



CENTER FOR  
DEVELOPMENT  
& DISABILITY

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UNIVERSITY CENTER FOR EXCELLENCE IN DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES  
EDUCATION, RESEARCH AND SERVICE

# **Inclusive Communities: Facts and Myths - Autism Spectrum Disorder**

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# Objectives

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Participants will:

1. Name at least three facts and myths related to autism;
2. State at least two actions they might take to include individuals with ASD.

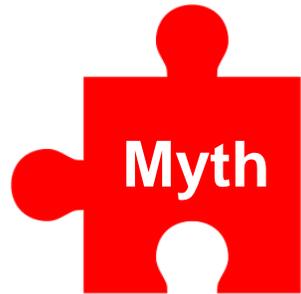
# Facts!

## What is Autism?

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A developmental disorder of neurobiological origin

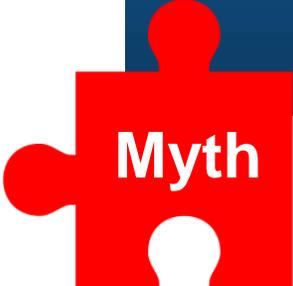
- **Developmental** - Evidence of the disorder sometime in the early developmental period
- **Neurobiological** – originates in and affects the nervous system
- **Lifelong** – no *known* cure
  - ✓ research shows that intervention matters to improve developmental functioning



Diets, enzymes, hormones, hyperbaric treatments, chelation are not cures and some treatments are harmful!

“If you’ve met one individual with autism, you’ve met one individual with autism.”

- Stephen M. Shore



Myth

***“That’s just the way they are!”***

# Know the characteristics!

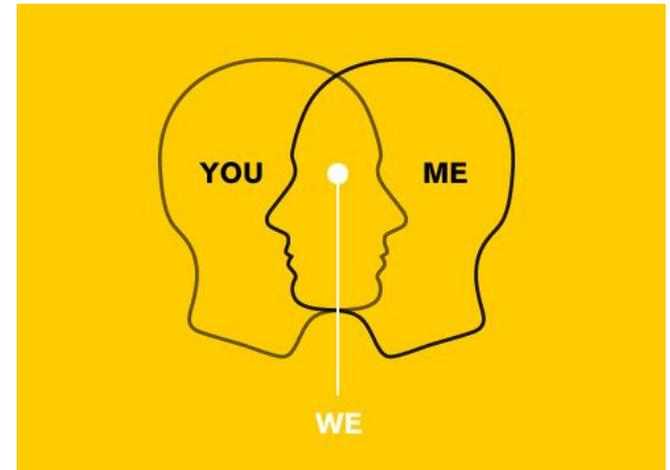
## Definition (DSM 5) and what it means

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**Persistent deficits in social communication and social interaction across multiple contexts, as manifested by the following, currently or *by history*:**

### Social-emotional reciprocity

- The back and forth of communication and relationships
  - Communicator directs something to another person
  - Listener understands and reciprocates in a meaningful way.



# Application of characteristic for officers

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Examples of questions or demands placed during police encounters:

- Get your hands out of your pocket
- Stop!
- Where were you coming from?
- Drop your weapon
- I need to see your identification

# Know the characteristics!

## Definition (DSM 5) and what it means

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**Persistent deficits in social communication and social interaction across multiple contexts, as manifested by the following, currently or by history:**

Nonverbal communication behaviors:

- What does *that* tone, body posture, facial expression mean to others?
- How do I use my face and body posture to communicate to others?



# Application of characteristic for officers

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Deficits in communicative behavior may be interpreted as 'suspicious'.

Is the individual being

- Noncompliant?
- Under the influence of alcohol or drugs?

Understanding that someone with Autism may not comprehend or demonstrate nonverbal cues such as:

- Eye contact
- Body language
- Voice intonation

In the Modern Age, where everything is connected to everything, the most important thing about what you can do is what you can do with others



# Know the characteristics!

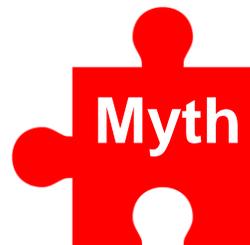
## Definition (DSM 5) and what it means

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**Persistent deficits in social communication and social interaction across multiple contexts, as manifested by the following, currently or by history:**

Developing, maintaining and understanding relationships

- Interconnections and interdependence between individuals
- **Fact**
  - Limited sexual knowledge in addition to social communication deficits leave people with ASD at an increased risk for sexual abuse and victimization.



People with autism lack empathy.

# Know the characteristics!

## Definition (DSM 5) and what it means

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**Restricted, repetitive patterns of behavior, interests, or activities:**

Stereotyped or repetitive motor movements, use of objects, or speech

Insistence on sameness, inflexible adherence to routines, or ritualized patterns of verbal or nonverbal behavior



Ways to be  
**RIGID**

- Getting really upset over any kind of change
- Getting really stubborn when things are not just what you expect
- Bossing other people to make them do what you want



# Application of characteristic for officers

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When you approach an individual with autism, they may be engaging in ***stereotypical behavior***. Some refer to stereotypical behavior as ***stimming***.

Examples of stereotypical behaviors may include but is not limited to:

- Pacing
- Moving fingers in front of eyes
- Smelling objects or people
- Rocking back and forth
- Chewing or mouthing objects
- Vocal stereotypy

# Know the characteristics!

## Definition (DSM 5) and what it means

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**Restricted, repetitive patterns of behavior, interests, or activities:**

Highly restricted, fixated interests that are abnormal in intensity or focus



# Application of characteristic for officers

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What might be interpreted as 'suspicious' behavior, could actually just be an individual fixated on something of interest

- Walking around parking lot, examining makeup of vehicles
- Standing for extended amounts of time at an intersection
- Approaching strangers to ask uninvited questions



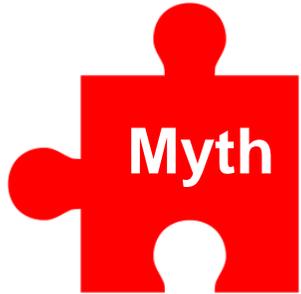
# Know the characteristics!

## Definition (DSM 5) and what it means

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**Restricted, repetitive patterns of behavior, interests, or activities:**

Hyper- or hypo-reactivity to sensory input or unusual interest in sensory aspects of the environment



# Application of characteristic for officers

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Changes in sensory input without warning can be problematic for individuals with autism and may cause the individual to meltdown.

Some examples of abrupt sensory input that may occur during a police encounter include:

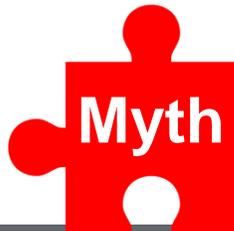
- Touching and putting hands behind back
- Patting down
- Physical restraint and detainment
- Handcuffs

# Fact!

## Incidence: 1 in 59

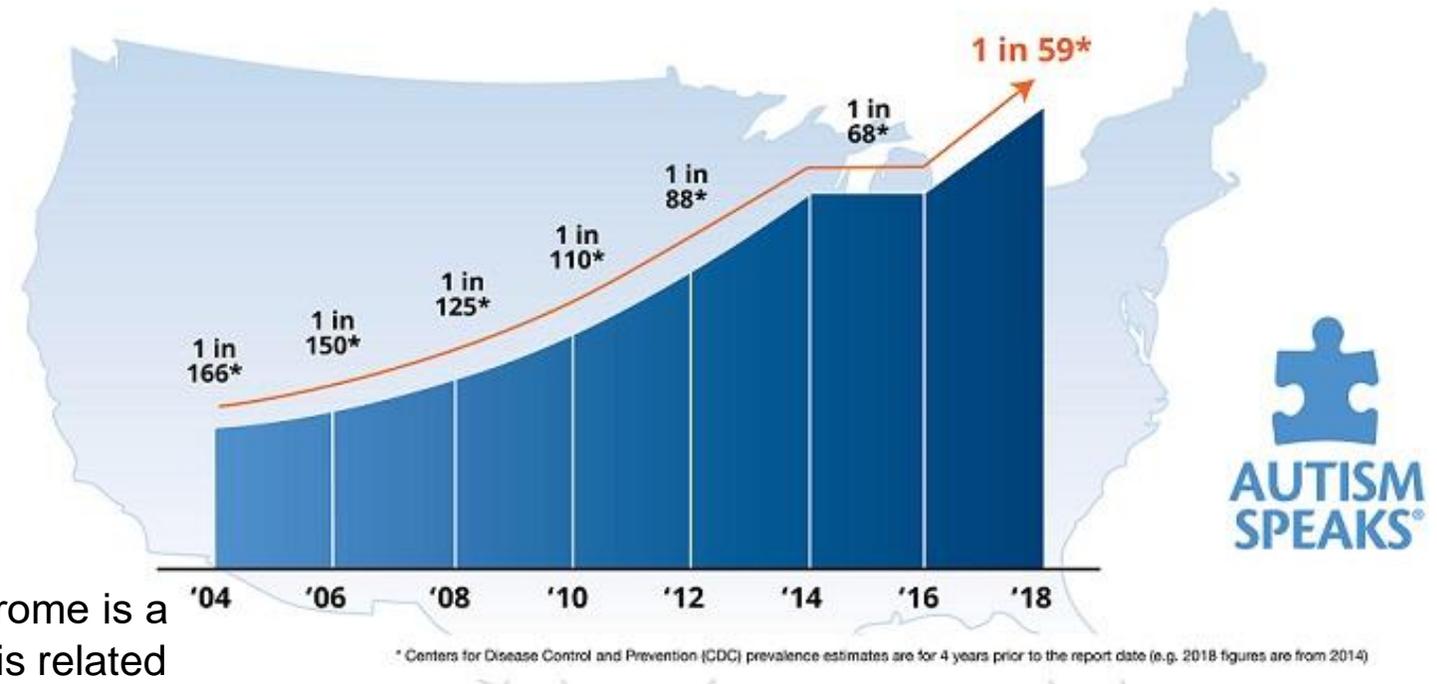
Four to five times as many boys as girls are diagnosed with ASD each year.

- Improvements in the diagnostic process
- More individuals who meet stricter diagnostic criteria



Asperger's Syndrome is a different diagnosis related to ASD.

### Estimated Autism Prevalence 2018



# Fact!

## Causes



In the presence of a **genetic predisposition to autism**, a number of **non-genetic or environmental influences** increase a child's risk (Epigenetics).

### ***Increased risk:***

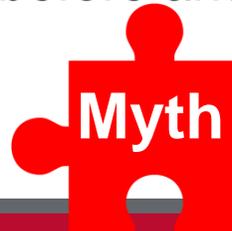
- ✓ Advanced parent age (either parent)
- ✓ Pregnancy and birth complications (e.g. extreme prematurity [before 26 weeks], low birth weight, multiple pregnancies [twin, triplet, etc.] )
- ✓ Pregnancies spaced less than one year apart

### ***Decreased risk:***

- ✓ Prenatal vitamins containing folic acid, before and at conception and through pregnancy

### ***No effect on risk:***

- ✓ Vaccines



*Vaccines cause Autism*

# Early Intervention makes a BIG difference

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Many symptoms are present by 12 months of age.

Early screening can and does lead to early diagnosis



*Regardless of genetic make-up, “we know that environmental differences early in life will make considerable differences in outcomes of children.”*

- Sally Rogers, *Early Start Denver Model*

***Wait and see is a good option***

# Facts!

## Learning

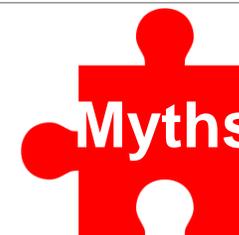
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Although more than 75% of individuals with ASD have average or above average cognitive ability, brain connections may be weak or disordered

For individuals with ASD, the brain is often object oriented rather than socially oriented

Individuals with ASD often have learning/thinking strengths such as memory, technology skills, attention to detail

Many have strengths in science, math, decoding and music.



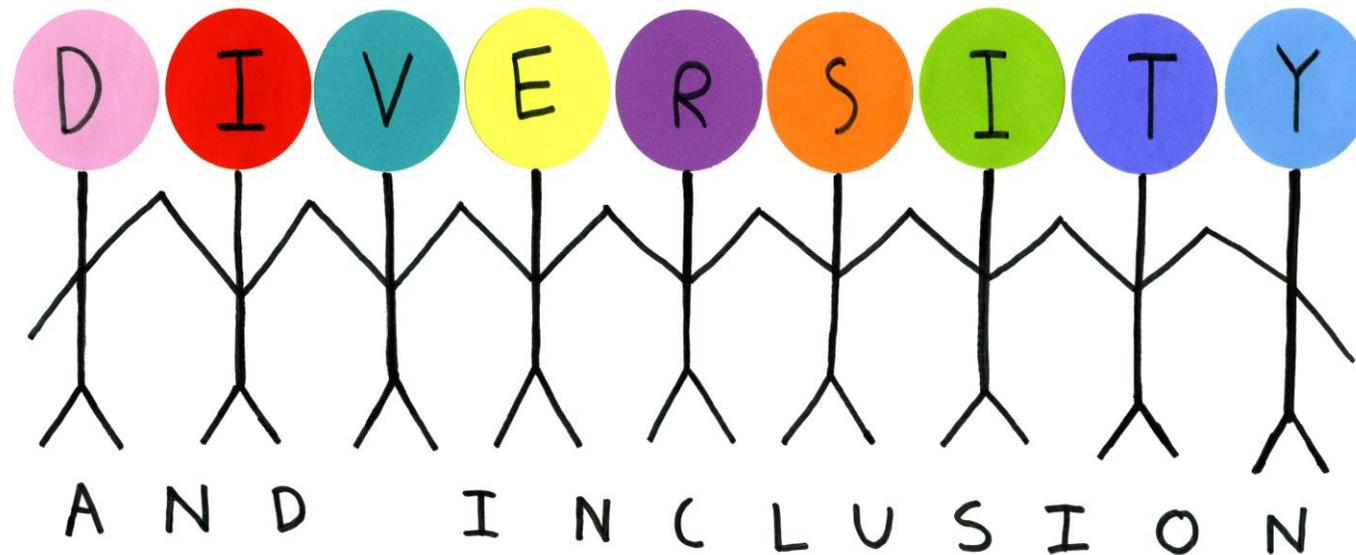
People with autism are usually intellectually disabled.

*People with autism are often "savants" like Rain Man*

# Creating Inclusive Communities

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Without greater public understanding, people with autism and other disabilities are at risk of becoming socially isolated and unable to be integrated in their communities in a meaningful way.



# Supporting individuals with disabilities (of all kinds)

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## From the Perspective of a Young Adult:

### Treat everyone with respect

- Talk to me the same way you talk to everyone else
- Don't assume everyone needs the same types of supports
- Not all people with Autism are the same

## From the Perspective of a Parent:

- Please assume we are doing our best; don't judge me or my child
- Presume competence. My child will love up (or down) to your expectations
- By welcoming my child into your community, ***you are making a big difference***

# Supporting Individuals with disabilities (of all kinds)

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- Have some fun! Most individuals with disabilities are there to have fun and be a part of what's going on. Participate and enjoy with them – you don't need to entertain! Don't worry about making mistakes – just treat them the way you'd want your siblings, children or parents to be treated
- Think ahead if you can. Most difficulties can be avoided by anticipating what might be hard and avoiding or modify the environment
- Remember that what's "fair" is that everyone gets what they need; not that everyone gets the same thing! Kids will holler – that's their job!

# Supporting Individuals with disabilities (of all kinds)

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- Remain neutral
- Try to determine if there is a nearby caregiver or someone that can better determine the individuals wants and needs
- Short, directive statements using a calm tone
- Trying to use reason/logic probably is not going to work
- Don't take it personally
- Our job is not to treat, but to teach!



# Our Role

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As service providers, we want to empower individuals with disabilities to become impactful members of their communities.

**All** behaviors are learned:

- Cleaning
- General hygiene
- Shopping
- Social skills
  - Human interaction

# How can we teach appropriate police cooperation?

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Behavioral Skills Training has been utilized to teach contextualized life skills

- Gun safety
- Student lockdown procedures
- Fire safety
- Abduction prevention skills
- Self-advocacy

(Dickson & Vargo, 2017; Hanratty et al., 2016; Harriage & Miltenberger, 2016; Johnson et al., 2005; Lang et al., 2016)

# This is not the answer to the problem, but it's a start!

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Ideally, we would hope police officers receive the training and resources required to serve people with disabilities.

As service providers we can aim to better prepare individuals with disabilities on how to interact during police encounters.

We hope to work collaboratively with police officers to make our communities safer for individuals with autism and other disabilities.