

# AUTISM AWARENESS MONTH

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## Introduction

On December 18, 2007, the United Nations General Assembly declared April 2 as **World Autism Awareness Day**.

In the USA, the whole April is **Autism Awareness Month**. It represents an opportunity to promote autism awareness, autism acceptance and to draw attention to the fact that every year more and more children are facing autism diagnosis. According to some reports, one in 50 U.S. children is autistic.

Autism or ASD (autism spectrum disorders, such as Asperger's) is a general term used to describe a group of complex brain disorders caused by a combination of genes and environmental influences. Children or adults affected by ASD might have various communication, social and behavioural difficulties as well as repetitive behaviours. Autism is not contagious and there is no cure for it.

The aim of the following activities is to inform school children about autism, motivate them to embrace children with different abilities and learn how to make friends with them more easily.

## Activity 1 (warm-up)

Write the word **ABILITY** on the blackboard. Say one "**I can**" **sentence** – for example, *I can knit, I can speak Spanish, I can do 15 push-ups*. Ask students to define "ability". They will probably offer the following definition: *An "ability" is something you can do.*

Then do the following as a whole-class activity; ask students "**Can you...?**" questions and tell them to stand up if they can do it.

- *Can you ride a bike?*
- *Can you speak French?*
- *Can you do a cartwheel?*
- etc.

With younger Ss, you can play the **Simon Says** game.

In this version of Simon Says game, students will only respond when the command is true for them. For example, Simon Says: *Everyone with brown eyes stand up!* or *Everyone who likes basketball, stand on one foot!* or *Everyone who has a pet cat, put your left hand on your head!* and so on.

After the game students can sit in a circle or just name some things in which they are similar to another student(s). Let them share something they did not already know about each other.

The conclusion: Not everyone stood up or raised their hand for all the questions or commands. We all have different abilities. We are all unique.

## Activity 2 Video

Tell your students about the following situation and ask them to answer your questions:

*Imagine yourself trying really hard to do something, really doing your best, for example, playing football and trying to score a goal. You try as hard as you can, but you do not have the ability to do it. What would you like other kids to say?  
How would you feel if they start teasing you and making fun of you?*

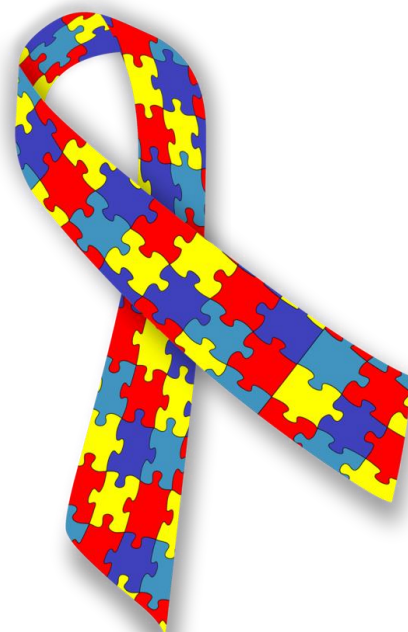
Explain that some children have certain difficulties that prevent them from doing an activity successfully or at all or make them feel really uncomfortable in certain situations.

Play the [video](#) which simulates **sensory overload** which children with ASD often suffer from.

Ask Ss to try to spell an English word or try to do some simple maths multiplications or deductions while watching the video (duration 2:01).

After watching, ask Ss whether they were able to concentrate on the task. Did they feel overwhelmed and nervous? Introduce the word **AUTISM** and explain that children with this disorder often feel this way and because of that often react in a way that may frighten or shock others.

You can also show your Ss the **Autism Awareness Puzzle Ribbon**. By wearing it as a pin or even as a frame on your social network profile picture, you educate others about autism. You can use an empty puzzle template (it can be easily found online) for some arts and crafts activities.



## Activity 3 KWL chart

Do a **KWL chart** activity. Ask Ss to fill in the **K column – write the things they already know** about ASD/AUTISM. It can also be done as a whole-class activity or individually/in pairs.

| <b>K (already know)</b> | <b>W (want to know)</b> | <b>L (learned)</b> |
|-------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------|
|                         |                         |                    |

The answers you may expect: *they act strangely, they make funny noises, they do not show emotions, they do not want to play with others* and so on.

Then ask Ss to fill in the **W column – what they would like to know** about ASD/AUTISM. Possible entries might be: *Why do autistic people behave in a funny way? Why do they move rhythmically (flap their hands, spin etc.) How do you become autistic? Is it contagious? Is there a cure/medicine for it? How can you help when a person with ASD feels overwhelmed?*

### Activity 4 KWL chart (continued)

Show Ss the short animated film [AUTISM EXPLAINED](#) (duration 5:30).

Tell students to fill in the **L column** of your KWL chart – what they have learnt while watching the film. Possible answers:

- ✓ *Autistic people repeatedly move and behave in a strange way because it calms them down when they are having a hard time.*
- ✓ *If you do not know something or cannot do something, it does not mean that you are stupid.*
- ✓ *Some usual things or noises may seem terrifying to autistic people.*
- ✓ *They have problems communicating with other people.*

Instead of watching the film, you can use the poem “I am Ethan”, written by an autistic boy’s mother. You will find it on the last page of this material.

### Activity 5 Video and discussion

Have a short discussion about the things that you have learnt together. Stress the fact that we are all different and unique. There is a nice saying about birds: *some of them fly fast, some of them fly slowly, some of them cannot fly at all.*

Tell Ss that autistic people usually have some special talents. Play the short [video](#) about an autistic man memory sketcher (duration 1:07).

### Activity 6

Have your students read the following poem written by an autistic boy, Benjamin. After they have read it, they can write short poems about themselves, focusing on their unique qualities and things that make them special. Students could read their poems aloud or you can put them on display.

If you teach lower levels, they can just finish the sentences:

***I am good at \_\_\_\_\_ . \_\_\_\_\_ is hard for me.***

Or they can make a class poster drawing the symbols for the activities they like/find too hard.

I am odd, I am new

I wonder if you are too

I hear voices in the air

I see you don’t, and that’s not fair

I want to not feel blue

I am odd, I am new

I pretend that you are too

I feel like a boy in outer space

I touch the stars and feel out of place

I worry what others might think

I cry when people laugh, it makes me shrink

I am odd, I am new

I understand now that so are you

I say I “feel like a castaway”

I dream of a day that that’s okay

I try to fit in

I hope that someday I do

I am odd, I am new.

I am Ethan.

You may not understand me, or the way I feel today.  
You may not understand my reasoning for things I do or say.

The reasons why I'm so loud and say things over & over again,  
Why I run so differently or lose my homework every now & then.

I write my letters backwards and sometimes numbers too,  
and when in a conversation, I'll say "Guess what" 100 times to you.

Too much noise, light, or excitement can set me in a spin.  
I don't like the way these pants feel rubbing against my skin.

I try to be good, but sometimes it's hard to control,  
I have to do it, it's an impulse, I don't always do what I'm told.

Ketchup, Ranch and BBQ sauce on everything I eat,  
sometimes I have days that I just can't sit still in my seat.

I like to talk a lot even when it's out of turn,  
my mind plays tricks on me and interrupts what I'm trying to learn.

Sit up straight, wipe my face, and play ever so soft,  
some of these things I have trouble with and I usually lose my train of thought.

I didn't mean to spill the milk mom, or slam the door so hard,  
everyone else is done with their homework, I don't know where to start?

My heart's as big as gold, my feelings get hurt too,  
I get sad, cry and have bad days just like you.

My brain works differently than other girls and boys,  
but one thing always holds true, I can give your life so much joy.

I get frustrated so easily and my hand won't work that way,  
I don't understand why those other kids won't let me come over and play.

Please don't think of me any differently or love of me any less,  
I'm just like other kids and trying to do my best.

I am very special in my own unique way, and every moment with me  
you'll never have a dull day.

By Kelly Graham

Source: <http://www.child-autism-parent-cafe.com/I-Am-Ethan.html>