

CHARACTERISTICS OF AUTISM

COMPETENCIES: OVERVIEW OF AUTISM



INTRODUCTION

There is a common saying: “If you’ve met one person with autism, you’ve met one person with autism.”



The population of people with autism is diverse, and autism is expressed in a wide variety of unique and individual ways. It helps if you can think of the autism spectrum not as black and white with shades of Gray in between, but rather as a spectrum of color, like a rainbow.

Autism is a spectrum of strengths, challenges in individual preferences and characteristics.

Keeping individual differences in mind, all people with autism share certain characteristics. These traits include the following:

SOCIAL COMMUNICATION DIFFERENCES

- Challenges with social interactions
- Difficulty “reading” social situations
- Differences in spoken language and in understanding other speech
- Differences in use of gestures and facial expressions to communicate

RESTRICTIVE AND REPETITIVE BEHAVIORS

- Extreme interest in a specific topic or activity
- Self-stimulatory behaviors (e.g., rocking, hand flapping, pacing)
- Strong need to maintain sameness in routine and/or environment

SENSORY DIFFERENCES

- Over-sensitivity to sensory input (“hyper-sensitivity”)
- Under-sensitivity to sensory input (“hypo-sensitivity”)
- Sensory differences affect behavior (e.g., avoiding or seeking sensory experiences)

WHAT YOU CAN DO NOW!

- 1 Can you observe how the sensory and social communication differences are expressed by the people you work with?
- 2 Can you identify an individual’s restrictive or repetitive behaviors?
- 3 How can the characteristics of autism translate into strengths and talents? How can you validate someone you support by pointing out her strengths or encouraging her talents?