



World Autism Day

Preschool Educator Toolkit



World Autism Day
Journée mondiale de l'autisme

 celebratethespectrum.com

 celebratethespectrum@autismontario.com

Overview

Introduction to World Autism Day	3
Introduction to Classroom Activities	4
Autism Acceptance	5
Activity: TV Characters for Young Children	5
Sensory Experience	7
Activity: Sensory Scavenger Hunt	7
Activity: Making a Sensory Bin	8
Celebrating our Unique Selves	10
Activity: My Playdough is Unique	10
Activity: Uniqueness in Nature Collage	11
Activity: 'All About Me' Body Tracing	12
Strengths	13
Activity: Strengths Links	13
Educator Resources	14
Community and Family Engagement	16
Welcome to Autism Ontario	18
Thank You	20

Introduction to World Autism Day

World Autism Day

Autism Ontario's World Autism Day campaign unites families, schools, communities, government, and professionals in recognizing World Autism Day on April 2nd and brings to light the triumphs and struggles of people on the autism spectrum.

Autism Ontario is excited to have you participate and celebrate with us throughout April. Through this initiative, we are building stronger, more inclusive communities for people on the autism spectrum. We are highlighting ongoing work happening across the province and the work that still remains to remove systemic barriers and help autistic children, youth, and adults live their best life.

If you have questions, comments, or feedback, connect with us at celebratethespectrum@autismontario.com. Thank you for being part of this important day and celebrating with us!

Celebrate the Spectrum

Celebrate the Spectrum is our theme for World Autism Day celebrations. It is an opportunity for positive action to provide spaces of support and advocacy for our diverse communities while learning about autism and how to make our communities better for people on the autism spectrum.

The campaign is flexible, and there are many great ways to get your students involved, including:

- Hosting your school's own World Autism Day third-party fundraising event
- Creating a 'strengths link' with your class
- Writing an article for Autism Matters magazine
- Donating to Autism Ontario

Learn more at celebratethespectrum.com

Please take photographs and share your stories and celebrations with us using the hashtags

[#WorldAutismDay](https://twitter.com/WorldAutismDay) and

[#CelebrateTheSpectrum](https://twitter.com/CelebrateTheSpectrum).

What's Next?

Check out celebratethespectrum.com to find videos, supplementary activities, and information to help enhance your World Autism Day celebrations with Autism Ontario! These resources are available in French and English and are suitable for students as an orientation to autism.

Don't forget to share your classroom or school experiences with us! Visit celebratethespectrum.com to learn how.



Introduction to Classroom Activities

Autism Ontario has developed a series of classroom activities for students as an introduction to autism and neurodiversity. These activities have been created to help promote classroom discussion and improve inclusion and acceptance.

Each classroom activity includes:

- Information on autism and/or neurodiversity
- An activity that the classroom can complete
- A discussion guide to encourage further conversation



Some activities include videos that celebrate the unique characteristics of autistic people. These videos will help students get to know autistic children and youth and focus on the unique strengths of people with neurodiversities.

The goal of the classroom activities is to promote awareness, inclusion, and acceptance of autism and neurodiversity, as well as creating awareness of each student's unique strengths and needs.

Please preview these videos and activities with school personnel and/or your parent council, as appropriate, prior to showing them in the classroom setting.

Activity: TV Characters for Young Children

Two popular children’s TV shows have recently added autistic characters. Their goal was to increase acceptance and inclusion and empower autistic children with a positive image of themselves in pop culture.

Thomas and Friends



This Thomas and Friends episode features a new character, Bruno the Brake Car, and how he interacts with his friends. His voice-over was done by an autistic child, Elliot. The production studio embraced Elliot’s strengths and needs in the recording process.

[Watch the video](#)

Sesame Street



This Sesame Street clip introduces Julia to the cast of characters and begins to introduce what autism is and can look like. The cast of Sesame Street talks about their emerging friendship with Julia and how they communicate with her. They highlight some of Julia’s strengths, as well as things she may need help with. For more resources and information created by the Sesame Street team, check out [their website](#).

[Watch the video](#)

Discussion Guide

After you watch the video, take a minute to discuss the following questions with your class:

1. What are some of the character’s strengths?
2. What are some things that the character likes?
3. What are some things that the character may need help with?

It can be helpful to have students answer the questions about themselves as well:

1. What are you good at?
2. What do you like to do?
3. What do you sometimes need help with?

Tips for Peers and Friends Supporting Autistic Students in the Classroom and on the Playground

1

Get to know others.

What do they love to do? What are some of their favourite things? What are they good at? How do they let you know this?

2

Respect the person's independence.

Can they do it on their own? How can we help without taking over? How can we all support classmates who may need a little extra help?

3

Be patient.

Each of us has different needs. Sometimes we learn things fast, and other times it takes a little longer to understand how to do something. What are some ways we can practice being more patient with one another?

4

Be a good friend.

Friends are very important. Friends can make you feel better when you are having a hard day or a sad day and celebrate with you when you are feeling good. How do you make friends? What are some of the ways we can involve and include one another?



References

National Autistic Society. (2022). Mattel introduces first autistic character in Thomas and Friends. <https://www.autism.org.uk/what-we-do/news/mattel-introduces-first-autistic-character-in-thom>

Suskind, R. (2017). Why the team behind sesame street created a character with autism. <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/innovation/team-sesame-street-created-character-autism-180967218/>

Activity: Sensory Scavenger Hunt

Our environments are filled with sensory information.

We all experience sensations differently. A loud, busy place like a preschool can be exciting for one person, and stressful for another.

A smell or taste that one person really enjoys might make another person say “yuck”! It is important to understand our senses. Below are some fun ways to explore senses.

A sensory scavenger hunt is a wonderful way to become more aware of the sensations around us.

Sensory Scavenger Hunt

Sensory Scavenger Hunt

by Bethany Brewin, Occupational Therapist

4. Smell & Taste (gustatory & olfactory senses)

Sample fresh local fruits or vegetables.

Can you guess how they will taste by smelling them? What about by touching with your fingers, your lips, your tongue, or your teeth?
Did anything surprise you?



5. Movement & Body Position (vestibular & proprioceptive senses)

Safely experiment with movement at a park or playground.

Can you move quickly?
Can you move super slowly?
• Can you find a way to be upside down?
Can you spin, roll, or twirl?
Can you bounce or jump?



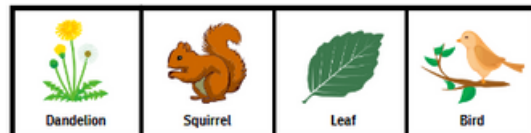
DISCLAIMER: This document reflects the views of the author. It is Autism Ontario's intent to inform and educate. Every situation is unique and while we hope this information is useful, it should be used in the context of broader considerations for each person. Please contact Autism Ontario at info@autismontario.com or 416-246-9592 for permission to reproduce this material for any purpose other than personal use. © 2021 Autism Ontario 416-246-9592 www.autismontario.com

Sensory Scavenger Hunt

by Bethany Brewin, Occupational Therapist

1. Sight (visual sense)

Create a "spot it" or "I spy" game to find local plants, animals, and objects. Pay attention to colours and shapes. Here are some ideas:

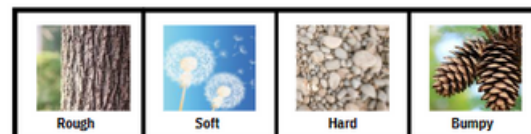


2. Sound (auditory sense)

- Close your eyes and listen. What sounds can you recognize? Birds? The wind? Water? Cars? Animals (squirrels chattering, dogs barking)?
- Try to imitate a sound with your voice. Can you chirp like a bird? Can you blow like the wind?

3. Touch (tactile sense)

Safely collect items in the forest, at the beach, at a park, or in your neighbourhood. Can you find something:



Activity: Making a Sensory Bin

Another good way to explore the senses is through a sensory bin. Sensory bins offer a safe way to learn and explore different touch sensations.

Keep in mind different sensory preferences when planning classroom activities.

What you need:

- A large bin, tin, or bowl
- Filler - sand, water, or something that is “taste-safe”, like oatmeal, dry rice, or cornmeal
- Cloth/towel - for wiping hands and cleaning up
- Small toys or items - toy cars, blocks, pinecones, leaves, etc. (optional)
- Tools - tongs, kitchen utensils, sand toys, measuring cups and spoons, etc. (optional)

Instructions:

- Fill your bin, tin, or bowl with filler.
- Add small toys or items that encourage sensory play.
- Children can explore using tools to scoop or measure.
- Items can be hidden for children to find, or create a list for a scavenger hunt of hidden items.

Discussion Guide

Think of some things you really enjoy.

- Something you love to taste?
- Something you love to smell?
- A song that makes you turn up the music?
- What is your favourite colour?
- What is your favourite way to move?

Think of some things that might be overwhelming for you?

- Something you don't like to taste?
- Something you don't like to smell?
- A sound that makes you cover your ears?
- What is your least favourite colour?



Sometimes people will use different strategies in response to sensations.

Some children may experience sensations more than others. For example, children may wear noise-cancelling headphones if certain sounds bother them or to help them concentrate while doing their schoolwork. Sometimes, someone who is feeling overwhelmed might just need some space and time until they feel better.

If a child is looking for more sensory input, what might you offer to help them feel better?

Some children may experience sensations less than others. For example, children may use fidget tools to get more of a sensation or to feel calm. Sometimes, children might make noise (singing, talking) when they are excited or stressed out.

If a child is looking for less sensory input, what might you offer to help them feel better?



Other Resources Related to the Sensory System

Children's Books

- Listening to My Body by Gabi Garcia
- My Body Sends a Signal by Natalia Maguire
- I Hear a Pickle: and Smell, See, Touch, and Taste It, Too! By Rachel Isadora
- Fun with My 5 Senses by Sarah Williamson
- My Five Senses by Alike
- Look, Listen, Taste, Touch, and Smell: Learning About Your Five Senses by Pamela Hill Nettleton
- The Listening Walk by Paul Showers

Books for Caregivers

- The Out-of-Sync Child by Carol Stock Kranowitz
- Sensational Kids by Lucy J Miller
- Building Bridges Through Sensory Integration by Paula Aquilla and Ellen Yack
- Beyond Behaviours: Using Brain Science and Compassion to Understand and Solve Children's Behavioural Challenges by Mona Delahooke

Activity: My Playdough is Unique

Differences make each of us unique and special in our own way.

Cultivating an inclusive environment will foster greater appreciation for diversity. Below are some activities to help children recognise and celebrate what is special about each of them.

This playdough mixing activity aims to demonstrate how differences can be special and unique.

Keep sensory preferences in mind as you work on this activity together. For example: some children may prefer to use a tool such as a large spoon to mix their playdough if they don't like to get their hands messy. You may also want to have a damp cloth and/or dry towel available for children to wipe their hands.

What you will need?

- Playdough, various colours



Instructions:

- Invite children to select a small amount of a variety of colours of playdough.
- Invite children to mix the playdough colours together.
- As the children mix their playdough, help them to notice how each creation is unique, special, and wonderful in its own way.
- Take pictures of these unique creations to highlight the individual designs. (optional)

Discussion Guide

- Which colours did you mix together?
- How is your playdough different than your friend's playdough?
- What is something you liked about friend's playdough?
- Why do you think it's wonderful that everyone's playdough is unique?

Activity: Uniqueness in Nature Collage

This nature collage activity aims to illustrate how differences are important.

Keep sensory preferences in mind as you work on this activity together. For example: some children may have tactile sensitivities or prefer personal space and limited physical contact. It is important to respect and understand their individual sensory preferences and offer alternative options, such as for this activity, drawing a picture of themselves.

What you will need?

- Items from nature - leaves, pinecones, acorns, flowers, etc.
- Paper
- Glue



Instructions:

- Go on a nature walk with your class and collect items from nature.
- Bring the nature items back to your classroom.
- In your classroom, provide the children with paper and glue, and help them to create a collage with their nature items.
- As the children work on their collages, talk about how each item from nature is unique, and how each item helps the earth in its own way.
- When the children are done with their collages, post them in the classroom for your class to continue looking at and discussing.

Discussion Guide

- What nature items did you collect?
- What is something unique about your nature items?
 - Have children consider a variety of attributes such as:
 - some flowers need shade, and others need lots of sunlight;
 - some pinecones are heavy, and others are light;
 - some leaves are green and others are brown; etc.
- How do your nature items help the earth in its own way?
 - Have children consider a variety of reasons such as:
 - acorns provide food for animals;
 - leaves make oxygen to breathe; etc.
- Why do you think it's wonderful that everyone's collage is unique?

Activity: 'All About Me' Body Tracing

This tracing activity aims to demonstrate how our differences make us unique.

What you will need?

- Paper - large mural paper
- Crayons or markers - variety of colours
- Items for decorating - yarn, fabrics, and other interesting materials to decorate (optional)



Instructions:

- On large mural paper, have each child lay down flat. Trace an outline of their body.
- Invite the children to depict themselves on the tracing using markers and crayons.
- If possible, provide them with yarn, fabrics, and other interesting materials to decorate further.
- Talk to them about themselves and their pictures as they decorate. Encourage their uniqueness and talk about what makes them special.
- If a child chooses, you can write a few things around their body tracing about what they like, don't like, their favourite things, their interests, and so on.
- When the children have finished their artwork, hang them on the wall for everyone to continue looking at and talking about differences and uniqueness in a positive way!

Discussion Guide

- What are some things that you love to do?
- What is something you are good at?
- Do you have a friend who is good at different things than you are?
- What is something that makes you unique?
- Why do you think it's wonderful that everyone is unique?

The Celebrate the Spectrum campaign aims to unite school communities in supporting autistic people and generating excitement in students about raising awareness about and acceptance of autism. This activity is meant to engage your class or your whole school in a fun and creative art project while inviting your students to think about the importance of inclusion and understanding of autism within their school.

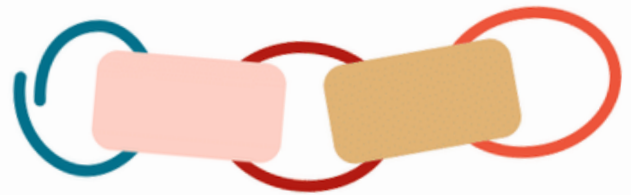
The intention of this activity is to show students that, although each person is uniquely one of a kind, we all have strengths worth celebrating. When placed together, the links can create a beautiful display of the diverse strengths within your classroom or school.

Activity: Strengths Links

[Watch the video](#)

Instructions:

1. Cut strips of coloured construction paper.
2. Distribute strips to all students in your classroom.
3. Have students write or draw a strength they have or something they are proud of on one side of the paper. Assist students who may be unable to write or need help identifying their strengths or interests.
4. Students can then create “links” or “loops” with the paper and link them together.
5. Collect all of the links/loops of paper and connect them to create a long link.
6. Display your links across the ceiling of your classroom or other school space.



This activity has been modified with permission from Understood.org. A detailed explanation of the activity, including a list of strengths and an accompanying YouTube video, can be found [here](#).



Educator Resources

Autism Ontario has worked with its partners to curate a selection of learning resources designed specifically for educators to further promote autism acceptance. If you'd like to access more information on autism, please visit the [Autism Ontario website](#) to search for learning resources. The site contains easy-to-understand documents and webinars that are relevant to autistic children, youth, adults, and their families.

The documents can be read online or printed and address a variety of topics benefiting English and French-speaking people, including autistic individuals, families, caregivers, service providers, educators, administrators, support staff, and advocates. The webinars are accessible at any time.

Please check out the resources below to help make your classroom and school community a supportive environment for all students with neurodiversities.

Back to School Webinar Series

This two-part mini webinar series aims to support caregivers in transitioning their child to school by building routines for success and supporting positive communication with their child's school team.

Part 1: Strategies to Prepare for School Routines

Kristin Gunby (Behaviour Analyst) and Bethany Brewin (Occupational Therapist) discuss simple routines that parents can implement at home to help students of any age make the transition to school a smooth one. Length: 60 minutes.

autismontario.com/node/896

Part 2: Strategies for Connecting with your School Team

Tracie Lindblad (Speech-Language Pathologist) and Danielle Nolan (Social Worker) discuss strategies for setting students and their teams up for success. They provide background information on the various meetings, documents, and assessments that may involve your students. Length: 60 minutes.

autismontario.com/node/899

Education Series: Navigating Special Education

In this webinar, a panel of experts provides valuable insights and practical tips to effectively navigate special education, especially for children entering the school system for the first time or who have been recently diagnosed with autism. The panel sheds light on the crucial aspects of communication, relationship building, and child education rights. Length: 60 minutes.

autismontario.com/node/993

Children’s Book Gift Guide

This guide includes information on children’s books related to autism and neurodiversity. Some of the books featured have been written by an autistic person, or caregiver. The guide also includes suggestions for making the most out of reading together, as well as some discussion questions to support learning and understanding.

bit.ly/3uSz0uA

Mental Health Matters Webinar Series- Part I: Strategies for Young Children

Danielle Nolan (Social Worker) and Bethany Brewin (Occupational Therapist) provide general strategies on how to support young children’s mental health. Topics include lifestyle strategies, sensory tools, mindfulness, strategies for “connecting”, and how to build emotional literacy. Length: 20 minutes/session

autismontario.com/node/1005

Back to School Mental Health Workbook

As children prepare to go back to school, it’s normal to feel anxious or worried. This workbook was created as a way for parents and children and youth to learn about and practice some mental health strategies that might be helpful for the school year. It includes sections for reviewing the previous school year and taking steps to plan for a successful school entry.

bit.ly/3QEgSq3

Exploring the Senses Webinar Series

Bethany Brewin (Occupational Therapist) focuses on how children process the sensory world. She discusses topics like how the sensory system works, various types of sensory styles, sensory-friendly adaptations, and strategies and sensory tools that parents can incorporate into their daily routines. Length: 40 minutes/session.

autismontario.com/node/876

K-12 Education Standards Development Committee Recommendations (Initial Report)

In 2021, the Ministry of Children, Community, and Social Services published a report that addressed both the practical steps and systemic changes required for equity in education in Ontario. Autism Ontario then responded with this article that addresses all outlined topics including attitudes, behaviours, assumptions, and perceptions.

autismontario.com/node/785

Community and Family Engagement

In the days leading up to World Autism Day, you can use these activities to get the entire school community thinking about autism and how to celebrate the spectrum.

Activity: Announcements

Your morning announcements are a great opportunity to promote the principles of World Autism Day and what it means for your school. Here are two different types of announcements that you can try in your school.

Option 1- Introduction to World Autism Day

“This year, our school is participating in Autism Ontario’s Celebrate the Spectrum campaign for World Autism Day. World Autism Day is a historic day in Canada for the autism community because it brings to light the struggles and triumphs of people on the autism spectrum and unites families, schools, communities, government, and professionals to make Ontario a more supportive and inclusive place for people on the autism spectrum.”

Option 2- Classroom Engagement

“We are working hard to make our school an inclusive and supportive place, not only for students on the autism spectrum but for everyone. Some ways we can do that are to show understanding and be inclusive. Here are some questions we can think about:

- What are some of the ways we can show understanding of one another?
- What are some of the ways we can include one another?

Stay tuned for the submitted answers tomorrow”

Classrooms can be encouraged to collect, record, and submit answers to be presented the following day.

Activity: Bulletin Boards

Bulletin boards can be an effective communication tool between your school and the larger school community. This can be a bulletin board in a classroom, hallway, or even a digital one on a communication app: wherever is most accessible for your families! Create a bulletin board that is inviting, attractive, and fun.

Things you can include are:

- Facts about autism
- Resources for families
- Information on World Autism Day

For different resources that you might want to include on your bulletin board, check out the [Autism Ontario’s learning resources](#).

Activity: Host a Fundraiser

Host a fundraising event at your school to raise funds and awareness of Autism Ontario! Some ideas are bake sales, raffles, silent auctions, dress down days, and trivia nights.

For ideas and a helpful fundraiser guide, see the [Autism Ontario Celebrate the Spectrum-Third-party Fundraiser Guide](#).



Community and Family Engagement

Activity: Social Media Engagement

The power of social media can be used to share information about World Autism Day and how your school is working to promote inclusion and acceptance. Here are some ideas of content that you might want to post or share.

Option 1- Reels or Stories

“How many years do you think Canada has been officially celebrating World Autism Day?”

Answer: 12 years! On April 2, 2012, Canada joined 192 other United Nations members who agreed that World Autism Day would bring autism and neurodiversity to the attention of all. Our school is helping to celebrate the spectrum!”

“Question: Research shows that 1-2% of the population is autistic. Based on this percentage, how many people in your town/city/school/school board are autistic?”

Option 2- Posts

“Autism doesn’t go away; autistic children grow up to be autistic adults, so it is important that our schools and communities support the needs of autistic students so they can live productive and meaningful lives.”

“April 2nd is World Autism Day! We are celebrating the spectrum because when we talk about autism, we are working together to make our school community a more understanding, inclusive, and welcoming environment for everyone!”



ABOUT AutismONTARIO

WHO WE ARE

A charitable organization founded in 1973. We have a history of 50 years supporting, representing, and advocating for all autistic individuals across the province regardless of race, ethnicity, income, religion, gender identity, or sexual orientation.

WHAT WE DO

We provide information on autism, support autism research, and implement programs and services for the autism community to address the issues that affect Ontarians with autism, their families, and their caregivers.

OUR MISSION

Creating a supportive and inclusive Ontario for autism

OUR VISION

Best Life, Better World, Making Autism Matter!

SERVICES WE OFFER

- Community events
- CommunityConnect Portal
- OAP Provider List
- Provincial newsletter
- Regional newsletters
- Adult programs
- Caregiver support groups
- French Language Services
- Regional supports
- Learning and positive advocacy resources
- Webinars and workshops
- Child and family supports
- March Break funding
- Summer support funding



We are guided by a Board of Directors with 12 diverse members – people on the autism spectrum, parents, caregivers, siblings of autistic people, and professionals.



We are Ontario's #1 source of information and referral on autism and one of the largest collective voices representing the autism community.



7 regions supporting people on the autism spectrum and their families across the province

OUR CARE VALUES

COLLABORATION

We believe in the power of working side by side with individuals, families, and communities to make informed choices about autism.



ACCOUNTABILITY

We hold ourselves and others responsible for achieving successful outcomes through high standards of integrity and fiscal responsibility.



RESPECT

We value equity, diversity, and inclusion, and we listen to understand.



EVIDENCE-INFORMED

We use and create knowledge to guide our decisions and work.



About Autism Ontario

Autism Ontario and its regions support people on the autism spectrum and their families across the province. We offer information and resources and support autism research while implementing programs and services for the autism community. Here are some examples of services we offer:

Family Events

Designed for autistic children, youth, adults, and their families and caregivers, these events provide access to a supportive environment in local communities. From movie mornings to recreational and social programs, they allow time for families to come together and connect in autism-friendly environments within the community.

autismontario.com/events

CommunityConnect

CommunityConnect is a centralized community portal, home to our service listings, learning resources, and events. You can search for autism services and Autism Ontario resources and events.

autismontario.com/communityconnect

Webinars

Autism Ontario webinars are designed to be an interactive, easy-to-understand resource for parents/caregivers, professionals, and educators. Webinars are presented in either English or French by subject matter experts in a discussion-based format. Webinars are a convenient way for viewers to stay on top of current research findings; learn about educational advocacy; build resources to support a child on the autism spectrum at school; gain tools to keep children and youth safe; and learn strategies to navigate the lifespan of people on the spectrum and their families.

autismontario.com/programs-services/webinars

Provincial Newsletter

A free online newsletter in English and French to stay connected with Autism Ontario.

autismontario.com/newsletter

To learn more about the programs and services offered by our provincial office or our local regions, please visit our website at autismontario.com.

Thank You

Dear Students, Teachers, Administrators, and Support Staff:

On behalf of Autism Ontario and the thousands of autistic people across Ontario, we would like to thank you for participating in this year's Celebrate the Spectrum campaign in celebration of World Autism Day. Without your school's participation and commitment to making Ontario a more supportive and inclusive place for autistic students, World Autism Day would not be such an outstanding success each year.

We hope that this toolkit promotes awareness and increases your understanding of autism, which are critical first steps in creating more supportive environments for autistic people in the classroom and communities across the province. By participating in World Autism Day, we invite you to be a part of a collective conversation about the importance of community, inclusion, and understanding in classrooms across Ontario. Our hope is that this conversation will continue both inside and outside the classroom and throughout your lives.

We also want to thank you for your commitment to fundraising on our behalf. Your dedication to raising funds for Autism Ontario is a testament to your school's investment in the work we do in the community and across the province through awareness campaigns such as World Autism Day. Please feel free to contact celebratethespectrum@autismontario.com if you have any questions.








Throughout the campaign, we invite you to share your stories and experiences with the World Autism Day campaign. This is the best way that we can spread the word about your school joining our mission and contributing to the impact that we hope to have on communities in Ontario.

Visit autismontario.com or connect with us on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, and YouTube to share your experiences and read other inspiring stories about autism in Ontario.

With your support, we are one step closer to creating a more inclusive Ontario.

Sincerely,



-  autismontario.com
-  [autismontarioprovincial](https://www.facebook.com/autismontarioprovincial)
-  [autismeontarioprovincial](https://www.facebook.com/autismeontarioprovincial) (français)
-  [@AutismONT](https://twitter.com/AutismONT)
-  [autism-ontario](https://www.linkedin.com/company/autism-ontario)
-  [@AutismOntario](https://www.instagram.com/AutismOntario)
-  [autismontario](https://www.youtube.com/autismontario)