

# *Storytimes and Children on the Autism Spectrum*



Presented by:  
Colorado Department of Education  
Colorado State Library  
Denver Public Library

# Autism Spectrum Disorders

Including children with ASD into Library Sensory Storytime



Brooke Carson  
CDE Autism Consultant



## **Materials have been adapted from multiple sources including:**

- *Ohio Center for Autism and Low Incidence Disabilities (OCALI)*
- *Nancy Miller, OTR, Kansas*
- *Diane Twatchman Cullen*
- *Sheila Smith*
- *Ellen Notbohm – Ten Things Every Child with Autism Wish You Knew*

# Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) Defined



ASD is a complex developmental disability that typically appears during the first 3 years of life. The result of a **neurological disorder** that affects functioning of the brain. Autism and its associated behaviors occur in approximately **1 of every 88 individuals.**

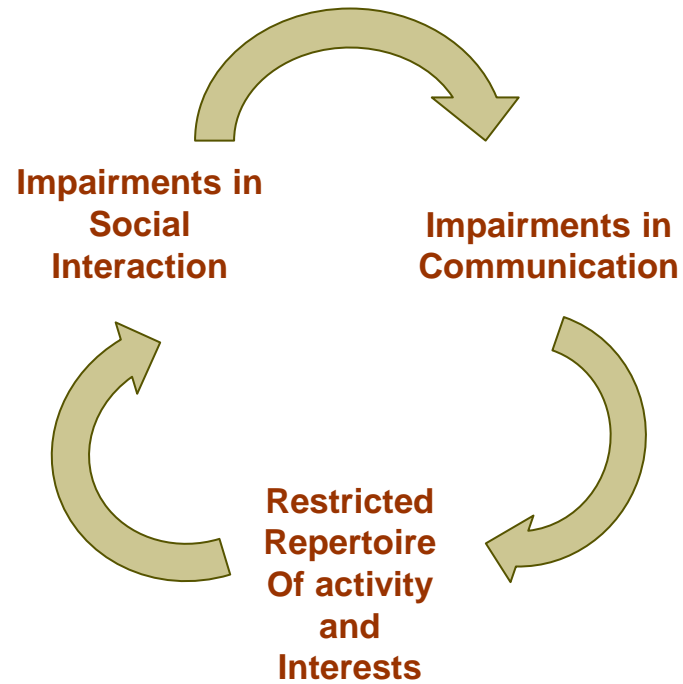
ASD is 4 times more common in boys than girls and knows no racial, ethnic, or social boundaries. Family income, lifestyle and educational levels do not affect the chance of autism's occurrence.

# Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) Defined



ASD interferes with the normal development of the brain in the areas of reasoning, social interaction and communication skills. Individuals with autism typically have difficulties in verbal and nonverbal communication, social interactions and leisure and play activities. They may exhibit repeated body movements (hand flapping, rocking), unusual responses to people or attachments to objects and they may resist changes in routines.

# Characteristics



# What Autism is Not



- Autism is not the result of poor parenting
- Children with autism are not unruly kids with “just a behavior problem”
- Most people with autism are not “savants” as portrayed in movies
- Children with autism are not without feelings and emotions

# Challenges and Difficulties



- Generalizing information: “Did you read this to me before?”
- Getting the “big picture”: “I thought you called that letter ‘d’? Now it’s called ‘dog’?”
- Inconsistent perceptions & retrieval: “I know you’ve asked me that before but I can’t remember what it’s called”
- Sensory issues: “You call this quiet time so how come I hear that vacuum cleaner running downstairs”
- Taking another's perspective: “I didn’t know when I pinched your arm that it hurt you. I just needed to squeeze something before I lost it”
- Managing transitions & change: “My visual schedule doesn’t say anything about this lady you call a sub”
- Concrete & literal thinking: “Why am I in trouble? You are the one who said ‘story time is finished’. You didn’t say line up and wait for my mom.”



# ASD Domains



- There is a complex **interdependence** of cognitive learning style, social understanding, language learning, sensory processing, and communication patterns.
- Communication/language/social/sensory skills do NOT emerge as a series of isolated behaviors.

# Social & Language Challenges



- Conveying own thoughts
- Using social niceties
- Limited eye contact
- Giggling, screaming inappropriately
- Nonverbal communication
- Initiating, maintaining interactions
- Literalness/abstract concepts
- Perspective taking
- Cause/effect
- Repetitive phrases, TV jingles
- Communication = behavior



## **Sensory Integration**

Our bodies and the environment send our brains information through our senses.

This information is processed and organized so that we feel comfortable, and secure and we are able to respond appropriately to particular situations and environmental demands.

*Adapted from: "Ten Things Every Child with Autism Wishes You Knew" by Ellen Notbohm*



## *My sensory perceptions are disordered*

- Ordinary sights, sounds, smells, tastes & touches of everyday life that you may not even notice can be downright painful for me.
- I may appear withdrawn or belligerent to you, but I am really just trying to defend myself.
- A simple trip to the grocery store may be torture for me
- I am visually oriented, this may be my 1st sense to become over stimulated.

*Adapted from: "Ten Things Every Child with Autism Wishes You Knew" by Ellen Notbohm*



## *My sensory perceptions are disordered* (continued)

- And there's so much hitting my eyes!.. glare from windows, moving fans on the ceiling, so many bodies in constant motion, too many items for me to be able to focus – and I may compensate with tunnel vision.
- The fluorescent light is not only too bright, it flickers. The space seems to be moving; the pulsating light bounces off everything and distorts what I am seeing. All this affects how I feel just standing there, and now I can't even tell where my body is in space.
- All this affects my vestibular sense, and now I can't even tell where my body is in space. This may lead me to stumble, bump into things, or simply lay down to try and regroup

# BAN THE COMMAND



© 1996 MICHAEL F. GIANGRECO, ILLUSTRATION BY KEVIN RUELLE

AFTER A HASTY SPECIAL EDUCATION  
PLACEMENT FOR BEHAVIOR PROBLEMS,  
SCHOOL OFFICIALS WERE EMBARRASSED  
TO LEARN THAT MARTY REALLY DID HAVE  
ANTS IN HIS PANTS.

SIT  
STILL  
AND  
LISTEN!!

*Nancy Miller, 2009*



# Transitions

# Transition Supports



FOR AN INDIVIDUAL WITH ASD,  
TRANSITIONS CAN BE DIFFICULT. THEY  
CAN SEEM UNPREDICTABLE AND  
RANDOM. EDUCATORS AND PARENTS  
CAN ASSIST THE INDIVIDUAL WITH ASD  
BY INCLUDING VISUAL SUPPORTS THAT  
PREPARE FOR TRANSITIONS.



# General Strategies for Successful Transitions



- Easily understood and concrete choices
  - a visual choice board of readily available choices for break/reinforcement
- Clearly defined expectations
- Extra processing time
- Concrete instructions (less verbal, more visual)

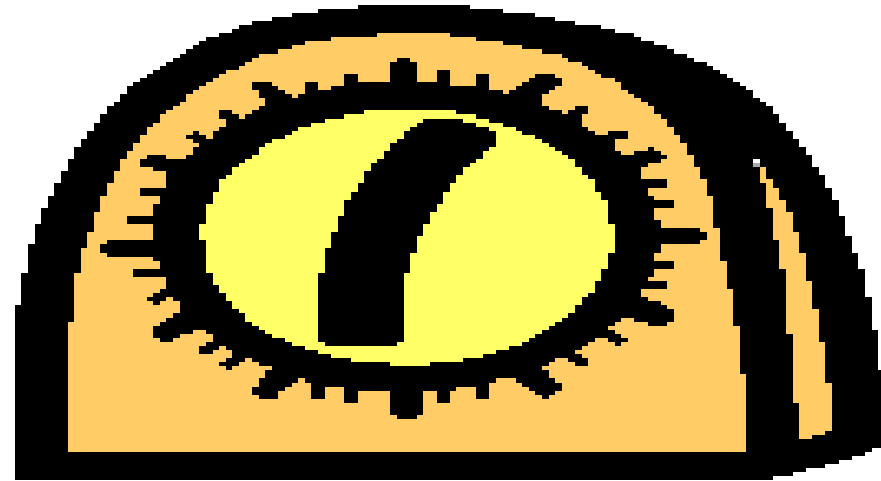
Schelvan, Swanson & Smith (2005).

# Use of Timers



- To forewarn that a transition will occur
- To indicate the length of an activity
- To indicate the length of time a child is expected to stay at storytime

timer





# *Visual Structure*

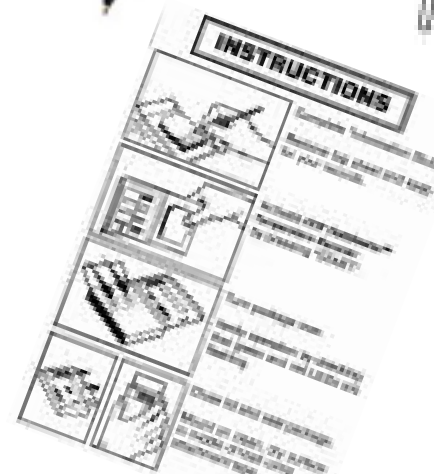
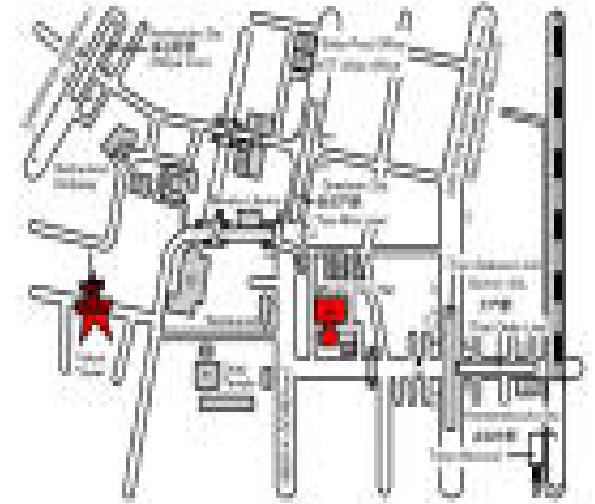


# Visual Supports

*a tool that enables the child to keep track of the day's events and activities and at the same time helps him or her to develop an understanding of time frame and an appreciation of environmental sequences*

*Diane Twachtman-Cullen*

# We all use visual supports



# Why we use visual supports



- They organize a sequence of events, enhancing the individual's ability to understand, anticipate, and participate in those events
- They supplement verbal instruction, clarifying the information for the individual and increasing comprehension
- They can be used to cue communication, providing reminders of what to do and say in a situation



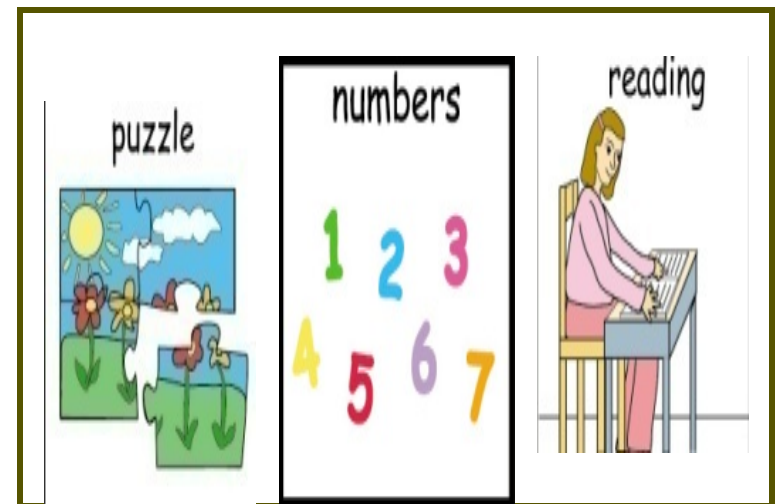
# Why we use visual supports (continued)



- Research has shown students with ASD demonstrate strength in visual learning
- Demonstrate decreased levels of frustration, anxiety, & aggression related to task completion
- Adjust more readily to changes in their environments

**First**

**Then**



*“I THINK IN PICTURES. Words are like a second language to me. I translate both spoken and written works into full-color movies, complete with sound, which run like a VCR tape in my head.” (1996)*



THINKING IN PICTURES

AND OTHER REPORTS FROM  
MY LIFE WITH AUTISM

TEMPLE GRANDIN

WITH A FOREWORD BY OLIVER SACKS



# Visual supports include



- pictures
- written words
- gestures
- objects within environment
- arrangement of environment or visual boundaries
- schedules
- maps
- labels
- organization systems
- timelines
- scripts
- signing

# Visual Boundaries



- Areas within the library, classroom, home, community, or work environment that may need visual boundaries include play area, group area, break area, and work area.
- **BOUNDARIES CAN BE CREATED BY:**
  - Blocking off the area with tape on the floor
  - Physically arranging the furniture to define the area, such as setting up the shelves or room dividers
  - Placing a carpet remnant in designated area

# *Storytime, circle, small group*



*Children use color to identify their chair*

# Take Home Message



***When information is presented verbally, the words are available for a brief moment, but when presented visually the information can be available for as long as the individual needs!***


# Activity Supports

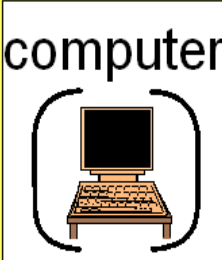


*Identifies  
the  
activity  
and tells  
what is  
expected*


# Visual Structure Examples



**First**  **work**

**Then**  **computer**


**First**







$2 + 4 = 6$

magnetic numbers

**Then**



ball bounce

	<b>SIT</b> sit and chair during work time
	<b>RAISE your HAND</b> when you want to talk to your teacher
	<b>WAIT</b> your turn to work or play
	<b>QUIET</b> when others are talking or working

# Final Pointers from the perspective of the child



- Create visuals ahead of time. I need them, you know I need them. Waiting for them makes me stressed!
- Label our storytime area and belongings
- Can the whole group have a visual schedule so I am not the only one?
- Have my storytime planned out by activities and/or minutes
- Teach my friends in the group about autism and how to be a friend
- Sometimes I don't understand when you talk to the whole group. Can it just be me and you working sometimes?

<http://www.lburkhart.com/pics.html>



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# SENSORY STORYTIME AT THE DENVER PUBLIC LIBRARY



Rachel Hartman, Children's Librarian

# Planning and Research

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- Read about what others are doing
- Drew on my experience as a ECE teacher in an inclusive setting
- Observed classrooms at Anchor Center for Blind Children

# Program Goals

- Help children with special needs and their families feel welcome at the library, storytimes and other library events
- Provide participants with a comfortable, accepting space to develop literacy and social skills
- Model sensory activities and early literacy skills for parents

# Target Audience



- Children with special needs and their siblings, parents/caregivers
- No age limit but geared toward preschool age
- Registration required
- Limit to 10 children

# Materials and Staffing



<http://www.hertzfurniture.com>



<https://store.schoolspecialty.com>



<http://www.creativityinstitute.com>



<http://www.relaxtheback.com>



<http://www.lakeshorelearning.com>



<http://www.alsc.ala.org>

# Publicity

## **SENSORY STORYTIME** **AT** **DENVER PUBLIC LIBRARY**

This storytime is designed specifically for children with special needs and their families. We will sing, read, dance, and socialize.

**When:** The second Saturday of every month at 2:00 p.m.

**Where:** Children's Pavilion at Central Library  
10 West 14th Avenue Parkway 80204

*To register please call 720-865-1306 or email [chlref@denverlibrary.org](mailto:chlref@denverlibrary.org).*

*Sign language available upon request.*



# Registration

- Provides an idea of how many children are coming
- Helps with learning names and welcome people as they arrive
- Gives access to email
  - To promote future storytimes
  - Ask about likes and dislikes
  - Send a social story and let parents know what book we'll be reading

# Schedule

- Announcements, welcome and hello song
- Picture schedule
- Name game
- Story
- Sing, dance, and/or circle time
- Repeat story
- Sing
- Closing song
- Social/play time after storytime



# Greeting and Announcements

- Greet people when then they arrive
- Announcements
  - Let them know children can get up and move around, leave the room and come back, or leave early
  - Let them know they are welcome at other storytimes and library events
  - Thank everyone for making time in their busy schedule to come to storytime
  - Encourage parents to participate

# Picture Schedule



# Name activity



Where is Kate? Where is Kate?  
There she is. There she is.  
Say hellos to Kate. Say hello to  
Kate.  
Clap your hands. Clap your hands.

Grady over the water,  
Grady over the sea.  
Grady catch a fish,  
He can't catch me.

Mariah's here today.  
Mariah's here today.  
We're all so glad Mariah's here,  
Let's all shout hurray!



# Books



*The Three Little Fish and the Big Bad Shark*  
by Ken Geist

*Dog's Colorful Day: A Messy Story About  
Colors and Counting* by Emma Dodd

*The Napping House* by Audrey Wood

*Chugga-Chugga Choo-Choo* by Kevin Lewis

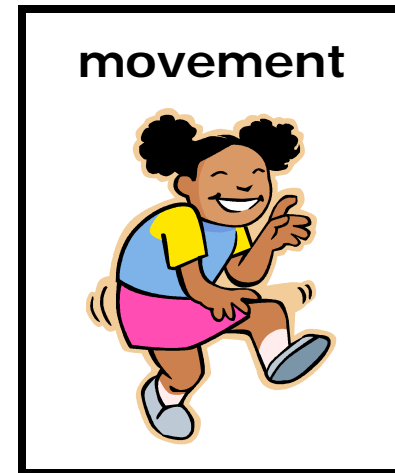
*Lunch* by Denise Fleming

*Pete's a Pizza* by William Steig



# Songs and Movement

- Sing songs related to the book
- Play instruments
- Dance or sing with iPod
- Cooperative Activity or Circle time



# Program Implementation

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- Be conscious of room setup
- Include lots of sensory input
- Create a flexible, calm, accepting atmosphere
- Provide positive reinforcement

# Evaluation

We want to ensure **Sensory Storytime** is meeting your needs. Please give us your feedback so we can continue to improve this program.

1. Have you come to a storytime at the Denver Public Library with your child before?

Yes

No

2. How did you hear about this program?

Web

Flyer

Friend

Other\_\_\_\_\_

3. Please circle the appropriate rating for the following:

	poor	fair	satisfactory	good	excellent:
Program content	1	2	3	4	5
Program presenter	1	2	3	4	5
Room setup	1	2	3	4	5
Overall quality	1	2	3	4	5

4. What was your favorite part of this storytime?
5. Do you have any suggestions to make this storytime better?

Thank you!

# Lessons and Opportunities to Grow


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- Stay positive and flexible
- Balance between sensory seeking and sensory overload
- Communication with parents



# Resources

- Libraries and Autism: We're Connected <http://www.librariesandautism.org/>
- Beyond Barriers : Creating Storytimes for Families of Children with ASD <http://goo.gl/UiZMV>
- ASLC five part blog series by Tricia Bohanon Twarogowski <http://goo.gl/k9hCB>
- ALSC Webinar-Sensory Storytime: Preschool Programming That Makes Sense for Kids with Autism <http://goo.gl/XsKnA>
- *The Out of Sync Child Has Fun: Activities for Kids with Sensory Processing Disorder* by Carol Stock Kranowitz
- *The Elephant In the Playroom : Ordinary Parents Write Intimately and Honestly About the Extraordinary Highs and Heartbreaking Lows Of Raising Kids With Special Needs* by Denise Brodey

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- If you have any questions or ideas, please contact me.
    - ▣ Rachel Hartman
    - ▣ [rhartman@denverlibrary.org](mailto:rhartman@denverlibrary.org)
    - ▣ 720-865-1306

*Thanks for attending the webinar!*

Please take a moment to let us know your opinion of this webinar:

[www.research.net/s/StorytimesASD](http://www.research.net/s/StorytimesASD)

To view these slides and see additional resources:

[www.cde.state.co.us/cdelib/LibraryDevelopment/YouthServices/ASDStorytimes.htm](http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdelib/LibraryDevelopment/YouthServices/ASDStorytimes.htm)

