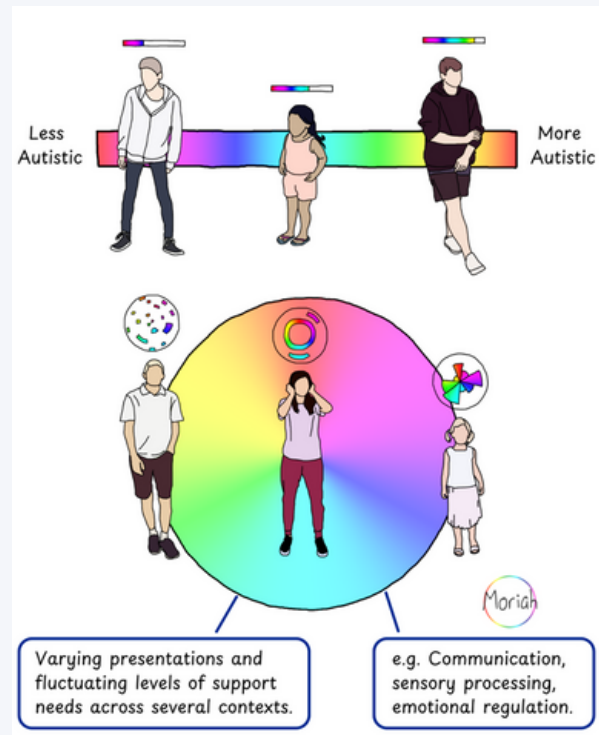


Understanding and Accommodating Autistics

The spectrum

The Autism spectrum is not a scale of being more or less autistic. It is a representation of the fact that every autistic's experience with autism can differ significantly from another. Anyone can experience traits that are commonly associated with autism but the degree to which autistics experience them is typically more extreme. Autism is a different neurotype, this means that sayings like 'everyone is a little autistic' or 'everyone is on the spectrum' aren't true and can be extremely invalidating of the experiences that autistics live through as a result of a society that isn't suited to their neurotype.



Use identity first language.

Identity first language is preferred by the majority of the autistic community. That is "autistic person" rather than "person with autism". Person first language is used for illnesses and injuries. Autism is not something that is wrong with us and is not something we just carry. It shapes and changes who we are and our entire lives and it is an okay thing to identify with.

Allow active work or active seating.

Stimming is really important for the wellbeing of many autistics. Stimming is any movement or action that helps the individual to regulate themselves and how they are feeling. It can be repetitive movements like tapping, twirling hair and fidgeting. One way to allow stimming while working is through the use of active seating. This can include wobble stools or swiss balls. A wobble stool is a seat with a curved bottom, designed to move around while in use. It is also common for individuals to stim through the use of fidget toys.



Social cues

Autistics may not use or interpret social cues in the way that is expected. This includes eye contact, tone of voice, body language, gestures etc. Social cues are not a reliable form of communication with many autistics so it is important not to rely on this as indicators for anything. Autistics may not appear to be listening or paying attention as a result of this but they may still be fully engaged in what is going on. They may not make eye contact or be able to tell when you're uncomfortable. It's important to be up front and clear about what you want. If you are unsure if they are listening or understanding, ask them.



Sarcasm and metaphors.

Many autistics are very literal and it is not uncommon for sarcasm and metaphors to cause miscommunications and confusion. It is important to understand that the autistic brain works very differently to a neurotypical brain and it can be really difficult trying to understand what is being said when it has hidden messages. It may be difficult for an autistic person to identify what is sarcasm and what is not and default to taking everything seriously and metaphors and common sayings often just don't make sense when taken in their literal form.

Rules, instructions, expectations and implications.

Autistics may not pick up on implications or things unspoken. Being very clear about rules, instructions and expectations and avoiding implications will go a long way in reducing miscommunications. Our brains work very differently to that of a neurotypical and what is common sense to you, may not be common sense to us. An example could be, "go get the key", which key? "Please get a water bottle for me", you have not specified that you want a bottle full of water. "This device needs to be charged", you have not said that you wish for me to charge it, you have simply stated a fact. Be clear, say what you want.

Alternative forms of communication

There are a number of scenarios where an alternative form of communication may be necessary. This can include interactions where individuals are either permanently or temporarily non-verbal or non-speaking. It also includes interactions with individuals who are struggling to process what is being said. Alternative forms of communication can include an AAC device, writing, sign language, or using gestures to indicate a choice about something. For example, giving the individual two options and having them tap the hand that correlates to each option.



Sensory difficulties

Many autistics are hypersensitive to their senses and may notice things that others do not. This can be really overwhelming because what might be bearable to one person can actually be debilitating and painful for an autistic person. Here are some work based examples of what can be helpful:



- Remove ticking clocks and replace them with silent ones
- Fix buzzing lights
- Allow the person to work in an area away from strong smells (like the kitchen for example)
- Allow the person to work with a barrier around their desk or up against a wall to avoid the distractions of colleagues
- Allow the person to work in an area of the room that has less stimulation
- Allow noise cancelling headphones or earplugs. It is important to understand that most of the time this does not inhibit the person from getting their job done and for some it reduces the level of what they hear to be similar to what others hear.

Changes

It is really difficult navigating a world that is not suited to your neurotype and is often not accommodating. Having routine and regular expectations creates some level of safety and comfort in a world that is exhausting. These routines and expectations can become extremely important for autistics and their wellbeing and it can be hard to adapt when things change unexpectedly. The more warning the person is given, the higher the chance of managing it well.

Processing conversation

Many autistics will take longer to process conversation. Please be patient, repeat things when necessary and give time to register what's been said. Having a visual form of the conversation as well as the spoken can be really helpful.

This resource was written by an autistic author (2025)