

Autism Spectrum Disorder and the Direct Support Professional



The Story of the Autism Awareness Ribbon

The puzzle pattern of this ribbon reflects the mystery and complexity of autism.

The different colors and shapes represent the diversity of people and families living with this disorder.

The brightness of the ribbon signals hope - hope through research and increasing awareness in people like you.

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WHAT IS AUTISM?

Autism is one of a group of disorders known as autism spectrum disorders (ASDs). ASDs are [developmental disabilities](#) that cause substantial impairments in social interaction and communication and the presence of unusual behaviors and interests. Many people with ASDs also have unusual ways of learning, paying attention, and reacting to different sensations. The thinking and learning abilities of people with ASDs can vary—from gifted to severely challenged. An ASD begins before the age of 3 and lasts throughout a person's life. (Center for Disease Control <http://www.cdc.gov>)

“Autism is a complex developmental disability that typically appears during the first three years of life and is the result of a neurological disorder that affects the normal functioning of the brain, impacting development in the areas of social interaction and communication skills. Both children and adults with autism typically show difficulties in verbal and non-verbal communication, social interactions, and leisure or play activities. Autism is defined by a certain set of behaviors and is a "spectrum disorder" that affects individuals differently and to varying degrees. There is no known single cause for autism, but increased awareness and funding can help families today.” (Autism Society of America <http://www.autism-society.org>)

“Autism is the most common of the Pervasive Developmental Disorders, affecting an estimated 1 in 150 births (Centers for Disease Control Prevention, 2007). Roughly translated, this means as many as 1.5 million Americans today are believed to have some form of autism. And this number is on the rise.

Based on statistics from the U.S. Department of Education and other governmental agencies, autism is growing at a startling rate of 10-17 percent per year. At this rate, the ASA [Autism Society of America] estimates that the prevalence of autism could reach 4 million Americans in the next decade.” (Autism Society of America <http://www.autism-society.org>)

WHAT DOES ALL THIS MEAN?

In recent years, made-for-TV movies, public service announcements, and celebrity interviews have increased community awareness of the condition called “autism spectrum disorder” (ASD). Talk shows review the different diets and early intervention techniques that seem to benefit some of the youngest of those being diagnosed. This community knowledge is wonderful and beneficial, yet some very fundamental facts are often ignored. The publicity, the research, the fundraising is all about children.

But what happens when the massive numbers of children being diagnosed with autism grow up and become adults?

That’s where you come in.

As a Direct Support Professional (DSP), you will be the front line of teaching and support for the men and women no longer under the wing of school programs. You may be the one identified to walk the path with them and to guide their success as they enter and progress through adult services.

- Some young adults with ASD will have a difficult “transition” from school to adulthood; an eventful period for most people; yet, potentially, very traumatic for those with autism.
- Some adults with ASD may continue to live with family members, yet, need involvement in day programs through local, county or state agencies for vocational habilitation or supported employment.
- Some adults with ASD may need residential support as they or family members age and can no longer successfully or safely live with family.
- Some adults with ASD may need companions to negotiate the world outside their home and work.
- Some adults with ASD may need long term health care as they enter their senior years

Your appreciation, understanding and educated awareness of their unique qualities can help them to live life to their fullest potential.

This course is designed to introduce you to the broad range of characteristics that are part of the diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder and to help you to recognize a variety of supports that you and a person with autism can employ to ease specific needs and enhance special interests.

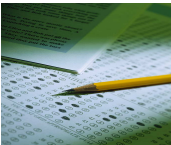
HOW WILL THIS COURSE WORK?



1. You will access a variety of websites and written materials so that you can learn at your own pace, review the materials frequently and sample an array of educational resources about autism spectrum disorder.
 - It is highly recommended that you take notes as you navigate the different internet sites, read the material, watch the videos and observe individuals with ASD.



2. You will use study questions and activities for many of the guided readings to strengthen your knowledge of the specific topics. Your responses will be reviewed and are to be included with your completed project: the PORTFOLIO.
 - First you may want to skim the assigned website information or reading material, looking at the section topics and titles, focusing on the scope of the information. Next, review any associated study questions. Go back to the material to guide you in learning the key concepts that will help you to develop a deeper understanding of the topic



Write out your answers to the study questions so you can refer to them as you develop the reasoning for your Work Packets, and have them to include in your Portfolio.



3. You will prepare and present **three** “**Work Packets**” that reflect your integration and application of the learned information. These will be the main portion of your PORTFOLIO.



4. You will communicate with a MENTOR with knowledge of ASD with whom you will discuss questions or ideas as you progress through the material.
 - E-mail your mentor regularly or when guidance is needed.



5. You will spend time in observation and interaction with adults with autism in different settings to empower your confidence in advocating for, developing and providing quality supports.
 - Seek counsel from others in your agency or area who have experience with autism. Contact the autism society of your region and become familiar with the resources available to you.



6. You will gather with other Direct Support Professionals to discuss the study questions and to participate in Work Sample development around selected concepts.
 - As you progress through this sequence, your skills of discernment of the needs of the person with ASD and your understanding of the support methods will increase. Continue to seek other resources through networking and more in-depth learning.

As you grow in knowledge and confidence, you may witness and feel the need for advocacy for adults with autism spectrum disorder. It is hoped that you will continue your education, training and work with persons with ASD.

Thank you for investing your time, energy and spirit on this journey.