

## Some Facts about Autism

Autism is a pervasive developmental disorder. It can affect social communication skills, information processing, fine and gross motor function, and sometimes intellectual skills. Autism is also a spectrum disorder. Its level of impact varies depending on the degree of severity of the disorder.

Approximately 1 out of 100 persons in the United States have some form of Autism.

## Types of Autism

The following are several specific forms of Pervasive Development Disorders that fall into the Autism Spectrum:

**Asperger's Disorder**—impaired social interaction with no significant general language delay. Testing in the average to above range of intelligence

**Autistic Disorder**—impaired social interaction, imagination, and communication skills with average-to-low levels of intelligence.

**Pervasive Development Disorder (Not otherwise specified** (also called atypical autism)—

Person does not meet the criteria for a specific diagnosis, but exhibits a severe and pervasive impairment in specified behaviors.

## Characteristics of Students with Autism

### Language

- Abnormal/no response to verbal cues; may need prompting for gain verbal response and/or be unable to initiate or sustain conversation
- Difficulty in verbally expressing wants or needs; may use gestures
- Limited eye contact; may look down or away when spoken to
- Unexplained laughing or crying

- Difficulty learning through conventional teaching methods
- Interprets information literally; difficulty grasping abstract concepts; may become preoccupied with ideas and need to be redirected back to subject matter.

### Social Interaction

- Difficulty mixing with peers; reduced ability to collaborate with others
- Less responsive to social cues than other students; inability to understand others feelings/views
- Prefers being alone; may appear withdrawn

### Behavior

- Inflexible; resistant to change in ritual or routine
- Impulsive; no real fear of danger
- Sustained odd behavior (See Common Autistic Attributes section)
- Over-sensitivity to stimuli (light, sound, scent, unexpected stimuli)
- Marked physical over-activity; may exhibit repetitive body movements (pacing, hand flicking, rocking).
- Marked passivity

## Suggestions for Helping Students with Autism in the College Classroom

- Provide a clear syllabus. Announce changes in advance, so student has time to get accustomed to new deadline. Unexpected changes in schedule and due dates may lead to frustration.
- Be sure that classroom rules and academic expectations are written in the syllabus, not just spoken.

- If possible, break assignments into shorter, more manageable units.
- Maintain a consistent, well-structured environment. Allow the student to sit in the same seat during class. Reduce distraction as much as possible. These students are very sensitive to outside stimuli (light, noise, unexpected stimuli). Some students may use earplugs to decrease environmental distractions.
- Use visual aids like Power Point, charts, and graphs when possible. Use of light colored paper for tests can help with distractibility.
- Don't expect direct eye contact.
- Utilize an outline to help the student understand the purpose of the discussion and your expected outcome.
- Do not internalize negative comments. Most often, this is the student's way of dealing with frustration. Autistic students are also sometimes very blunt. They mean no disrespect.
- Notify Disability Services if student shows a pattern of non-attendance.

## Common Autistic Attributes

### Unusual Behavior

Students with autism may need to engage in certain behaviors (vocalization, repetitive body movements) or keep certain objects with them as a means of self-regulation. Harmless, non-disruptive, or odd behaviors may need to be acknowledged and tolerated. **However, these students are held to the same code of conduct as other MCCC students.** If behavior becomes abusive or disruptive, these

behaviors will need to be addressed by the instructor and Disability Services notified.

### **Emotional Reaction**

Many students with autism have significant difficulty with understanding, expressing, and regulating emotion. These students have limited tools to express feelings. They may have difficulty with problem solving and decision making.

### **Changing Routine**

Autistic students may use atypical reactions to communicate when they are bothered by change (inappropriate anger or language). This is the coping mechanism they often use to process frustration. It is good to give these students adequate time to process change.

### **Behavioral Triggers**

Some students with autism may exhibit erratic behavior. This may involve the loss of personal control. This behavior may be triggered by:

- Unexpected changes (pop quiz, fire drill, change in seating)
- Sensory issues (unusual sensitivity to visuals such as carpet patterns, sounds, odors)
- Environment (room temperature, lighting, computer bussing)
- Stress build up (this could result from change in routine earlier in day or innocuous occurrence)

### **Helpful Information for Instructors**

- Autistic students often have a low frustration level. If a student's frustration level appears to be escalating and is disrupting the class,

it is best to try to avoid direct confrontation. If this is not possible, try to speak to the student privately. Inform the student that you understand he/she is frustrated at this time. Ask if the student would like to leave class for a moment or speak to a Disability Counselor.

- If the student becomes verbally unruly or exhibits inappropriate behavior that cannot be tolerated in a classroom setting, calmly ask the student if you can speak to him/her privately in the hall. Remain calm and keep your vocal tone quiet. Inform the student that it is college policy that he cannot be permitted to remain in the classroom if the inappropriate behavior persists as it will disturb others. If it is determined that the student cannot return to the class at this time, assure the student that you will follow up with him/her at a later date. Contact Disability Services as soon as possible at (734) 384-4167.
- Disability Services will attempt to do a follow-up appointment with any referred students and will communicate back to instructors as to what may be attempted to deter further incidences.
- Regular contact with a Disability Counselor will be suggested to the student as a future intervention plan

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Http: [www Inter-science, wiley.com](http://www.Inter-science.com)

# **Helping Students with Autism Succeed at Monroe Community College**



**Disability Services  
Learning Assistance Laboratory  
Campbell Learning Resource  
Center (C-218)  
(734) 384-4167**