

# Pinpoint Problems



## **FAQautism.com Toolkit**

for family members, teachers, therapists,  
caregivers, and others interested  
in the well-being of individuals with autism.

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## Audio Tracks

- Track 1 Chapter 1: What is going on?
- Track 2 Chapter 2: Scout out the causes
- Track 3 Chapter 3: Matter of degree
- Track 4 Chapter 4: Real life examples
- Track 5: Chapter 5: What's next?
- Track 6: Chapter 6: Bonus for you

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### Introduction

This FAQautism.com Toolkit, *Pinpoint Problems*, is one in a series of practical, to-the-point workbooks, each of which addresses just one facet of autism. The mission of FAQautism.com is to maximize the potential and enhance the quality of life of individuals with autism and those around them. In keeping with that mission, the FAQautism.com Toolkits focus on providing options for dealing with various issues that arise in the daily lives of people with autism. The Toolkits assume readers are familiar with definitions, statistics, research, and other aspects of autism so these Toolkits are presented in a sparse workbook / audio discussion format, allowing readers to dive right into an issue and to explore options applicable to their particular situation.

The *Pinpoint Problems* Toolkit addresses an issue common with many parents, teachers, therapists, and others interested in the well-being of individuals with autism. Most of us tend to attempt to come up with solutions for challenging issues before we actually determine the exact nature of the problem. The Toolkit provides practical guidelines for pinpointing the exact nature and cause of various issues, giving us the tools for developing effective solutions without spinning our wheels.

Before we get started on this Toolkit, *Pinpoint Problems*, it is good to step back and recognize the positive aspects of our friends with autism. Even the most challenging individual is a precious human being. We can become so focused on addressing difficult behaviors and challenges that we begin viewing our friends as a bundle of problems. The most important contribution we can make to the quality of life of our friends with autism is to start each day recognizing and celebrating areas of strength and ability. Starting with that attitude allows us to be more effective in dealing with challenging issues that arise each day.

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## Chapter 1

What is going on?

 **Listen** to the audio track for Chapter 1

 **Jot Down** your thoughts on the Discussion Outline.

### Discussion Outline

#### 1. Consider the spectrum

A. Because the spectrum of autism is so broad, and because autism affects three distinct areas of functioning, no single strategy is effective for all people on the spectrum.

B. The American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM-IV-TR) lists "qualitative impairments in social interaction and communication" and "restricted, repetitive and stereotyped patterns of behavior interest and activities" as the diagnostic criteria for autism (APA, 2000, p. 70). Even within these specific guidelines, individuals exhibit different combinations and different levels of severity in all three domains of communication, social interaction, and restricted behaviors.

C. Because of these individual differences, it is impossible to develop one strategy or approach for dealing the problems encountered by people with autism. But we can take some purposeful steps to address challenging issues, the first of which is to pinpoint the problem.

## 2. Check assumptions.

A. Our friends with autism – toddlers, children, teens, and adults – deal with many challenges every day. Sometimes we make the mistake of thinking that every issue is related to a person’s autism, whereas it may actually be a natural part of life or a problem typical to that developmental stage. Let’s take a look at four general categories of challenging issues.

1. Age-specific issues. Some issues are typical for certain age groups or for certain stages of life whether a person has autism or not.

2. Typical autism-related issues. Most individuals with autism deal with challenges to some degree in communication, social interaction, and obsessive, restrictive, or repetitive behaviors as well as sensory sensitivities.

3. Mischief or intentional misbehavior. Just as is true of their typical peers, some people with autism are consciously and purposefully rebellious, confrontive, or disobedient.

4. External circumstances. Sometimes diet, scheduling, noisy surroundings, or other factors can impact a person’s mood, attitude, or behavior.

B. Consider keeping an informal written record of problems and challenging issues. No need to spend too much time nor to write out every detail, but it is a good idea to jot down brief notes.

### 3. Types of challenges

A. Taking a close look at daily challenges not only helps us recognize patterns and recognize circumstances surrounding the issues, but it helps us prioritize the need to address different challenges. For example, some behaviors may irritate us, but are, in reality, not something that requires our immediate attention.

1. Dangerous or Hurtful Behaviors.

2. Disruptive Behaviors.

3. Destructive Behaviors.

4. Inappropriate Behaviors.

5. Annoying behaviors.

6. Age-appropriate behaviors.

B. When we notice an issue in the life of an individual with autism that needs some attention or intervention, it helps to keep track of what is happening so we can notice any patterns and be aware of any factors that contribute to the problem. Then we can take a close look at the list and determine which issues are related to external circumstances, which are purposeful misbehaviors, which are a natural result of autism, and which are a natural outgrowth of the individual's developmental level.