for people with Autism Spectrum Disorder and their families.

<https://autismsociety.org/>