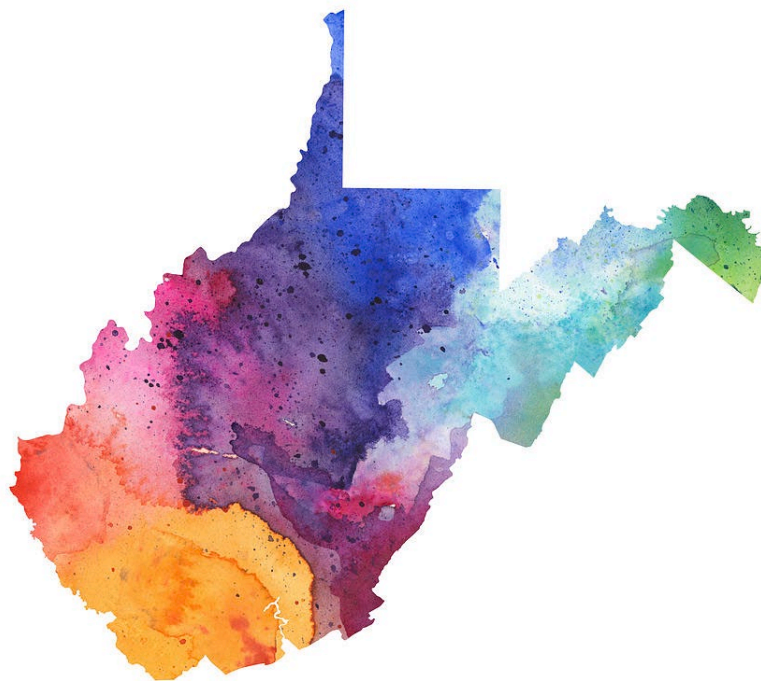


April is National Autism Awareness Month

2025

Resource Guide for WV Schools



**WEST VIRGINIA
AUTISM TRAINING CENTER**
AT MARSHALL UNIVERSITY

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INTRODUCTION

The Autism Society of America celebrates Autism Awareness Month each April to highlight the growing need for awareness about, and acceptance for, autism spectrum disorder. Across the nation, thousands of planned events take place each April that are designed to educate the public about autism and about important issues within the autism community.

Included in this guide are ideas and resources that may assist school administrators, educators, and staff in their efforts to create an environment of acceptance and support for students with ASD. Please feel free to reach out to the WV Autism Training Center with questions, concerns, or inquiries.

Autism Quick Resource Links

[National Programs](#) – provides a link to the Autism Society’s National Helpline as well as other resources to support employment, safety, training, and health and wellness needs for the autism community.

[Autism Internet Modules](#) - designed for those who support, instruct, work with, or live with someone with autism, the Autism Internet Modules (AIM) guide users through case studies, instructional videos, pre- and post-assessments, discussion questions, activities, and more.

[Autism Resources in WV](#) – provides a list of autism resources available in WV (site is maintained by WVU Center for Excellence in Disabilities)

WV Autism Training Center at Marshall University

The mission of the **West Virginia Autism Training Center** (WV ATC) is to provide support to individuals with autism spectrum disorder as they pursue a life of quality.

The WV ATC was established in 1984 by the WV Legislature and is located at Marshall University. Services are available to families of West Virginians with autism spectrum disorder as well as their educators and others significant in their lives.

WV Autism Training Center

Old Main 316

1 John Marshall Drive

Huntington, West Virginia 25755

304-696-2332

<https://www.marshall.edu/atc>

STATISTICS

What is Autism?

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a lifelong neurodevelopmental disorder that occurs in early childhood and affects communication, social skills, and behavior. While ASD causes clinically significant impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of current functioning, the severity to which individuals are affected in each may vary.

Did you know?

- 1 in 36 children have autism
- Almost half of children identified with ASD have average or above average intelligence.
- ASD occurs among all racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups.
- Boys are 4 times more likely to be diagnosed with autism than girls.
- More than 5.4 million adults in the United States have ASD.
- ASD is the fastest-growing developmental disability.
- There is no known single cause of ASD.
- Sometimes lights and noises bother someone with ASD more than they might bother you.
- Everyone is different. Being different is not a bad thing. We are all different.

IDEAS TO PROMOTE AWARENESS AND ACCEPTANCE

School – Wide Awareness

Here is a basic list of ideas that you can use to help spread awareness and acceptance of autism spectrum disorder in your school:

1. Plan an Autism Awareness spirit week in April.
2. Engage in friendly competition by organizing awareness-themed decorating contests.
3. Give older students an opportunity to read a book about autism to younger students.
4. Get active! Motivate students to show support by getting involved in a local autism walk or awareness event and by learning about the local autism organization.
5. Post facts about ASD around the school or talk about them in the morning announcements. You can find a list of facts in the Statistics Section.
6. Invite speakers to talk about autism spectrum disorder. Speakers can be people on the spectrum, family members of individuals with ASD, or professionals in the field. Reach out to the WV Autism Training Center to see if we can support you.
7. Ask classmates, friends, and teachers to wear autism shirts to raise awareness on a particular day.
8. Ask the school library to set books about ASD out on display throughout April. See list of books in the Books and Media Resources Section.
9. Show a video about autism spectrum disorder. For a list of ASD related movies and video clips, see list in Books and Media Resources Section.
10. Post ideas of how students can support those with autism spectrum disorder around the school.
11. Have teachers and students wear blue on April 1, 2025, in recognition of Autism Awareness Month.



Classroom Awareness

Help students learn about autism spectrum disorder and ways they can more easily accept their peers with ASD by incorporating one or more of the following activities:

1. Teach a lesson on tips for being a friend to someone with autism. See Educator Resource Section.
2. Share information to help students understand and accept individuals with ASD. See Educator Resource Section.
3. Choose books or stories for students to read that discuss autism spectrum disorder or have individuals with ASD as characters. See Book and Media Resource Section.
4. Have students decorate autism ribbons and display them in the classroom or on the door.
5. Encourage students to write letters to legislators about the needs of students with disabilities, including autism spectrum disorder. Students will need to think critically about this issue and learn how to constructively write and advocate for this cause.
6. Create a pen pal system where students write letters, draw pictures, or cards to students with special needs, particularly ASD, fostering friendship and connection as well as reading and writing skills.
7. Set aside a designated time each day, or a special time once a week, to discuss autism spectrum disorder and related topics. You can incorporate an activity listed in the Educator Resource Section or find additional lesson ideas by using the web links located there.
8. Learn about famous people with ASD and encourage students to find out more about these individuals.
9. Bullying is an issue of concern for most schools. Discuss the concept of bullying and encourage students to adopt a No-Bullying attitude toward all peers, including those with ASD*.
10. Show students a video to help them understand what it is like to experience the world through the eyes of someone with ASD. Then have a class discussion on how they felt watching the video and ways they can support those with ASD in their school. See Book and Media Resource Section for suggested videos.

*** Students with autism spectrum disorder are very vulnerable to bullying. The IAN Research Report: *Bullying and Children with ASD (March 2012; October 2014)* found that 63% of children with ASD, ages 6-15, are bullied. Educating the school population about Autism Spectrum Disorders can increase understanding and acceptance, thus reducing the bullying.**

https://iancommunity.org/cs/ian_research_reports/ian_research_report_bullying

EDUCATOR RESOURCES

Definition of ASD – Student friendly version

Autism spectrum disorder is a neurodevelopmental disorder. That means some kids' brains develop a little bit differently. Autism spectrum disorder is also sometimes called autism or ASD for short.

Autism spectrum disorder is not a disease. You cannot catch it from someone else. ASD cannot be cured. People with autism spectrum disorder have it their whole lives. It does not go away when they get older.

Kids with ASD see the world a little bit differently than others. They might have trouble talking to people, making friends, and sometimes they might move in unusual ways or do the same things over and over.

A person with autism spectrum disorder might have trouble:

- talking to others and learning the meaning of words
- hanging out or fitting in with others
- dealing with changes (like trying new foods, having a substitute teacher, or having items moved from their normal places)
- dealing with loud noises, bright lights, or busy hallways
- communicating their wants or needs
- a preoccupation with a narrow topic or interest
- clumsiness, atypical posture, or different ways of moving

Kids with autism may have a little trouble with these, or they may have a lot, but they can still learn new skills and do all kinds of things. Sometimes they only need a little help to learn and do everyday stuff, but sometimes they might need a lot of help.

Adapted from Kid's Health.org <https://kidshealth.org/en/kids/autism.html> and Jack's Asperger's Talk <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ku1lajn5EU0>

Conduct a Class Discussion

Conduct a class discussion on how to make friends with peers with autism spectrum disorder. Ask for ideas from the students and list them on the board for all to see. Point out that all involved will benefit from the friendships established. Be sure the following are included in the discussion:

- **Be Patient**-Those with ASD may take a little longer to process. They are not intentionally doing things to get on your nerves.
- **Speak Clearly**- Use short sentences and no slang works best, and do not use figures of speech which may cause confusion for them.
- **Accept Them**-Accept the differences and strengths just as you would any friend. Know they are intelligent and talented in many areas that you may not be aware of.
- **Find Commonalities**-Ask your friend with ASD what they like to do and discover things you both like and can share together.
- **Include Them**-Ask your friend with ASD to join you when you are with your other friends. If engaged in a game or activity, explain clearly how to participate.
- **Be Aware**-Get to know what bothers your friend with ASD and what makes them uncomfortable, including any sounds, smells, or even crowds. Try to avoid these things if possible. If unavoidable, stay beside him or her and let them know how you understand and care.
- **Be A Good Friend**-If you see a student with special needs being bullied, stand beside him or her and let everyone involved know that you are there to support that student. Have the student walk away with you and then alert your teacher of the problem.
- **Ask Questions**-If there is something you don't understand about your friend with ASD, ask them to explain. If you cannot understand their language, ask them to write it down, type it, or draw a picture. If all else fails, ask your teacher for help.

Source: *Understanding Autism Spectrum Disorders: Tools for Schools*, WV Team Autism



Share Information

Share information to help students understand and accept individuals with autism spectrum disorder.

Understanding ASD starts at a young age, and there is no greater place than the classroom to begin. Understanding autism spectrum disorder and learning how to interact with people with ASD comes from being taught how to treat and talk to someone with autism. Children naturally want to be helpful. Give them an opportunity by encouraging them to be a buddy to someone with ASD. It is up to teachers and parents to teach children about differences, acceptance, and understanding.

Share the following information with students to get started.

- People are born with autism spectrum disorder and while they look just like you and me, ASD changes the way their brain works.
- Some people with ASD talk and others do not. Just because they cannot talk does not mean they don't have anything to say.
- Nobody knows what causes autism spectrum disorder, but we do know that a person with ASD will always have autism.
- Kids with ASD are the same as other kids in a lot of ways. They like birthdays, swimming, and having friends.
- Being kind and compassionate is one of the best things you can do to help someone with autism spectrum disorder.
- Here are a few ways to be a friend:
 - ✓ Play games they like to play.
 - ✓ Talk to them like you would any other kid.
 - ✓ Give them a high five when you are having fun!
 - ✓ Sit next to them in the lunchroom.
 - ✓ Visit them at their house.
 - ✓ Invite them to your house.
 - ✓ Show them what to do so they can imitate you.
 - ✓ Be a buddy to them on the playground.
 - ✓ Walk with them to the next class.
 - ✓ Support them with kindness and understanding.

Adapted from The Autism Society of Akron

Classroom Activity Suggestions

Acknowledging Similarities and Differences

The teacher, or a designated student, chooses an object without sharing what item they have chosen (an accessory or certain colored object such as red shirt) and then sorts the class based on “who has it and who doesn’t.” Between each instance of student sorting, the students take a turn guessing what the object is. Close the lesson talking about how what makes us different is also what makes us unique.

The Brainstorm

Have students list ways to be a friend to someone different from themselves and write their responses on chart paper. Examples may include say “hello,” invite them to sit at lunch with you, ask them to play a game at recess, speak with them about something they enjoy. Discuss the completed list with students and post in the classroom or hallway.

Word Find

Ask students to write “Autism Awareness” on a piece of paper and then write down all of the words that can be created using the letters in “Autism Awareness.”

Definition of a Friend

Cut out large autism awareness ribbon shapes and have students write their definition of a friend on it. Decorate the room with the ribbons.

Speaking Without Words

Explain that many children with ASD are not able to speak or have few words. Whisper a simple sentence to one student, such as “My hand hurts,” “I want a hamburger for lunch,” or “I am allergic to milk.” Ask that student to tell the class the sentence without using words. Afterwards, discuss how difficult and frustrating that would be if you had to communicate without spoken words all the time.

Printable Activities

Please see the printable activities located in the Appendix of this guide.

*Some activities adapted from Autism New Jersey Mini-Lesson Ideas

Additional Resources

Links to ideas and lesson plans

<http://autism.sesamestreet.org/>

Sesame Street Autism Resources Page

<https://vcuautismcenter.org/resources/communication.cfm>

Provides downloadable lesson plans to improve communications and social skills

<https://educators.brainpop.com/bp-topic/autism/>

Provides downloadable lesson plans for grades K-12

Books/Pamphlets

WVDE Guidelines for Best Practice, Autism Spectrum Disorder - [Free to download](#) or request hard copy from WVDE.

10 Things Every Child with Autism Wishes You Knew - by Ellen Notbohm

1001 Great Ideas for Teaching and Raising Children with Autism or Asperger's - by Ellen Notbohm and Veronica Zysk

Early Intervention and Autism: Real Life Questions, Real Life Answers - by James Ball

Beyond the Autism Diagnosis: A Professional's Guide to Helping Families - by Marion O'Brien, Ph.D. and Dr. Julie Daggett, Ph.D. - Book for professionals working with children on the autism spectrum. Provides insight into building positive relationships with families.

Podcasts

"All Autism Talk", *Autism Spectrum Therapies* - various autism-related topics

<https://autismtherapies.com/podcasts/#posts>

"Weekly Science Report", *Autism Science Foundation* - information on current research - listener friendly descriptions of scientific concepts, research studies, etc.

<https://itunes.apple.com/us/podcast/autism-science-foundation-weekly-science-report/id1017003702?mt=2>

BOOKS RESOURCES

Books for Elementary Level

TITLE	DESCRIPTION
A is for Autism by Jennifer Bloink	Uses a simple ABC format to teach about autism spectrum disorder
We're Amazing 1,2,3!	Children's book, Sesame Street, also in free e-book form
Nobody Knew What to Do: A Story about Bullying by Becky McCain	Discusses bullying and how children can stand up for others
Exceptionally Good Friends: Building Relationships with Autism	Children's book, discusses process of making friends from two perspectives
Ian's Walk-A Story about Autism by Laurie Lears and Karen Ritz	Helps children understand associated behaviors related to ASD
The Autism Acceptance Book by Ellen Sabin	Activity book, conversation-starter and educational tool that teaches children about ASD
I See Things Differently: A First Look at Autism	Children's book, introduces ASD
Tobin Learns to Make Friends by Diane Murrell	Provides specific suggestions for young children
My Best Friend Will by Jamie Lowell and Tara Tuchel	Promotes understanding
Captain Tommy by Abby Ward Messner	Teaches understanding and kindness
A Friend Like Simon	Children's book, introduces ASD
Andy and His Yellow Frisbee by Mary Thompson	View of childhood ASD from a young person's point of view

Books for Secondary Level

TITLE	DESCRIPTION
Buster and the Amazing Daisy by Nancy Ogaz	Character with ASD
The Wright and Wong Mystery Series by Laura J. Burns and Melinda Metz	Characters with ASD
A Wizard Alone: The Sixth Book in the Young Wizards Series by Diane Duane	Character with ASD
To OZ and Back: A Bones and Duchess Mystery by Alexandra Eden	Character with ASD
Haze by Kathy Hoopman	Character with ASD, novel includes facts about autism
Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night by Mark Haddon	Character with ASD
Of Mice and Aliens by Kathy Hoopman	Character with ASD
Wishing on the Midnight Star by Nancy Ogaz	Promotes inclusion
The Reason I Jump	information/reference - written by individual with ASD

VIDEO RESOURCES

Videos

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dKCdV20zLMs> - video to introduce Julia (puppet with Autism Spectrum Disorder) on Sesame Street

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KmDGVguzn2k&feature=youtu.be> - ****Carly's Café - Experience Autism Through Carly's Eyes** This experience is viewed through the eyes of Carly Fleischmann, a 17 year old girl living with non-verbal Autism Spectrum Disorder.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=plPNhooUUuc&feature=youtu.be> ****What it's like to walk down a street when you have autism or an ASD**

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lr4_dOorquQ ****Can You Make it to the End?** A young man with ASD takes a trip through the mall.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GTT1KldAQbo> - ****audio description of how people with ASD differ in sensory processing**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ku1lajn5EU0> - “Jack’s Asperger’s Talk” – 11-year-old student addresses his 6th grade class and shares what it’s like to have autism spectrum disorder

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YIK2yXfrCfw&t=5s> - “My Autism,” by George - George's journey with autism at 9 years old. He shared this video with his fourth-grade class to help them understand why he behaves the way he does sometimes (during lunch, group activities, recess, etc.).

(Those with epilepsy or who are prone to seizures should not watch these videos. Viewers should also be prepared for increased volumes, which are intended to simulate the intense auditory stimulation associated with ASD.)**

Movies

Autism the Musical - Follows five children with Autism Spectrum Disorder as they work together to create and perform a live musical production. Bunim/Murray Productions, distributed by HBO Documentary Films, released April 2007, 94 minutes

Best Kept Secret - Documentary of a high school teacher preparing her students with Autism Spectrum Disorder for life after graduation. Independent Film, produced by Danielle Di Giacomo, Released May 2013, 85 minutes

Life, Animated- Documentary about a boy and his family and how they overcame great challenges by turning to Disney animated movies to give them the language to express love, loss, kinship, and brotherhood. Distributed by The Orchard, released July 2016, 92 minutes.

The Family Next Door- Documentary about the Lund family (4 children, 2 on the autism spectrum) and their journey. Distributed by Netflix, released September 2020, 82 minutes.

WV Autism Awareness Month Events

APRIL 2025

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
		1 WEAR BLUE FOR AUTISM AWARENESS MONTH KICK-OFF	2 WORLD AUTISM DAY	3	4	5 INCLUSIVE PLANETARIUM VISIT (WVU PLANETARIUM & OBSERVATORY) ADVENTURES IN ACCEPTANCE: HONORING SIBLINGS AND THEIR HEROES (DICK COPELAND SQUARE, PRINCETON, WV)
6 VISIT THE WVATC WEBSITE FOR INFORMATION ON EVENTS, RESOURCES, AND SERVICES.	7 "LIKE" THE WVATC FACEBOOK PAGE FOR INFO & UPDATES	8	9	10	11	12 CHECK OUT OUR BOOK OF THE MONTH "MASTERPIECE" BY ALEXANDRA HOFFMAN (AVAILABLE AT BOOKTENDERS, BARBOURSVILLE, WV)
13 SENSORY FRIENDLY MOVIE SHOWING OF "A MINECRAFT MOVIE" (RITZ THEATER, HINTON, WV @ 2PM)	14 "BRUINS WALK TOGETHER AUTISM WALK (BROOKE HS STADIUM, WELLSBURG, WV)	15	16	17	18 WOOD CO. MAKE AND TAKE SENSORY CRAFT (WOOD CO. SOCIETY, PARKERSBURG, WV)	19
20 CHECKOUT THE AUTISM SOCIETY YOUTUBE CHANNEL	21	22 SHARE WITH A FRIEND ANY NEW FACTS YOU HAVE LEARNED ABOUT AUTISM	23	24	25	26 WALK FOR AUTISM (CLARKSBURG CITY PARK, CLARKSBURG, WV) RUTH SULLIVAN RALLY FOR AUTISM (RITTER PARK, HUNTINGTON, WV)
27	28	29	30 INCLUSIVE STORYBOOK WALK (WIERTON, WV)		VISIT YOUR LOCAL LIBRARY TO SEE WHAT BOOKS ARE AVAILABLE ON THE TOPIC OF AUTISM.	

WV Autism Community Organizations

Nicholas County Autism Support Network

Contact: Vanessa Stapleton

Phone: (304) 651-3008

Email: vanessa.stapleton@hotmail.com

Territory: Nicholas County and surrounding areas

Potomac Highlands Autism Support Network

Contact: Leigh Saville

Phone: (304) 851-1422

Email: leigh.saville@marshall.edu

Facebook: Potomac Highlands Autism Support Network

Territory: Hampshire, Hardy, Grant, Mineral, Pendleton Counties

River Valley Autism Network

Contact: Patricia Boyce

Phone: (304) 273-3228

Facebook: River Valley Autism Network

Territory: Jackson County and surrounding areas

Support for Friends and Family of those with Autism/Asperger's

Contact: Kimberly Isaacs

Phone: (304) 966-4079

Email: istenochick13@yahoo.com

Facebook: Autism Support Group Parkersburg, WV

Territory: Wood County and surrounding areas

CARES (Community Autism Resources and Education Systems)

Contact: Danielle Stewart, Events & Marketing Coordinator

Phone: (681) 799-8227

Website: www.wvcaresforautism.org

Facebook: WVCARESforautism

Territory: Kanawha, Putnam, Cabell Counties

APPENDIX

R M B F N S T E W S G U D U W
 D I U D I Y D R L A M G K N T
 M N B V E U C X O M V T K D T
 A W H B L F P W B P W Y G E T
 U F S C O Q V T A Y P I D R P
 T I N A V N N W C S F U E S S
 I I V W K R F L B A Q G S T S
 S L M O D G A U N O J X H A D
 M I X W V S P U Z Z L E S N N
 B U E O S A Q R A G P G F D E
 A I E R S S E N E R A W A M I
 G T O X Q I C C L Q Z H S W R
 X O F A T Y Z I J T Y L B R F
 M I W E I T X S E B V M M Q S
 D R R C Z Q U B K L Z Q H K V

AUTISM
 FRIEND
 PUZZLE
 UNDERSTAND

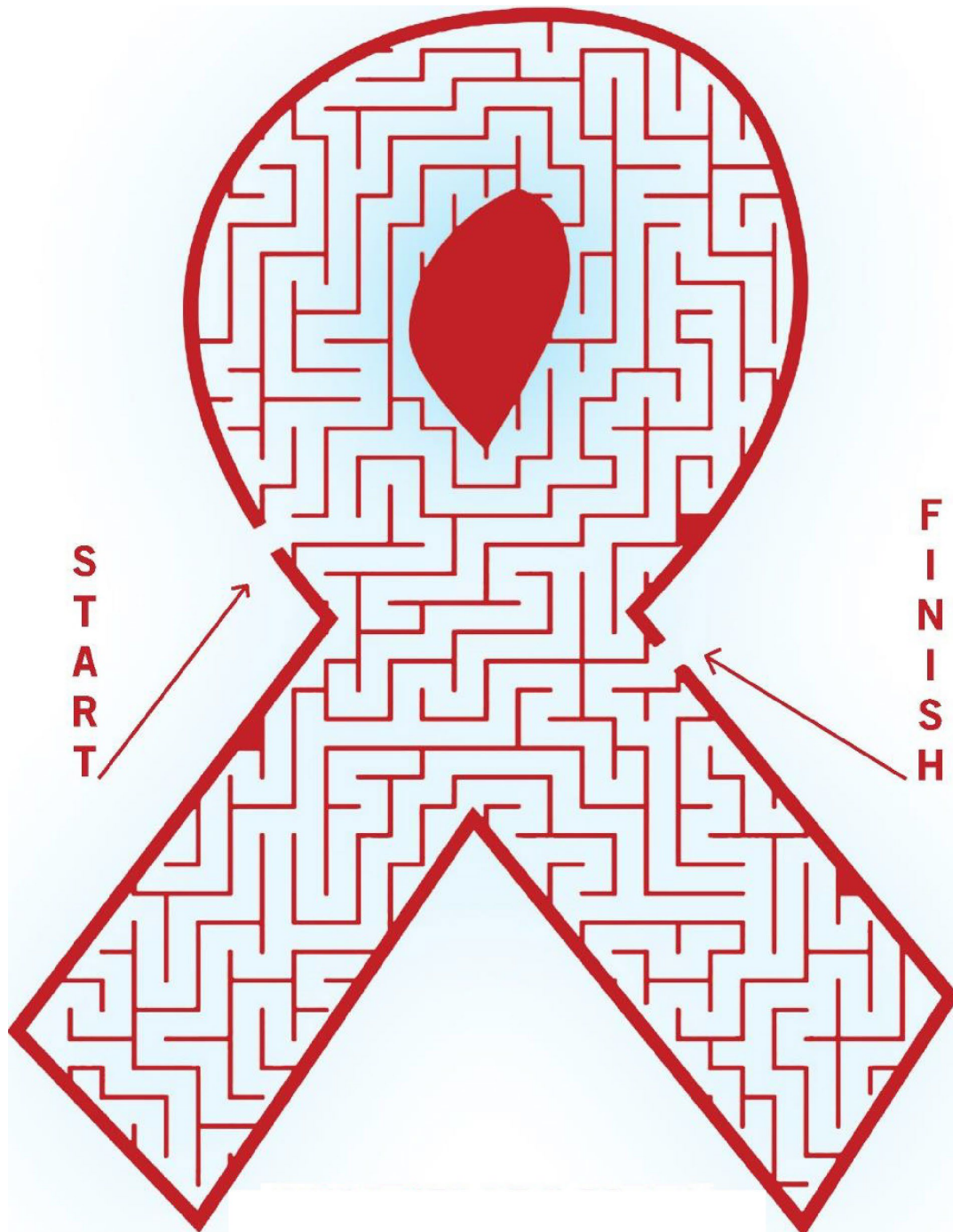
AWARENESS
 FUN
 RIBBON

CLASSROOM
 INCLUDE
 SUPPORT



World Autism
 Awareness Day

CAN YOU FIND YOUR WAY THROUGH THIS WINDING MAZE?



A Appreciate my special talents.

U Understand my unusual behaviors.

T Take time to wait for me to respond.

I Include me!

S Stick up for me when I need help.

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<http://autism.lovetoknow.com/about-autism/five-ways-improve-autism-awareness>