



# **Promoting Success For Individuals With Autism**

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April is Autism Acceptance Month, a time to spread awareness about autism and advocate for the acceptance of people with Autism Spectrum Disorder and be a force for change.

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a developmental disability that can cause minor or significant social, communication and behavioral challenges. One in 54 children are diagnosed with ASD, including one in 34 boys and one in 144 girls.

Autism is a complex disorder that affects each individual in different ways. I often think of this quote from Dr. Stephen Shore when discussing the effects of autism: “If you’ve met one person with autism, then you’ve met one person with autism.” However, there are still some symptoms that may occur in many cases: not maintaining eye contact, very specific and focused interests, difficulty understanding the emotions of others or expressing their own feelings, trouble understanding sarcasm, repetitive body movement and difficulty acceptance or making changes.

Despite some challenges individuals with ASD may face as opposed to individuals who are considered neurotypical, their disability should not count them out from opportunities. Like everyone, people with ASD have strengths, weaknesses and specific skills and can contribute to getting jobs done and accomplishing goals.

It is important to give individuals with ASD supports as needed. In education, this may look like allowing them more time to take tests, testing in more private settings, allowing breaks or providing more communication tools. In employment, this may look like letting them work at their own pace, hosting job fairs that are more sensory-friendly and allowing them to use other supports as needed.

In my past work with Centerstone’s Autism Services: Think! Learn! Explore! (CASTLE), I have had the opportunity to support many children with ASD. We fully believe that these children have just as much of a chance to succeed in their lives as anyone without ASD. We have always approached every situation with the patience and understanding needed to help them as they develop necessary skills they may have more trouble developing on their own, such as language and learning.

However it looks, it all comes down to supporting and believing in individuals with ASD and not disqualifying them from opportunities. Allow them the space and resources they need to succeed, and they will prove themselves capable. If people never provided individuals with ASD with opportunities, we would not have accomplished scientists like Dr. Temple Grandin and Albert Einstein, entertainers like Sir Anthony Hopkins and Andy Warhol, or influential musicians like Mozart.

Individuals with autism are as capable of achieving greatness as anyone else – so don’t ever count them out.