

Autism Spectrum Disorder

What it means in the classroom





What is Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

Autism is a group of developmental brain disorders, collectively called Autism Spectrum Disorder. The term spectrum refers to the wide range of symptoms, skills and levels of the impairment/disability. The impairment can be mild or severe.

Recent Changes

Rett syndrome, Childhood Disintegrative Disorder, Pervasive Developmental Disorder-Not Otherwise Specified (PDD-NOS) and Asperger Syndrome. With the May 2013 publication of the new DSM-5 diagnostic manual, these autism subtypes will be merged into one umbrella diagnosis of ASD.



Less Severe

More Severe



What are the symptoms of ASD?

ASD symptoms vary but the most common are:

- Social impairment
- Communication difficulties
- Repetitive and stereotyped behaviors.



Social Impairment

Students with ASD have difficulty interacting daily in social situations. Some children may even:


- Make little eye contact.
- Do not respond to emotional cues in social interactions.
- Their body language and expression may not match what they are saying.
- Have difficulty understanding another person's point of view.



Communication Difficulties

Typically by a child's first birthday, toddlers can say a few words, turn when they hear their name and point to things they want. They can communicate with gestures, words, or facial expressions when they do not want something.





For children with ASD, reaching these milestones are not as straightforward. They tend to:

- Be slow or fail to respond to their name or other verbal attempts for attention.
- Be slow or fail to point to objects to show others what they want.
- Be delayed in developing language.
- May have difficulty with back and forth conversation.



Children with ASD also:

- Communicate using their own sign language or by using pictures.
- Develop a condition called Echolalia – repeat words/phrases they hear.
- Use words that seem out of place and odd.
- Speak one word or repeat words without putting them into sentences.

Repetitive & Stereotyped Behaviors

- Children with ASD often have repetitive motions which may be extreme or very mild and discreet. These repetitive actions are called “stereotyped behaviors.”
- They may have focused interests with objects or parts of objects, such as wheels on a moving vehicle.
- They become upset if their toys are accidentally moved and may line up their toys a certain way instead of playing with them.
- Repetitive behavior may take the form of intense preoccupation with interest such as learning about vacuums or science topics.



Previously Known as Asperger's Syndrome

Characteristics:

- Engages in one-sided conversations without noticing if the listener is listening.
- Displays unusual nonverbal communication, no eye contact, awkward body postures, few facial expressions.
- Does not show empathy, understanding to other's feelings.



Previously Known as Asperger's Syndrome

More characteristics:

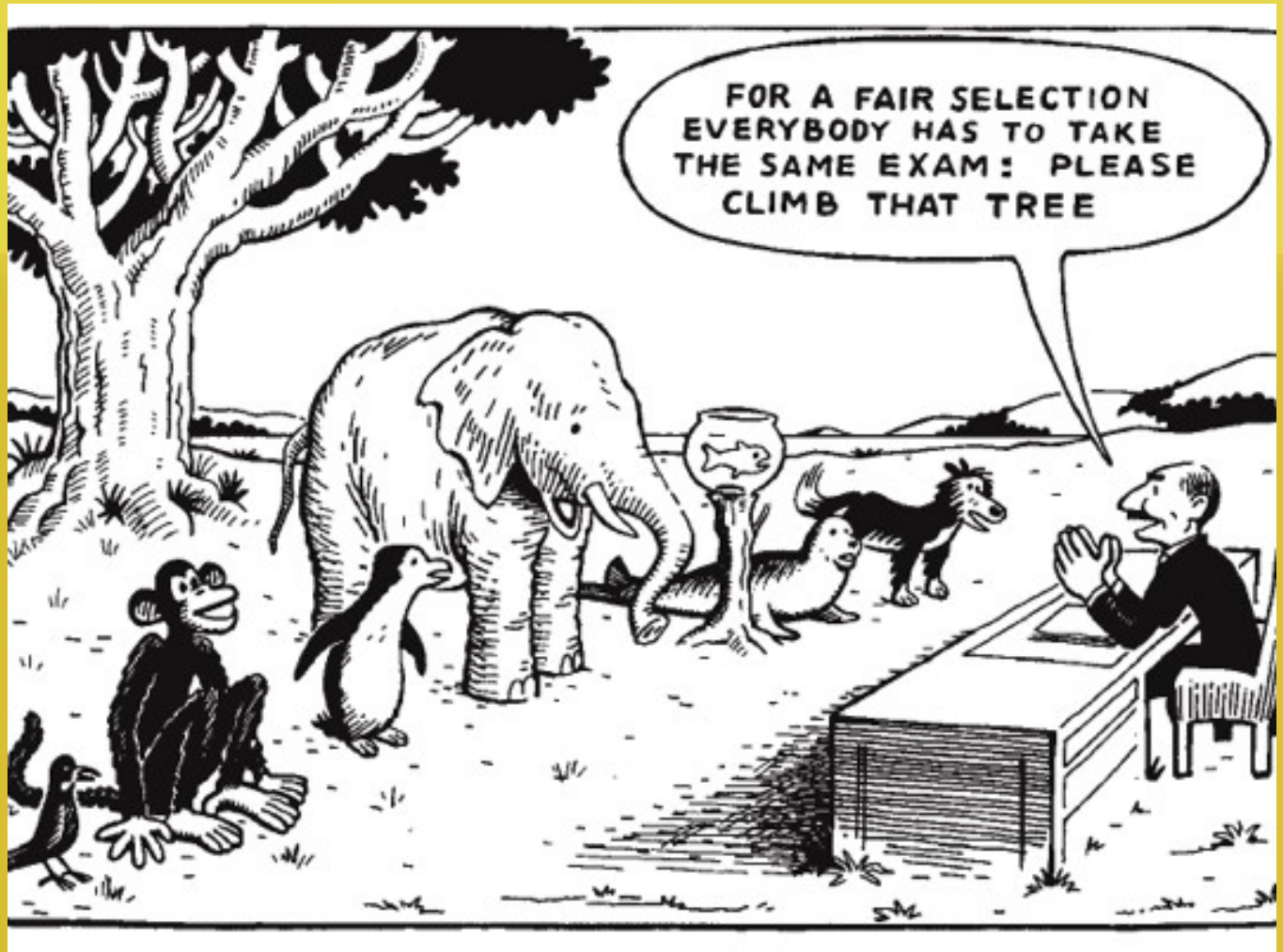
- Displays difficulty “reading” social cues or humor
- Speaks in an often fast, monotone voice.
- Moves with poor coordination.
- Children with Asperger's and Autism are visual learners.





No two children express the same severity of symptoms.





Accommodations for the Classroom



Accommodations in the Classroom

- Provide a very clear structure and routine.
(Provide a picture board for activities or schedule.)
- Provide a warning of change in routine or activity.
- Use unambiguous language and avoid humor/irony. Ex: “My feet are killing me.” or “It’s raining cats and dogs.”
- Address student individually at all times.
- Use short sentences and repeat directions.

Accommodations in the Classroom

- Use various ways of presentation. Ex. Visual instruction, peer modeling, physical guidance.
- Understand that some changes in manner or behavior may be reflecting anxiety.
- Don't take rude behavior personally. The target for the student's anger may be unrelated to the source of the anger.
- Specific teaching of social skills, rules, etc.
- Remove distractions.





Accommodations in the Classroom

- Try to link work to the student's interests.
- Explore options for word-processing or technology for learning. (Ex. iPad, tablets, computer.)
- Protect student from teasing, Educate peers of his/her needs.
- Support the student in open-ended and group tasks.
- Allow some access to obsessive behavior as a reward for positive efforts.



Accommodations in the Classroom

- Keep communication open and constant with parents and other professionals.
- **Remember**: Behaviors that may seem like non-compliance may have other meanings for the child with Autism or Asperger's. The non-compliant behavior may be the child's only way of indicating the need for help, escape from a stressful situation, lack of understanding, protesting against unwanted events, etc.

Visual Supports

I want



big wheel



golf



trampoline



bubble blower



sand and water table



sidewalk chalk

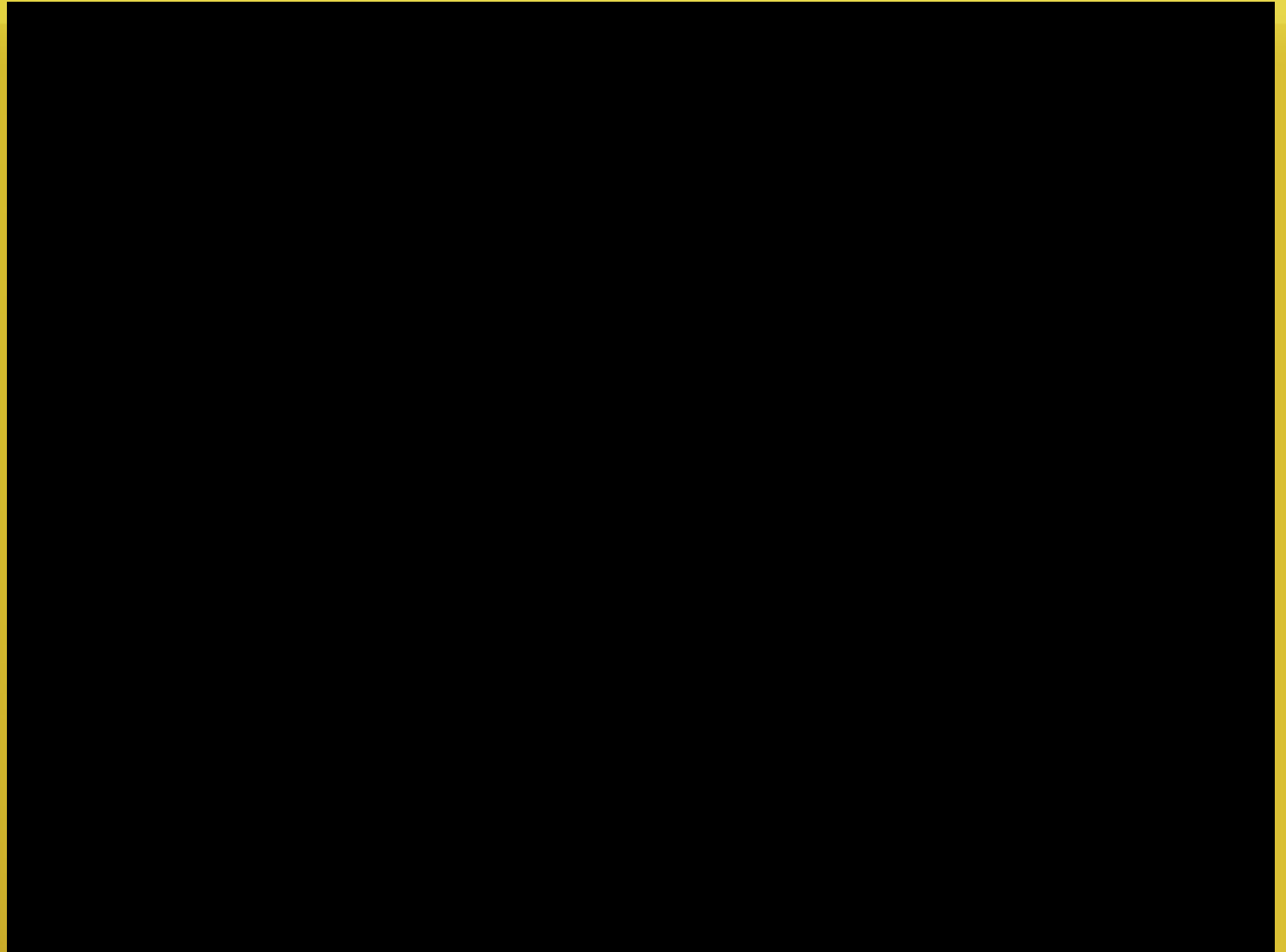
Morning Routine: LUKE

- Get dressed
 - Pajamas in dirty clothes basket
 - Brush teeth
 - Swish mouth wash
 - Make breakfast choice
 - Make lunch choice
 - Eat breakfast
- If complete before 7:20 am and breakfast is eaten, you may play DS and earn 1 token

More Visual Supports



Autism and Technology



Success...

“Patience. Patience. Patience. Work to view my autism as a different ability rather than a disability. Look past what you may see as limitations and see the gifts autism has given me. It may be true that I’m not good at eye contact or conversation, but have you noticed that I don’t lie, cheat at games, tattle on my classmates or pass judgment on other people? Also true that I probably won’t be the next Michael Jordan. But with my attention to fine detail and capacity for extraordinary focus, I might be the next Einstein. Or Mozart. Or Van Gogh.”

-Ellen Notbohm, author of Ten Things Every Child with Autism Wishes You Knew

References

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