

[illegible]

What should I add to this slide?

- Flashing lights
- Pink neon framing
- More cowbell
- Holy cow NOTHING.

First, a poll.

We'll come back to that question in a little while.

Agenda

- Characteristics of Autism
- Library issues
- Why is this of interest?
- What can we reasonably fix?

The background is a light gray with various abstract geometric shapes. There is a large black circle on the left with orange lines inside. A large orange parallelogram is at the top. A dark purple irregular shape is in the center-right. A pink triangle is in the lower-left. A green circle is at the bottom-left. An orange circle is at the bottom-right. A purple triangle is at the bottom-right. A black triangle is at the top-left. A red trapezoid is at the top-center. A gray trapezoid is at the top-right. A black circle is at the top-right. A black circle is at the bottom-center. A black circle is at the bottom-right. A black circle is at the bottom-right. A black circle is at the bottom-right.

Sidebar: language

In general, autistic people prefer “identity-first” naming rather than “person-first.” But you can (should) always ask a specific person about preference.

Sidebar: who are we talking about?

Autism is a big, broad spectrum, and autistic people are not a monolith.

Today we're talking about autistic adults who are independent and integrated into ordinary daily activity.



Let's have another poll.

What traits do autistic library users have?

- They don't care about other people
- They make inappropriate noises or movements
- They are anxious about social interactions
- They don't like following the rules

Characteristics of Autism

Autism is about
neurology.

We used to talk about
different disorders
that have all been
folded into one

Sidebar: more language

- Sometimes autistic people call themselves “neurodivergent.” This is in opposition to “neurotypical.”
- Another way to say ‘not autistic’ is “allistic.”

Characteristics of Autism

Issues include:

- Hypersensitivities
- Comorbidities
- Social interactions
- Perseveration
- Rule clarity

The background is a light gray with various geometric shapes scattered across it. There's a small red dot in the top left, a blue circle with a white center below it, a red inverted triangle in the top center, a large orange circle in the top right, a white circle partially visible on the right edge, a purple circle in the bottom right, and several triangles in shades of green, gray, and black. A purple horizontal bar spans the middle of the slide.

Hypersensitivities

WHY ARE
THESE
SLIDES SO
DANG
BUSY???

Because this is how
hypersensitivities feel.



Ahhhh. Better.

But think about it:
all day every day
overstimulated
and unsure where
to look or what to
attend to.



Hypersensitivities

Smells
Textures
Unusual sounds
Emotional responses
Density of surrounding people
Visual distractions
Ordinary sounds
Qualities of light
Tastes



But sometimes...

Smells
Textures
Unusual sounds
Emotional responses
Density of surrounding people
Visual distractions
Ordinary sounds
Qualities of light
Tastes

Sometimes autistic people
have some areas of near-
insensitivity as well in these
same domains.



Comorbidities

Not all people with these conditions are also autistic, but there's a lot of overlap, and many autistic people have:

- **OCD**
- **Anxiety disorders**
 - **ADHD**
 - **Dyslexia**
- **Auditory processing issues**
- **Other neurological/neurosocial issues**



One thing that helps

- OCD
- Anxiety disorders
- ADHD
- Dyslexia
- Auditory processing issues
- Other neurological/ neurosocial issues

Sometimes, autistic people (and allistic people) “stim” because it helps provide a point of focus or helps provide a counterbalance to something overwhelming.



Social interactions

Difficulty with:
Entering conversation
Exiting conversation
Humor/lack of humor
Facial expressions
Body language
Subtlety versus directness

Autistic people usually
prefer direct feedback
over tact!



Common misconception

Difficulty with:

- Entering conversation
- Exiting conversation
- Humor/lack of humor
- Facial expressions
- Body language
- Subtlety versus directness

Autistic people are sometimes perceived, because of this, to not care about other people. This is not a correct perception.



Perseveration

Persisting:

- Behavior
- Conversation
- Presence
- Strong interests
- Opinions that are restated until they are points of contention



Or, “just move on!”

No one perseverates because they are trying to be rigid or argumentative. They are “stuck,” because executive function skills in autistic people are often jumbled.

This also shows up in struggling with change in practice, policy, or routine (which all goes much better if clearly communicated).



Rule clarity

Autistic people:

- Struggle with ambiguity
- Notice ambiguity other people may not
- Usually like clear rules
- May have a hard time articulating why a rule is unclear to them when it seems clear to neurotypical people



Unstated rules

Unstated rules, many of which are social expectation rules, are particularly challenging.



Another poll!

Which of these
items does not
belong?

- A penny
- Mount Rushmore
- A \$5 bill
- A nickel



Were you able to answer?

You probably didn't think that was ambiguous at all. And yet, this is the kind of question where rules and ambiguity come into play.

Library issues

- Sensitivities to noise and light in what is expected to be an academic space
- Distractibility
- Difficulty discerning how rules apply

Library issues

- Anxiety about asking for help
- Difficulty negotiating conversational give and take
- Frustration with other users' perceived deviation from rules

Why is this of interest?

Autistic students may

- Struggle to distinguish between appropriate and inappropriate responses in our spaces
- Struggle to recognize when their behavior is creating problems

Why is this of interest?

Managing autistic students' social skills is not the library's job; however, finding ways to meet their information needs despite their struggle to articulate them probably is.

Why is this of interest?

Autistic adults may seek employment with us, and because we may interpret their needs as socially odd, we may reject their applications even though they may be excellent employees.

What can we reasonably fix?

- Space design
- Information design
- Service points
- Interviews
- Interpersonal interactions

In designing spaces

- Consider creating areas of less contrast and less crowding.
- Provide a variety of shapes and textures in furnishings.
- Include different lighting options to reduce glare in oversensitive eyes.
- Provide spaces which feel less open or visible/more protected.

In presenting information

- Consider presenting information in tables or flow charts that identify relationships.
- When information is conditional, be thoughtful about the Boolean logic (a lot of autistic people love Boolean logic) behind how it's presented
- Consider describing how the information is organized at the top of the page. Don't assume it will be apparent that it's alphabetical or most-important-first.

At service points

- Offer multiple ways to “talk” (chat/email).
- Be explicit and accurate about expectations.
- Be prepared to clarify/differentiate ambiguities.
- Be prepared to redirect focus.
- Be prepared to remove from overwhelm.

In interview situations

- Offer a written copy of questions for the interviewee to refer to both as reminder and as focal point.
- Consider interviewing practices which avoid large-group in-person scenarios; consider being explicit about where to look or offering something to look at together.
- Expect and plan to redirect answers which refer to ambiguities you hadn't noticed.
- Be thoughtful about how interpersonal behavior is relevant to the posted job.

Interpersonal interactions

- Notice a person lingering and explicitly open or close a conversation or interaction.
- Be prepared to let the person know the social expectations have been met/exhausted.
- Describe next steps and set expectations for follow-ups/continuation. Meet those expectations.
- Understand that sustained eye contact is very difficult, and that it costs other attention.

Resources

- **ASAN: the Autistic Self Advocacy Network**
- **Local/Campus groups that include autistic leaders**
- (Autism Speaks has a history of exclusion and is not preferred by the autism community)



Questions?

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