

*Award Wining Program  
2020 Resilience NSW Community Awards  
2020 National Resilience Award Community  
Category*

# Ask Me What I Need !

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Autism awareness training for  
emergency services

This project was funded under the joint State and Commonwealth Natural Disaster Resilience Program



This Workshop and training video that is included today is designed to create awareness of the needs of Autistic Youth and Adults during a Disaster, Hazard, Emergency or Relief Operations

They're the little things that can make all the difference to someone's anxiety, to someone's decision making, and ultimately has the potential to determine whether people live or don't live in really traumatic or horrific experiences,"

**COMMISSIONER SHANE FITZSIMMONS**

Resilience NSW

## Introduction

Why was this project needed?

People with disability have been excluded from community preparedness activities which has created inequitable disparities in survival.

People with disability are at higher risk of injury or morbidity than the general population in disasters.

(Garlick 2015, Hisamatsu 2013, Tatsuki 2012, Villeneuve, Robinson, Pertiwi, Kilham & Llewellyn 2017)

## People with Disability.....

...are the first to be left behind and the last to be rescued, and their rights to protection and safety are often denied .

“People with disability are two to four times more likely to die in a disaster than the general population.”

(Gray & MacDonald 2016, Stough & Kang 2015).  
Michelle Villeneuve, University of Sydney  
Diversity in Disaster; Australian Journal of Emergency  
Management, Monograph No. 3, 2018.

Definition of Autism Spectrum Disorder according to the  
*Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5)*

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a developmental disorder characterized by:

- Difficulties with social and communication skills
- May display a variety of repetitive behaviours

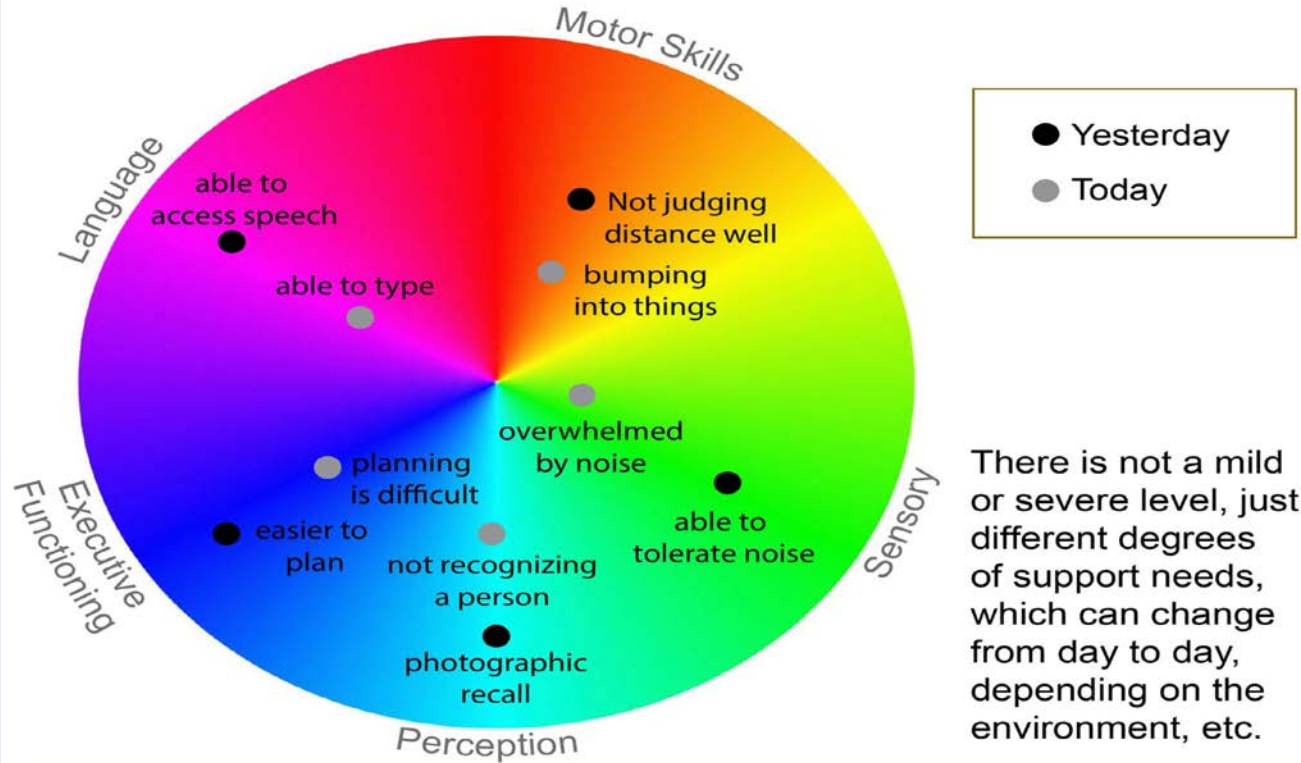
In the late 1990s, Judy Singer, a sociologist, who is autistic came up with a word to describe conditions like ADHD, Autism, and Dyslexia, this word was "*neurodiversity*". Her hope and objective was to shift the focus of discourse about ways of thinking and learning away from the usual litany of deficits, disorders, and impairments.

**Neurodiversity is an approach to learning and disability that argues diverse neurological conditions are result of normal variations in the human genome.**

What many people imagine when they hear “autism spectrum.”



What the “autism spectrum” can actually look like.



## Why is this Project Important?

- Autism in the Population 1 in 68
- Autistic children are usually in the care of an adult or caregiver
- Autistic adults are generally independent in the community

Many autistic adults have co morbid conditions being mental health issues, diabetes, heart conditions, vision and hearing impairments and physical conditions.

## The objective...

was to provide awareness and acknowledgement of the needs of Autistic adults when they are placed in an emergency environment.

**For emergency services personnel to implement appropriate strategies as required**

**1. To Ask the Person what they NEED**

SAVE TIME and SAVING LIVES



## Autistic people surveyed stated that that wanted more preparedness for themselves and training for emergency services

- Some participants didn't get assistance in an emergency because they were too stressed to express their needs
- General Preparedness skills are low- people would like training
- Best Practice required
- Training about Autism for Emergency services
- Evacuation centres to have rooms and resources

## From the Emergency Services surveyed, results demonstrated that:

- An overwhelming majority of people have not received any staff development training about Autism.
- Those that have had training they have mainly attended workshops or professional development programs.
- 75% of participants would like to complete Autism awareness training.
- Of those that did not want to do training they commented that it was ***not within their role*** or felt there were others more suitable to do this.

The most identified benefits for training would be to:

**Provide a safer environment for people when faced with an emergency, hazard or disaster.**

**Save time and save lives.**

## Evidence of Need

There is a 'growing body of literature addressing the psychological condition which is the consequence of a previous disease or injury of children and adolescents after natural disasters.

(Roussos et al. 2005; John et al. 2007)

The literature completely lacks any descriptions of adaptive outcomes for autistics after natural disasters...'

J Autism Dev Disord (2012) 42:954–960

Searches in Australian literature and related sites found that there have been no studies conducted that mention people with disability at the time of the project.

**Royal Commission into National Natural Disasters Arrangements Report  
28 October 2020**

### **The Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience**

The Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience (AIDR) develops, maintains and shares knowledge and learning to support a disaster resilient Australia. You searched: 'autism'

**Knowledge Hub**

**EM Library Results**

**Results:** Your search returned **no** result

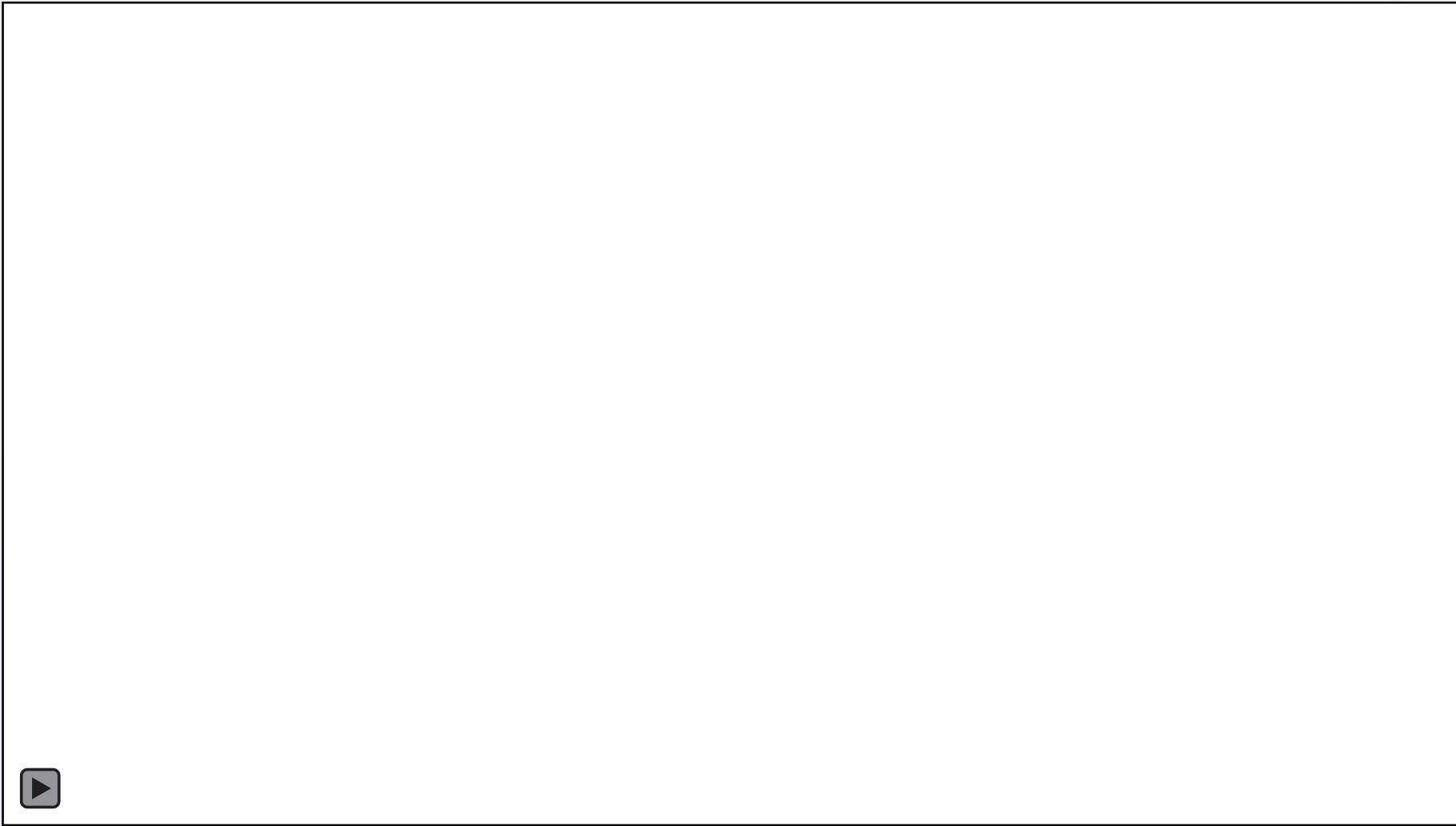


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## Autism Awareness Training Video for Emergency Services

- Autism is a spectrum - it is an invisible disability
- Everyone is an individual
- Look out for people with non typical movement
- Reduce sensory overload
- Search in bodies of water
- Always ask the person, what do you need?

## Autism is a spectrum

- it is an invisible disability
- Everyone is an individual

A Persons' needs vary depending on the environment and stress





## Most autistic adults have sensory issues

- This can either be hyper or hypo sensitivity to light, sound, touch and smell
- Physical orientation
- Physical movement
- They may not identify the usual signs of danger such as smoke
- Interoception difficulties

## Unusual or atypical gait

Lower balance point  
Arm movement  
Can appear like a drunk movement when burnt out

## Communication

### Verbal

- Hyper Verbal
- Language Processing – latency in response
- Literal comprehension and responses
- Selective Mutism
- Situational Mutism
- Non Verbal / Non speaking
- Alternative Augmentative Communication Systems
- Non Electronic
- Electronic / Apps

## **Drowning is the leading cause of death among children with autism.**

Autistic Children are 160 times more likely to die by drowning

Autistic children often wander away from safety either to escape discomfort, or to reach a place of intense interest.

By removing themselves from a dangerous situation they may be placing themselves in greater risk.

The rescuer may be the perceived danger

## RECOVERY, RECOVERY, RECOVERY !

Sensory/social burnout is a primary cause of adults on the spectrum missing work, school or other obligations

There must be adequate time, and an environment conducive to sensory recovery.

When the negative stimulus ceases, without recovery, sensory burnout will occur.



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Ask the person – what do you need?



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## Conclusion

# Ask me what I need !

5 take aways from this session

Think about your colleagues and that they maybe neurodiverse – do you need to adapt your training?

Would you like more indepth information and training from any part of the presentation?

I would appreciate you completing the brief survey monkey from Todays presentation

Berinda Karp  
<https://autismstep.com.au/>



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<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/MCJ5PPJ>



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