

## Activity 1—Different is good

The following activity is intended to be used with school-age peers of children with an autism spectrum disorder (ASD). A teacher, parent, caregiver, or other advocate can lead this activity with children. If this activity is being done in a classroom setting, the child with ASD should not be present.

### **Materials needed:**

- Newsprint/paper/board
- Markers or chalk

### **Preparation:**

- Write the following questions on a sheet of paper or the board:
- What are three ways people can be different from each other?
  - How does being different make YOU feel?

Before asking peers to answer these questions, take a few moments to answer them for yourself. Think about your answers and the feelings they bring up. This will help you empathize with the students' feelings.

### **Procedure:**

- Lead the peers through the above questions. Ask each question, giving peers time to say their answers out loud. Write their responses on the paper or board.
- Guide the peers through a short discussion of what autism spectrum disorders are and how children with ASD have some characteristics that are different from their peers. You may choose to use the Autism Classroom Connections video to provide more information on children with ASD. You may say: *Children with autism spectrum disorders experience the world differently. Some sights, sounds, feelings can be very overwhelming. Yet, we all have things that make us different, like we discussed before.*
- Then, ask peers:
  - How can having friends who are different than you be a good thing?
  - How can you be a good friend to someone with an autism spectrum disorder?

## Activity 2— We're all the same on the inside

This activity can be done on its own or as an extension of Activity 1: Differences are Good. The activity is intended for peers of children with an autism spectrum disorder (ASD)

### **Materials needed:**

- One brown and one white egg
- Two small bowls

### **Preparation:**

Discuss with peers the ways in which people are alike (for example, everyone has a nose, eyes, two arms, and so forth). Discuss how people are different (for example, some people have green eyes; some wear glasses; and so forth).

### **Procedure:**

1. Show students a brown egg and a white egg.
2. Discuss the eggs' similarities and differences.
3. Turn away from the class and break each egg in a bowl. Hide the shells.
4. Ask the students if they can tell which bowl contains the egg from the brown shell and which egg contains the egg from the white shell.
5. Conclude the activity with a discussion about how people may look or act differently on the outside but are all similar on the inside.

As an extension to this activity, students could create a "chain of diversity."

1. Using colored construction paper, ask students to cut two strips of paper.
2. On the first strip of paper, instruct students to write down one attribute that makes them similar to other classmates. On the second strip of paper, ask them to write down one attribute that makes them different.
3. Help the students create a paper chain that links together these similarities and differences.

*Note: The chain can be hung in the classroom as a visual representation of how students' similarities and differences "link" them together.*



## Activity 3— Social rules

The following activity is intended to be used with school-age peers of children with an autism spectrum disorder (ASD). A teacher, parent, caregiver, or other advocate can lead this activity with children. If this activity is being done in a classroom setting, the child with ASD should not be present.

### **Materials needed:**

- Paper and pencils

### **Preparation:**

Begin this activity by briefly discussing with the students how some children with ASD have trouble understanding simple social rules or etiquette. Give examples, such as: They may interrupt a conversation inappropriately; they may talk about one topic nonstop without letting someone else talk; or they may not understand jokes. Discuss with them how children with ASD may feel uncomfortable in social situations because they do not know how to act and may feel anxious.

### **Procedure:**

1. Divide the class into small groups of 4 to 5 children. Ask each group to develop a new social rule for the group. For example, they could decide that whenever a person says hi, everyone has to jump on one leg. The point is for them to come up with a rule such that it would be hard for other members of the class to figure out why they are doing that particular action. They may want to brainstorm or write down their idea on a piece of paper.
2. Once the groups decide on their rules, ask one member of each group to interact with another group. Do this one at a time.
3. After each group has had an opportunity to demonstrate its new rule and get others to guess what it is, ask the class how it made them feel to interact with the other groups. Were they uncomfortable not understanding the rules? How could it have been easier?
4. Conclude this activity by emphasizing that it is helpful to explain certain rules or situations to students with ASD. This will help students with ASD feel included and more part of the class.