**Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD)**

# What is Autism?

Also known as neurodiversity, autism is considered broad range of conditions that can present as a challenge with **social skills**, **repetitive behaviors**, **speech and nonverbal communication**, as well as by **unique strengths** and **differences**.

# Residential Life and Possible Obstacles for a Student with Autism

**Roommates:**

* May struggle with understanding personal space, and boundaries
* May have sensory sensitivities or insensitivities
* May have extreme fears for no reason
* Can be obsessive, ritualistic, or repetitive, and/or a perfectionist
* Allergies and food sensitivities are possible
* May have unusual sleep patterns
* May struggle with hygiene

**Social Situations:**

* Often lacks initiation with social interactions
* Generally doesn't share observations or experiences with others
* Difficulty understanding jokes or sarcasm
* Struggles with reading body language, and/or understanding the rules of conversation and group interactions
* Gives honest and at times spontaneous responses, but can be irrelevant or possibly inappropriate to the topic
* May have difficulties understanding another's feelings
* Possibly prefers to be alone, aloft, or the opposite of being overly friendly
* Difficulty making and maintaining friendships
* May talk excessively about preferred topics of interest
* When talking, the voice may have an abnormal pitch, intonation, rhythm, stress, and/or volume
* Usually prefers sameness/ resists change
* Can get easily overwhelmed
* Can be impatient
* Common to have little to no eye contact
* May show resistance to being touched

The CDC estimates 1 in 59 children have been identified with ASD. The diagnosis occurs in all racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups. It is reported that ASD is 4 times more common among boys than among girls. https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism/data.html

**Get their attention**

Use the students name, ask them to listen/pay attention, engage the student by talking about their special interests.

**Make your message easy to process**

Say less, and say it clearly. Use specific key words and repeat if necessary, pause between phrases. Avoid sarcasm, irony or figurative language. Try to use the least amount of verbal communication as possible by using visuals or checklists.

**Offer choices instead of questions**

Avoid open-ended questions and be specific. Boundaries should be specific, and be prepared to explain the “why”.

**Explain the hidden curriculum**

For students with autism, understanding what to do in social situations does not come naturally. Be prepared to explain social situations and how the student should behave and react. (Example: what to do during res hall activities.)

Person-First Language Reminder: A disability descriptor is simply a medical diagnosis; People **First Language** respectfully puts the **person** before the disability. Meaning, you have a **student with autism,** not an autistic student.

# Best Practices for Communicating With a Student Who Has Autism