



## **NOTES FOR TALKING WITH STUDENTS ABOUT AUTISM**

### **EVERY PERSON IS UNIQUE**

Our world is made up of many different kinds of people.

Each one of us is special in our own way, but we are all very much alike. We all have families, people we love and things we enjoy doing. But the way we may understand or do some of those things can be different.

One example of understanding about differences in people, is comparing us with different computer systems. A Microsoft computer (pc) and an Apple Mac (which includes iPads) have different operating systems, different ways of doing the same things. But they both have the same objectives, aim for the same results.

People may see the world slightly differently but we are all trying to achieve the same things To love our family, make good friends and to try and do the things we enjoy to help us be happy in our lives.

### **WHAT CAUSES AUTISM?**

No one knows why some people have autism, and there may be many different causes. Scientists are still trying to find out just what those causes are and how to best help people with autism. In the United States, 1 in 68 children now have autism, so it is very likely that most families will have a relative or close friend who has someone with autism in the family.

### **HOW DO KIDS WITH AUTISM ACT?**

Kids with autism may act in different ways. Some may have difficulties with certain activities, but they may have strengths in other areas. For instance, a child with autism may be a math whiz, or a great artist, or unbeatable at computer games. Still, they might have trouble putting their thoughts into words or understanding what you say.

Some children with autism prefer that things stay the same or that people always sit in the same seats. They may sometimes struggle when things change. When they seem to be acting different, please remember that they might be scared of something or feeling confused and may not be able to tell you how they are feeling.

### **SOME KIDS WITH AUTISM MAY:**

- Have trouble talking, make strange sounds, or not talk at all
- Flap their hands, spin or just walk around a lot
- Sit quietly and not look at others
- Play or behave differently than other friends
- Be very active or be very quiet and like to spend time alone

- Have trouble looking directly at you
- Do or say things over and over again (like lining up toys or repeating a line from a movie)

### **WHY DO CHILDREN WITH AUTISM ACT THIS WAY?**

Some kids with autism may not see, hear or feel things the way you do. For instance,

- The sound of a school bell may hurt their ears
- The taste of some food may be too strong for them
- The fabric of some clothes may scratch or feel bad on them

At the same time, some things that may bother you, like a bee sting, may for some kids with autism not feel as painful

Some kids with autism struggle to understand facial expressions. For example, if you are frowning they may not understand you are unhappy or angry. However, that does not mean that you should stop trying to talk to them.

Some children with autism can't speak much or at all. But it doesn't mean they can't understand you. Please talk with them as you would with your other friends.

Some kids with autism can't express themselves when they feel angry or confused or unhappy. They may make noises or spin around or flap their hands. Equally, they may make such gestures when they feel happy or excited. Or, they may do such things because their emotions are so strong to them that these actions help to calm themselves down.

Some kids with autism get upset when there is change in their lives. It could be a new teacher, a new room, a changed schedule. Changes can be very scary to them. They may cry, hold their hands over their ears, or run away. They are not choosing to misbehave. This may be the only way they can deal with their emotions.

### **FAMOUS WITH AUTISM**

- Jane Austen: Famous Author
- Woody Allen: Famous Actor and Director
- Vincent Van Gough – Famous Artist
- Leonardo Da Vinci – Famous Artist and Inventor
- Charles Schultz – creator of Snoopy and other cartoons
- Mozart: Great Classical Composer
- Clay Marzo – Champion Surfer
- Mark Twain – Famous Author
- Sir Isaac Newton – Famous scientist
- Bill Murray – Ghostbuster
- Lionel Messi – Soccer Superstar
- Steve Spielberg – Famous Director
- Jim Henson – creator of The Muppets
- Bill Gates – Founder of Microsoft
- Albert Einstein – Genius and Scientist

## **HOW CAN I BE A FRIEND TO SOMEONE WITH AUTISM?**

When you become a friend to a person with autism, you both learn a lot from each other. Here are some ideas that can help you be a better friend to a kid with autism. Can you think of some ways you can be a friend?

- Accept your friend's differences
- Know that some kids with autism are really smart, just in a different way.
- Protect your friend from things that bother him or her
- Talk in small sentences with simple words and use simple gestures like pointing
- Join your friend in activities that interest him or her
- Be patient – understand that your friend doesn't mean to bother you or others
- Wait – give him or her extra time to answer your question or complete an activity
- Invite your friend to play with you and to join you in group activities
- Teach your friend how to play by showing him or her what to do in an activity or game
- Sit near your friend whenever you can, and help them do things if they ask you to
- Never be afraid to ask your teacher questions about your classmates with autism
- Help other kids learn about autism