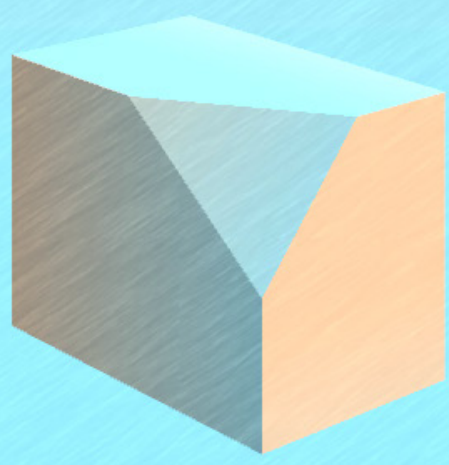


PRISM

CLASSROOM DISCUSSION



What is autism?

Autism is a neurological disorder that is typically diagnosed by the age of three. The symptoms of autism involve three major areas of development, and impact a child's abilities to:

- Engage in reciprocal social interactions with others
- Communicate with others in developmentally appropriate ways; and
- Participate in a range of activities and behaviors typical of the child's age and stage of development

One of the hallmarks of autism is that the characteristics vary significantly.

No two children with autism are the same. Impairments can range from relatively mild to more severe. Autism spectrum disorders are **found in all cultures and across all socio-economic groups**, with the ratio of boys to girls with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) being 4 to 1.

Why conduct this activity?

Teachers must set the example by making every effort to **promote acceptance** of a student with autism as a full member and integral part of the class, even if that student only attends class for a few hours each week. As a teacher, you must create a social environment that **encourages positive interactions** between students with autism and their typically developing peers.

Children with autism, by definition, have difficulties with social skill development and understanding language and social cues. **With appropriate assistance, however, children with autism can engage with peers and establish mutually enjoyable and lasting interpersonal relationships.**

Research shows that when typically developing children are provided with clear, accurate and straightforward information, they have

- More positive attitudes
- Increased understanding
- Greater acceptance of their peers with autism

Assuming there are no restrictions on disclosing that your student has autism, educating your class about autism and how it can affect their classmate can be an effective way to increase positive, social interactions between the children.



FOX

The main character of the game. Children play as the fox to advance through the game.

To help children understand the overwhelming stimuli that their peers with autism are subject to.

- What animal were you playing as? What was it like playing as the fox?
- What might you do if you felt the same way everytime you stepped into bright sunlight?
- Did you know that, like nocturnal animals, sometimes human beings have heightened senses, and are more sensitive to lights and sounds? For example, someone with autism may have similar sensory sensitivities. However, they might find certain things that help them feel better when overwhelmed.
- What did the fox do to feel better? Did he have to do it a lot?
- Similarly, someone with autism might find something that helps them feel better, and have to do it repeatedly to cope with the discomfort.

The fox helps a hungry bear find some honey, so that she can help build the dam.

To help children understand that their peers with autism have difficulty communicating when highly stimulated.

BEAR



- Do you remember meeting the bear? What did the bear want?
- Did you need to howl before you could see what the bear wanted?
- People and animals that have a hard time dealing with their surroundings might find it difficult to communicate, just like the fox couldn't tell that the bear wanted honey until it howled.
- Do you think the bear was annoyed that the fox was howling?
- Was it necessary for the fox to howl to properly talk to the bear?
- Have you ever seen your friends do something that doesn't make sense to you? Have you done things that your friends might think is strange?
- People with autism may sometimes wave their arms or move back and forth to help themselves feel better. They may even scream, like the fox howls.
- Do you think it makes sense that they may need to do that to express themselves?
- Teachers and parents help children with autism learn to manage their feelings and feel more comfortable.



FAWN

The fox brings a lost baby fawn back to its parents, a stag and a doe, who also agree to help with the dam. The baby fawn loves fireflies. *Children's peers with autism may deliver lectures on a favorite topic rather than allow or participate in a conversation.*

- Who met the baby fawn? Could you share what happened when you met her?
- Was it frustrating to talk to her?
- Has it ever happened to you with your friends? How did that make you feel?
- Sometimes your friends may have a hard time realizing that you're not interested in what they're talking about. This is even more common in your friends that have autism. What can you do when this happens?
 - » Try to take an interest in what they are talking about
 - » Try other ways to help them understand that you want to talk about something else
 - » Do not give up, because while you may feel like it, you would miss out on a new friend just because of one conversation

The fox needs help finding wheatgrass to heal the injured boar. The rabbit can help, but it's not apparent that she's listening.

To help children understand that their peers with autism have difficulties with multi-tasking.

RABBIT



- Did anyone meet the injured boar? What did he need?
- Were you able to find everything to help him? How did the rabbit help?
- Was there something strange or different about the rabbit?
- But she must've been listening, because she got the wheatgrass for you, right?
- Has this ever happened with your friends?
- Sometimes it's not always obvious that your friend is paying attention to you. For example, they may be writing or drawing as they talk to you and it may look like they are not listening. If your friend has autism, they have to try extra hard to pay attention to what you are saying. To do this, they may even close their eyes, or turn away. You can always ask to make sure they are paying attention.



MOOSE

The fox meets a moose who doesn't want to talk, but still wants to be friends.

Children's peers with autism may desire social interaction, but have difficulty knowing how to initiate and maintain friendships.

- Who met the moose?
- What happened when you tried to talk to the moose?
- Did you try talking to the moose again? Why?
- It wasn't really clear that the moose wanted to be friends, because he didn't talk like the other animals. But when you figured out how he expresses his feelings, you found a new friend!
- Similarly, sometimes you can't tell what people are thinking just from their facial expressions. Do you know people who don't show what they feel?
- People with autism have to work harder to show how they feel. That's why sometimes, as their friend, it can be hard to tell what they mean or how they feel.
- If you are ever unsure, just ask!

Now that the children know more about autism, take some time to talk about what they learned and what they can do to be better friends.

It is important to not leave the discussion simply at awareness of the difficulties their peers face, but also go over action steps and final thoughts.

REVIEW

- What did we learn about our friends with autism from the fox?
- What do you think could be a good thing about having heightened senses?
- What can you do to help in situations where your friends may feel overwhelmed like the fox?
- What did we learn about our friends with autism from the fawn?
- What do you think could be a good thing about having specific interests like that?
- What can you do in situations where your friends may not realise you don't want to talk about their interests?
- What did we learn about our friends with autism from the rabbit?
- What do you think could be a good thing about having a strong sense of focus like that?
- What can you do in situations where you feel like you are not being heard?
- What did we learn about our friends with autism from the moose?
- What can you do to help in situations where your friends may not want to talk?