

Youth Yak May 20, 2011

Inclusive Library Programming for children with autism spectrum disorders (ASD).

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It is estimated that 1 in every 110 children is diagnosed with ASD. Their presence can be a wonderful reward when the library becomes a special place where they and their parents feel comfortable and included.

This program can help library staff:

- be attuned to others needs and ensure positive experiences for children and adults
- learn some of the characteristics and helpful tips for interacting with people who have ASD
- learn ways to provide inclusive activities

Autism is a biological disorder—the brain is built differently and things are experienced differently.

- Distractions set off behaviors. Sounds, smells, lots of people being around—these things can affect folks with autism disorders and they reach a breaking point. They don't *misbehave* with intention.
- 3 areas of diagnoses: communication, socialization, and repetitive movements/behaviors.

Some characteristics of folks who have autism disorder often include:

- Communication:
 - Sentences with many words are often misinterpreted. The person will focus on part of the sentence and get stuck on only part of the meaning.
 - Idioms/silly saying will be taken literally. i.e. *Keep your shirt on*, the person will wonder why that was said because they do have their shirt on with no intention of taking it off.
 - Inflexible to routines
 - Fine motor skills are often difficult, such as writing
- Socialization:
 - Difficulty with peer-to-peer relationships
 - May be unaware of personal space boundaries
 - Does not pick up social cues and needs to be taught
 - Eye contact not very good, have some difficulty looking at someone and understanding what is being said all at the same time
 - Find it hard to share what they see with someone else, there is a social disconnect
 - Does not connect actions with emotions. i.e. hitting, laughing at inappropriate times. They have to be taught.

- Repetitive movement/behaviors:
 - Repeats motions such as rocking back and forth, hitting head on surface, shaking hands/fingers, etc.
 - Repeats things over and over. I.e. Talking about the Titanic. Assumes you have equal interest in their interests.
 - Preoccupation with things, i.e. spinning wheels on toy car.

Awareness and suggestions for interacting with those with ASD:

- Let them know how things will proceed. They are often inflexible to routines and not knowing what to expect can be stressful.
- May read very well, yet comprehension may be lacking. It is often difficult to find the words to answer questions.
- May be very good at memorizing facts, yet organizing thoughts is difficult
- Children with ASD are now becoming adults and are better able to communicate what the disorder feels like and can better express what affect it has on them
- some lights, sounds, and smells actually cause physical pain
- are often visual learners, so having a story picture board, props, task strips, or pictures of expected behaviors (someone making a shhh motion with finger to lips) is helpful. [Boardmaker is a source for task strips; <http://www.boardmakershare.com/Activity/819868/go-fish-sentence-strips>]
- Use fewer words, concise positive statements. ASD folks need time to process what you said.
 - say *hands down*, instead of *don't hit*. This helps avoid the chance that the person with ASD will be stuck on the word hit.
 - Use statements of expectation: 1st we will do this, then..., and then....
- Avoid the words *never* and *always*. ASD folks take things very literally.
- Post rules with visuals too. Those with ASD appreciate rules.
- Start and end storytime with a routine, such as a song, feltboard, etc.
- Use a carpet to define the area for storytime
- Reinforce positive behavior, use stickers, punch cards
- Think outside the box
- Be aware that what may work one time may not work another and what is a distraction (lights) one day may not be a problem another day.
- Parents of children with ASD already know the negatives, give them the positives
- Communicate with the parents—they know what works/helps.