

UNIVERSITY OF
LOUISVILLE®

KENTUCKY AUTISM
TRAINING CENTER 

Autism Considerations for Emergency Responders

Heidi Cooley-Cook, KATC

Major John Gosper, Lexington FD

Patrick Branam, Lexington EMS

Learning Agenda

- Overview of Autism Spectrum Disorder
- Characteristics of ASD
- Impact of characteristics of ASD on emergency situations
- Simple strategies to engage an individual who may have autism
- Discuss how to build relationships with the autism community

What is Autism?

Autism is a lifelong developmental disability, resulting from a neurological disorder that affects the brain functioning.

Prevalence of Individuals with ASD

1 in 68

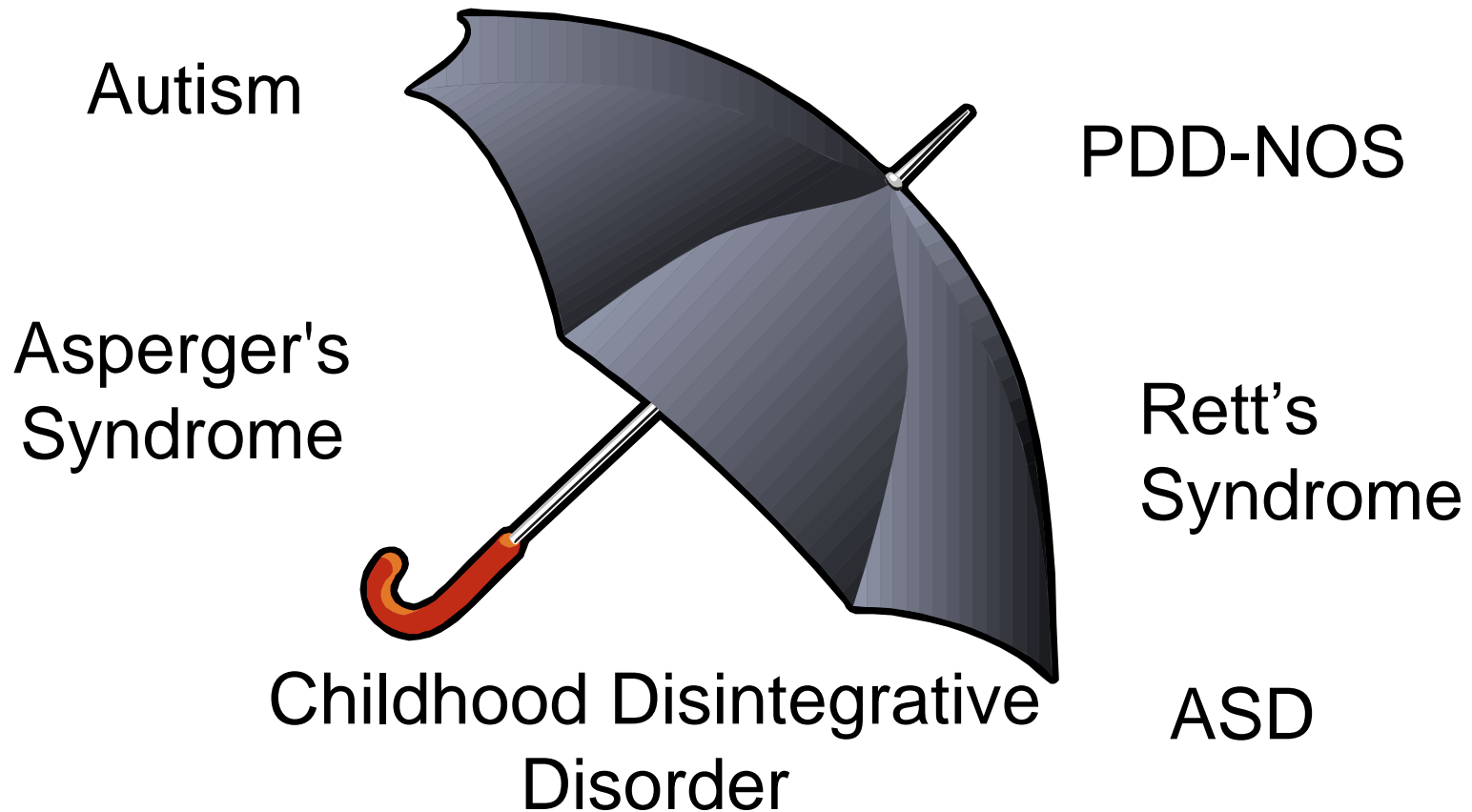
March 2014 CDC report



Demographics

- Knows no racial, ethnic, or social boundaries
 - May not be any physical characteristics
 - Five times more prevalent in boys (1 in 42) than girls (1 in 189)
 - Usually affects sensory and motor processing systems of the brain
 - Varying degrees of severity in different individuals
- If you've met one person with autism,
you've met ONE person with autism**

Autism is...a spectrum disorder



Autism affects how an individual thinks, communicates, and interacts with others

Triad of characteristics

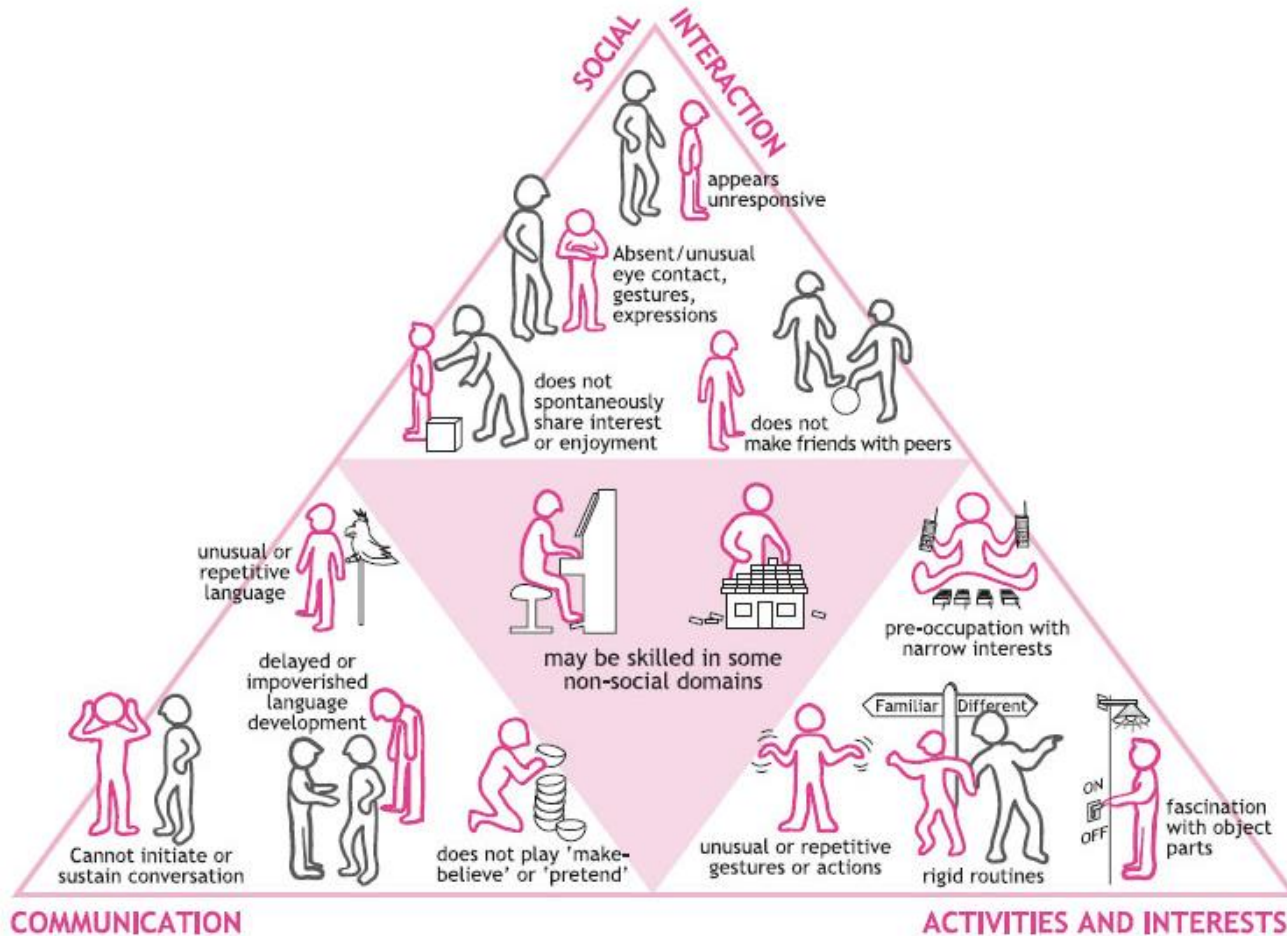


Figure 1: The triad of impairments in ASDs
National Autistic Society

Autism is **NOT**...

- A mental illness
- The result of bad parenting
- Unruly individuals who choose not to behave
- Always associated with mental impairment
- Always associated with behavioral challenges

Children do not “outgrow” autism, but...

Studies do show that early diagnosis and intervention lead to significantly improved outcomes.

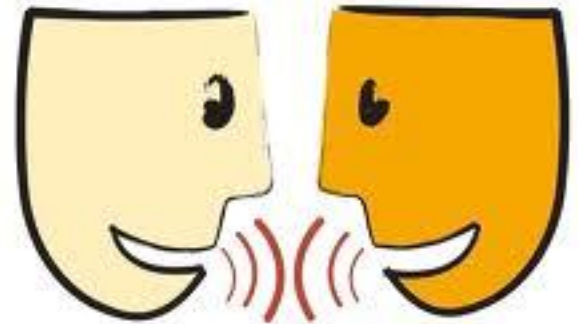
(IDEA for Partnerships)

Communication

- Non-verbal communication
- Receptive language (understanding what is being said)
 - Sarcasm & Idioms – literal understanding
- Expressive language (communicating wants and needs)
 - Idiosyncratic language
 - Scripting
 - Echolalia

Social Interaction

- Eye Contact
- Personal Space
- Appear Unresponsive
- Body Language
- Unspoken social rules



Restricted or Repetitive Behaviors & Interests

- Restricted behaviors and interests
 - Inflexible adherence to routines/schedules
 - Special interests
- Repetitive behaviors/movements/speech
 - Lining up of items
 - Rocking, hand flapping
 - Humming, Echolalia
- Sensory differences
 - Hyper or Hypo sensitive – sound, smell, lights, tastes, textures

Other

- Over-selectivity – tunnel vision
- Theory of Mind – perspective taking
- Executive Functioning – using history to influence present actions
- Magnified response to simple requests
- Generalization
- Emotions
 - Emotional regulation
 - Identifying own and other's emotions

When would you encounter an individual with ASD

- Motor vehicle accident
- Fire
- Emergency at school
- Wandering/elopement
- Medical emergency

Emergency Situations

- Check windows for ASD sticker, license plate, awareness ribbon
- Check glove compartment or visor for fact sheet on individual with ASD
- Harness may be used
- Seatbelt covers may be utilized

Emergency Situations

- Secure home environment
 - Shatter-resistant windows
 - Bars on windows
 - Locked exterior and interior doors
 - Rules/routines for leaving house

Be aware they might try and get back into the house even after rescue

Emergency Situations

- Talk to teacher and/or para-educator
- Specific routines/rules for leaving school building or classroom
- Ask for specifics on what was happening before the behavior

Emergency Situations

- 4 times more likely than their typical peers to elope
- May be pursuing special interest
- May be escaping undesired environment
- May be lost
- Make sure to check areas of water

Emergency Situations

- Communication
 - Unable or struggle ‘telling’ or showing what hurts
- Sensory differences
 - Sounds
 - Lights
 - Pain perception

Emergency Situations

- Due to underdeveloped trunk muscles there is a higher chance of positional asphyxia during restraint
- May be at increased risk for seizures
- If possible identify one responder to stay with them till delivered to hospital or caregiver

Tips for First Responders

- Stay with the individual
- Look for identification – ID bracelet or anklet, temporary tattoo, ID or information card, QR code
- Look for tracking device – Project Keepsafe, Protect and Locate, etc
- Engage using special interest – look at clothes or language

Tips for First Responders

- Keep verbal communication to very short phrases
 - 2-3 words
- Allow time for responses
- Draw pictures or use their communication device or put picture cards on emergency apparatus
- Responses may be ‘blunt’ or ‘rude’

Tips for First Responders

- May also have seizure disorder
- May have poor muscle tone – do not restrain
- Do not try and stop repetitive motions
- Work with community organizations and schools to identify people on the spectrum that are high risk for emergencies
- Be aware of how you are communicating

Community Outreach

- Invite the families affected by autism to fire stations and police stations to familiarize them with firefighters and police officers
- Visit schools and special education classes
- Use available resources to educate emergency responders and parents on ways to aid in interaction with first responders

FREE SOURCES FOR THE AUTISM COMMUNITY IN KENTUCKY

UNIVERSITY OF **LOUISVILLE**

KENTUCKY AUTISM
TRAINING CENTER

The mission of the Kentucky Autism Training Center is to strengthen our state's systems of support for persons affected by autism by bridging research to practice and by providing training and resources to families and professionals. KATC is committed to improving the quality of life for those affected by ASD.

NEED HELP?

Looking for resources
and information?
Contact the KATC:

502.852.4631
katc@louisville.edu

[louisville.edu/education/
kyautismtraining](http://louisville.edu/education/kyautismtraining)



Website



Newsletter



Kentucky Services and
Supports Directory



Resources for Families,
Educators and Service
Providers



Kentucky's Family Guide to
Autism Spectrum Disorders



Training



Community Awareness
Brochures



Learn the Signs, Act Early
Kentucky



Amanda L. King
Resource Library



Social Media
Facebook, Twitter, YouTube



Webinars



Listserv

Other Recourses

- National Autism Society
- National Autism Association
- Autism Speaks
- Center for Disease control
- Many local Autism support groups and organizations
- Project Lifesaver
- Protect and Locate

Questions?

Contact info:

Heidi Cooley-Cook

(502) 852-6401

hacool01@louisville.edu

Center contact info:

Telephone: (502) 852-2467 or

800-334-8635 ext. 852-4631 Fax: (502) 852-7148

<https://louisville.edu/education/kyautismtraining>



E-mail: kato@louisville.edu

Major John Gosper

(859) 539-0995

Gosperj@Lexingtonky.gov

Patrick Branam

(859) 613-3124

Branamo@Lexingtonky.gov



Stay Connected to the KATC

Visit or web site:

www.louisville.edu/education/kyautismtraining

Join our listserv send a note to
katc@louisville.edu



facebook