

Neurodiversity

Understanding and awareness of autism

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What is it?

Having a neurodiverse brain means you have sensory processing differences compared to the majority of the population



A word cloud of neurodiverse conditions. The words are arranged in a cluster, with 'Autism' being the largest and most central. Other words include 'Dyslexia', 'ADHD', 'Alexithymia', 'Dyspraxia', and 'Dyscalculia'. The colors are primarily purple and green.

Dyslexia
ADHD
Autism
Alexithymia
Dyspraxia
Dyscalculia

Why is it important to understand?

Typical work environments (and the world in general) may be hostile to people with Autism & the neurodiverse population in general, year ending June 2021 only **29% of autistic people were in employment**

Autistic adults are **9 times** more likely to die from suicide, and Autistic children are **28 times** more likely to think about or attempt suicide.

Damaging Stereotypes

- Autism presents itself differently in women, compared to the stereotype of it only affecting white boys who like trains, or intelligent but rude men
- Women may commonly be mis-diagnosed (i.e. Borderline Personality Disorder)
- People of colour and those from other minority groups may also never get diagnosed

If you've met one autistic person, you've only met one autistic person

General Statistics

“Brugha's 2009 survey of adults living in households throughout England found that **1.8% of men and boys** surveyed had a diagnosis of autism, compared to **0.2% of women and girls**”

“As recently as 2010, **white kids were deemed 30% more likely** to be diagnosed with autism **than Black children and 50%** more likely than Hispanic children”

What is it Like?

Misunderstandings
Burnout
People Pleasing
Routine
Special Interests
Inappropriate
Blunt Masking
Eye Contact
Hyperfixations Fawning
Frustrations **Time Alone**
Structure
Exhaustion
Distractions
Info Dumping
Noise
Procrastination
Dwelling

Why can the work environment be so hostile?

- Sensory issues
- Communication differences
- Differences in thinking
- Lack of structure and routines
- Masking to fit in

Sensory Issues

An autistic person may be very sensitive to;

- Noise
- Smells
- Lighting Conditions
- Busy Environments

With a need to have places in the office to retreat to when these sensory experiences get too much.

Often experiencing these things can either be **painful**, or **joyful**.

An Autistic person may be unable to filter out unwanted sensory input, it's experienced all at once

Communication Differences

Often the onus is put on the person with Autism to reach more than halfway when experiencing communication differences with another person

- Tasks need to be communicated concisely
- Communication preferences may not be verbal
- Extra time may be needed to process information
- Having the camera on and making eye contact may be uncomfortable
- Try to avoid interruption people in mid-sentence

Communication Bad Example, The

- Specify deadline dates directly
- What you need and when
- Bullet pointed list
- Be literal, don't imply
- Try to avoid micromanaging
- Be open to criticism that you may have communicated poorly
- Avoid walls of text
- Avoid meaningless small talk when it's obvious you want something
- Be open to different modes of preferred communications

Differences In Thinking

- An Autistic person may think better in terms of images, or other abstractions, such as numbers
- May struggle with simple things, such as tying shoe laces, or reading analogue clock faces (co-morbidity traits)
- May find relative complex tasks easy and easy tasks difficult

Lack Of Structure And Routine

- Need for space for regular breaks, lunchtime should be a sacred space
- Reduce the need for unexpected events
- Need for flexible work patterns
- A unexpected break in routine may cause distress
- Empowered to say no to meetings

Structure need not be imposed, but created collaboratively

Masking To Fit In

- An autistic person may be masking to hide their behaviours, this is a survival strategy a person may develop to blend in with others to avoid consequences such as bullying, a lot of autistic people have a lifetime of trauma as a result
- Hidden autistic behaviours may include the need to stim, such as hand flapping, rocking gentle or needing to pace
- Masking may also mean engaging in activities that are difficult to take part in, formulating sentences may require extra effort
- **The consequences of masking all the time can be exhaustion and result in burnout**

Hidden Consequences

You may not see the visible consequences of a person living in a world not built for them, such as;

- Meltdowns
- Non-Verbal
- Exhaustion & Burnout

Ways Of Working

Be open to individual ways of working, and be open to change, your way of working may be good for you, but damaging for another

Just because a certain way of working has been common practise for many years, doesn't mean it's an effective or a good way of working (be an agent for positive change, rather than a spokesperson for tradition)

A neurodiverse friendly workplace benefits us all!

Strength Based Mindsets

Hyper-focusing

Doing repetitive tasks quickly with high quality

Learning really quickly

Identifying patterns that nobody else can see quickly

Conventional thinking can sometimes slow down progress considerably

Difficult things to you, may be easy to a person with autism, and vice versa

What Can I Do To Help?

Challenge your own ways of thinking, not everybody thinks the same

When there is a misunderstanding or conflict, don't assume the other person is the primary cause of the problem, it takes two people to tango

Whilst feedback is useful, be considerate with feedback, open a dialogue, you may be commenting on a neurological condition that is difficult to change, try to work with the neurodiverse brain, not against it

Give space to people to allow time to process

When creating meetings ensure a clear agenda is defined with outcomes clearly stated in the description, allow others to make the choice about whether to attend

Don't book important meetings during lunchtime

Challenge traditional working conventions

Don't be a Dick

Questions!

Follow up links;

<https://embrace-autism.com/autism-tests/>

<https://embrace-autism.com/asrs-5/>

<https://monotropism.org/>

<https://adhdaware.org.uk/what-is-adhd/neurodiversity-and-other-conditions/>

<https://hdsunflower.com/us/insights/post/for-people-with-non-visible-disabilities>

Sources;

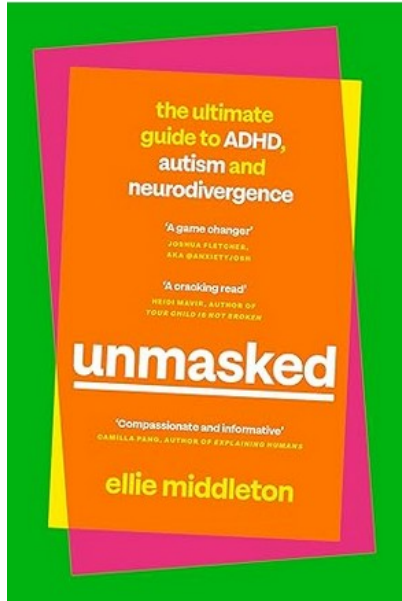
<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/disability/articles/outcomesfordisabledpeopleintheuk/2021>

<https://www.autistica.org.uk/what-is-autism/signs-and-symptoms/suicide-and-autism>

<https://www.autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/what-is-autism/autistic-women-and-girls>

Recommended Reading;

Unmasked – Ellie Middleton



“Whether you are neurodivergent, suspect you might be, or want to be a better ally, UNMASKED will help you make sense of it all, and put the power in your hands.

Ellie was 24 when she learned she wasn't broken. She wasn't a bad person, she was neurodivergent. Her late diagnosis of ADHD and autism was like a lightbulb being switched on and she could finally start to heal from the trauma of being undiagnosed and mis-understood for so long.

Since getting her diagnosis, Ellie has made it her mission to change the way we think about autism, ADHD and neurodivergence and in UNMASKED she shares what she has learned along her journey.”

Recommended Reading;

The Autistic Brain – Temple Grandin

“Want to read just one book about autism? Read this. Written by Temple Grandin, one of the world's most accomplished and well-known adults with autism, this thought-provoking, insightful and inspirational book - with illustrative diagrams and key points pulled out for emphasis - will assist not only fellow autistics and families with affected members, but also researchers and physicians seeking to better understand the condition”

