



# How to Respond to Victims with Autism in a Disaster



## What is Autism?

Autism is a disorder of neural development that is characterized by impaired social interaction and communication, and by restricted and repetitive behavior.

An Autistic person may also have medical issues, lack of coordination and muscle tone, and various levels of sensory perception or integration dysfunction. Imagine not knowing where your body ends and space begins, or having no idea whether or not you are sitting straight or falling out of your chair. Often they cannot process more than one physical sense at a time, if at all (noise, sight, touch, smell).

Most often, a person with an Autism Spectrum Disorder looks just like you or me. Also keep in mind that each person on the spectrum may exhibit completely different physical or behavioral symptoms, which may include:

**Difficulty understanding language or gestures**

**Inability to follow multiple commands**

**Limited or no speech, or repetitive phrases only**

**Avoids eye contact**

**Spinning, rocking, flapping arms, hitting self, biting self**

**Hyper or hypo sensitivity to light, sound, smell, touch, or taste**

**Abnormal fears or lack of fear in a dangerous situation**

**Absence of cause-and-effect connections, needs reminders**

**Takes everything literally, no understanding of sarcasm or exaggeration**

**Repeats words but doesn't understand them**

