Through a New Lens: Understanding the Autistic Perspective

Presented by:

Ryan Walsh, Neurodiversity Training Specialist
Asperger/Autism Network (AANE)
Agenda

- About AANE
- Developing a Shared Language
- Autism Through a Neurological Lens
- Q&A
AANE.org helps Autistic and otherwise Neurodivergent people build meaningful, connected lives. We provide individuals, families, and professionals with information, education, community, support, and advocacy — all in an inclusive atmosphere of validation and respect.
An Inclusive Community

Autistic Adults, their Family Members, & the Professionals who serve them comprise our Board of Directors, Advisors and Staff.

Committed to welcoming individuals of all gender identities, races, ethnicities, cultures, ages, sexual orientations, and neurotypes.
Information, education, community, and support for ...

Adults
(post high school & select supports for teens)

Family & Friends
(of children, teens, and adults)

Professionals
(educators, therapists, employers & more)

AANE is committed to racial equity.
What do you know about autism and neurodiversity?
Developing a Shared Language
What is Neurodiversity?

Neurodiversity is the diversity of human brains and minds – the infinite variation in neurocognitive functioning within our species.

- Term coined by Australian sociologist Judy Singer in the late 1990s
- Natural variations in individual cognition
- There is no “normal” or “average” human brain

Nick Walker, Neurocosmopolitanism, 2014
NEURODIVERGENT UMBRELLA

ADHD  ASPD  BPD  DID & OSDD  AUTISM  DYSLEXIA  DYSPRAXIA  SENSORY PROCESSING DISORDER  PTSD  DYSGRAPHIA
BIPOLAR  DID  NPD  CPTSD  OCD  TIC DISORDERS  SCHIZOPHRENIA  MISOPHONIA  HPD  DYSCALCULIA  DOWN SYNDROME  SYNTHESIA

Source: https://www.instagram.com/livedexperienceeducator/
Identity and Intersectionality

- Race
- Ethnicity
- Gender
- Sexuality
- Culture
- Neurotype
Disability is defined by societal expectations

- Identity
- Intersectionality
  - Systemic barriers
  - Marginalization
  - Advocacy
Medical Model
- Disability arises from the autistic disorder
- Views autism as a disorder/disease/personal tragedy
- Focuses on ‘fixing’ perceived deficits and finding a cure
- Assigns power to caregivers and professionals to make decisions

Social Model
- Disability arises from societal expectations
- Views autism as a set of neurological differences
- Focuses on removing barriers to equity and inclusion
- Protects autistic autonomy and the right to free and informed consent

Autistic individuals are disabled
There’s a lot of language out there…
From a medical model to a self-determined approach

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Medical Model/Diagnostic</th>
<th>Person-First</th>
<th>Identity-First</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Autism Spectrum Disorder</td>
<td>on the Spectrum</td>
<td>Autistic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asperger Syndrome</td>
<td>Asperger profile</td>
<td>Autist</td>
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<tr>
<td>High Functioning Autism</td>
<td>Autism</td>
<td>Neurodivergent</td>
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An evolving conversation about language…

Shifting from a medical model to a self-determined approach

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<tr>
<td>• Person with Autism</td>
<td>• Neuro-spicy</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Suffers from Autism</td>
<td>• Neurodivergent</td>
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Not Sure? ASK!
An evolving conversation about language…
*Shifting from a medical model to a self-determined approach*

<table>
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<th>Low Functioning</th>
<th>High Functioning</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Presumes incompetence</td>
<td>• Limits access to supports</td>
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Presumes incompetence
Minimizes strengths and abilities
How the world experiences the individual
Linear

1. Limits access to supports
2. Minimizes obstacles and challenges
3. How the world experiences the individual
4. Linear
Autism Through a Neurological Lens
What is Autism?

It is:

- A set of neurobiological differences that affect how information is processed.
- A disability
- These processing differences may affect:
  - Communication
  - Ability to form/sustain relationships
  - Executive functioning
  - Regulation (sensory, attentional, emotional)
  - Concept generalization and learning

It is not:

- Able to be outgrown or cured
- A behavioral disorder
- An emotional disorder
- A mental illness
- Linear
A Neurological Lens

definition; viewing and understanding behavior and communication as a function of an individual’s specific neurological profile
Behavior through a Neurodiversity Lens

Common Misperceptions
- Disrespectful
- Unwilling
- Unmotivated
- Lazy
- Noncompliant
- Mean
- Arrogant

Through a Neurological Lens
- Social communication differences
- Sensory discomfort
- Ambiguity
- Depleted internal resources
- Co-Occurring Conditions
- Trauma
Navigating the World is Exhausting for Neurodivergent Individuals

The barriers in place today require autistic individuals to do this balancing act 24/7.
Social Communication

Distinct ways of communicating

Find an access point

Aspects:
- Nonverbal Communication
- Double Empathy
- Masking
Masking

- Overscheduling
- Forcing Spontaneity
- Tolerating Extreme Discomfort
- Hiding Interests
- Suppressing Movement

Unmasking

- Taking Breaks
- Say No
- Access comfort
- Sharing Interests Openly
- Move when you need to

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Sensory Processing

How one processes sensory input

hyper- or hypo-responsive

Systems:

- gustatory (taste)
- olfactory (smell)
- tactile (feeling)
- visual (seeing)
- vestibular
- proprioceptive
- auditory (hearing)
- interoception
Executive Functioning

A set of cognitive processes and mental skills that help an individual plan, monitor, and execute their goals

Aspects: organization, planning, initiating, and stopping tasks, explaining reasoning in words, processing speed
Co-occurring Conditions

Medical or psychological conditions that can occur alongside autism

**Examples:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depression</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bipolar</td>
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<td>ARFID</td>
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<td>ADHD</td>
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<td>OCD</td>
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<td>Ehlers-Danlos</td>
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<td>Irlen</td>
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<tr>
<td>IBS</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dyslexia</td>
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Supporting Individuals with Co-occurring Conditions

- **Anxiety**
  - Common to autistic people
  - Can build quickly, but can also be cumulative
  - Long term anxiety can cause Autistic Burnout

- **Dysregulation**
  - Occurs when a person is overwhelmed
  - Can look different in all autistic people
  - Hypo/Hyper-Reactivity

- **Supports**
  - Finding a neurodiversity affirming therapist
  - Internal resources (Spoon Theory)
  - Unmasking
  - Using natural community supports.
Alexithymia & Interoception

- Autistic individuals may have a hard time naming their emotions (alexithymia) or their physical sensations (interoception)
- Feeling vs. Communicating
- Using tools like a feelings wheel, a sensations wheel, and mindfulness may help you tune in (they may not).
- Knowing this can help inform therapy and self-advocacy.

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Context Matters: Independent Work

- Social Communication
- Social Pragmatics
- Sensory Processing
- Executive Functioning
- Anxiety

Lower Demand

Higher Demand

Check marks indicate areas where context matters for independent work.
Context Matters: Team Meeting

Social Communication
Social Pragmatics
Sensory Processing
Executive Functioning
Anxiety

Lower Demand → Higher Demand

Higher Demand

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Context Matters: Lunch with Coworkers

Social Communication
Social Pragmatics
Sensory Processing
Executive Functioning
Anxiety

Lower Demand

Higher Demand

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How to be an ally every day!

- Communicate clearly and directly
- Interrupt microaggressions
- Challenge stigma, stereotypes, & bias
- Listen actively & attentively
- Validate individual experiences
- Focus on people’s strengths
- Recognize deep systemic barriers
- Advocate for universal design based practices
Questions? Comments?
AANE Programs & Services for Families

**Free Information & Referral for Parents/Families of:**
- Children, Teens, Adults up to age 22
- Adults Over 23

**Coaching for Parents of:**
- Children, Teens & Adults up to Age 22
- Adults Over 23

**College Consultations**

**Support Groups for:**
- Parents of Children, Teens & Adults through Age 22
- Parents of Adults Over 23
- For Grandparents
- For Couples & Partners
- For People who think their Parents are on the Spectrum

**LifeNet Independent Living Support Program**

**Conferences, Webinars, & Workshops**

**Neurodiverse Couples Coaching**

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AANE Programs & Services for Adults

- Adult Support Groups
- Social Activities & Events for Adults
- LifeNet Independent Living Support Program
- Neurodiverse Couples Coaching
- Free information & referral call for adults
- LifeMAP Coaching for Skills Development
- College Consultations
- Conferences, Webinars, & Workshops
Donations from our community members help keep our webinars and other programs low-cost and free.

If you’d like to contribute, use this QR code or this link.

Thank you for your support.
AANE is here to Support You!

Free Information & Resource Calls, Community and Organizational Training, Inclusive Online Support Groups, Social Connection Opportunities, LifeMAP Coaching, Workshops & Webinars, & MORE!

Thank you!

Ryan Walsh
Neurodiversity Training Specialist, AANE (he/him)
ryan.walsh@aane.org

AANE.org
Still Have Questions?

**Adults**
(post high-school adults & select supports for teens)

[www.aane.org/resources/adults/](http://www.aane.org/resources/adults/)

**Family & Friends**
(of children, teens, and adults, including grandparents, other relatives, and partners)


**Professionals**
(educators, therapists, employers, service providers, and more)

[www.aane.org/resources/professionals/](http://www.aane.org/resources/professionals/)