

HOW TO LEAD AN AUTISM *SHIFT* IN THE CLASSROOM

1. **Share the following autism facts with students:** (You might begin your discussion by asking students if they know anyone with autism and ask what behaviors they have noticed kids with autism exhibit, you may find they offer most of the facts about autism before you do.)

When a person has Autism it often means they have difficulties with social interaction, they may have isolated areas of interest and avoid eye contact, resist physical contact, or avoid some activities because they feel overwhelmed by the way things sound, smell, taste, look or feel. They usually have difficulty with verbal and nonverbal communication, which might mean they don't talk as well as you do, or don't understand facial and body cues, like when someone is showing they are ready to end a conversation. Children with autism might also display repetitive behaviors like wanting to spin in circles, rock back and forth or repeat the same phrases over and over in efforts to cope with the chaos they experience inside.¹

According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), 1 in 59 children have autism.²

2. **Give The Autism *Shift* survey to students.** Included are two surveys, one with additional pictures and simpler language for elementary school age students and one for middle and high school age students.
3. **Show The Autism *Shift* videos** for the appropriate age group from the *Classroom Shift* tab at www.TheAutismShift.com/classroomshift.
4. **Have an open discussion about the videos and the surveys correct answers,** survey answer discussion information is included.
5. **Vote whether you had an Autism *Shift*** in your classroom on the *Classroom Shift* tab at www.TheAutismShift.com/classroomshift. And please share your classroom shift stories on The Autism *Shift* Facebook page www.facebook.com/autismshift. Thank you for your participation!

¹ <https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism/facts.html>

² <https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism/data.html>

AUTISM SHIFT SURVERY ANSWER DISCUSSION GUIDE

1. Do you think a child with autism is smart?



ANSWER DISCUSSION TOPIC: Children with autism are very smart, in fact many people believe Einstein and musicians like Mozart were Autistic.³ They may learn in a different way, but they are intelligent and often have a specific area of interest they will excel at.

2. Do you think a child with autism learns things when they are in your classroom?



ANSWER DISCUSSION TOPIC: Children with autism are always learning from the world around them and in your classroom, just because they don't seem like they are listening or learning, doesn't mean they aren't⁴. Make sure you always say kind things to and around individuals with autism and include them in your conversation, because they are listening⁵, even if they don't respond the same way you would, they will appreciate you treating them the same as everybody else.

3. Do you think a child with autism can control the way their body moves, the loud noises they sometimes make with their mouth, or how some sounds hurt their ears?



ANSWER DISCUSSION TOPIC: "One of the main symptoms for individuals with autism is an inability to process all the different sensory inputs in their environment. Many times individuals on the spectrum have hypersensitivity to sights and sounds" smells, taste and touch. "This generally leads to an increase in anxiety and stress. A person with autism may flap their arms, [or] rock back and forth as a way to cope with the chaos they are

³ <https://the-art-of-autism.com/historical-figures-who-may-have-been-on-the-autism-spectrum/>

⁴ <https://www.monadelahooke.com/being-nonverbal-doesnt-mean-i-cant-think/>

⁵ <https://www.iol.co.za/lifestyle/family/parenting/this-letter-is-not-a-cry-for-pity-2024218>

experiencing” inside.⁶ Watching the videos on sensory overload you can see how experiencing that type of stress on a daily basis would be a challenging way to live.

4. Do you think a child with autism wants to make friends with others like you do?



ANSWER DISCUSSION TOPIC: Yes! Children with autism do want to make friends.⁷ They may not have the same language skills as you or even the same social skills, like they may feel more comfortable not looking you in the eye when you have a conversation, or may speak about a specific topic longer than you normally would. If this happens, remember, individuals with autism often have an area of interest they excel at so it feels safe for them to speak about it. It is ok to politely tell your friend with autism you are ready to talk about something else and thank them for sharing what they know.

Here are a few tips to help you include individuals with autism in your play or group whose language is delayed. Don't feel anxious that your conversation may feel very different than what you are used to, it is better to be there as a friend than to always say exactly the right thing.

TIPS FOR COMMUNICATING WITH INDIVIDUALS WITH AUTISM⁸ **(Role-play Recommended)**

When you ask questions to an individual with autism who has a language delay, try asking questions that:

- **Give Choices.** For example, ask, “Do you want to play basketball or soccer?” Rather than, “What game should we play together during our break?”
- **Allow Time for Answers.** Individuals with autism process information differently than you may, so remember it might take them longer to respond to you, just wait, if they aren't giving you any feedback, then try to phrase the question a different way or with different options.
- **Use Pictures or Visuals.** You can show individuals with autism pictures or objects to communicate, like you can show your friend a picture of a puzzle and chess board and ask, “Which one would you like to play with, the puzzle or the chess board?” Let them point to their choice.

⁶ <http://www.forbes.com/sites/robertszcierba/2016/06/07/experience-what-it-feels-like-to-have-autism/#289eba8d7614>

⁷ <https://ollibean.com/an-autistic-weighs-in-on-friendship/>

⁸ Cox, Renee. Adapted from “Tips for Engaging with Students with Language Impairments.” 2016.

5. Do you think a child with autism can stop being Autistic?

YES




NO




ANSWER DISCUSSION TOPIC: *Individuals with autism can't stop being Autistic⁹, but some can learn to speak more clearly, communicate with assisted devices like computers, or learn ways to cope with the environment around them when it makes them feel overwhelmed. Remember, Individuals with autism are not less than you, they are just different, and isn't the world a better place because we are not all the same? Enjoy getting to know a person with autism at your school and see what you can learn from them. They will enjoy getting to know you too.*

⁹ <https://www.webmd.com/brain/autism/understanding-autism-treatment#2>



THE AUTISM SHIFT SURVEY – ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

1. Do you think a child with autism is smart? 




2. Do you think a child with autism learns things when they are in your classroom? 




3. Do you think a child with autism can control the way their body moves, the loud noises they sometimes make with their mouth,  or how some sounds hurt their ears? 



4. Do you think a child with autism wants to make friends with others like you do? 



5. Do you think a child with autism can stop being autistic? 



THE AUTISM *SHIFT* SURVEY – MIDDLE & HIGH SCHOOL

1. Do you think a student with autism is intelligent?

YES NO

2. Do you think a student with autism learns information when they are in your classroom?

YES NO

3. Do you think a student with autism can control the way their body moves, the loud noises they sometimes make with their mouth, or how some sounds hurt their ears?

YES NO

4. Do you think a student with autism wants to make friends with the people around them?

YES NO

5. Do you think a student with autism can stop being autistic?

YES NO