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# Greetings from Chelsea

**H**ello, my name is Chelsea, and I am 11 years old. I am in the fifth grade. I don't know if you recognize me, but I see you every day at recess. I notice that you have a lot of friends, and it seems like you all have a good time together on the playground. I think I might enjoy some of the games you play. It looks like it might be cool to be one of your friends.

Here is the challenge, though. I have a disorder called autism, which can make it hard for me to make friends. You seem to be good at making friends. How about if I tell you more about me, so we can get to know each other?





# What in the World Is Autism?

**A**utism is called a “spectrum disorder,” which means that people with autism have a lot of different symptoms and behaviors; some are more obvious than others.

I like to describe autism using a rainbow. There is a huge rainbow of people, each with a variety of abilities, talents and challenges. Each person with autism (as well as any other person, for that matter) is a completely unique individual; no two are exactly the same.

I have what some people call “severe autism,” which means that I am on one end of the rainbow. You would probably notice my symptoms and behaviors pretty quickly (like covering my ears, spinning, flapping my arms or making funny noises).

Other kids on the rainbow of autism have Asperger Syndrome, which is sometimes called high-functioning autism. Kids with Asperger Syndrome are better able to communicate with you through speech. I sometimes prefer using a keyboard or picture cards (I will explain what those are later). Regardless of where a kid falls on that rainbow of autism, making friends and expressing emotions can be tricky.

Autism changes the way the brain usually works. Brains of kids with autism work differently than those without, which can make language (talking) and social interaction (playing) difficult. Brains are kind of like computers. Some process information better and faster than others.

I heard that 1 out of 150 children are born with autism. That's a lot of kids on the autism rainbow. Over one million people in the United States today have some form of autism. Also, autism is four times more likely in boys than in girls! I am in a special day class for students with autism, so I end up being around a bunch of boys most of the day. I don't get a lot of "girl time" in the classroom.