

GREAT RACE TO AUTISM AWARENESS



The purpose of the Great Race to Autism Awareness is to raise awareness in our scouts, leaders, parents, and community through a series of interactive stations. These stations are designed to simulate some of the sensory challenges faced by those on the autism spectrum, as well as motor skill & communication challenges. Through awareness comes acceptance, as well as decreasing the chances of that individual on the spectrum from being bullied by their peers.

The Great Race was first created for the Scout O Rama in Three Fires Council in 2012 by Sean & Richard Williams. Richard is an Eagle Scout from Troop 3 "Bob's Hill Boys", and is on the autism spectrum. He is a big advocate for others on the autism spectrum.

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SOUND STATION

Have participants put on a pair of headphones. An adult will turn on the music player. For the next 20 seconds, try talking to the participant sitting across from you while they have music playing in their headphones. One side of the table will listen to the CD, while the other side attempts to talk with the table of “listeners”. Then you will switch roles.

ASK THEM: On a scale of 1 to 5 (5 means “very hard to have a conversation” and 1 means “not hard to have a conversation”), rate how you felt during the conversation.

INFORMATION:

This is the most commonly recognized form of sensory impairment. Hearing impairments can affect someone's ability to **communicate** and possibly also their balance. People on the Autism Spectrum may experience the following:

under- sensitive to sound:

- *They may only hear sounds in one ear, having only partial hearing or none at all in the other.
- *They may not acknowledge particular sounds.
- *They might enjoy crowded, noisy places or bang doors and objects.

over- sensitive to sound:

- *Noise can be magnified and sounds become distorted and muddled.
- *People with Autism are so sensitive to sound that they can, for example, hear distant conversations as if they are in the conversation.
- *People with Autism may have an inability to cut out sounds – notably background noise, which often leads to difficulties concentrating. Sometimes having good hearing means that all of the different noises get really LOUD and distracting and it can hurt their ears. They may hit their heads to deal with the noises.
- *People with Autism might cover their ears or say words to themselves to focus on something else so that the noises they hear don't seem so loud.

Ways to help

Under-sensitivity: Use visual supports to back up verbal information.

Over-sensitivity: Shut doors and windows to reduce external sounds.

Prepare a person before going into the noise

Suggest that they wear earplugs.

Lower your own speaking voice

SIGHT STATION

Have participants put on blindfold or black goggles. After 15/20 seconds, have them remove goggles, asking them to try to not blink for 15 seconds.

ASK THEM: On a scale of 1 to 5 (5 means “you had to rub your eyes, or your eyes started to tear up,” and 1 means “you felt no discomfort at all”), rate yourself on how sensitive your eyes were to the light.

INFORMATION:

under-sensitive to light:

- *Objects appear quite dark, or lose some of their features.
- *Main vision is blurred but peripheral vision quite sharp.
- *An object in front of them is magnified but things on the periphery are blurred.
- *Poor depth perception – problems with throwing and catching; clumsiness.

over-sensitive to light:

- *Distorted vision: objects and bright lights can appear to jump around.
- *Images may fragment or break apart
- *Easier and more pleasurable to focus on a detail rather than the whole object.
- *Your friends with autism see a lot of small things that other people don't notice like every single color in a room.
- When something is out of place, they may become upset. They might cry or flap their hands, twist their bodies, or tap on a desk. This is for comfort.

Ways to help

Small changes to the environment can make a difference.

Three points to remember are:

***be aware:** look at the environment to see if it is creating difficulties for people with Autism. Can you change anything?

***be prepared:** tell people with Autism about possible sensory stimuli they may experience in different environments.

***be understanding and kind:** ask the person if they need to step out of the room for a moment, they may not be able to recognize what is causing their uneasiness.

TASTE STATION

Give participants a piece of sour candy. Have them suck on the piece of sour candy for 15 seconds without eating or chewing or spitting out.

ASK THEM: On a scale of 1 to 5 (5 equals “you had to spit it out,” and 1 equals “you liked the taste”), rate yourself on how sensitive you were to the taste of the candy.

INFORMATION:

Chemical receptors in the tongue tell us about different tastes - sweet, sour, spicy and so on.

People with an ASD may experience the following differences.

Under-sensitivity to taste:

- *Likes very spicy foods.
- *Eats everything - soil, grass, Play-dough. This is known as pica.

Over-sensitivity to taste:

- *Finds some flavors and foods too strong and overpowering because of very sensitive taste buds. Has a restricted diet.
- *Certain textures cause discomfort; some children will only eat smooth foods like mashed potatoes or ice-cream or plain noodles.
- *People with sensitive tastes can vomit and feel sick at the taste of certain textures or flavors of food.

Ways to help

- *Do not mix sauces in foods. Let people put their own sauces on food like spaghetti and spaghetti sauce, or ketchup on burgers.
- *Ask the person with Autism what foods they like. Ask a parent what foods can be eaten by their child with Autism. Provide a fruit alternative.
- *Never make fun of a person with special dietary needs or assume they are being picky eaters.

SMELL STATION

Spray a perfume card with perfume (Bath & Body a good source). Have participant hold card under their nose for at least 20 seconds.

ASK THEM: On a scale of 1 to 5 (5 means “you were coughing or gagging,” and 1 means “the smell didn’t bother you at all”), rate yourself on how sensitive you were to the smell.

INFORMATION:

Chemical receptors in the nose tell us about smells in our immediate environment. Smell is the first sense we rely upon. People with an ASD may experience the following differences.

Under-sensitivity to smell:

- *Some people have no sense of smell and fail to notice extreme odors (this can include their own body odor).
- *Some people may lick things to get a better sense of what they are.

Over-sensitivity to smell:

- *Smells can be intense and overpowering. This can cause toileting problems.
- *Dislikes people with distinctive perfumes, shampoos, etc.
- *Dislikes certain foods. May vomit or get physically ill at the smell of certain foods.

Ways to help

- *Ask a parent or the person with Autism if certain smells irritates them.
- *Be kind. If a person with Autism has body odor, give them a gentle message.
- *If you know a certain food bothers a person, give them notice that the food will be served before it is served to allow person to leave area.
- *Use unscented detergents or shampoos, avoid wearing perfume, make the environment as fragrance-free as possible.

TOUCH STATION

Have the participant feel the sandpaper in the middle of the board. (Texture is from an average touch sensitivity). Now have the participant feel the sandpaper on the right side of board. (Texture is from under sensitive touch sensitivity). Lastly, have participant feel the sandpaper on the left side of board. (Texture is from over sensitive touch sensory)

ASK THEM: On a scale of 1 to 5 (5 means “very”, and 1 means “not very much”), rate how much difference you felt between the 2 materials.

INFORMATION:

Touch is important for social development. It helps us to assess the environment we are in (is an object hot or cold?) and react accordingly. It also allows us to feel pain. People with an ASD may experience the following differences.

Under-sensitivity to touch

- *Holds others tightly - needs to do so before there is a sensation of having applied any pressure.
- *Has a high pain threshold.
- *May self-harm: bang head, hit head, pick at lip, pick nails until they bleed.
- *Enjoys heavy objects (eg, weighted blankets) on top of them.

Over-sensitivity to touch

- *Touch can be painful and uncomfortable; people may not like to be touched or hugged and this can affect their relationships with others.
- *Dislikes having anything on hands or feet.
- *Difficulties brushing and washing hair because head is sensitive.
- *Only likes certain types of clothing or textures.

Ways to help

- *Know if a person is under or over sensitive and be careful when playing games or shaking hands or tapping their shoulder.
- *Warn a person if you are about to touch him or her; always approach him or her from the front.
- *Remember that a hug may be painful rather than comforting.
- *Allow a person to complete some activities themselves so that they can do what is comfortable for them.

MOTOR SKILLS

Have participant put on a pair of work gloves. Have participant now tie the shoe lace on the boot.

ASK THEM: On a scale of 1 to 5 (5 means “you had a lot of trouble tying shoe lace,” and 1 means “you had no problem at all tying shoe lace”), rate yourself on tying your shoe lace on the boot.

INFORMATION:

Situated in the muscles and joints, our body awareness system tells us where our bodies are in space, and how different body parts are moving.

Under-sensitivity

- *Stands too close to others, because they cannot measure their proximity to other people and judge personal space.
- *Hard to navigate rooms and avoid obstructions.
- *May bump into people.
- *Clumsy. May not be able to do simple movements like jumping jacks.

Over-sensitivity

- *Difficulties with fine motor skills: manipulating small objects like buttons or shoe laces.
- *Moves whole body to look at something.

Ways to help

- *Do not rush person with Autism while doing fine motor tasks.
- *Do not laugh at person with Autism when they act clumsy.
- *Offer to help tie shoes or button coats.
- * If a person with Autism stands too close, give them a gentle reminder to give you more space.

SIGNING

Have participant look at the display with the signing phrase on it. Have participant try to sign the phrase. Be encouraging!!

ASK THEM: On a scale of 1 to 5 (“5 means you had a lot of difficulty trying to sign the phrase,” and “1 means you had no problem signing the phrase”). Rate yourself on how challenging this activity was.

INFORMATION:

Some of those on the autism spectrum are considered non-verbal. This can mean that they have the ability of speech, but can't form meaningful words, or they are unable to use spoken language. One way they can communicate with others is sign language (signing). Difficulty in communication can be frustrating, and those with non-verbal autism can get frustrated and upset.

Ways to help

- **Smile – a smile is worth a thousand words**
- **Give choices when asking a question “either” “or”**
- **A Picture is worth a thousand words whenever possible.**

WHO'S ON THE AUTISM SPECTRUM?

Have participants look at the picture board and place all of the pictures of those people who are on the Autism Spectrum in the middle section of the board.

ASK THEM: On a scale of 1 to 5 (5 means “you had a lot of trouble identifying who was on the spectrum,” and 1 means “you had no problem identifying who was on the spectrum”), rate yourself on identifying who was on the spectrum.

INFORMATION:

You cannot tell who is on the Autism Spectrum and who is not. It has been said, once you know someone with Autism, you only know ONE person with Autism. This means that everyone is different, with different challenges and different needs, and different abilities. Even people with Autism are very different from each other. That is why this disorder is called a SPECTRUM.

Ways to help

*Treat everyone the way you want to be treated. **Live the Scout Law.**

*Be KIND to everyone. We never know what challenges people have and we should never judge people.

*Be FRIENDLY. People are all different. Everyone has challenges as well as abilities.

*Be COURTEOUS. Do not stare at people with challenges, or others who may be having a sensory meltdown. Do not rush another person to finish an activity.

*Be HELPFUL. Offer to help when another person seems to be struggling doing an activity. We never know when we may need help ourselves.

*Be CHEERFUL. Always reassure a person that they can do it, even if it takes them longer.

STATION SUPPLIES:

Sound Sensory

2 sets of headphones (minimum)
1 2-way jack
Music or Sound Track
CD Player or iPhone, etc.

Taste Sensory

Sour Candy
Trash Bag

Sight Sensory

Goggles
Something to block out light (Duct Tape or Paint)

Touch Sensory

3 grades of sand paper (fine, medium, rough)

Smell Station

Card Board Perfume Sticks
Perfume (Bath & Body good place to get these)

Motor Skills

Big bulky gloves
Boots with long shoe laces

Signing

Sign Language Alphabet (Pictorial)
Phrase or Word you want signed (Pictorial)

Who is on the Autism Spectrum?

Board with Velcro
Pictures of people (spectrum & non-spectrum) w/Velcro

Wrap-Up

After going through the stations, take time to go over what they have learned from this. Tie in the scout oath & law, and the cub scout motto. Tie this into earning your Disability Awareness Merit Badge, Belt Loop, & Pin.

Cub Scout Belt Loop: 1. Invite someone on the spectrum to talk about their experiences and work one of the stations.
2. Hosting the Great Race 2 Autism Awareness and having your scouts go through the stations
3. Have the scouts make an autism display for the great race or do one after they learn about autism spectrum challenges for their next pack meeting.

Cub Scout Pin: 2. Make the cub scout promise or motto your phrase for the signing station.

Merit Badge: 1. Discuss proper disability etiquette and person 1st language during your wrap-up, and have them explain why it is important.

3a. Have a scout on the spectrum work a station and talk about his experiences in taking part in scouting activities. Wrap-up another good place to do this.

3b. Have an individual on the spectrum talk about their experiences and activities they like to do. Have them work a station &/or talk at wrap-up.