

# Learning about autism from someone who lives it and works with those who have autism

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BOCA RATON, Fla. - Twenty-three-year-old Sam Rogerson is a coach to his 21-year-old friend Scott Rubin when they're at work.

"You're a hard worker," says Sam as they pack hundreds of plastic clips into bags.

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"Good job," he says as another bag is filled.

Sam is on the higher end of the autism spectrum, and has begun working with those on other sections of the spectrum.

"It's really a perfect environment for me to work with kids with intellectual disabilities, and helping them make a variety of good choices," he said.

Every week, Sam and Scott take the train and bus to the All-Tag office in Boca Raton. There they work loading the tags stores use to detect if clothing is being stolen.

As someone who lives with it and supervises someone with autism, Sam provides a unique view of life with autism.

He says a big problem is understanding what others are saying. His advice: be direct.

"Use small words and break it down into little sentences and like slow down a little bit," said Sam.

He says when talking with someone with autism, avoid every day phrases.

"Let's say it's raining cats and dogs. A lot of people with autism get confused by that, so help them describe what it means," he said.

While working with Scott, Sam demonstrated another key to communicating to those with autism: stick to the point.

"Remember let all the air out before you close it," he said to Sam as they sealed the bags.

He warns that when a conversation goes too long, they can lose focus and the words start sounding the same.

"Let's say for example like 10 or 15 minutes they talk for a long time and give you instructions, 'Sam I've got instructions for you, number one,' and moments later, when it gets too long it goes blah, blah, blah."

But what he wants most is for people to understand he's more than someone with autism

"I have autism but that is not who I am," he said.

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