

Neurodiversity: The challenge, The gift

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DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES



What is Neurodiversity

“Neurodiversity is the idea that neurological differences like autism and ADHD are the result of normal, natural variation in the human genome.”

John Elder Robison



The Neurodiversity Model

- There are some traits of autism and other neurodiverse conditions that cause discomfort or difficulty with daily functioning that can be treated, but we should not seek to eliminate these conditions
- Many if not most people who are neurodiverse state their neurodiversity is central to who they are and would not agree to be “cured” if that could be done.
- They instead seek opportunities to use their gifts, understanding, and accommodations for their differences

Autism By the Numbers

1 Million

people with autism will become adults in the US during the next 10 years.

Voc Rehab Service Utilization article (Roux, Rast, Anderson, Garfeld, & Shattuck 2020)

Autism By the Numbers

- 1:54 children at the age of 8 have a diagnosis of autism
 - 42% had an IQ within the average to gifted range
 - 33% have an intellectual disability
- Approximately 70% of people with autism have at least one coexisting condition
 - 29.2% clinical anxiety
 - 28.2% ADHD

Autism By the Numbers

Over half
of people with autism...

experience disruption to college and employment after high school, often because of inadequate supports or poor fit

Autism By the Numbers

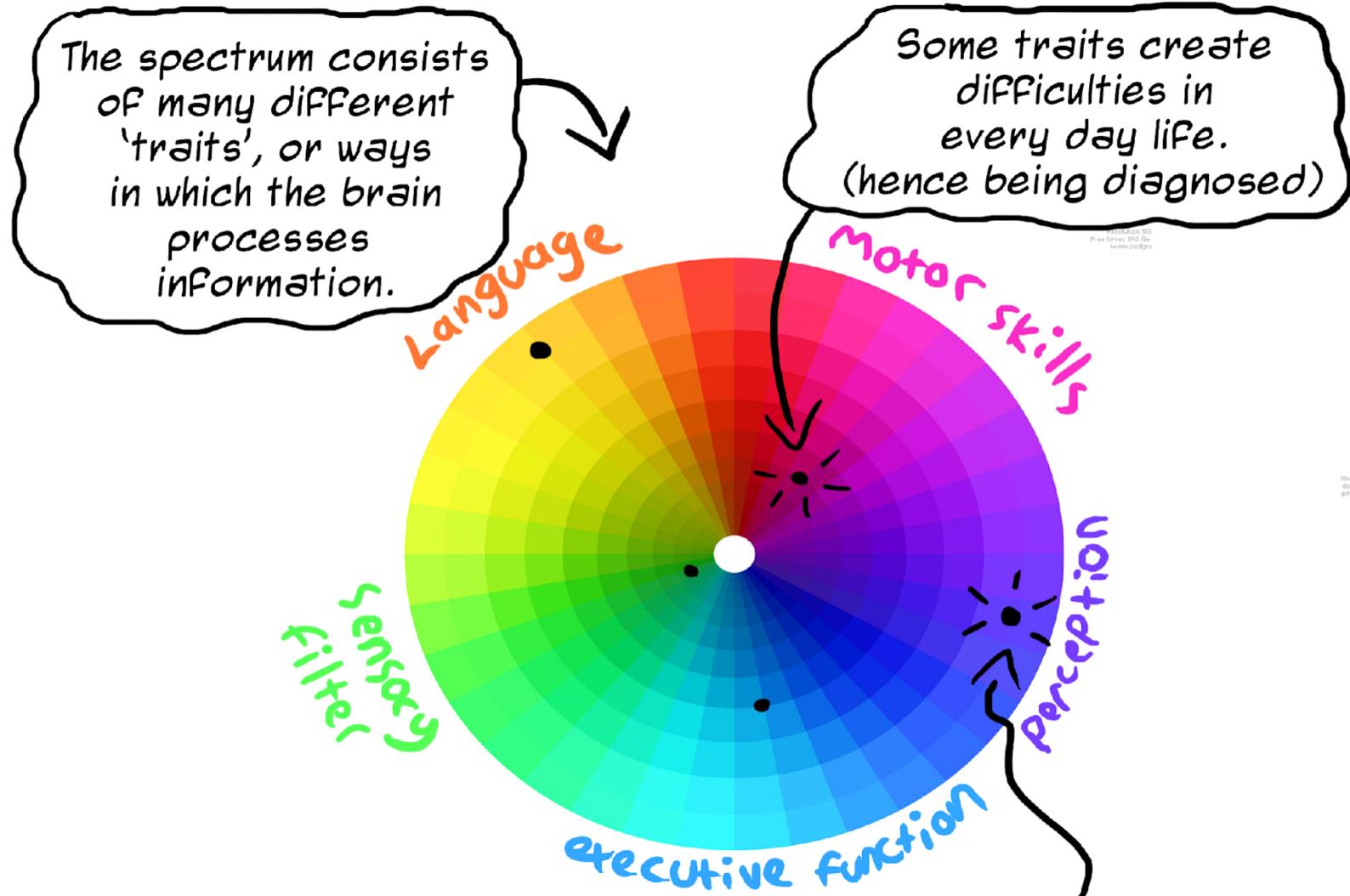
Over half
of people with autism
who are employed...

are underemployed

A Clinical View of Autism

SOCIAL-COMMUNICATION (all 3)	Range of expression and examples
Deficits in social-emotional reciprocity	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• abnormal social approach and failure of normal back and forth conversation• reduced sharing of interests, emotions, affect, and response• failure to initiate or respond to social interactions
Deficits in nonverbal communicative behaviors used for social interaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• poorly integrated verbal and nonverbal communication• abnormalities in eye contact and body language or deficits in understanding and use of nonverbal communication• lack of facial expression or gestures
Deficits in developing and maintaining developmentally appropriate relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• difficulties adjusting behavior to suit different social contexts• difficulties in sharing imaginative play and making friends• absence of interest in people

A Different Way to think about the Spectrum



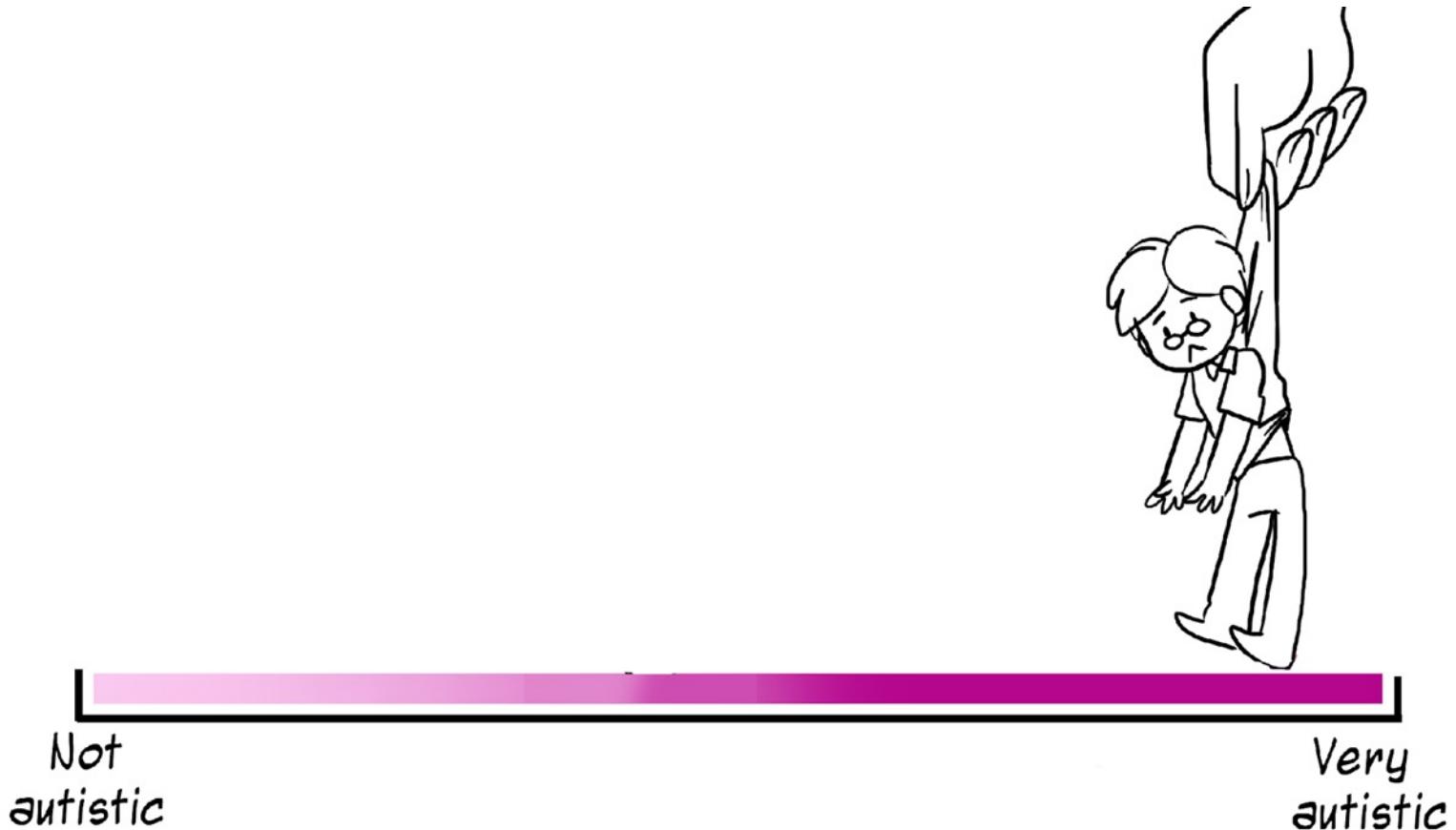
A Clinical View of Autism

Severity Level	Social Communication	Repetitive Behaviors
Level 3: Requiring very substantial support	Severe deficits in function: very limited social initiations, minimal responses to others' initiations	Inflexible behavior (IB), extreme difficulty coping with change, or RRBs markedly interfere with functioning in ALL spheres
Level 2: Requiring substantial support	Marked deficits even with supports in place: limited social initiations, reduced or abnormal responses to others' initiations	IB, difficulty coping with change, other appear frequently enough to be obvious to casual observer and interfere with functioning in variety of contexts
Level 1: Requiring support	Without supports, deficits cause noticeable impairments. Difficulty initiating social interactions, clear examples of atypical or failed responses. May have decreased interest in social interactions	IB causes significant interference in one or more contexts. Difficulty switching between activities. Problems of organization and planning hamper independence

A Clinical View of Autism

A comic by Rebecca Burgess

Clinical or traditional understanding of the term “spectrum.”



ADHD

Frequent Gifts	<i>Potential Challenges</i>
Creativity	Impulsivity, difficulty with rote task
Leadership	Questioning authority
Spontaneity	Challenges with Prioritization, punctuality
Multi tasking	Organization
Optimism	Difficulty with deadlines
Social	Challenges working alone/without feedback
Intuitive	Logic
Comfortable with risk	Risk taking
Calm during crisis	Bored by routine

Challenges That CAN Come with Neurodiversity

- Sensory Sensitivities
 - Lights
 - Noise
 - Textures
 - Smell
- Executive Functioning
 - Focus
 - Task initiation
 - Planning/prioritization
 - Organization
 - Time management
 - Flexibility
 - Stress tolerance
 - Learning from past experience

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Good Job Fit

Job fit can be key

- Skills required
- Interests match the task
- Sensitivities
- Amount of inherent structure within the tasks
- Number of tasks involved
- Social demands
- Characteristics of the physical space
- Ability to provide accommodations for marginal functions (non-essential duties)

Executive Functioning and Anxiety

As Anxiety Increases
Executive Functioning
Decreases

- Getting started
- Staying on task
- Organizing information & materials
- Making decisions
- Persisting despite obstacles
- Planning/Prioritization
- Stress tolerance
- Memory
- Self Advocacy

Anxiety Impact on Executive Functioning Versus Perception of Others

- Getting started → • Laziness, not interested
- Staying on task → • Goofing around
- Organizing information/materials → • Being defiant
- Making decisions → • Either not working or not following protocol
- Persisting despite obstacles → • Flight or fight
- Planning/Prioritization → • Not completing tasks as expected
- Stress tolerance → • Flight or fight
- Memory → • Not completing tasks as expected
- Self Advocacy → • Not asking for direction or assistance

A thought About Disclosure....

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My takeaway from over 35 years of experience: People who are neurodiverse work twice as hard as I am and genuinely care about their work and relationships

Communication is Key

Many people make assumptions about how to support. Some unhelpful responses:

- Socially anxious/communication challenges?
 - ~~Don't talk or invite out~~
- Difficulty with tasks?
 - ~~Give simpler tasks~~
- Not completing assignments?
 - ~~Ultimatums~~

Some Helpful Phrases

1. I value you. Is there any way I can help with _____?
2. I know you care about your work. It seems like you have been having a hard time recently. (Be prepared to provide specific instances if appropriate and needed). How can I help? _____
3. I notice when _____, you seem to _____.
Is that accurate? _____
How can we work together to _____?
What would be helpful to you? _____

Some Phrases to Avoid

1. Do you have _____ (disability)?
2. Why do you/did you do that?
3. Don't be so _____
4. Just _____

ASK JAN (Job Accommodation Network)

JAN	FOR EMPLOYERS	FOR INDIVIDUALS	ADA LIBRARY	A TO Z LISTS
Arthritis	Drug Addiction	Leg Impairment		
Ataxia	Dystonia	Little Person		
Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (AD/HD)	Eating Disorders	Low Vision		
Auditory Processing Disorder	Ehlers-Danlos Syndrome	Lupus		
Autism Spectrum	Electrical Sensitivity	Lyme Disease		
Back Impairment	Epilepsy/Seizure Disorder	Marfan Syndrome		
Bipolar Disorder	Essential Tremors	Mental Health Impairmen		
Bladder Impairment	Fetal Alcohol Syndrome	Migraines		
Bleeding Disorder	Fibromyalgia	Multiple Chemical Sensiti		
	Food Allergy	Multiple Sclerosis		

ASK JAN: Accommodations for Executive Functioning and Concentration

Products:

- Lighting/auditory sensitivities. Timers. Recorders

Strategies:

- Task Separation: Prioritize assignments. Assign new task when the previous project is complete. Creating a "cheat sheet" of priorities
- Visual task sheet and /or visual schedule
- Marginal functions: Trade marginal duties with a colleague for duties that are a better fit

ASK JAN: Key Anxiety, Stress Accommodations

Products:

- Lighting/auditory sensitivities. Timers. Recorders

Strategies:

- Tailored feedback
- Mentoring:
- Task Separation
- Visual task sheet, checklists, and /or visual Schedule
- Marginal functions: Trade marginal duties with a colleague for duties that are a better fit

Neurodiverse People In My life

- “Dalai Lama” Pastor with ADD who was let go for poor administrative skills
- Many neurodiverse musicians, artists, chefs
- 3 men with autism who had “surprising” data entry skills who had been told to be greeters or stock shelves
- Coworker with ADD who focused intently on serving families but had difficulty remembering basic protocol and office skills. Provided with simple notebook with “cheat sheets”

Gender Identity

- Transgender: People whose gender identity is different from the gender they were thought to be at birth. (National Center for Transgender Equality)
- Transgender individuals are 3-6 times more likely to be autistic than cisgender individuals (Warrier et al. 2020)
- Important to be respectful of what name and pronoun the person wants others to use (e.g. he/him, they/them, she/her)
- Deadnaming: Using a person's birth or former name without consent

Resources

- Business Advisory Council
 - <https://www.linkedin.com/company/northern-california-business-advisory-council>
- Video: Adult ADHD: Updates on research, diagnosis and treatment
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ECEkHR-p5co&t=694s>
- Love on the Spectrum (Netflix)