

DE- STIGMATIZING AUTISM

A toolkit that informs and provides resources for those looking to learn more about Autism!

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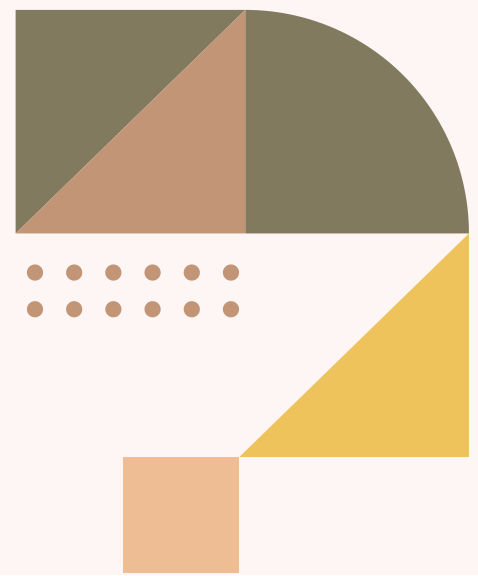
WHAT IS AUTISM?

- A **developmental disability** characterized by a number of potential symptoms, including (but not limited to):
 - Stimulative behavior (**stims**)
 - Trouble socializing
 - Reaching **neurotypical** development stages at different points
 - Can be later **OR** earlier
 - Special interests
 - Intense reactions to **external stimuli**
 - A buzzing light
 - Clothing textures
 - Interest in detail
- Many within the community use "**neurodivergent**" to describe themselves, but what is that?
 - **Neurodivergent**: differences in processing information
 - Used to describe those with autism, ADHD (Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder), bipolar disorder, OCD (Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder, and schizophrenia



WHAT AUTISM IS NOT

- Autism is **NOT**:
 - A mental illness
 - A birth defect
 - Abnormal
 - Only for white, rich, cisgender boys
 - Severe or Mild
 - Basing language on support needs is more respectful
 - Bad
 - A problem that needs to be "fixed"
 - The puzzle piece symbol **embodies** this concept
 - A rainbow infinity sign is more **inclusive**, as it communicates that autism is on a **spectrum** and a **good thing!**



A NOTE ON LANGUAGE

- Person-First versus Identity-First language
 - Person first:
 - Separating an **identity** from a **person**
 - Ex: Person with Autism
 - Identity first:
 - **Integrating** an identity with a person
 - Ex: Autistic person
- Many people within the Autistic community prefer identity-first language
 - They **do not** perceive their Autism as something that can or should be separated from themselves
- Asperger's versus Autism
 - Aspergers:
 - A term for low-support individuals, developed by Hans Asperger, a man who collaborated with Nazis and sent many Autistic children to Am Spiegelgrund, a clinic that euthanized its patients
 - Some have abandoned the term due to its history
- Always ask the person you're referring to for **their preference!**





POTENTIAL COMORBID DISORDERS



- Anxiety
- Depression
- Eating Disorders
 - ARFID (Avoidant-Restrictive Food Intake Disorder)
- OCD
- ADHD
- Burnout



A NOTE ON ARFID

- You may have heard of the other mental disorders listed, but what is **ARFID**?
 - **ARFID (Avoidant-Restrictive Food Intake Disorder)**
 - Includes:
 - Extreme stress related to eating
 - Aversion based from smell, texture, temperature, or taste of foods
 - Limiting food intake
 - **NOT** related to body image, but specifically to the food
 - ARFID can manifest at any point in the lifespan, but often begins at childhood
 - Treatments:
 - Dietician
 - CBT





LIVING WITH A DISABILITY

- Living with a disability can often result in Autistic people feeling **ostracized** from their peers
- A combination of common life stressors, functioning within neurotypical standards, and **masking** can cause serious, Autistic burnout
 - **Masking:** a **protective** measure that many Autistics engage with to **blend** into neurotypical society
 - Includes:
 - **Reducing** stims
 - Attempting to **ignore** offensive stimulus
 - **Forcing** eye contact
 - **Working** for extensive hours
 - **Refusing** their own **needs** to appear "more normal"
 - Autistic burnout can **differ** from neurotypical burnout
 - Includes:
 - **Extreme** exhaustion
 - Trouble functioning
 - "Reduced tolerance to stimulus" (Raymaker et al., 2020)

SUPPORTING A LOVED ONE WITH AUTISM

- **LISTENING** is so important!
- **Education** about autism from resources created by people **with autism**
- Helping to **organize schedules** and **make decisions**
- **Listening** about their special interests/engaging with those interests **directly**
- Being **explicit** in directions/expectations
- **Asking** about **preferences** and how to **support** in the event of a **meltdown/burnout**
 - **Learning triggers**
 - **Support items**
 - Earplugs, headphones, chew toys, stims toys, stuffed animals, etc. can all assist an autistic person and provide support
- Check the **references** for some helpful links! :)





RESOURCES

- Media Portraying Autistic Individuals
 - TV Shows:
 - **Atypical**
 - An autistic teen attempts to **assimilate** into neurotypical culture while dealing with many challenges
 - **Note:** the main character **IS NOT** portrayed by an actor with autism. There are mixed opinions on this, so research and ask around to make your own decisions before engaging with this piece.
 - **Extraordinary Attorney Woo**
 - An autistic lawyer experiences her first job at a **law firm**
 - **Note:** the main character **IS NOT** portrayed by an actor with autism. There are mixed opinions on this, so research and ask around to make your own decisions before engaging with this piece.
 - **Heartbreak High**
 - An extremely **accurate** portrayal of an autistic girl **navigating** relationships and high school
 - **Note:** the autistic character here **IS** portrayed by an autistic person.

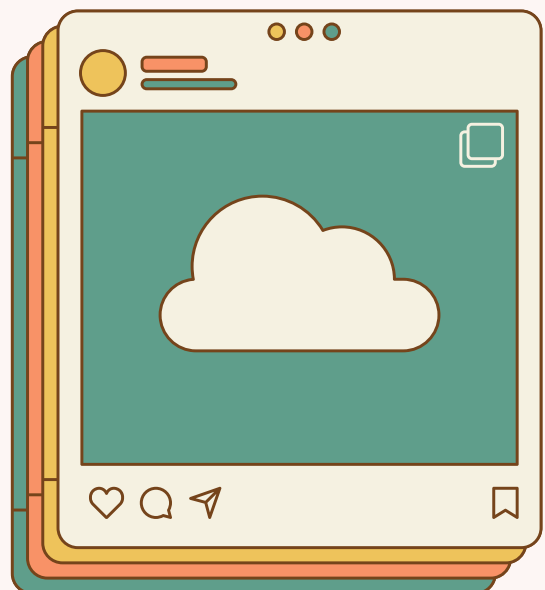
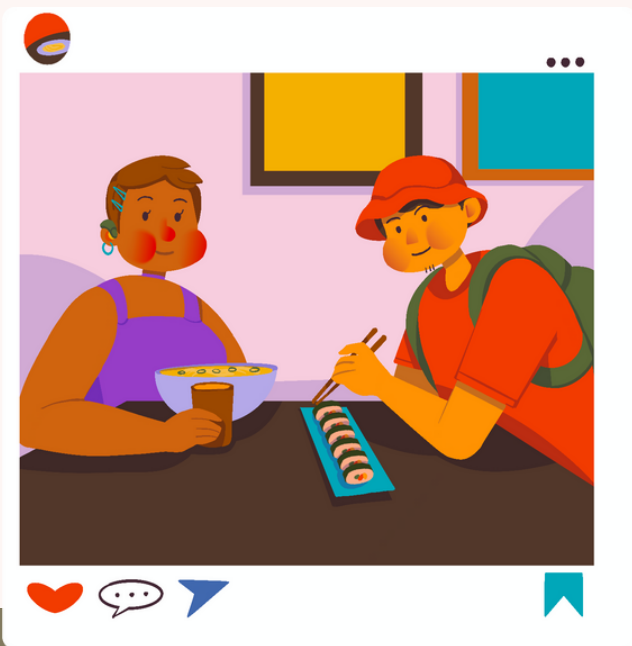


RESOURCES

- Media Portraying Autistic Individuals (continued)
 - **Books:**
 - **Unmasking Autism** by: **Devon Price** (he/it)
 - A book **de-stigmatizing autism** and providing avenues for an autistic individual to begin **unmasking**
 - Framed as a **helping book** for people with autism, but provides many perspectives that can be helpful for a neurotypical person seeking to **understand autism**
 - Note: Devon Price is a trans white person, so some of his perspectives are not reflective of all experiences, particularly for people of color. Much of the information he provides is very useful, but it's also important to keep his privilege in mind when reading
 - **Sensory: Life on the Spectrum** edited by: **Bex Ollerton** (she/her)
 - A collection of **comics** drawn by **autistic artists** who communicate some of their **struggles** and **daily lives**
 - **The Autistic Guide to Adventure** by: **Allie Mason** (she/her)
 - A book focused on introducing new hobbies
 - Provides **fact sheets** and **sensory experiences** involved
 - Geared towards **younger** people, but still an **interesting, informational** read!

RESOURCES

- Media Portraying Autistic Individuals (continued)
 - **Instagram Accounts:**
 - [_ellawillis](#) (they/them)
 - A queer autistic person who shares info about Autism and their autistic experience!
 - [autie.nay](#) (she/her)
 - autistic woman who shares about her experiences, special interests, and general info about autism
 - [autisticpositivity](#) (she/they)
 - An autistic person who provides history, humor, and personal info related to their experiences of autism



RESOURCES

- Websites:

- <https://autisticadvocacy.org/>
 - One of the largest, most well-known sites that provides **resources** related to autism
- <https://www.reddit.com/r/autism/>
 - A forum specifically for **discussions, information, and support** for members of the autistic **community** and their **families**
- <https://awnnetwork.org/>
 - A site built for autistic **women** and **nonbinary** people
- <https://communicationfirst.org/>
 - A site dedicated to people who **cannot communicate verbally**; provides **resources** and **support**
- <https://neuroclastic.com/>
 - A site created to spread **information** and **inclusivity** for all **autistics**
- <https://depts.washington.edu/dbpeds/Screening%20Tools/DSM-5%28ASD.Guidelines%29Feb2013.pdf>
 - **Criteria** for ASD according to the **DSM-5**

****Note: when looking for websites, make sure that the websites are supported or facilitated by autistic people!****



RESOURCES

- **Alternatives to ABA "therapy"**

- **Note:** ABA is a controversial form of therapy developed by Ivaar Lovaas, the same person who created **gay conversion therapy**
 - ABA is focused on modifying behaviors **perceived** as negative and forcing autistic people to assimilate into neurotypical society
 - "Treatments" can include **withholding food, preventing stims** (which serve as self-regulation), **electric shocks, and social training**
 - Some modifications have been made, which include **play-based training**
 - Some people **have** benefitted from modified forms of the therapy, but most of the goals rely on changing "**unacceptable**" behavior
- Most of the autistic community **DOES NOT** endorse ABA
- **Other, more positive therapies include:**
 - CBT
 - OBT
 - Speech Therapy



HELPLINES AND HOTLINES

- **24/7 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline**
 - CALL or TEXT 988
 - Languages: English, Spanish
- **24/7 Crisis Counselors**
 - TEXT "NAMI" to 741741
- **NAMI Mercer HelpLine x17**
 - CALL 609-799-8994
 - Hours: Mon-Fri 10am-10pm E.T.
- **24/7 LGBTQ+ Counselors (The Trevor Project)**
 - TEXT "START" to 678678
 - CALL 1-866-488-7386
- **24/7 SAMHSA Substance Use National Hotline**
 - CALL 1-800-662-HELP (4357)
 - Languages: English, Spanish



REFERENCES

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