

8 Things Kids Should Know About Autism!

Statistically speaking, your child knows at least one other child with autism and interacts with him or her on a daily basis. The more we talk to our kids about accepting and understanding differences, the less likely they are to bully other kids. When you talk to your kids about being accepting of the “quirky” kids in their class, you are also teaching them to be accepting of other kinds of differences: skin color, accents, clothing brands, religious beliefs, etc. Whether it is autism acceptance or awareness, take the extra step to mention not just how people with autism are different, but how they are similar. *To get you started, here are eight things kids should know about autism:*

1. You cannot tell who has autism by looking at them.

No one “looks” autistic. When a person is autistic, it means their brain works differently.

2. Everyone’s brain works differently.

There are probably kids in your class who are really good at reading but have to work harder in math. There may be a kid who is a talented artist but not as skilled in reading. Everyone has things that they are good at and things they need to work harder at. Just like every other kid, most kids with autism are good at some things but have to work harder at others.

3. Why are they doing that?

While you can’t tell that someone with autism has it just by looking at them, sometimes you may notice a kid who is doing something different: spinning around for a long time, jumping up and down a lot, or rocking back and forth. Those repetitive activities are called *stims* and they’re doing it because it feels good, relaxing, fun, or it’s a way to block out too much noise around them.

4. Explain the rules!

Kids with autism want to play too! Sometimes it is harder for them to ask if they can play with other kids, and they might not understand which people are playing what or how to get in the game. Besides asking your friend if they want to play, it can be helpful if you explain the activity or game and who is playing.

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5. Everyone uses ‘odd’ behaviour

We all exhibit odd behaviour from time to time. When you are really bored or concentrating very hard you might bite your nails, tap your feet or hum to yourself. Some people talk to themselves, are picky about foods or will only wear certain types of clothing. People with autism might do these things too, but they may have more trouble stopping the behaviours than you do.

6. Lots of people talk with their hands.

Hand-flapping is pretty common in kids with autism; but not every kid who flaps his or her hands is autistic, and not every kid with autism flaps. Most of the time, hand-flapping just expresses excitement.

7. Kids with autism can have trouble with facial expressions.

Sometimes, kids with autism won’t know how you’re feeling just by looking at your face. Also, sometimes their facial expressions won’t match how they’re actually feeling. Often, if your friend with autism doesn’t seem to have any expression on his/her face, it just means they are still thinking about something. The best way to know how someone is feeling is to ask.

8. What are you a fan of?

Some people with autism, especially a kind of autism called Asperger’s Syndrome, are really interested in one particular thing. Really, really interested. Their favorite topic could be anything: a certain video game, a kind of animal, ancient Egypt. Sometimes kids with autism will forget to talk about other things besides their favorite topic. It is OK to say, “can we talk about something else now?”