

Special Needs Students

“You must be willing to adapt your teaching to meet the needs of your student”

One of the most complex disabilities to understand is autism. Because there is such a wide range of characteristics associated with the term “autism”, children will demonstrate varied levels of learning processes and social behavior. It is important for instructors to take the time to learn the background of their students prior to starting a swim lesson. Interviewing the parent or guardian to discuss what the child likes or dislikes (such as colors, smells and noise). If appropriate, parents may share the child’s IEP to give the instructor additional information. Senses are sometimes elevated, so instructors must take care to adjust each to the child. This will greatly improve the learning process of the student.

Mastering teaching the student with autism will improve the instructor’s ability to teach all other students (typical and non-typical).

What is Autism? Autism is classified as a neuro-developmental disorder that manifests in delays of "social interaction, language as used in social communication, or symbolic or imaginative play," with "onset prior to age 3 years," according to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders. The ICD-10 also requires symptoms to be "manifest before the age of three years." Autism is often not physiologically obvious, in that outward appearance may not indicate a disorder, and diagnosis typically comes from a complete physical and neurological evaluation.

There have been large increases in diagnosed autism, for reasons that are heavily debated by researchers in psychology and related fields within the scientific community. Some believe this increase is largely due to changed diagnostic criteria and/or societal factors, while others think the reason is environmental. The United States Centers for Disease Control (CDC) estimate the prevalence of autism spectrum disorders to be between 2 and 6 per 1000 births (i.e., between 1 in 500 and 1 in 150 births). Additional statistics from independent states show 1:88 in boys. The National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) states the "best conservative estimate" as 1 in 1000.

With early intervention, intense therapies (most notably Applied Behavioral Analysis), practice, and schooling, some children diagnosed with autism may improve on their skills to the point of neuro-typical children. Some children and adults with autism are opposed to attempts to cure autism, because they see autism as part of who they are. Instructors will benefit from becoming successful in teaching students with varying degrees of autism and then applying those teaching techniques to all special needs students.