

Neurodiversity

Understanding and awareness of neurodiversity
Autism

AND Digital

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 used are purple, green, and magenta.

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 diagnosed with 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 (comorbidity 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

Hyperfocusing

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

Whilst feedback is useful, be considerate with feedback, open a dialogue, you may be commenting on a neurological condition that is impossible to change

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>

<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>

<https://apnews.com/article/how-common-is-autism-e38179682e2759b0aff9c017bf7ebf61#:~:text=That's%20up%20from%201%20in,about%202%25%20of%20white%20kids.>

Recommended Reading;

<https://www.amazon.co.uk/Unmasking-Autism-Incredible-Hidden-Neurodiversity/dp/1800960549>

https://www.amazon.co.uk/Adult-Autism-Assessment-Handbook-Neurodiversity/dp/1839971665/ref=sr_1_5?crid=2094IACOVUR64&keywords=autism+handbook&qid=1699372286&s=books&sprefix=autism+handbook%2Cstripbooks%2C65&sr=1-5

Strength based, rather than deficit based

Autism Spectrum Disorder

Rather than

NOT BEING YOURSELF (MASKING)

Survival strategy

A life of contradictions



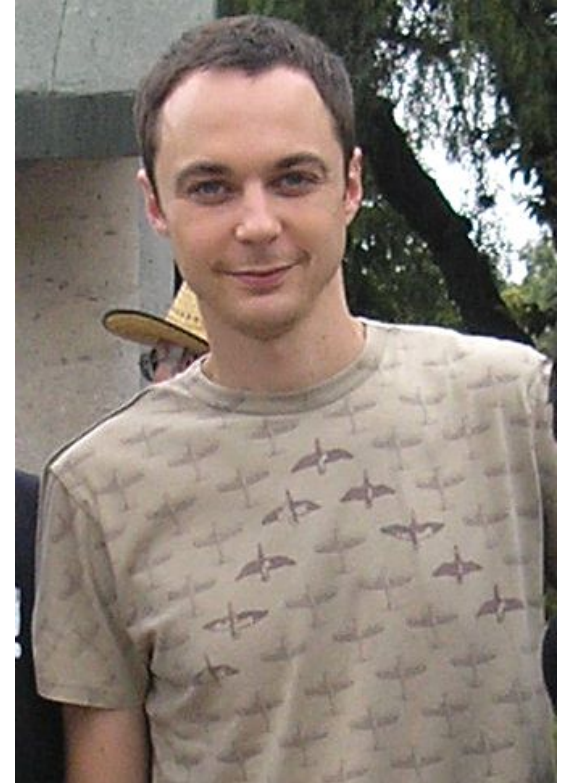
- You may be ok in one scenario, but not ok in a similar scenario
- You may seek out sensory experiences, but also get overwhelmed by them
- You need structure but it becomes mundane
- So many more...

Negative Stereotypes

“Not all neurodiverse people are super smart and rude” - Me, just now.

“Not all neurodiverse traits are bad” - Me, just after now.

“Sheldon Cooper can kiss my arse” - Also Me, then, which was also now.



Common Traits -same as slide above?

- Sensory differences
- Ability to focus intently on a single task (hyper focusing)
- Ability to also get easily distracted
- Need for routine and structure
- Difficulties with task switching
- Think differently, may think in terms of images rather than words
- Taking things literally and thinking in black and white terms
- Communicate differently

We Are Not All The Same

However, there is not a single trait that defines neurodiversity, if you've met one autistic person, you've met one autistic person.

Not all of us like trains.

Conditions aren't limited to just affecting children.



Somebody May Need

- More clearly defined tasks, and with a more literal statement of things you may think are obvious (PROVIDE EXAMPLE)
- Consideration for preferred communication methods, such as slack messages, rather than video calls (eye contact?)
- Routine and structure (not enforced upon them, but defined with a collaborative approach)
- More time to process new information, time to pick up new tasks, task switching should be avoided as much as possible
- For personal space not to be invaded

Consequences Of Unmet Needs

- Meltdowns/shutdowns (all of which may occur in private)
- Unable to speak
- Too exhausted at end of the day to do anything else

Empowering Control Over Meetings

- Flexibility with meetings, with options to not attend if the meeting appears to be irrelevant or the meeting agenda hasn't been clearly communicated
- The option to keep the camera off during meetings (eye contact may be uncomfortable)
- Breaks before and after meetings, for preparation time and rest time
- Reiterate the need for sacred times of day for no meetings (such as lunchtime)

Shared Responsibilities

“The responsibilities of creating a good neurodiverse environment are a shared responsibility, for neurotypicals and the neurodiverse” - Me, again, just now.

“A neurodiverse workplace is good for everyone” - Me, once more, about a week ago.

Work Environment

A typical office may be a source of anxiety, providing sensory overload, relating to excessive background noises, smells and poor or overly bright lighting, such as fluorescent lights.

Somebody may be unable to “tune out” these sensory experiences and can be overwhelmed.

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)



Being An Effective Communicator

Try to be specific, descriptive and concise in how you communicate, you may be unaware that you are communicating in an ambiguous style

Ask others about their preferred method of communication, it may be different to yours, how do you like to receive information? Verbally? Text? Diagrams? Audio/Video Call?

Consider that your preferred method of communication isn't the most effective way to communicate

Structure

Create structure and routines within client environments as quickly as possible, reduce the unknowns

Encourage people to be in control of their day-to-day working structure and routines

With structure, you enable the creation of a healthy culture

Strengths

Appeal to people's strengths, somebody on the spectrum may be very good at things you may think are difficult, and struggle with things you may find easy

Questions?

OVER AND OUT

Add example of clearly explained tasks

Duplicate information in some slides

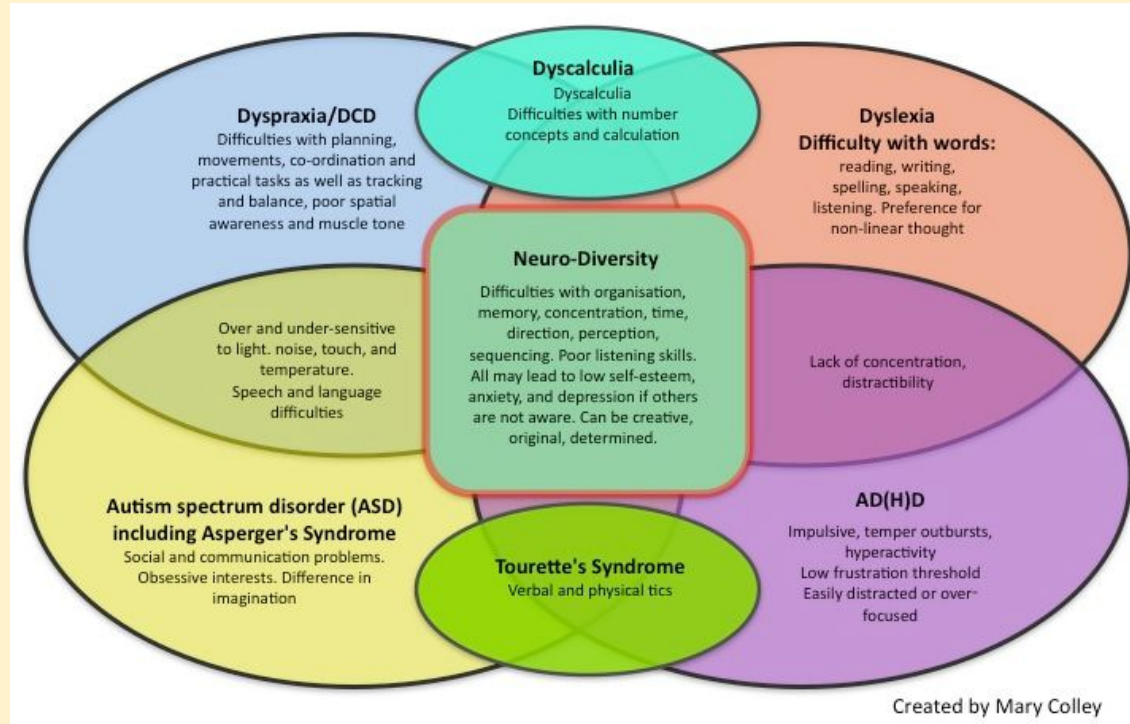
Add colour

Talk a bit about masking and fawning

Self-diagnosis is OK

What is neurodiversity?

Neurodiversity describes the idea that people experience and interact with the world around them in many different ways; there is no one "right" way of thinking, learning, and behaving, and differences are not viewed as deficits



Our Clients

*“A neurodiverse mindset first not only benefits us, but also helps improve our clients” -
Garfield the cat, probably*

- Helping them define structure and routine
- Teach them to tackle unknowns quickly
- Help them look after their employees
- Create a healthier work environment
- Teach them to gain the best of out of their employees diverse ways of thinking

Understanding Autism and ADHD

Building a neurodiverse workplace

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