

## **Caring for Individuals with Autism Training**

Caring for Individuals with Autism is not only beneficial for the families, it is becoming a necessity. Providing Respite Care for these individuals is a rewarding process for the Provider as well as providing a much needed break for the Caregiver to help reduce stress as a family unit. Below is some information for you as a PPRS provider to help you understand how to work with individuals with Autism as well as understanding the Autism diagnosis itself a bit more.

### **Understanding Autism:**

Science has not yet pinpointed the exact cause of Autism. In the last few years it has moved from the thought it is a genetic condition but focusing more in environmental, toxic, auto-immune, and viral agents. Individuals with a diagnosis in the Autism Spectrum can exhibit many symptoms including gastrointestinal issues, immune, allergies, sensory, motor, and physical conditions which should be treated to improve the overall health of the individual. Until a time that Autism can be science we do not rule out any treatments, therapies, or suspected causes. We at PPRS will work with families and practitioners to provide care that they believe is best for the individual.

### **Autism Facts: (ASD = Autism Spectrum Disorder)**

- 1) Autism affects 1 in 68 children in the United States.
- 2) ASD is more prevalent in Males
- 3) Autism itself does not affect lifespan; however those with Autism may have other factors that do. (ex: seizure disorders)



- 4) ASD is the fastest growing developmental disorder
- 5) ASD symptoms are treatable
- 6) Early intervention is the key to positive changes
- 7) Around 40% of children with Autism do not speak

While there are similarities to providing Respite Care to individuals with ASD and typical care there are also many differences. Providing care to an individual with Autism Spectrum Disorder requires a bit more:

- One on One Focus
- Behavioral Interventions
- Proper Technique and Rewarding
- Encompassing Everyday life skills
- Redirection Techniques for Improper Behavior
- Following Instructions
- Good Verbal Skills
- Sometimes knowing a bit of Sign Language can help communicate

### **Caring for Individuals with Autism:**

Anytime a respite provider will be caring with an ASD individual it is of the utmost importance to understand the individual as best you can before your first shift. At the meet and greet please thoroughly go over the service plan and ask the caregiver and individual if possible any questions you might have about the following items.

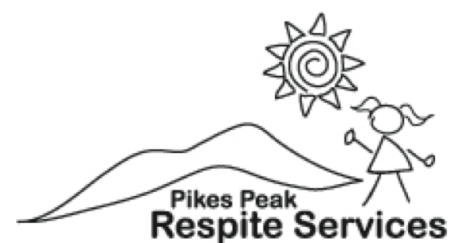


- Behaviors
- Communication
- Verbalization
- Medical Needs
- Habits
- Things the individuals like and don't like • Hobbies

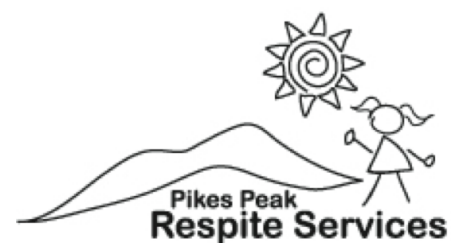
It is a requirement to provide safe and effective respite care to know the individual the best you can before working your first shift. Listen to the primary care giver, they are the ones that know them the best, listen to the individual and what he or she likes, does not like and the best way to ensure the best visit possible.

If at any point you are not comfortable with your knowledge or training while working with individuals with Autism please let Beverly or Aimee know and we will ensure that you get more training until you are completely comfortable with the situation.

- Behavior can be a form of communication, particularly for those whose skills in communication are greatly impacted. To determine a pattern, pay attention to what occurs right before and immediately after a behavior. If you are stumped, ask other parents and professionals what might be the underlying cause(s) of behaviors.
- Know that just because an individual may be nonverbal, he or she is still able to hear and understand much of what is said around them. Make sure all messages are positive.



- Every individual is different, so it's important to be mindful of sensory input in the individual's environment. Consider the visual input (e.g. fluorescent or bright lights), auditory input (e.g. loud noises), tactile input (e.g. certain surfaces, textures, fabrics), and smell/tastes (strong perfumes or certain food textures) that may be bothering the individual with an autism spectrum disorder. If these sensory issues are not addressed, repetitive behaviors and a failure to respond to certain relevant stimuli may develop.
- Break tasks down into smaller steps. Showing pictures of each step, modeling the task, and saying each step out loud can help facilitate learning. Set students up for success and provide rewards when goals are reached.
- Try to keep language as simple as possible by using minimal words when making your point or providing information. Avoid the use of sarcasm and idioms, as these may be taken literally.
- Unstructured activities and wait time can be a source of anxiety and confusion for some individuals. Specific directions and checklists of what to do during unstructured activities can be beneficial. Bringing a "wait time" activity (i.e. books, toys) can ease this anxiety.
- Individuals on the spectrum will read our emotional level about a situation. Use a calm tone of voice and avoid physically touching the individual, even in the midst of a behavioral outburst. Excited adults yield excited children. Practice your poker face.



- Many individuals with autism spectrum disorder may be less likely to communicate for social purposes and will need to practice their conversation skills. This may include talking about a topic that is not their special interest, staying on topic, turn taking, asking related/ appropriate questions, checking for their conversation partner's understanding and predicting what information their partner may or may not know about a concept or situation.
- Some individuals will engage in restricted and repetitive behaviors because they have a limited repertoire of alternative behaviors and interests. It is important to expose individuals with ASD to a variety of activities and experiences and explicitly teach them leisure skills.

No two individuals with Autism are the same, no two shifts for respite care will be the same. Each individual will present new challenges as well as new ways to have a successful respite shift. No one understands Autism to the full extent therefore understanding your client and his or her caregiver the best you can will help you in your provider evolution and learning. While on a PPRS respite shift is is your responsibility to ensure a safe, fun environment for the individual so that the caregiver may have a much needed break.