

# Supporting individuals with autism — from classroom to career

By Eden Miller, ASU News  
June 18, 2025

According to the CDC, autism rates have increased in the last five years, underscoring a need to understand its impact across the lifespan.

The [2025 community report on autism](#) notes that 1 in 31 children are identified as having autism spectrum disorder by age 8 — up from [1 in 36](#) in 2020.

That's why teams of researchers and practitioners at Arizona State University are working across diverse disciplines to understand autism and help those affected.

“Autism research is critical for advancing our scientific understanding of neurodevelopment and developing meaningful ways to help autistic individuals and their families thrive. As we learn more about the diverse experiences of autistic people, we will work toward improving research and interventions to support their needs and improve their quality of life across the lifespan,” said [Michael Yudell](#), dean of ASU's [College of Health Solutions](#).

Because the presentation of autism varies widely, each individual's experiences, needs and challenges are also distinct.

Students with autism may need additional assistance in a variety of areas, from socialization and communication to taking in sensory stimuli and motor functions. As children with autism grow into adults, universities must be prepared to support these students and their unique needs as they seek success in the classroom and the workplace.

Here's a look at the ways ASU faculty and staff are working toward understanding, supporting and providing care for individuals with autism.

## Advocating for early intervention

[Joshua Anbar](#), assistant teaching professor in the College of Health Solutions, makes contributions to the conversation through his own unique perspective as a researcher with autism.

Though there has been less stigma around autism in recent years, more research is needed to understand how presentation differs across the spectrum and what resources are still needed to fill

the gaps.

In an [interview](#) with [Doing Well](#), a health news outlet from ASU Media Enterprise and ASU Learning Enterprise, Anbar breaks down what autism is, how it's diagnosed, what resources are available and why early intervention is important to ensure proper support and care is available for individuals with autism.

## Supporting students on campus — and beyond

Arizona State University is committed to providing students with autism the resources they need to succeed.

Programs like [GATE](#) (for Growth, Achievement, Transformation, Enrichment) and [EASE](#) (for Employment Assistance and Social Engagement) provide structured support with both academic and professional development. In addition to [these programs](#), ASU offers events to support prospective, incoming and current neurodivergent students.

## Practicing mindfulness

Mindfulness may be more than just a powerful tool for dealing with stress. According to Associate Professor [B. Blair Braden](#), it may be helpful for individuals with autism spectrum disorder, too.

[Across two studies](#), Braden, who is with the College of Health Solutions, found that while mindfulness practices affected men and women with autism differently, mindfulness-based stress reduction may still help improve disability-related quality of life.

## Understanding how autism ages

In a [series of studies](#) performed by ASU's [Autism and Brain Aging Lab](#), Braden and her team also explored aging with autism and how communication changes as adults with autism age, finding that the areas of the brain responsible for social communication, cognition and executive functioning thinned more quickly with age than in neurotypical individuals.

Braden is using this data to design new interventions to assist older adults struggling in these areas.

## Gut health linked to autism symptom relief

In a [study](#) helmed by the [ASU Biodesign Institute](#), researchers discovered that microbiota transfer therapy, in which healthy gut bacteria is transferred to children with autism, is associated with improvements in gastrointestinal issues as well as physical and behavioral symptoms of autism.

The key to its success lies in the gut-brain axis, which allows the gut and brain to communicate.

## Closing gaps in early autism diagnosis

[Kristina Lopez](#), an associate professor in the School of Social Work, focuses her research on disparities in early autism diagnosis and access to services for underserved children and families, particularly within Latino communities.

Her work has shown that children from diverse backgrounds are often diagnosed later, face more barriers to care and are less likely to receive high-quality services. In a 2021 ASU News [interview](#), Lopez discussed the systemic challenges that contribute to these gaps — and how early diagnosis and intervention efforts can be improved.

---

## Why this research matters

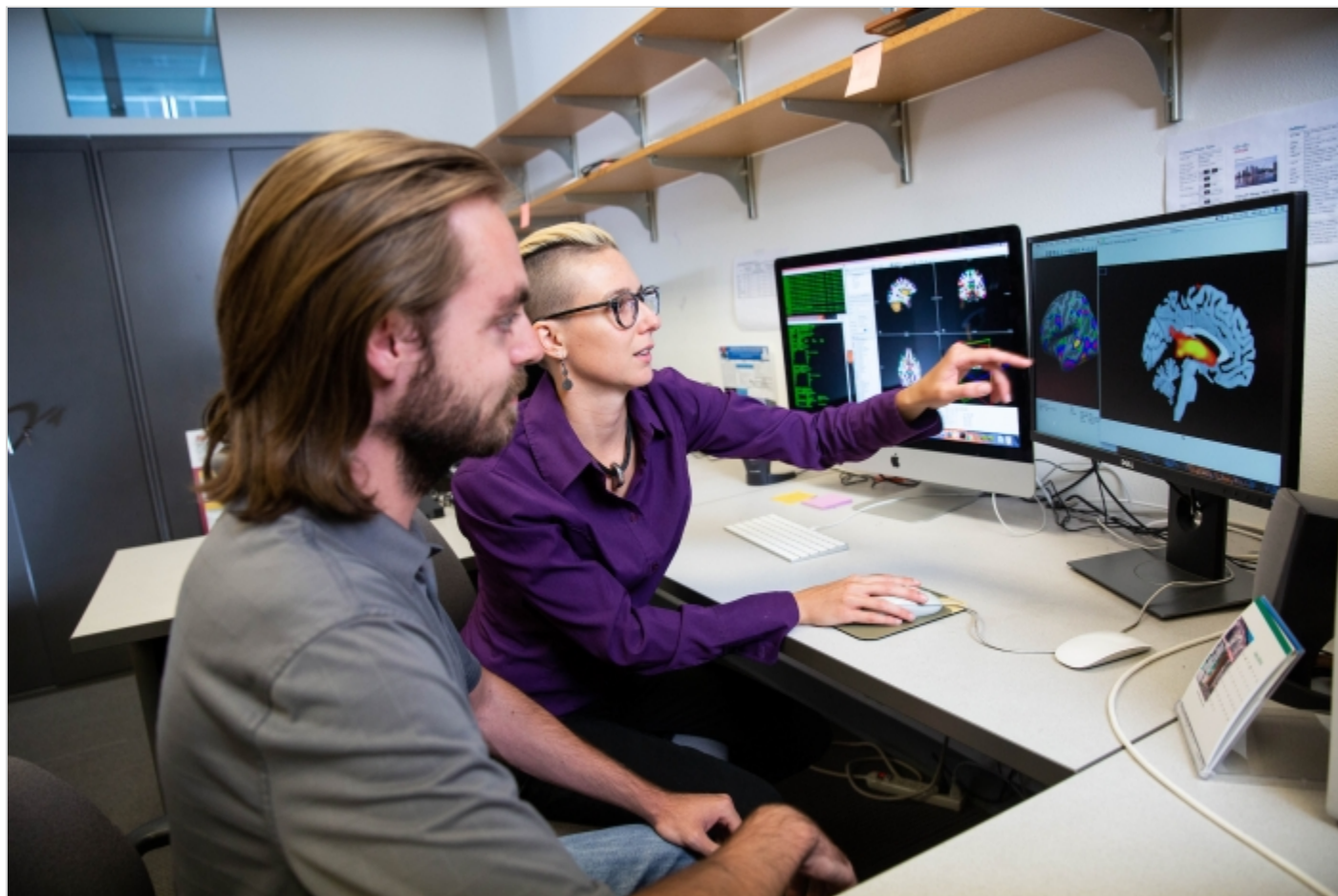
Research is the invisible hand that powers America's progress. It unlocks discoveries and creates opportunity. It develops new technologies and new ways of doing things.

Learn more about ASU discoveries that are contributing to changing the world and making America the world's leading economic power at [researchmatters.asu.edu](https://researchmatters.asu.edu).

---

*This story originally appeared on [ASU News](#).*

## Main image



Associate Professor B. Blair Braden (right) studies age-related changes in adults with autism spectrum disorder in the Autism and Brain Aging Lab. Photo by Deanna Dent/ASU