



Join us on **2 April** to celebrate World Autism Understanding Day



Classroom Activity Pack

Note about autism resources

Information and understanding about Autism has changed substantially over time, particularly in the past five years. Before conducting a lesson about what autism is, it is important to ensure students have access to contemporary and quality sources, preferably that have been developed in partnership with the Autistic community.

When leading this discussion, it is also important to remember that this is an opportunity to break down stigma associated with autism in the next generation by giving students strengths-based, positive information.

The following pages contain two activities you can use in the classroom to celebrate World Autism Understanding Day. A detailed supplement entitled '**Resource for educators**' should be reviewed in order to guide the class discussions.

For more information, visit aspect.org.au/WAUD or [click here](#) to download a Promotional Pack which includes:

- World Autism Understanding Day posters (digital files)
- World Autism Understanding Day posts for your social platforms (Make sure to use the hashtag **#WAUD2024**)
- Digital meeting backgrounds

Classroom Activity Pack

World Autism Understanding Day

About World Autism Understanding Day

Developed in 2007 by the United Nations (UN), World Autism Awareness Day is celebrated each year on 2 April.

For over a decade, Autistic Advocacy groups have been calling for organisations and governments to shift away from the word 'awareness' to 'understanding' or 'acceptance'. That's because language – and specifically how we use language to talk about autism and Autistic people – is so important.

After listening to the experiences and thoughts of Autistic people, Aspect has decided to move away from 'awareness' of autism – to a day where we work to foster a greater understanding and acceptance of autism and Autistic people.

On 2 April we are inviting you to join us to celebrating World Autism Understanding Day

We have developed some resources that you can share with your classroom and get your students involved to better understand autism.

The activities are all designed to help students get an insight into autism, and what it is like to live in the world as an Autistic person. The aim is to bring to life some of the social, communication and sensory differences of Autistic people.

Note: if you have an Autistic student in your class, it is important to be sensitive to how they may feel about the activities in the work pack. If they are aware of their autism diagnosis, it may be helpful to discretely discuss these activities ahead of time. They may or may not be interested in leading this discussion or giving insights from their own lived experience. At the same time, they may not be interested in being singled out, and some may not wish to disclose to their peers. Both are valid and it is important to give students that choice.

Ask students what they know about World Autism Understanding Day and autism.

Some questions to ask your class:

1. What is autism?
2. Have you heard of World Autism Understanding Day and what do you think it is?
3. Why do you think people celebrate World Autism Understanding Day?

Some key things you might decide to communicate can be found in 'What is Autism?' in this resource pack.

A Note on Colours and Symbols of Autism

There is no one universally recognised colour or symbol for autism. Historically, the most used has been the colour blue, and the puzzle piece. Within the Autistic community, however, these symbols are considered by the majority, to be non-representative of Autistic people and are not preferred. More recently, the colour and symbol used by the Autistic community is the infinity symbol, in rainbow or gold.

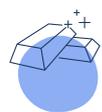
Relevance of:



- The infinity symbol – This is used to represent inclusion of all people. The broader neurodiversity movement also uses the rainbow infinity symbol.



- Rainbow – to reflect the diversity of the autism spectrum.



- Gold – 'Au' is the symbol for the chemical element, gold. Additionally, the Autistic community consider themselves rare and valuable, just like gold.

Now is a good time to briefly explain about autism or perhaps even to give the class 10 mins to do their own research (depending on their age). You can find out more about autism and how it impacts people by visiting aspect.org.au

Thanks for supporting World Autism Understanding Day 2024 – together we can all create a more inclusive and respectful world. For more information visit aspect.org.au/WAUD



Research – the diversity in Autism (years 5–12)

There's a saying in the Autistic community, 'once you have met one Autistic person, you have met one Autistic person'. What that means is that despite demonstrating a shared set of diagnostic criteria, autism can present very differently from person-to-person.

This activity aims to develop students' knowledge of the diversity that exists within the Autistic community. By developing this knowledge, students will have a less stereotyped view of what autism is, and be able to have greater understanding for Autistic peers.

Learning Objectives

- Raise awareness and understanding of autism
- Generate discussion and questions about autism
- Revise key terms from the syllabus

Curriculum – Years 5 – 12

- Social and emotional growth and development patterns
- Encourages an understanding and valuing of self and others
- Develop and maintain friendships and work cooperatively as a group member
- Express needs, wants, feelings, ideas and opinion

What you need

Computers with internet access.

How to do it

Teacher is to assign students into small groups. Allow your class 30 – 40 minutes to research the well-known, Autistic individuals below using a computer or iPad. At the end of the lesson, allow 10 minutes for a leader of each group to report back what they have learnt.

List of Autistic individuals:

- Chloe Hayden – Actor and Autism Advocate
- Stephen Wiltshire – British Artist
- Tim Sharp – Australian Artist
- Lisa Gershwin – Scientist
- Carly Fleischmann – Creator of the YouTube channel, 'Speechless with Carly Fleischmann'
- Tim Chan – Author and Autism Advocate

Some question prompts may include:

- What are they known for?
- What is their area/s of strength/interest?
- How do they communicate?
- How has their autism helped them?
- What adaptations have they had to make because of autism?

Activity two



Autism, Sensory Processing and Focus (K-6)

Autism commonly affects the way Autistic people experience and process the sensory environment. For some, sensory input can feel much more intense than most people. For others, sensory input doesn't register very strongly. Also, some people may experience a mixture of both depending on the particular sense and sensory input. Without the 'just right' level of sensory input, a person may find it difficult to focus.

Learning Objectives

Students will develop an understanding around the following topics:

- Raise awareness and understanding of autism
- Generate discussion and questions about autism
- Understand that Autistic people might use their senses differently
- There are some ways to be supportive of an Autistic classmate

Curriculum – Years K – 12

- Social and emotional growth and development patterns
- Encourages an understanding and valuing of self and others
- Develop and maintain friendships and work cooperatively as a group member
- Express needs, wants, feelings, ideas and opinions

Preparation

Be advised, this activity has a very strong sensory component. Please make available ear muffs and a quiet corner for students who may find this difficult.

- Find a classroom worksheet from the Stage below your class. For example a math worksheet from Year 2, if your class is in Year 3. This can be any activity or worksheet, but should be something that would not be considered challenging. Make enough copies for each person to have one.
- Cue up a YouTube clip of construction noise or a loud door squeaking.

How to do it

- Advise students that this may be an overwhelming activity in terms of sound and light. If they find the experience a bit overwhelming, they can use the earmuffs or quiet corner at any time.
- Ask for about five volunteers who feel comfortable making a little noise or being a distraction.
- Assign the volunteers a task each. Tasks may include; flicking lights on and off; rolling a curtain up and down, stomping around the class, clapping hands, chattering consistently, occasionally shouting something.
- Ask volunteers to start out slowly and softly, and when you prompt them to get gradually louder and more frequent.
- Hand worksheets out to all students and instruct the students to complete them.
- After 2 minutes of working quietly, turn on the YouTube containing the distracting noise, and instruct the volunteers to start being distracting.
- Build up the intensity of the distractions over 5 minutes. If there are students finding this particularly dysregulating, finish early.



Class Discussion

Explain that for some (but not all) Autistic people, the sensory environment can be felt very intensely, particularly light and noise. Also, most people do something called 'habituation'. This is where your brain automatically tunes out background noise after a while e.g. if a cicada starts chirruping, you might notice it at first, but after a while you don't. Many Autistic people don't experience this, and tend to notice all the noises, all the time. For many Autistic students this can be very distracting when trying to complete their classwork.

Some question prompts about their experience could include:

- How easy was it to complete their work when there was no sensory distractions?
- How easy was it to complete their work by the end of the activity? Was it more difficult?
- What emotions did they feel when they were trying to complete their worksheet with all of the distractions? Prompt if needed [angry/frustrated/annoyed/distracted]
- What do they feel could be changed in a school environment to make it more inclusive for an Autistic student? Prompt [in the classroom/in the playground]

Concluding Activities

Recap briefly on what your class has learned about World Autism Understanding Day and autism, and compliment their involvement with learning more about autism.

You could ask the class to make some suggestions about how they could make the school and the world around them more inclusive for Autistic people.

Could they spread understanding by presenting what they learned to another class or in assembly?

Do they want to organise a fundraiser, such as a morning tea or walk, to raise money to support people on the autism spectrum?

Could they hold an autism mufti day where students are asked to wear the colours that represent autism (gold or rainbow)?

What things could they do to be more inclusive of all people in the playground, with their friends at home or in the classroom?