

# I CAN Share My Story

## A conversation guide for classrooms

### What is the Canucks Autism Network?

The Canucks Autism Network (CAN) provides year-round, innovative, high quality sports, recreational, social, and arts programs for individuals and families living with autism, while building awareness and capacity through community networks across British Columbia. For only \$25 per ASD participant per year, the entire family can enroll in Canucks Autism Network programs and events. To learn more about the programs offered by CAN, visit our website at [www.canucksautism.ca](http://www.canucksautism.ca)

### What is Autism?

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a developmental disorder, more generally referred to as “autism”. ASD is diagnosed based on difficulties with social communication and behaviour, but there is significant variability amongst individuals who share the diagnosis. ASD occurs in all racial, ethnic, and social groups, but is almost five times more likely to occur in boys than girls. The U.S. Centre for Disease Control estimates 1 in 68 children has been identified with ASD. The Ministry of Children and Family Development (2011) has reported there are over 9000 children and youth in British Columbia diagnosed with autism.

### I CAN Share My Story

This project was created after a number of our We CAN Be Friends schools approached the Canucks Autism Network about having individuals with autism present to their class about their experiences living with autism. With there being over 225 We CAN Be Friends schools across the province, we determined that we could reach more students and involve more individuals with autism by creating these short videos that are accessible to everyone.

**The videos show a range of individuals with autism; however, not everyone’s experience is captured in these videos. Other individuals with autism and other families may have different responses to these questions.**

## Things to consider

Before sharing these videos with your class please consider the following:

- Make the sure that the parent of the student with autism is onboard with your class having this discussion.
  - Every family has a different approach to the diagnosis. It's the families' choice whether they want to have this discussed in the class and how they would like it to be discussed.  
**We would kindly ask that you are respectful to each family's wishes about sharing their child's diagnosis when using these materials in your classroom.**
- Consider the student with autism's own understanding of their diagnosis and whether they want to share their story with the class or if they do not want to be singled out.
- Be aware of other students' ability to identify the student with autism even without the use of names.
- Consider the siblings of those with autism in your class and contact their parents as well.

## Alternatives to viewing these videos:

There are many ways you can make your class more 'autism friendly' without ever using the word 'autism.' It is important to keep these alternatives in mind when families do not wish for the diagnosis to be discussed within the classroom.

Here are some ideas about how to make your classroom more autism friendly without saying 'autism':

- Encourage a discussion about how everyone has things they are good at and things that are challenging. Have students list the strengths of people they admire (personal or famous) and share why they admire those people
  - Discuss how everyone has individual differences/strengths/challenges. People are gifted in some ways but they also find some things challenging.
  - Discuss how we can learn from other people's strengths and help people when they face challenges
  - Everyone has different strengths and abilities that make us special and able to contribute to our world
- Have them demonstrate what being a good friend/classmate looks like in the classroom and on the playground and ways in which they can be Friendship Superheroes
  - Go over Pinkus' five ways to be a Friendship Superhero: help each other, use kind words, listen, wait your turn
  - Say "hi" to your classmates when you arrive, invite your classmates to join in when playing an activity, show your classmates how to play a game you think they'd like
- Discuss what being a good team player looks like and have them demonstrate this when playing a game together

- Being a team player looks like: encouraging your teammates, helping set up equipment, ensuring everyone has turn
- Remind students that it feels good to be included, and that it is important to always try to include others

## Conversation Guide

### Pre-video viewing

- Ask the class to share what they know about autism (for example, “Let’s write down 10 things you know about autism or things you think of when you hear the word”).
  - Write their responses on the board.
  - After all responses have been given, go through each one and discuss any that are myths or not accurate.
    - Refer to What is Autism Resource from the Autism Society of America – found on the Getting Started section of the We CAN Be Friends Resource page or click the following link: [http://www.2d-hosting.com/autism-society/files/2014/04/growing\\_together.pdf](http://www.2d-hosting.com/autism-society/files/2014/04/growing_together.pdf)
    - **We strongly recommend you share this document with the class before watching the videos.**
- Provide the following ‘take home’ messages:
  - Everyone with autism is different: that’s why it’s called the autism **spectrum**. There are huge differences in language, interests, challenges and strengths. Individuals with autism all have in common challenges with social interaction and often have challenges with social communication.
  - Remember, if we think about all the people in the world, we are all on a **human spectrum**. We all have strengths, challenges, and unique abilities and interests. We can all contribute and have fun. The autism spectrum is just one part of the larger human spectrum.
  - Everybody’s brains work differently, and everyone deserves respect and understanding. You can provide support to individuals with autism simply by taking time to understand who they are as an **individual**, beyond their autism. People with autism desire and deserve friendship and support just like everybody else. This is true for any classmate you might meet who has any type of ‘label’ (e.g., ADHD, anxiety, CP, FASD, etc.)

### Watch I CAN Share My Story summary trailer video

- As a group, watch the two-minute summary trailer video.
- Perhaps choose a few full length videos to watch either as a class or have older students choose to watch a few on their own and then share with the group their perspectives on what they watched. **Please make an effort to select videos that reflect different parts of the autism**

**spectrum. Remind students that these are only a FEW examples of individuals living with autism and that there is a very wide range of individuals who have autism.**

### Post viewing

- After watching the summary trailer video, lead a further discussion about autism and encourage the students to share their reactions.
  - What is something new you learned about autism from the video?
  - Did anything surprise you?
  - What might be challenging for someone with autism?
  - What are some challenges parents of children with autism may face?
  - Are people with autism all the same or different? Is everyone without autism the same or different?
  - What are some strengths that the individuals in the video have?
  - Why might it be hard for people with autism to make friends?
  - How can you help someone with autism make friends or include them in activities?
  - How can you find out the ways a person communicates?
  - How can we help people with autism achieve their goals?
  - How can you help someone with autism at school?
  - Think about your own experience with autism (either as an individual with autism, a family member/friend/classmate of someone with autism) and consider if you would like to share your experience with others.

### Summarize

- Autism is a spectrum – if you've met one person with autism, you've met ONE person with autism. There is a huge range and just like everyone else, each person with autism is an individual with unique likes and dislikes, challenges, and abilities.
- Every person with autism is different but they want to have friends, just like anyone else.
- You can help them to be included (and perhaps become their friend) by asking them to join in activities and doing things with them that they might enjoy.

### Contact Us

If you have any questions, concerns, or comments about I CAN Share My Story, please contact our Program Coordinator Darcie Domes at [darcie@canucksautism.ca](mailto:darcie@canucksautism.ca)

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