

1/15/15 | Sensitivity Training: Autism | Marisa Savard, MA, BCBA (Board Certified Behavior Analyst)  
and Coordinator of Social Programming for Manhattan Children's Center

- Non-logical choices are hard for children on the spectrum. **The strength of OMB lies in that it encourages students to embrace an un-logical next step** eg: let's go to planet Jell-O.
- Good practice to check in with your site contact and see what basic concepts the children may or may not grasp such as:
  - Colors
  - Shapes
  - Sizes (difference between big/small and distinction between big, bigger, biggest).

As these concepts can be difficult for people with Autism.

- **Avoid open ended questions** like, "Where are we gonna go today?"
  - A child on the spectrum may recall their literal schedule for the rest of the day when trying to answer this question, eg: "Next is lunch and then I go to gym class, and then I go home."
  - Instead, give them options and choices to choose from. "Where are we gonna go today? Should we go to the moon or to the ocean?"
- **Persistence and patience** are the two key attributes necessary for working with this population. Any frustration or resistance you are getting is not because you are doing something "wrong".
- If you want a child to perform a specific action, model it for them instead of verbally instructing them.
  - "Put your hat on," could trigger confusion. Do you mean, put your hat on... the floor? Put your hat on... the table? Put your hat on... your lap? **If you show them, there's no question about the action you desire from them.**
- To set the tone in the room, as actors you're used to setting the vibe of a show through smiling, through using a cheery tone of voice. **These signals and cues may not translate to people with Autism.**
  - **Narrate how you are feeling instead:** "I am so happy and excited to see you today." "I'm really looking forward to performing with you today."
  - You could also prompt the children to express emotion by engaging with their neighbors, eg: "Turn to your neighbor and show them your smile."
- If you need to redirect a child who for example is trying to wander behind the curtain or standing on stage when they shouldn't be **say what you DO want them to do.** Avoid telling them what you don't want them to do.
  - A more powerful action for them to follow is, "David, let's sit down now." vs "David, it's not time to stand on the stage now." From the latter they might wonder, "When will it be time to stand on the stage?" "Is it time now to stand on the stage?" instead of sitting down.
- See additional PowerPoint on backstage