Understanding and Supporting Patrons with Autism Spectrum Disorder
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- Paraprofessional for a school district
- In home behavior support specialist
- Behavior Consultant
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- Focus: Behavior and working effectively with a variety of people
Today’s Objectives

- My #1 Goal is to have you walk away with something valuable
- Review the common characteristics of individuals on the Autism Spectrum
- Review types of Behaviors you might observe while working with an individual with Autism Spectrum Disorder.
- Strategies for communicating effectively
- Strategies for de-escalating an upset patron
- Discuss questions or specific scenarios from participants.

Please keep an open mind...
Autism Spectrum Disorder

- Developmental Disorder
- Observed early
- Pervasive
Structural Brain Differences

Differences Managing Emotions, Language Development, Social Perspective
Autism Spectrum Disorder

1) Social Interactions
2) Verbal and Nonverbal Communication
3) Interests
4) Behavior
Characteristics of Autism Spectrum Disorders (DSM-5)

1) Differences in Social Interaction:
   - Lacking in Social-Emotional reciprocity
   - Struggles in developing, maintaining, or understanding relationships
Characteristics of Autism Spectrum Disorders (DSM-5)

2) Differences in Verbal and Nonverbal Communication

- Spoken language
- Body language/gestures
- Facial Expressions
- Voice modulation
I want

- big wheel
- golf
- trampoline
- bubble blower
- sand and water table
- sidewalk chalk

- bathroom
- clothing
- comment
- favorites
- feelings
- food
- home
- school
- park
- toys
Characteristics of Autism Spectrum Disorders (DSM-5)

3) Restricted, repetitive patterns of interests & activities

- Very restricted areas of interest that are especially intense or focused
- Adherence to routines, sameness, or rules in an inflexible manner
Characteristics of Autism Spectrum Disorder

4) Behavior

- Hyper or hypo reactivity to sensory input (hearing, vision, taste, texture, smell, etc).

- Repetitive physical movements, repetitive movements with items/toys, or repetitive speech
Recap - Commonly Observed Behaviors

Hand flapping,  
Walking on tip toes  
Avoiding eye contact  
Repeating words/phrases  
Use of sounds instead of language  
Hand leading  

Limited facial expressions  
Wiggling fingers or items in front of the eyes  
Spinning items  
Reactions to Sensory information  
Tantrums  
Self- injurious behavior (biting hands, slapping face)
Additional Variables....Often individuals with Autism Also experience other challenges such as:

- Anxiety
- Additional Sensory Integration issues
- Sleeping disorders
- Obsessive Compulsive Disorder
- Reactions to new medications
- Food allergies
Questions about what we’ve covered?

Coming up next…. Strategies for improving our environments and our interactions to best serve a variety of patrons…
Understanding What You are Seeing

We will typically not know someone’s diagnosis....thus

We must rely on the **Behaviors** we see in front of us.

- Behavior is a Major form of communication
- Behavior can be “read” and interpreted, like a book
Practice...

Example: An individual visiting the library avoids making eye contact, turns their body sideways when speaking to you, and covers their ears when you speak to them....

What does this behavior tell you?
Calming Interactions
Preparing Yourself... Communication Strategies

Respect

Use clear, direct, literal language

Avoid metaphors

Avoid relying on subtle body language

Allow time for processing
Practice examples:

- Times almost up!
- Please stop that
- Excuse me?!
- The computer needs to be shut down in 10 minutes.
- I need you to set the book down on the table.
- Please follow these rules (point to rules poster).
Social Modeling as a strategy ....

- Social modeling... using ourselves as an example of how a person would behave in a specific situation.

- Social modeling works as a cue to others how we expect them to behave/treat us

- When you might use this: when introducing yourself, when following library rules, when talking to patrons
Practice: Bringing Calm to a Situation

Scenario:
An individual in the library becomes escalated, raising their voice, not following directions of staff, and disrupting other patrons.

Question:
How do we deescalate this situation in a safe and respectful manner?
Ways to Respond...

Step 1: Take a breath & “Read” the behavior

Calm, quiet voice

Clear, precise, direct questions/statements

Try visual prompts- taking a deep breath yourself, visibly relaxing your own body, pointing to a quiet sign/or easily accessed exit

Remove stimulation- ask patrons to move to another area temporarily, dim lights of possible, reduce noise, etc.
Welcoming Spaces
Preparing your Library Environment...

things to consider

- Visual prompts/reminders can work wonders
  - Post rules with visual cues
  - Prepare maps of the library (versions for children and adults)
  - Have handouts prepared (ex: “The Three Steps to obtaining a library card”)
- Complete a walk through of your library and look/listen/feel/smell for sensory irritants
  - Are there any flickering lights? Can you dim lights in a certain area? Are there quiet/calm areas with fewer posters or decorations? Are there times when a parent can bring in a louder child?
Final Points

If you encounter odd/"rude" behavior- it’s not personal

If a difficult situation arises, ask the caregiver calmly if they would like any help

Calm/quiet reactions are best

Short, simple directions Or visual prompts

Allow for time to process

Social modeling

Creating sameness/routine
Questions?

Scenarios you’ve encountered?
Additional Resources

Autism Internet Modules

http://www.autisminternetmodules.org/

National Autism Association

http://nationalautismassociation.org/

Autism Speaks

https://www.autismspeaks.org/

Libraries and Autism: www.librariesandautism.org/video/htm

● Recommended video

“What is feels like to be Autistic- Temple Grandin”: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1qPFAT4p8Lc