

OVERWHELMED

Sometimes youth on the Autism Spectrum become so over-whelmed they are unable to function. Most situations can be avoided by asking the youth to gauge their own comfort level.

Because the body language of Autism Spectrum people is DIFFERENT from others, you may not be able to tell when a youth is becoming overwhelmed or agitated.

1. **Shutdown** – Under severe stress, they may refuse to engage or participate
2. **Meltdown** – Under severe sensory distress, they may cry or yell
3. **Safe Place** - The best way to deal with impending shutdown or meltdown is the use of “safe place” or allowing some time away from the group.

If, despite all strategies, a youth becomes overwhelmed and begins to meltdown the best strategy is QUIET AND CALM. Loud voices or even attempts at reasoned discussion may only exacerbate.

Tips for Youth Group Leaders

Common characteristics of youth on the Autism Spectrum

The Rev. Rebecca Black

DIFFERENCES IN LANGUAGE AND VERBAL PROCESSING

1. Literal – Youth on the Autism Spectrum tend to take things literally. Although many can understand sarcasm or metaphor, be sure to explain EXACTLY what you mean. And don't make a fuss if they get it wrong – they're not trying to be funny or challenging.

2. Body Language - Youth on the Autism Spectrum may not understand body language. They may avoid eye contact, and most likely will not appreciate any form of physical contact. Arrange seating so youth can have “privacy” for/from facial expressions. Don't think they're not engaged or not listening! Don't try to force eye contact— this causes distress.

3. Hesitation in Speaking - Youth on the Autism Spectrum sometimes repeat words or hesitate between words – this is usually because they think most readily in pictures and are having

trouble choosing which words to use. Be patient and don't finish sentences – AS youth often have amazing insights and it is worth waiting for them to verbalize.

4. VISUALPROCESSING Acuity - Youth on the Autism Spectrum prefer written instruction to verbal, and picture illustrations to verbal ones. Speaking urgently or loudly will cause them distress, and too much audio input will cause them to “shut down.” Always have a quiet area available for decompression from too much input.

5. Monologuing or Perseveration - Youth on the Autism Spectrum are often “deep” learners – studying a narrow topic field exhaustively. They tend to “monologue” or “perseverate” on these preferred topics and be unaware of social cues that they have gone on too long. Help them by intervention and redirection.

SENSORY

Many youth on the Autism Spectrum are hypersensitive to their sensory environment. Helping them be comfortable will assist in their engagement with the group.

1. **Light** – flickering or buzzing lights can be painful. Replace bulbs or fixtures if necessary. Many AS youth find darkness or sudden changes in light uncomfortable. Try not to use darkness or changes such as flicking lights on and off as a signal.
2. **Noise** – Youth on the Autism Spectrum are extraordinarily sensitive to sound, and are easily overwhelmed in crowds, or when several people are talking at once. Try to assist the group in taking turns in conversation. Allowing the youth to wear ear plugs or headphones will also help.
3. **Personal Space** – Youth on the Autism Spectrum are often completely oblivious to personal space and may unintentionally offend others. It's OK to gently remind them to "step back."
4. **"SAFE" Space** – providing an agreed-upon "safe space" where youth can retreat when overwhelmed will help them stay engaged with the group. This space should be within eye and earshot of the group, but allow the youth to turn away.

TRANSITIONS

Many youth on the Autism Spectrum have difficulty shifting direction or attention from one topic or task to another

1. A **VISUAL cue** is preferable to verbal
2. **Staged "warnings"** of transitions will help – "In ten minutes, we will..." "5 more minutes.." etc.
3. **Clarity** – Mean what you say and say what you mean. Use a timer, set limits and stick to them. Youth on the Autism Spectrum are very literal and rigid—if you say "I'll be back in 10 minutes" then please do your best to stick to that. Being loose about terminology or times will cause distress.



EMOTIONAL MATURITY and "NO FILTER"

An Autism Spectrum diagnosis is based on developmental delays. This means that AS youth can lag behind their peers in several ways—especially emotional maturity and social skills.

1. Put expectations in writing
2. Don't assume youth know "correct" or "age-appropriate" ways to act
3. Understand that social skills and negotiating social situations are the equivalent of an unknown language to Autism Spectrum Youth. Other youth will probably also benefit from frank discussions about the "whys" of social behavior.
4. Many Autism Spectrum youth do not understand "social talk" – they are extremely honest and do not understand why what they say might be offensive to others.

CHANGE

One of the hallmarks of people on the Autism Spectrum is a resistance to change. Autism Spectrum Youth almost universally prefer all things in an unvarying order, and will not assume that general rules and expectations apply in new situations.

1. Preparing these youths for any changes in routine, in agenda or in expectation should be done as much in advance as possible.
2. Even minor changes can be stressful – Autism Spectrum youth do not "generalize" from one situation to another. Just because a rule applies in one space doesn't mean to them that it applies in others.
3. Explicit "rules" about expectations in each and every space the group uses will reduce anxiety

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the columns you want to balance. On the Insert menu, click Break. Click Continuous. Word inserts a continuous section break, which balances the text equally among the columns.

If you want to force a new page to start after the balanced columns, click after the continuous section break and then insert a manual page break.

Removing Columns

If your document is divided into sections, click in the section or select multiple sections you want to change.

Continued from Page 1

Continuing Articles across Pages

Your By-line

Some of the articles in this newsletter were created using linked text boxes, which allow articles to flow continuously across pages. When you add lines of words to a text box, the words in the following text box flow forward. When you delete words from a text box, the words in the next text box move back. You can link several text boxes in an article and you can have multiple articles in a document. The links do not have to occur in a forward direction.

To insert linked text boxes in a document, click Text Box on the Insert menu. Click and drag in your document where you want to insert the first text box. Insert additional text boxes where you want the text to flow.

To select the first text box, move the

Choose Columns from the Format menu, and then click One.

Formatting Text Boxes

Type your sub-heading here

Your By-line

You can change the look of a linked text box by applying color, shading, borders, and other formatting. If you want to format all the text boxes in an article, you must format them individually.

Select the text box and double click its border. If you want to change the color or borders on a text box, choose the Colors and Lines tab. To change the size, scale, or rotation, click the Size tab. To change the position of the text box on the page, click the Position Tab. If you have other text surrounding the text box, and want to change the way the text wraps around it, click the Wrapping tab.

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This Month's Events

Date
Time, Location
Event name
Type a description of your event here. For more information call 000-0000.

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Date, Time

Location

Event name

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Inserting and Editing Pictures

Your By-line

You can replace the pictures in this template with your company's art. Select the picture you want to replace, point to Picture in the Insert menu, and click From File. Choose a new picture and then click Insert. Select the Link to File box if you don't want to embed the

To edit a picture, click on it to activate the Picture toolbar. You can use this toolbar to adjust brightness and contrast, change line properties and crop the image.

You can also use the Format Picture dialog box to edit a picture. To open it, select the picture, click the right mouse button, and click Format Picture. You can change the size and position of the picture, crop it, adjust the brightness and contrast, and change the text wrapping. The pictures in this template use the tight wrapping style.

For more detailed editing, double-click on the graphic to activate the drawing layer, where you can group or ungroup picture objects, re-color, or delete objects.

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art in the newsletter. This is a good idea if you need to minimize your file size. Embedding a picture adds significantly to the size of the file. You might want to consider embedding a picture if file size is not an issue and you use a picture in every edition of your newsletter.

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Questions and Answers

Q: I would like to change some of the text box shading to improve the print quality. Can that be done?

A: Yes. To change the shading or color of a text box, select it and double click its borders to open the Format Text Box dialog box. Click the Colors and Lines tab and then choose the new color from the Color drop-down list in the Fill section.

Q: What's the best way to print this newsletter?

A: Print on 8 1/2" x 11" paper.

you're mailing without an envelope, seal with a label.

Q: I would like to use my own clip art. How do I change the art without changing the design?

A: To change a picture, click on the picture, then point to Picture on the Insert menu and click From File. Choose a new picture, and click Insert.

Q: How do I change the text and borders that appear at the bottom of every page?

A: Click Headers and Footers on the

change the text in the footer, select it and type your new text. To change the border, click Borders and Shading on the Format menu.

Q: Can I save a customized newsletter as a template for future editions?

A: Yes. Type your own information over the sample text and then click Save As on the File menu. Choose Document Template from the Save as, type drop down list (the extension should change from .doc to .dot). Save the file under a new name. Next time you want to create a newsletter,

