

Understanding Autism...

Answering Four Questions about Autism



1. What Is Autism?

According to the Mayo Clinic, autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a condition related to brain development that impacts how a person **socializes** with and **perceives** others, causing problems in social interaction and communication. The disorder also includes limited and repetitive patterns of behavior. The term spectrum in autism spectrum disorder refers to the wide range of symptoms and severity.

- Developmental conditions like autism often come bundled with other disorders. For example, nearly 75% of people with autism also have sensory processing disorder (SPD). This condition can make lights, noises, textures, and smells overwhelming.

2. How Common Is Autism?

According to a 2018 study from the CDC, approximately **1 in 59** children are diagnosed with ASD. Autism is diagnosed through observed behavior, not through a medical test, such as a blood sample. Autism is not a disease to be “cured” or something a person outgrows. However, through various therapies people with autism can work toward mitigating difficult symptoms to more easily manage the activities of daily life.

3. How Does Autism Impact Participation at Church?

Because autism is an invisible disorder, typical autistic behaviors are often misinterpreted. For example, someone with autism may find it difficult to make eye-contact during a conversation. This might be interpreted as unfriendliness, which makes forming relationships difficult. Add to this symptom difficulty processing the many sights and sounds of a church service, and it's not hard to see how church can quickly become a hostile environment for someone with autism.

4. What Can You Do?

Provide awareness about autism for those in your church. Most churches unknowingly and unintentionally create physical spaces and social expectations that exclude people with autism.

Some ideas for raising awareness about autism in your church:

- Have someone share about their experiences with autism during a church service, preferably someone who has autism.
- Provide an autism fact sheet (like the one you are reading right now) for your congregation.
- Include information about autism on your church's website, letting individuals and families affected by autism know they are welcome.

Myths About Autism

Myth:

People with autism don't want to form relationships.

Fact:

Like everyone, people with autism are created in the image of God and were made for relationship with God and others! A church that models God's love and acceptance of people with autism becomes a powerful example of the love of Christ.

Myth:

People with autism have lower intellectual capacity or people with autism are all secret geniuses.

Fact:

Autism does not necessarily impact intelligence. Roughly half of people with autism have average or above average intelligence. Because people with autism often communicate and learn differently than their peers, it may seem like they are not engaging, when in truth they're absorbing everything.

Myth:

People with autism do not experience emotion.

Fact:

People with autism experience all the same emotions you feel. This myth may come as a result of emotions being processed or communicated differently by people with autism.

Myth:

Autism is just another word for "bad parenting" or "lack of discipline."

Fact:

Autism is a real, medical condition. Through early intervention and certain behavioral therapies, people with autism can learn to better navigate their world.