

WHAT IS AUTISM? A condition or neurotype that is characterized by challenges with social interaction, verbal and non-verbal communication, and restricted and repetitive behavior.

Some individuals may have other co-occurring needs or disabilities. You don't "outgrow" autism (adults and children are autistic), and you can't tell by looking at someone whether they are autistic.



MILLIONS of ADULTS

are autistic but were never formally diagnosed or are diagnosed later in life



1 in 6

people have sensory needs or sensitivities

Autism is a Spectrum

Autistic individuals have a variety of needs, interests, and abilities

1 out of 31

children are diagnosed with autism in the US (varies globally)

Approximately
80 MILLION

people across the globe are diagnosed with autism

COMMUNICATION

- Keep your communication simple, specific, and direct - avoid jargon
- Be patient and don't force eye contact or touch
- Provide direct communication about social rules or expectations
- Demonstrate behaviors, allowing time for observation and reflection
- Many individuals prefer the term "autistic" rather than "person with autism", but this can vary based on culture or personal preferences - it's always ok to ask someone's preference.

INDICATORS SOMEONE MAY BE ON THE AUTISM SPECTRUM

- Lack of understanding or personal space/boundaries
- Verbal communication may not match body language
- Repetitive movements or speech, (stimming)
- Different conversational/social skills or abilities
- May not make direct eye contact or understand gestures
- Low tolerance for change in routine or expectations
- Lack of typical displays of interest or emotions
- Lack of facial expression
- Sensory sensitivity or overwhelm
- Big reaction, or no reaction, to sensory input

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE CERTIFIED?

The **Certified Autism Center™ (CAC)** credential requires IBCCES **training and certification of at least 80% of public-facing staff** in autism and sensory differences. The goal is to be better prepared and equip staff to provide services and experiences to all, including autistic and sensory-sensitive individuals. **Certification must be renewed every two years, with updated training provided for staff and ongoing support and resources from IBCCES** as long as the organization is certified. **Many CACs also undergo an onsite review** by IBCCES experts to develop resources and programs to better serve autistic and sensory-sensitive guests.



Training topics: As a CAC, staff completed training on understanding autism and sensory sensitivities, communication, parent/caregiver and autistic perspectives, and basic safety best practices.

Who is your credentialing organization, IBCCES? The International Board of Credentialing and Continuing Education Standards (IBCCES) was established in 2001 and provides a series of certifications focused on autism, neurodiversity, and cognitive differences. The goal of the programs is to help professionals and organizations better understand and work with individuals that are neurodivergent or on the spectrum, across a variety of industries, including tourism, recreation, corporate, healthcare, and education settings. For details, visit: [IBCCES.ORG](https://www.ibcces.org)

An individual is making noticeable repetitive gestures, body movements or vocalizing loudly.

This is common self-regulatory behavior typically known as “stimming”. This is done often if the person is overwhelmed but can also be done when they’re excited or happy. If they’re not hurting themselves or anyone else and do not appear to be in distress, treat them as you would any guest. If the guest seems to be in distress or harming themselves or others, you can offer assistance to them or their caregiver to see if there is a low sensory area or other option that would be helpful.

You notice an individual becoming overwhelmed and possibly having a meltdown.

Ask the person’s caregiver or companion if you can provide assistance - the individual themselves may not be able to speak to you or let you know what they need if they are in a meltdown. You can offer a quieter or more secluded area if the person is able to move to another area, but they may not be able to. Ensure other guests don’t crowd the area and try to move everyone away from causing more of a commotion.

A guest or their caregiver notifies you they are on the autism spectrum.

Welcome them like you would all guests - you can say “Thank you for sharing that! Is there anything specific I can suggest or provide for you today during your visit?” Based on their response and what your location offers, you can educate them on the accommodations or supports you provide: e.g., “Thank you for sharing that! If you need to take a break, we have low sensory zones in the area. We also have sensory guides on our app and on the signage at each ride. Can I help you with anything else to make your visit a great one?” or “We do offer the IBCCES Accessibility Card so you can access accommodations at Guest Services. Let me show you...”

A guest asks what it means that you’re a Certified Autism Center™.

Let them know it means that your staff have received training in autism and sensory awareness and you partner with IBCCES to provide other supports or options for visitors and for ongoing recommendations. If your location offers sensory guides or other tools, you can also mention these. If the guest has feedback or suggestions on accommodations, take note of them and thank them for the feedback. Your location may not be able to implement all accommodations, but certification is one way you are working to be more inclusive to visitors and you welcome all ideas or suggestions for review.

An autistic visitor wanders/runs away or loses their parent/guardian.

Follow your internal safety protocols for Lost Child/Parent. Keep in mind, autistic individuals are often drawn to water or may have special interests such as certain characters, trains, animals, ect. so ask parents or caregivers if there is a place they would be drawn to and check these areas first. Also ensure all exits are monitored as the individual may try to escape the environment completely if overwhelmed and may not respond to their name or to staff.

SYMBOLS RELATED TO AUTISM YOU MAY ENCOUNTER



>>> REMEMBER:

- **“If you’ve met one person with autism... you’ve met one person with autism.”** Everyone has different needs and strengths. The spectrum is not linear (high and low, slight to severe) but more like a web or wheel of interconnected needs, strengths, abilities, and concerns.
- **Empathy and kindness** go a long way - autistic individuals and their families have likely been judged or misunderstood in the past. They want to feel comfortable and welcomed so they can make memories and have fun. A friendly smile or helpful information about how to navigate your location go a long way.
- **Never assume that someone has autism unless they tell you.** Some individuals love to share that they are autistic and let you know what accommodations they need, but others do not feel comfortable disclosing that information.
- **Many people (1 in 6) have sensory sensitivities or get overwhelmed and can benefit from low sensory areas/additional accommodations,** not just those with autism.