

Make Friends with Autism

Autism is a multi-faceted disorder that affects a person's ability to communicate, form relationships, and respond appropriately to the environment. As a result of these challenges, many people with autism find it difficult to join in community activities, interactions and gatherings.

Make Friends with Autism is a community-focused autism education program that promotes building relationships and encourages the understanding, inclusion, and support of people with autism and their families. People with autism, their family and friends, would like to be able to participate and enjoy all parts of community life without criticism. This initiative promotes the inclusion of all people and conveys the strengths and challenges people with autism might face within community life. Here are some tips to better understand and welcome people with autism and their families in your community.

- Autism is a "spectrum" disorder that affects each person in different ways. The characteristics of autism cannot be generalized. Each of us is an individual with likes and dislikes, strengths and weaknesses. We all want to feel understood, accepted, and included.
- Expressing interest and understanding shows support and encouragement. When speaking about a person with autism, refer to the disorder using person-first language: "a person with autism" rather than "an autistic person."



- Autism can affect a person's thought processes, perception, attention, social interactions, and communication. Although people with autism may have a different way of doing or saying something, they may still understand and want to participate. Never underestimate or discount a person's capabilities.



- Learn about a person's interests and provide opportunities for participation and sharing. Think of age-appropriate and respectful ways to modify activities so a person with autism can participate. Provide opportunities for personal expression and allow a person to make choices that reflect their own interests, needs and desires. Be patient and allow the person time to complete tasks. Acknowledge their talents and accomplishments.
 - When giving instructions, be simple, direct, patient and flexible. Limit unnecessary noises, visual challenges, and distractions (bright lights, loud noises, etc.) as they may be unsettling to a person with autism.
 - If you see a seemingly unruly situation or an outburst, you shouldn't pass judgment. A nod of understanding and a few words of encouragement will go a long way. Offer some help if you feel it is needed.
- A person with autism may repeat words or phrases, use words inappropriately, or not understand meanings or gestures. Speak directly to the person, even though he or she may not seem to understand or be able to respond verbally. To convey your message, be direct with the words you use and pause between spoken words and phrases, giving time to process information.
 - People with autism often do not fear danger. Understand that a person with autism may not realize risks and hazards in common situations. They may also mishandle items that would typically be considered safe. Common warning signals may not be understood. We should all work together to promote each other's safety.

For more information about this initiative
call 1-888-CHILDREN, ext. 5343

www.makefriendswithautism.org