



American Counseling Association

School Counselor Connection

Autism

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is one of the most frequent disorders school counselors and other clinicians are likely to encounter. One in fifty-nine children met the criteria for a diagnosis of ASD (CDC, 2018). Additionally, we can expect to see over 50,000 people per year with ASD enter the college and career world without the services they may have received in previous school settings (Autism Speaks, 2019). Autism does not discriminate and impacts every section of our population; however, minority children are receiving the diagnosis later than other children, highlighting the need for better services for all (Autism Speaks, 2019).

Autism impacts every aspect of a person's life, and can lead to lack of employment, underemployment, lack of college and career readiness and college-going, and impaired social and family relationships. Some clients may be non-verbal, and some may be high functioning but not able to connect with others. Autism frequently co-occurs with many other mental health issues, including anxiety, depression, ADHD, seizure disorders, intellectual disabilities, numerous health concerns, and safety issues. Safety issues are important to highlight, and reflect the criteria for an Autism diagnosis. Many persons with ASD become overwhelmed by sensory input and often have high levels of anxiety in social situations, plus are unable to express their emotions. Lack of communication skills, characteristic of most persons with ASD, further exacerbates these overwhelming feelings. These feelings may cause a person to flee a situation because they lack the necessary coping skills to communicate and ask for help. Repetitive behaviors, fixation on one interest, and rigidity are also diagnostic criteria and can lead to social isolation, problems in the person's career and education, and a host of related challenges.

With this knowledge we are developing interventions that are working to help people with ASD in schools...

- We are screening for ASD as young as two years of age, and early intervention is working.
- Research is increasing our understanding of ASD and developing effective treatments for ASD. Training in social skills, self-regulation, CBT, and Applied Behavioral analysis is helping people with ASD learn prosocial behaviors, express their feelings, cope and learn skills for life and careers.
- Special education services, school counseling services, occupational therapy, and speech therapy are helping students with ASD in the schools. Collaboration is essential for success.
- Job coaching, transition programs, and fostering independent living skills are promoting college and career readiness and success.

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counseling.org

Resources:

Autism Speaks (2019)
Available at
www.autismspeaks.org

**Centers for Disease
Control (2018)**
Available at
www.cdc.gov