

The background image shows a group of police officers in uniform and high-visibility vests. One officer in the foreground is holding a plate of food. To the right, a young child in a blue winter hat and jacket is smiling. The image is overlaid with a large, semi-transparent teal arrow pointing to the right.

Autism Spectrum Disorder and the Justice System

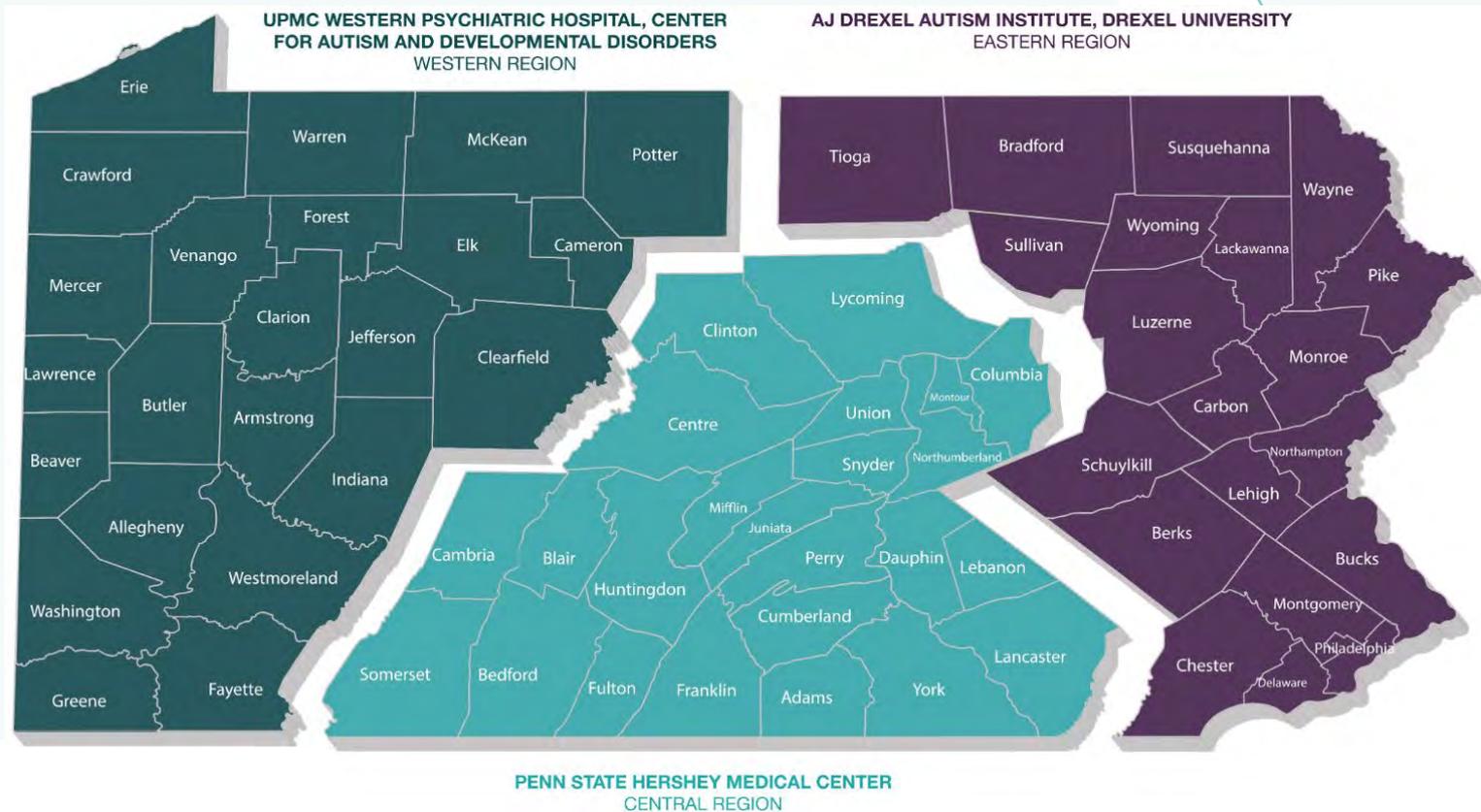
Kate Hooven, MS, Justice System Project Coordinator



Bringing autism resources together

What is ASERT?

Autism Services, Education, Resources and Training



What does ASERT do?

support

THE AUTISM
COMMUNITY
THROUGHOUT
PENNSYLVANIA



educate

INDIVIDUALS WITH
AUTISM AND THEIR
FAMILIES,
PROFESSIONALS,
AND COMMUNITY
MEMBERS



measure

DATA, NEEDS, AND
CHANGE



build

RESOURCES,
PROGRAMS, AND
INNOVATIVE
PROJECTS



connect

LOCAL, REGIONAL, AND
STATEWIDE RESOURCES



AUTISM 101

What is Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)?

- ◆ Very complex neurological condition
- ◆ Life-long condition: autism is something an individual is born with; it is not acquired and individuals do not “outgrow” Autism Spectrum Disorder.
- ◆ Involves challenges in social, communication, and behavioral development
- ◆ It is not a mental illness and not an intellectual disability; however those diagnoses can co-exist.

What Causes ASD?

- Combination of genetics and environment
 - Researchers have identified a number of genes associated with the disorder
 - No specific environmental causes have been identified yet



Source: National Institutes of Health-NINDS

Myths & Misconceptions

MYTH #1:

For the longest time, there was an assumption that individuals with ASD also experienced intellectual disability.

FACT:

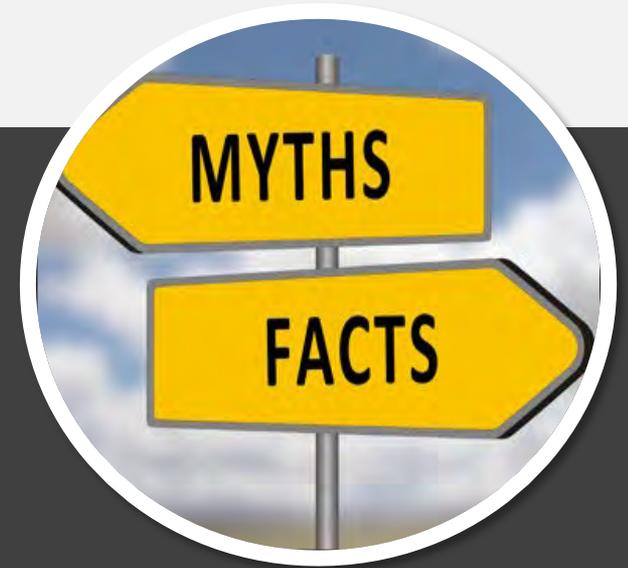
Autism is a Spectrum Disorder

MYTH #2:

ASD is a disability that affects children.

FACT:

ASD is a lifelong challenge. Children with ASD become adults with ASD.



Myths & Misconceptions



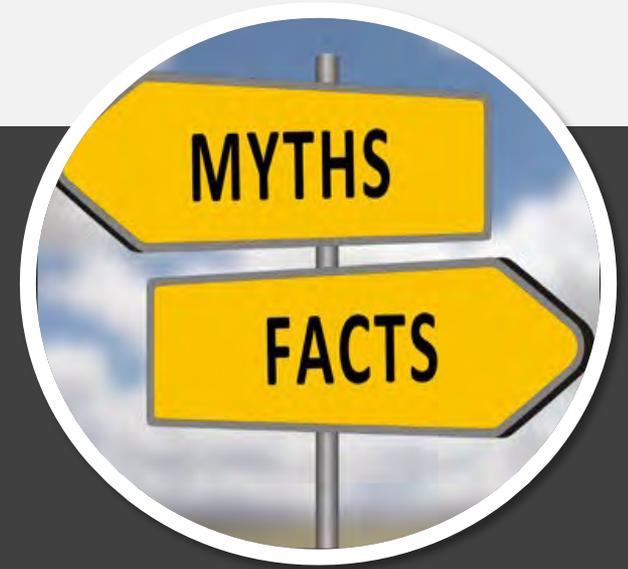
MYTH #3:

Assumption that individuals with ASD were “savants” akin to Rain Man.

FACT:

ASD is broad continuum with individuals showing a broad range of strength and challenges.

“When you have met one person with ASD, you have met ONE person with ASD”



Myths & Misconceptions

MYTH #4:

ASD is caused by bad parenting
("Refrigerator moms")

FACT:

ASD is a neuro-developmental, brain-based disorder. We know ASD is caused by a combination of genetic and environmental factors, and that is being thoughtfully researched.



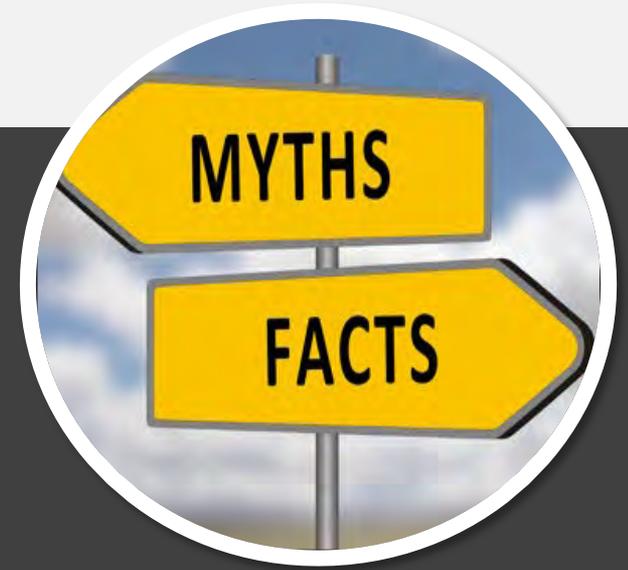
Myths & Misconceptions

MYTH #5:

ASD used to be regarded as a low incidence disability.

FACT:

The Spectrum is broad and prevalence is now 1:36. This is attributable to several factors including better diagnosis and a broadening of the autism umbrella.



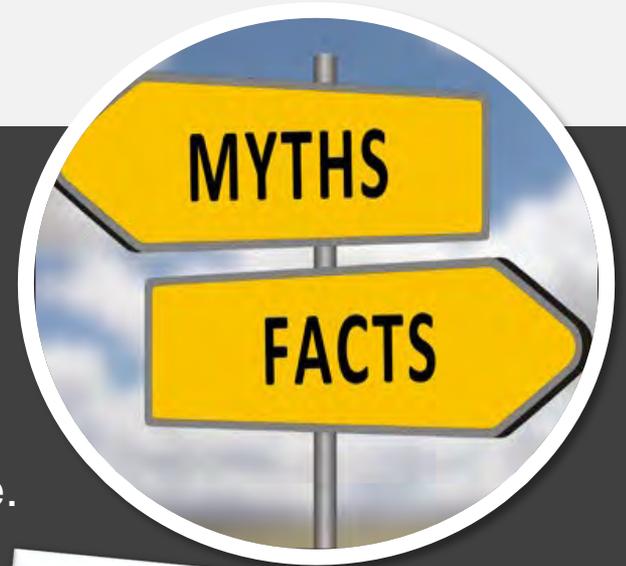
Myths & Misconceptions

Myth #6: ASD can be cured.

FACT: There is no cure for ASD, but with the right kind of support, provided by some well trained professionals, individuals can learn, grow, contribute.

Myth #7: Vaccinations cause autism.

FACT: Vaccinations **DO NOT** cause autism. Correlation is not causality.



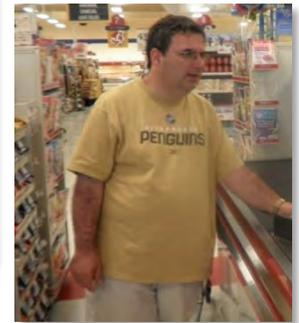
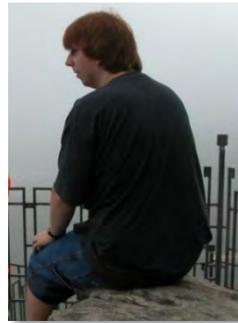
**AUTISM HAS
NO PHYSICAL
CHARACTERISTICS**



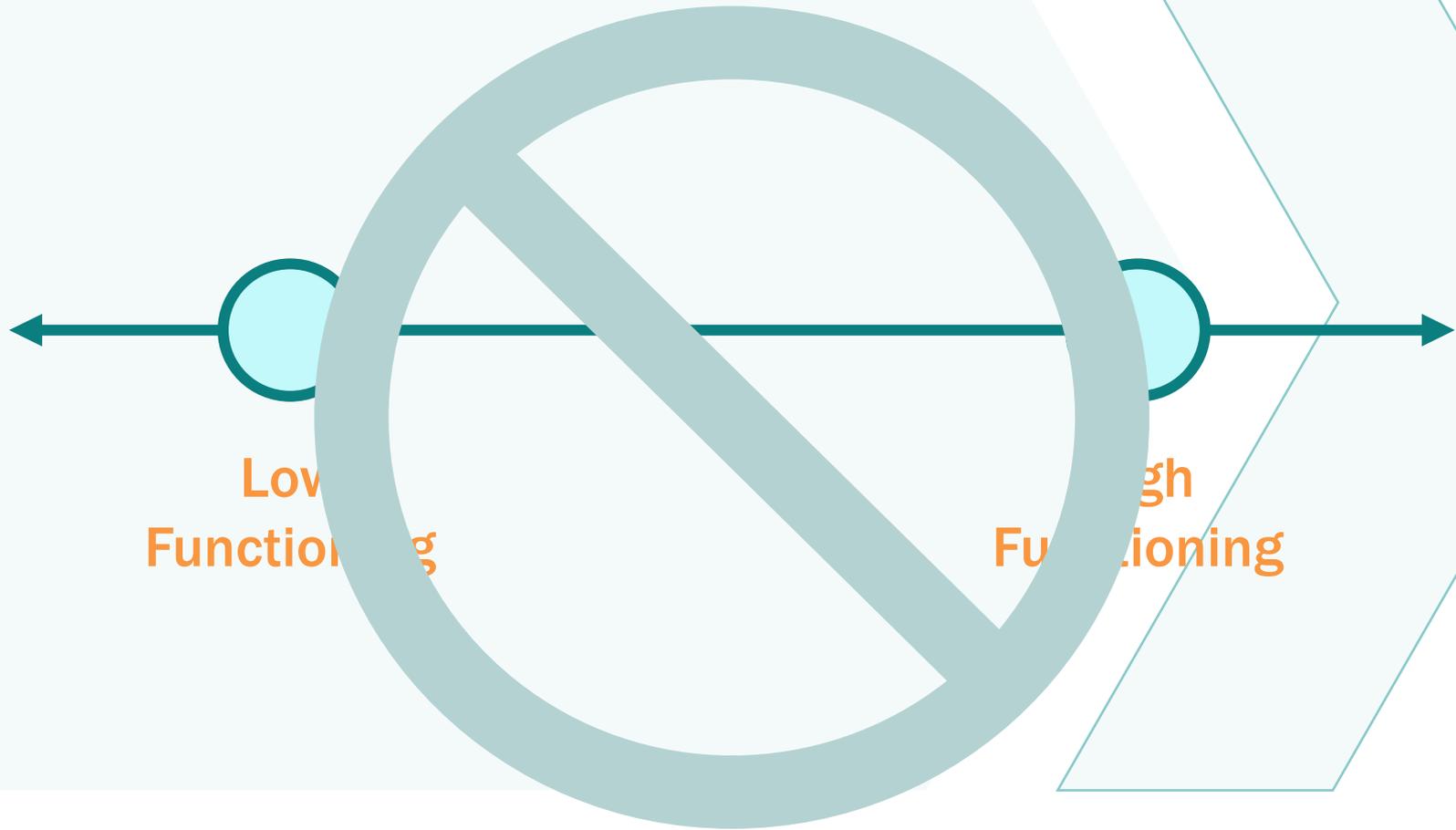


The term “spectrum” refers to the wide range of symptoms, skills, and levels of disability in functioning that can occur in people with ASD.

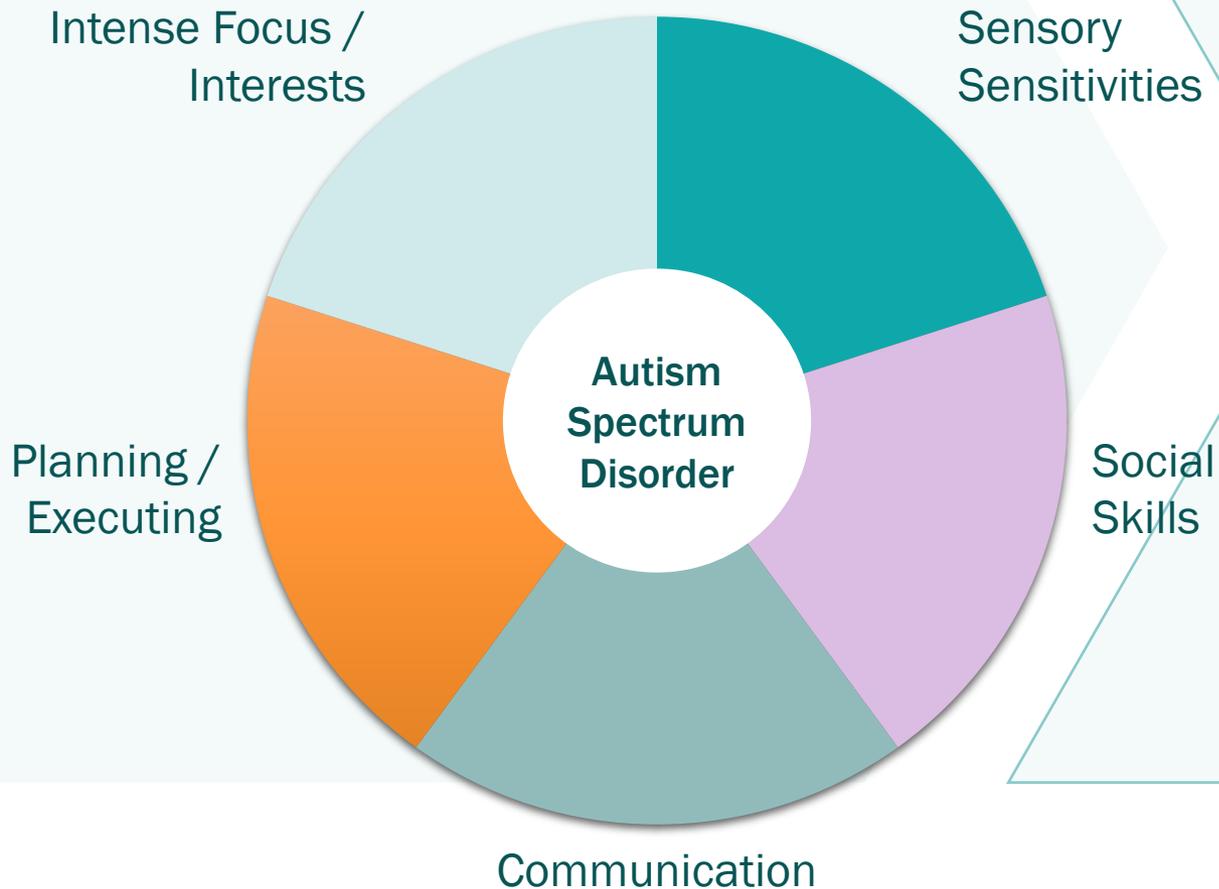
No two people with ASD are alike, even if they have the same diagnosis.



Explaining the Spectrum



The Autism Spectrum: Re-conceptualized



Social Interaction Characteristics

01 Lack of Attention to Faces

02 Reduced Eye Contact

03 Lack of Social Reciprocity

04 Difficulty in Receiving and Expressing Emotions

05 Difficult in Developing Peer Relationships

06 Difficulty in Using Nonverbal Social Communication

Social Interaction

Tools/Strategies for Little/No Eye Contact

- Does not mean they are not listening
- Wait for their response first
- Smile and engage
- Try to capture attention, but do not force it

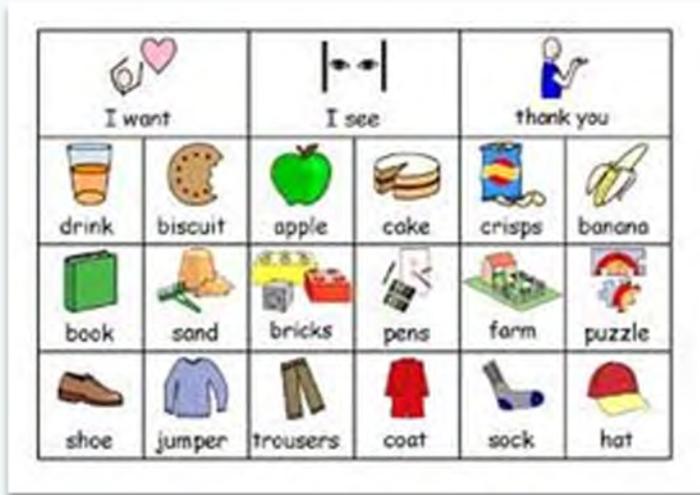


Communication Characteristics

- Absence or Delay in Language
- Stereotyped or Repetitive Use of Language
- Difficulties in Initiating or Maintaining Conversation
- Deficits in Voice Tone
- Lack of Social Play

Communication Difficulties

Tools/Strategies for Lack of/Delayed Language



**Picture Exchange
Communication
System (PECS)**



**Alternative
Communication**

Restricted or Repetitive Behavior

01 Stereotyped,
Repetitive Motor
Mannerisms

02 Restricted
Interests

03 Inflexible
Adherence to
Routines or Rituals

04 Preoccupation
with Parts of
Objects

STRATEGY

Quiet

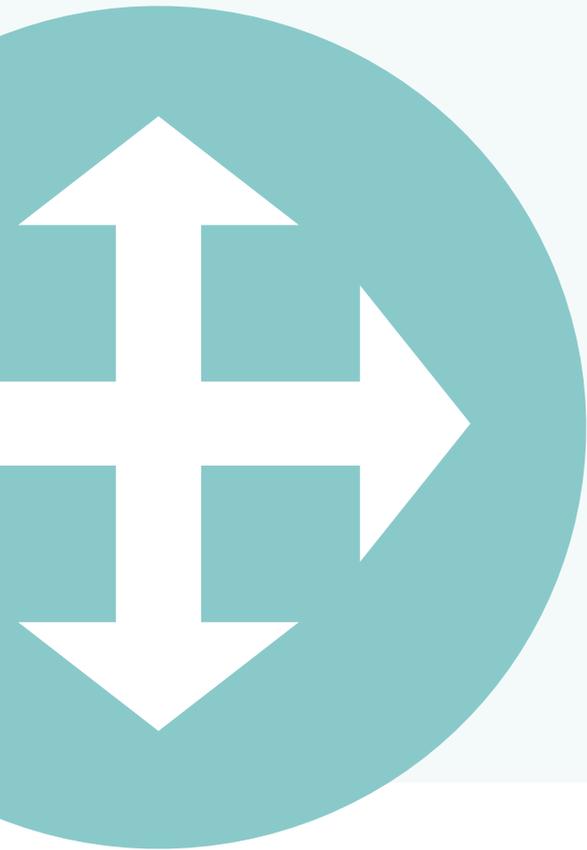
Change is a Challenge

- Change causes reactions
- Unknown can be scary
- Same is “safe”

How Change May Appear

- Defiance
- Stubbornness
- Melting Down
- Shutting Down
- Failure to Adjust

Preparing for Change



- Provide **visual cues**
- Practice**
- Give advance **notice**
- Keep **sensory needs** in mind
- No **vague or abstract** language

Overstimulation

Signs of Possible Overstimulation

- Flapping
- Pacing
- Rocking
- Scripting
- Loud Verbalizations

Which Can Lead To

- Tantrums (e.g. yelling, flapping)
- Eloping (running away)
- Self Injurious Behavior (biting self, hitting head)
- Aggression



TOOLS AND STRATEGIES

TIPS & TRICKS

- 1 Use visual schedules
- 2 Have a quiet room/space
- 3 Use a motivational system
- 4 Have communication strategy in place
- 5 Be mindful of triggers and escalating behaviors
- 6 Give alternative, replacement activities

Interviewing/Court Testimony

Determine how the individual communicates
(verbal/gestures/device)

Use the individual's words (especially if they use a communication device)

Build trust and rapport/caring attitude

Use visuals

Take breaks

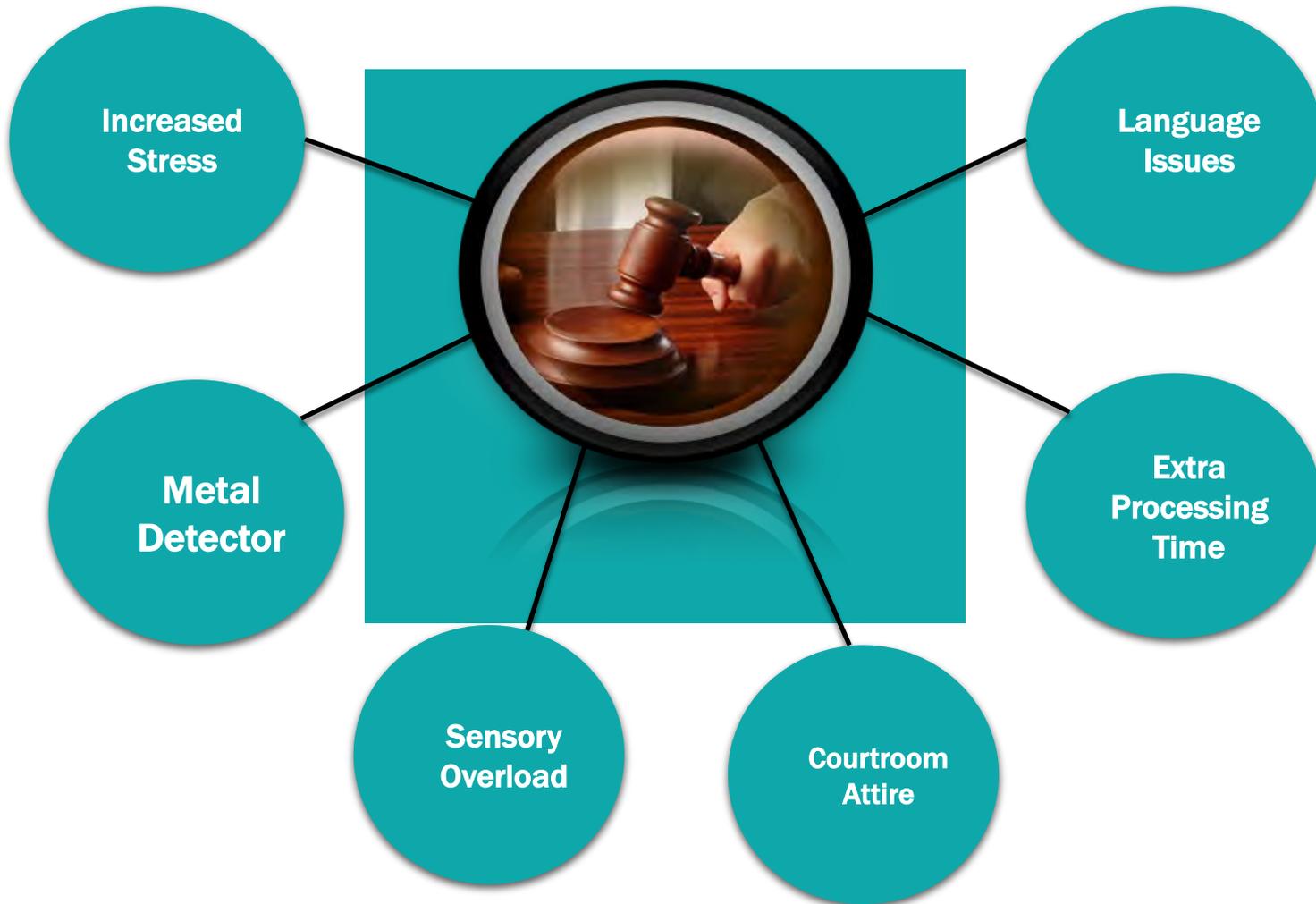
Timing of the interview is important

Ensure the physical space is conducive to sensory needs

Avoid Infantilization

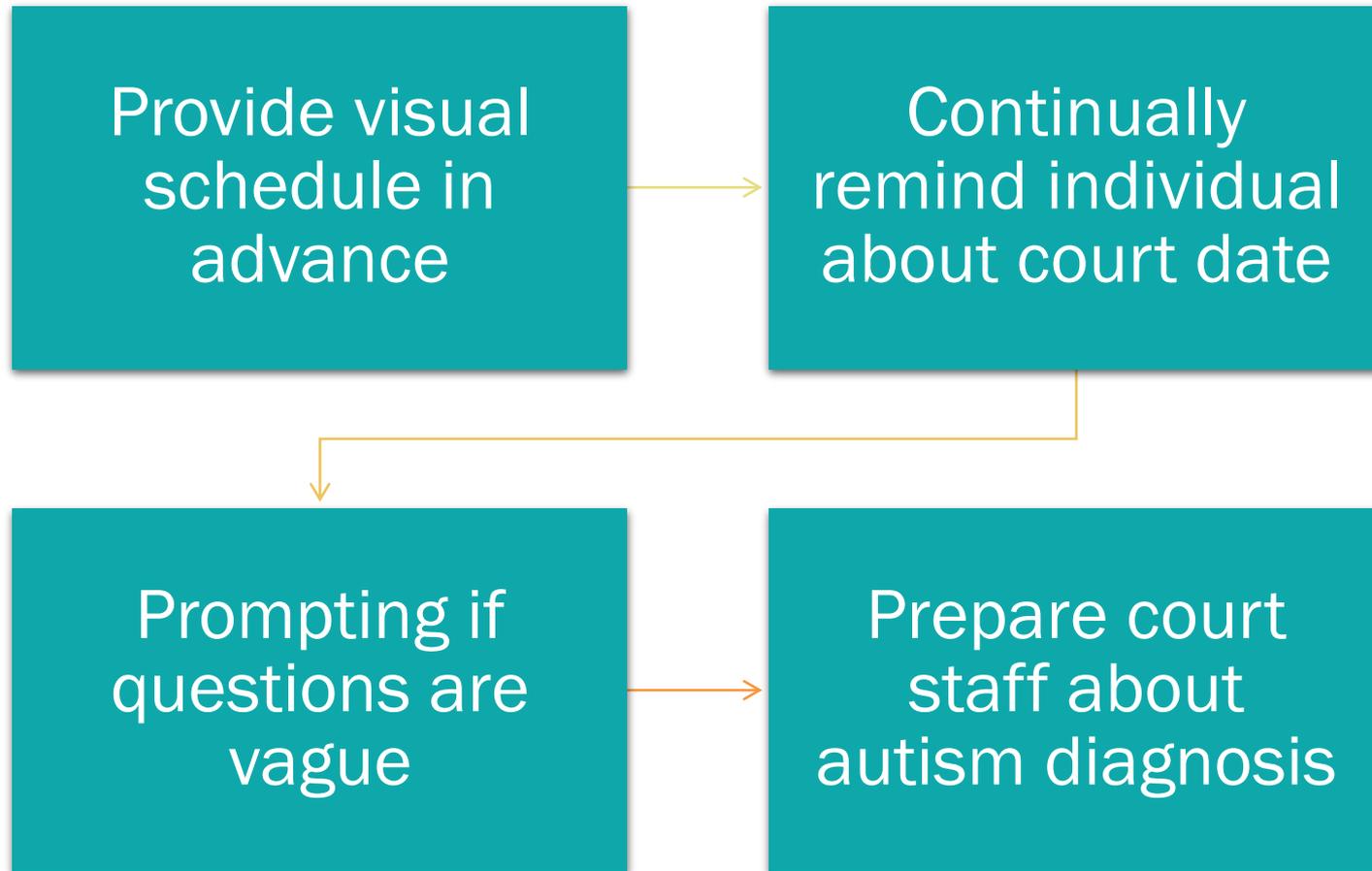
Use same interviewer every time

APPEARING IN COURT



APPEARING IN COURT (CONT.)

Tools/Strategies for Supporting Individual in Court



Court Room Decorum Expectations



Stand when the Judge enters



Keep disruptive behaviors to a minimum



Dress appropriately



Be on Time

Summons/Notices/Complaints



Fines, Costs and Restitution

- 85% of autistic adults are unemployed
- Payment plan support
- Visual schedule of payment plan
- Understanding the difference between court costs, fines and restitution

IMPORTANCE OF SHARING THEIR DIAGNOSIS

People may not recognize symptoms of ASD and may misinterpret them

People may assume individual is under the influence of drugs or alcohol

People may believe individual has a mental health diagnosis

People may assume individual is being uncooperative

People may be concerned of deception with little to no eye contact

IMPORTANCE OF SHARING THEIR DIAGNOSIS

Minority groups tend to be diagnosed later and less often

Autism in some countries may still hold a stigma, lower diagnosis rate

Some may be fearful of sharing their diagnosis

Fear a diagnosis could impact employment opportunities

Fear of being seen as “less”



Resources

PA Autism Training Conference (PATC)

- November 7th-9th
- Co-run by the ASERT Collaborative and the Office of Developmental Programs: Bureau of Supports for Autism and Special Populations
- 16th Annual PATC
- Topics: aging, reentry after incarceration, communication, neurodiversity, and intersectionality
- Many sessions led by autistic speakers



PATC *Virtual*
Pennsylvania Autism Training Conference

IGNITE

#PATCIGNITE2023



Creating an ASERT Account

The screenshot displays the ASERT website interface. At the top right, a dark button labeled "Login/New Account" is highlighted with an orange border. Below the search bar is the ASERT logo with the tagline "Bringing autism resources together". A grid of navigation icons includes "Contact Us", "About Us", "Autism in PA", "Favorites", "Resources", "Events", "Support Groups", and "eLearning". A dark banner below the navigation reads "Select a category to view resources". Underneath, four category tiles are visible: "Individuals with Autism" (with a photo of a young man at a computer), "Parents & Caregivers" (with a photo of a woman and a child on a tricycle), and two partially visible tiles for "Community" and "Professionals" (with photos of people outdoors).

JUSTICE RESOURCE COLLECTION

Are you looking for resources about autism and the justice system?



www.pautism.org/justice

**Background
Information**

**ASERT Justice
Trainings**

Social Stories

**Resources for
Professionals**

JUSTICE SYSTEM SOCIAL STORIES

The Law, Part 3: Getting Arrested & Transport

The laws say the police officer may put handcuffs on me. The handcuffs will feel cold and hard.



An officer may search my body to make sure I don't have anything on me that could be harmful.



The police officer has a key to take the handcuffs off me. The police officer may remove the handcuffs once the situation is safe.



The police officer may put me in his police car to take me to the police station.



The police car has lights that are bright and a siren that is loud. Police cars are also meant to keep me, the police and the community safe.

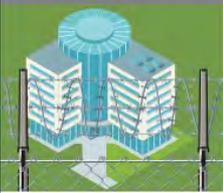


Once we get to the police station, the officer will let me out of the police car.



Detention Center, Part 1: What are detention centers?

A detention center is a secure building for kids who break the law.



When I arrive, I will be asked questions by the staff. This is called intake.



If I break the law, I may have to stay in a detention center.



Staff may touch my clothes and check my body to make sure I don't have anything that could be unsafe.



The staff at the detention center supervise me and make sure I am safe.



This may require removing my clothes.



Prepare, Learn, Advise and Notify (PLAN)

When confronted with an emergency, an individual with autism can become overwhelmed and frightened which may cause them to react to the situation in a way others cannot understand.



www.paautism.org/PLAN

Be Safe Resources



Prevention Resources

Intervention Resources

pautism.org/besafe