

Autism Acceptance

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We need to emphasize strengths not just weaknesses or cures when portraying kids and adults with autism. With support, people with autism can live independently, work, and be productive members of our communities.

Autism has many unique advantages for people. For example, [research](#) has shown that some people with autism outperform others on auditory and visual tasks. People with autism may excel in the workplace. For example, if someone has a narrow focus on video games or politics, that intense interest could one day turn into a job.

People with autism are parents, siblings, neighbors, students, workers, bloggers, and volunteers. Each person experiences autism in different ways and at different intensities. We may be super sensitive to noise and rely on predictable routines. One popular saying that I promote is that if you meet a person with autism, you have only met one person with autism. No two people with autism are the same.



Here are some ideas to promote autism acceptance:

1. Host events to spread the word about the gifts and talents of people with autism to employers and the community at large.
2. Recognize that neurotypicals and people with autism are more alike than different. For instance, the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed that many of us with or without autism have difficulty dealing with sudden major

changes, uncertainty, unpredictability and dealing with the constant urge of needing to be in control of one's environment.

3. Do not use terms like “High” or “Low Functioning.” Functioning labels are harmful because they are often used to deny access to needed supports and services. In addition, these terms deny or minimize our challenges on a day-to-day basis in all aspects of life, including but not limited to community living, employment, activities of daily living, mental health support, dealing with trauma, transportation and so forth.
4. Support self-determination and dignity of risk, especially as kids move from school to adulthood.
5. Be trauma sensitive, especially as we emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic. Understand that people may have a history of trauma.
6. Create sensory-friendly environments especially in the areas of medical care, employment, and things like COVID-19 vaccine initiatives.
7. As part of being a strong ally, call out ableism and gaslighting when you see it.
8. Encourage businesses, disability organizations, and nonprofits to hire people with autism - not just offer services to them.
9. Advocate for systems change that is person-centered and supports us to live in the community to the greatest extent possible.
10. Talk with state policy makers about why IQ limits are not person-centered.
11. Include people with autism in professional roles on research and systems change projects.
12. Champion Supportive Typing and all augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) forms of communication. Communication is a civil right regardless of whether the method is evidence based or not!
13. Support in an empathic, nonjudgmental way. Refrain from gaslighting and microaggressions (such as lack of opportunity for professional growth in work settings, body language, avoidance, refusal to accommodate a person’s needs).
14. Focus on minimizing stressful situations and settings as much as possible.
15. Celebrate the gifts, joys, and talents of people with autism.

It is important that we remember the lessons learned and make COVID-19 policy innovations part of the new normal. This includes things like telehealth, remote

job coaching, tutoring, and more 1:1 individualized services. At the beginning of the pandemic, the federal Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) allowed states to waive or loosen rules around how services were provided, hiring practices, and staff COVID mitigation measures (<https://www.medicaid.gov/state-resource-center/downloads/covid-19-appendix-k-instructions.pdf>).

Many people do not want to go back to 100% of our pre-COVID normal. For instance, day programs and segregated settings increase the risk of catching COVID-19 more than person-centered community-based settings. Just going to a building to sit around and do repetitive tasks all day is not person-centered. We must use this crisis to create a world that is more autism-friendly, especially when it comes to sensory issues. To support people with autism and other vulnerable populations post-COVID, we should have hours at stores set aside just for people with autism and other chronic issues.

Resources

<https://praacticalaac.org/praactical/30-ideas-for-celebrating-autism-awareness-and-acceptance-month/>

<https://www.planetneurodivergent.com/identifying-and-overcoming-microaggression-directed-toward-individuals-with-developmental-conditions/>

<https://www.teacherspayteachers.com/Browse/Search:autism%20acceptance>

<https://theautismhelper.com/autism-awareness-resources/>

<https://360behavioralhealth.com/30-ideas-celebrating-autism-awareness-acceptance-month/>

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