

# **AUTISM:** A TRAINING **FOR FIRST RESPONDERS**



**CENTRE de RESSOURCES et de FORMATION  
RESOURCE and TRAINING CENTRE**



# OBJECTIVES

1. The importance of training first responders about autism spectrum disorders (ASDs)
2. What is autism?
3. Communication strategies
4. Deescalate a crisis situation
5. Complications
6. 911 calls
7. Resources

# THE IMPORTANCE OF TRAINING – *PREVALENCE*

- About 1 in 68 children have been identified with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) according to estimates from the CDC.
- ASD is reported to occur in all racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups.
- It is 4.5 times more common among boys (1 in 42) than among girls.
- ASD commonly co-occurs with other developmental, psychiatric, neurologic, chromosomal, and genetic diagnosis.
- The co-occurrence of one or more non-ASD developmental diagnosis is 83%.

# NUMBER OF CHILDREN IDENTIFIED WITH ASD



**1 in 68**



U.S. Department of  
Health and Human Services  
Centers for Disease  
Control and Prevention

# THE IMPORTANCE OF TRAINING – *MISINTERPRETED BEHAVIOURS*

“Mother of boy with autism says Cornwall police treated him inhumanly during arrest” – CBC News



“Florida Cop Charged with Attempted Manslaughter in Shooting of Autistic Man’s Unarmed Therapist” – NBC news

# WHAT IS AUTISM?

**Autism is a neurological disorder that affects:**

- Communication
- Social relations
- Learning
- Behaviours
- Sensory integration

**The learning, thinking, and problem-solving abilities of people with ASD can range from gifted to severely challenged.**

# AUTISM

*Persons with autism may possess the following characteristics in various combinations and in varying degrees of severity.*



Inappropriate laughing or giggling



No real fear of dangers



Apparent insensitivity to pain



May not want cuddling



Sustained unusual or repetitive play; Uneven physical or verbal skills



May avoid eye contact



May prefer to be alone



Difficulty in expressing needs; May use gestures



Inappropriate attachments to objects



Insistence on sameness



Echoes words or phrases



Inappropriate response or no response to sound



Spins objects or self



Difficulty in interacting with others

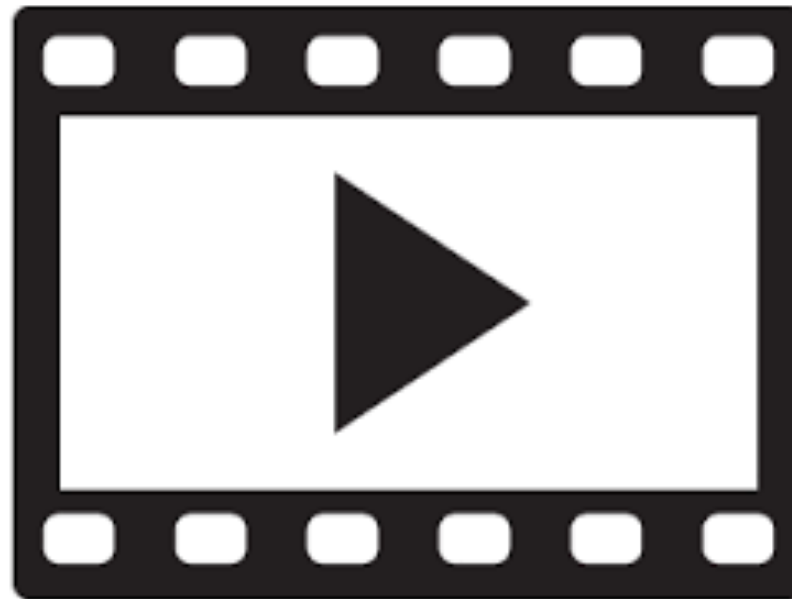
# CHARACTERISTICS

## A person with ASD can:

- Engage in repetitive behaviours
- Appear unaware when people call their name or talk to them
- Avoid eye contact and prefer being alone
- Have trouble expressing their needs
- Be sensitive to touch, sounds of lights
- Not understand notions of danger or security rules



# VIDEO “THIS IS AUTISM”

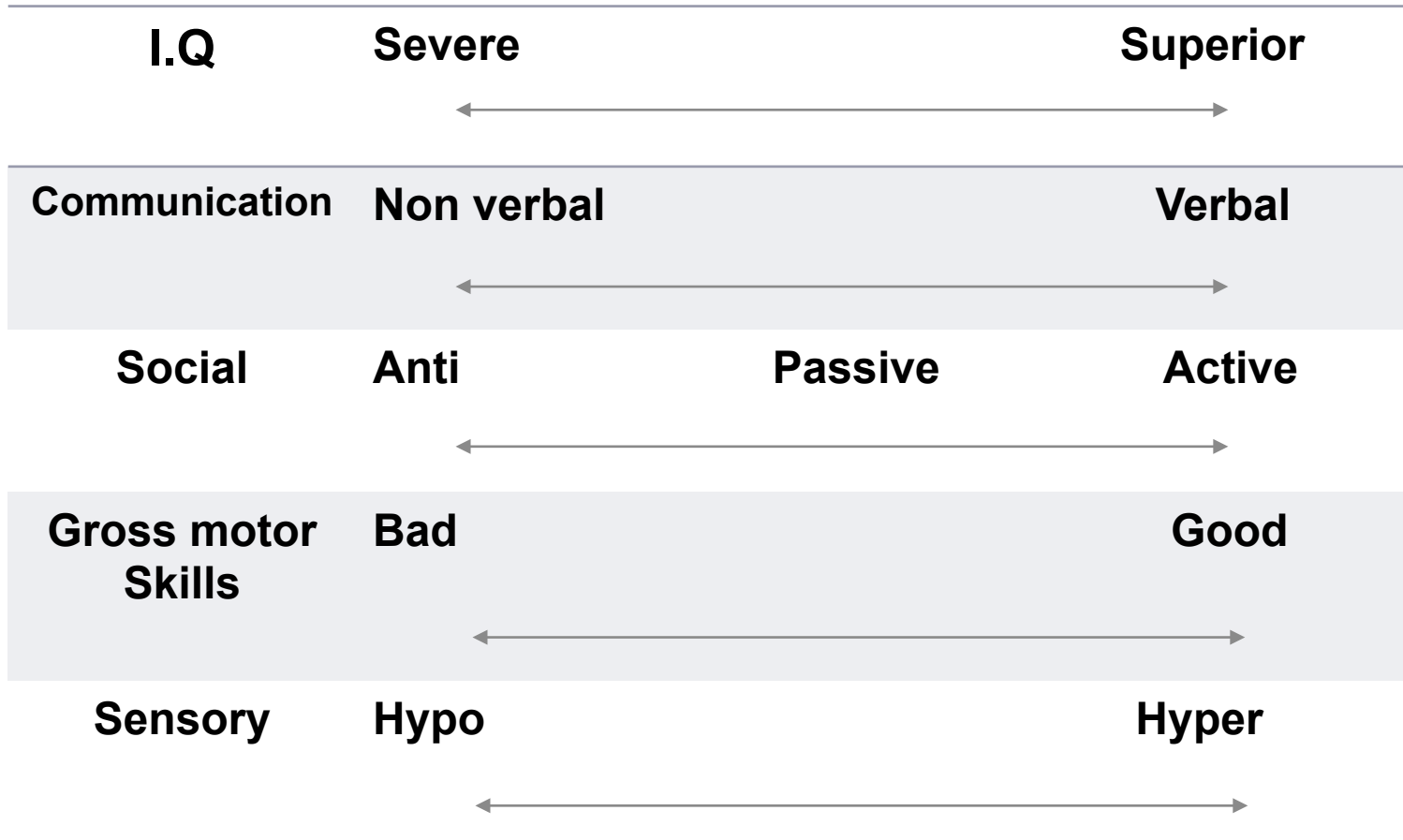


*[asdfirstresponders.ca](http://asdfirstresponders.ca)*

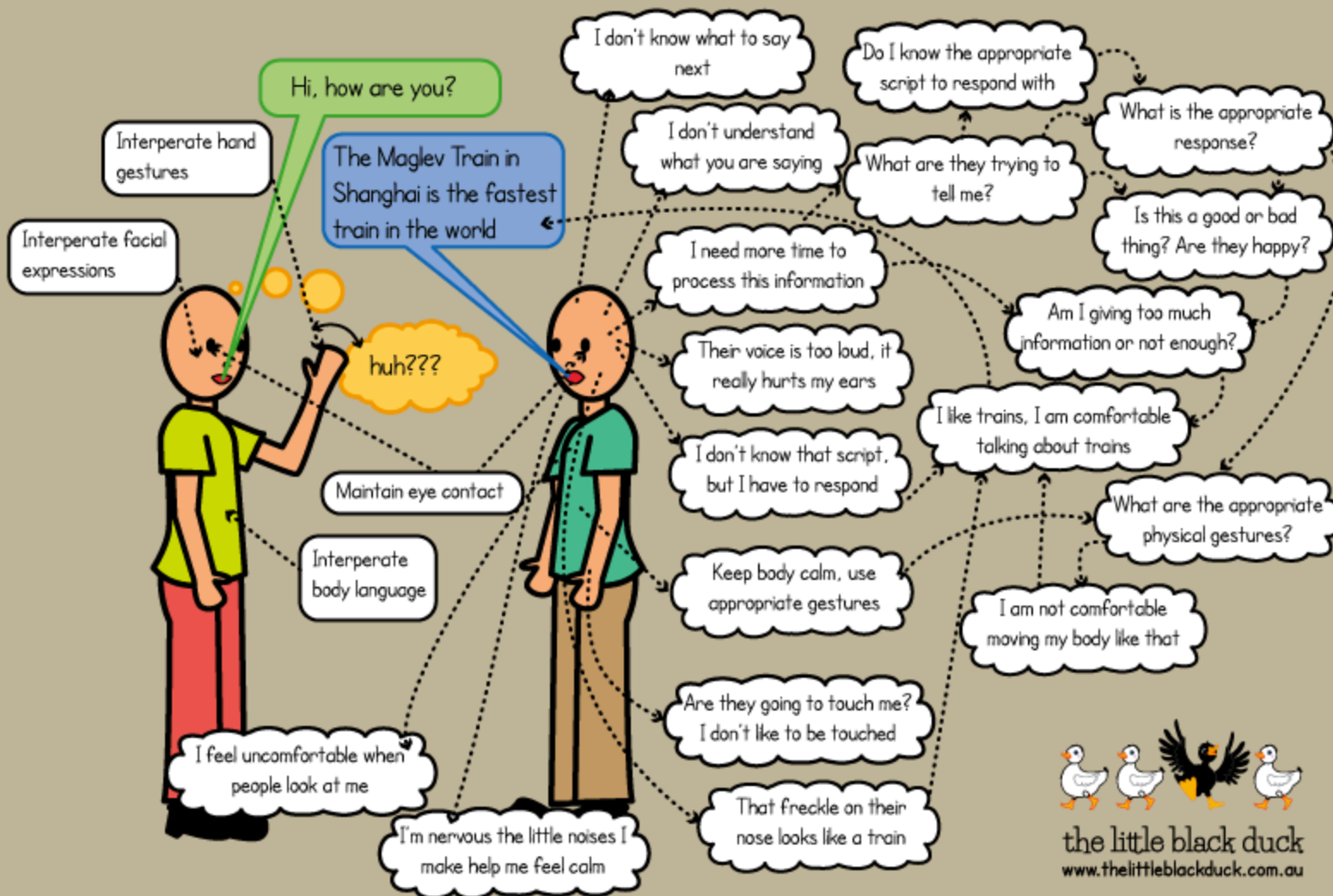
# RELATED DISORDERS

- Intellectual disorder
- Sensory integration disorder
- Anxiety disorder
- Depression
- Characteristics of obsessive compulsive disorder
- Medical problems
- Sleep problems
- Epilepsy

# A SPECTRUM



# communication and autism



# COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

1. Speak in short and clear sentences
2. Give step by step instructions
3. Avoid the use of sarcasm or popular expressions
4. Give the person enough time to respond to your instruction
5. Use gestures or model the instruction

# DEESCALATE A CRISIS SITUATION

**Consider the sensory environment.**

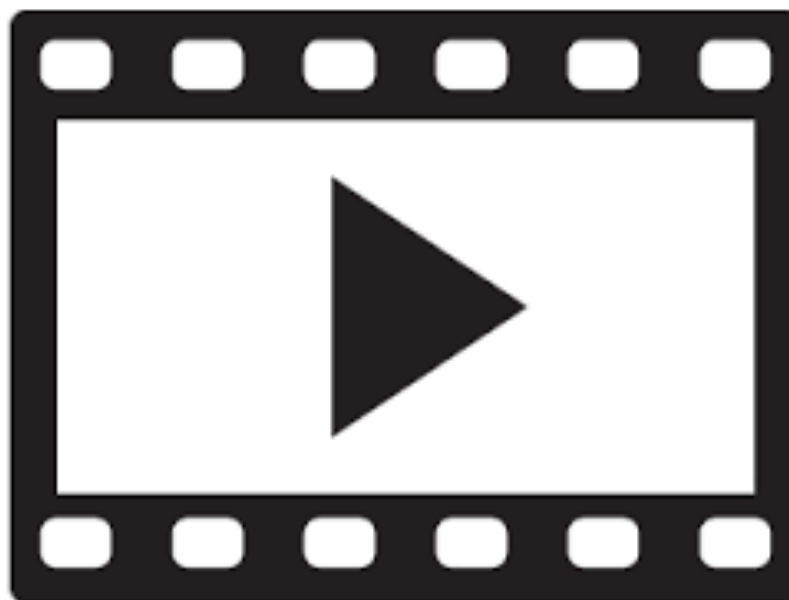
- Flashing lights
- Loud sirens
- Radios
- Big crowds
- Invading personal space

**The factors can overwhelm a person with autism and increase their anxiety.**

# DEESCALATE A CRISIS SITUATION

- Remain calm and reassuring
- Give clear step by step instructions
- Avoid touching the person or inform them before doing so
- Avoid crowds
- If possible, turn off flashing lights
- If possible, turn off sirens
- **GIVE TIME**

# VIDEO: “SKILLS AND STRATEGIES FOR FIRST RESPONDERS”



*[asdfirstresponders.ca](http://asdfirstresponders.ca)*



# COMPLICATIONS

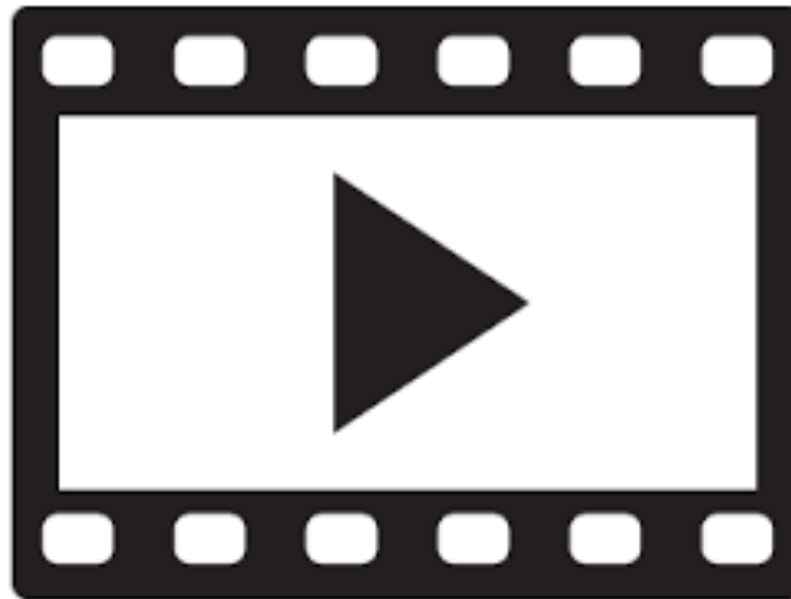
## People with autism may:

- Look for places to hide
- Refuse help from a police officer or firefighter
- Feel intimidated by the presence of a first responder
- Not understand the notion of danger or safety regulations
- Appear to be difficult or aggressive with a first responder

# 911 CALLS

- A person is acting “weird”
- An intervention by a parent or caregiver is wrongly interpreted
- A person is looking inside a house or in a yard
- A person is in someone’s pool
- Someone’s behaviour is escalating

# VIDEO 3: “AUTISM: A ROUNDTABLE”



*[asdfirstresponders.ca](http://asdfirstresponders.ca)*

# RESOURCES

[www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)

[www.autismspeaks.ca](http://www.autismspeaks.ca)

[www.casda.ca](http://www.casda.ca)

[www.autismcanada.org](http://www.autismcanada.org)

[www.cnaf.net](http://www.cnaf.net)

# IMAGES

[c2w.com](http://c2w.com)

[blog.magestic.com](http://blog.magestic.com)

[cdc.gov](http://cdc.gov)

[cbc.ca](http://cbc.ca)

[nbcnews.com](http://nbcnews.com)

[emaze.com](http://emaze.com)