

Employment and ASD



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What is ASD?

- I believe ASD at its heart is NOT a social and communication disorder.
- I believe ASD is a Sensory Processing disorder most easily recognised by its consequences on communication, social interaction and imagination.
- We perceive differently – therefore we think and act differently.


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What is ASD?

- Therefore, ASD is much more than just “social shyness”.
- If you only try to teach me to be more sociable, you will have missed the point.

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What is ASD?

- ASD = a smaller information intake channel. 
- We are constantly overwhelmed by too many: sights, sounds, smells, textures, movements, body messages, thoughts and emotions.

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Monoprocessing

- Due to overwhelm, we concentrate our processing power on one channel at once. This is the most efficient way to make sense of the world.
- Monoprocessing = one channel at once out of the eight:
 - Thinking,
 - Sight, Hearing, Touch, Taste, Smell,
 - Propriosensory, Vestibular.

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What does Monoprocessing look like?

- Lack of eye contact (or staring).
- Wrong facial expressions.
- Hidden emotions or lack of emotions.
- Poor body language (due to not processing body signals).
- Person might appear not to be listening to you because they are not looking at you.



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Effects of Monoprocessing on Communication

- We are honest and don't have an instinct to deceive others.
- We believe what we are told.
- We miss information.
- Literal interpretation of words (in absence of clues).
- Misunderstanding of jokes, sarcasm, irony.
- We are not good at detecting if someone is lying to us.
- The rate you are speaking might be faster than the rate we can process it.
- We need more time to take in information and to respond.



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How can you help?

- Be precise and literal.
- If you say you will do something, **YOU MUST DO IT!**
- Slow your speech and movements down.
- Don't jerk your body around or overload with chit chat.
- Allow extra time for the person to respond – be patient.
- Don't expect or demand eye contact.
- Don't assume someone who isn't looking at you is not paying attention.
- If you get the wrong answer, you've asked the wrong question. Try again with a more precise question. E.g. "What was the school like?" resulted in a description of the building.



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Sensory Processing

- A lot of us experience sensory input as either:
 - ❖ too strong (hyper-sensitive = over-sensitive)
 - ❖ too weak (hypo-sensitive = under-sensitive)
 - ❖ constantly changing between too strong and too weak.



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What might sensory problems look like?

- Person anxious and jumpy.
- Person putting hands over their ears.
- Person speaking in a monotone or too loud or soft.
- Too much background noise/chit chat prevents concentration.
- Problems with heights/stairs.
- Stimming = self-stimulatory behaviours like hand-flapping or rocking.



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What might sensory problems look like?

- Dislike of being touched and/or touching certain things.
- Wrong estimation of force. I grip objects too hard.
- Body co-ordination difficulties and poor posture.
- Might be clumsy and fall easily.



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Tinted Glasses

- Coloured glasses can aid sensory problems.
- The glasses reduce brain overload by filtering out certain colours (so less information goes into the brain), thus speeding up mental and sensory processing and lowering stress levels.
- Do not demand removal of any such glasses because **YOU** like to make eye contact.

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The environment is crucial

- I don't suffer from autism; I suffer from intolerance of difference.
- In a good situation, with understanding people, I am not "disabled" by my autism.
- In another situation, trying my hardest, things won't work out.



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Who can work?

- Not everyone on the spectrum can or should work.
- Who CAN work is not a matter of intelligence.
- Some have too severe autism. Some are too badly damaged by society and have serious mental health problems.



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School vs. Work Place

- Success at school and university depends on rote learning abilities to pass exams. There is no (or extremely little) need for social skills to succeed academically.
- Success in the work place is mostly dependent on having excellent communication and interpersonal skills. Struggles at work can come as a huge shock.

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What we are good at

- Accuracy
- Attention to detail and being thorough
- Diligence and high quality work
- Creating and following systems
- Less work time spent on social chat
- Following written instructions
- Focus – intense concentration on one thing.
- Being logical
- Rote memory
- Computer programming, maths and sciences?
- Foreign languages?



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What we are not good at

- Being concise (e.g. my 23,000 word essay!)
- Empathy and being tactful
- Understanding non-literal communication
- Reading body language/facial expressions
- Remembering oral instructions (unless we write them down)
- Taking in information quickly (esp. if someone is talking and drawing simultaneously)
- Working in a noisy/chaotic environment
- Knowing "unwritten rules"
- Emotional intelligence
- Sacrificing quality for speed



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What helps us at work

- Very clear, literal communication.
- Extra time for some tasks.
- You might have to explicitly tell us social norms that "everyone knows" or unwritten social rules.



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What helps us at work

- Consideration of our sensory issues (e.g. needing quiet).



- Realistic expectations. Continuing failure to meet the expectations of others is life-destroying.

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Say what you mean

- Resist the temptation to be tactful and indirect, as you may be with other colleagues!
- If not, you might not be understood.
- You risk not getting what you want and misunderstanding us as rude and obstinate.
- We like directness and will not think you are being rude.

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Direct Communication

- Do not say "I recommend" if you mean "you must not".
- Do not assume that we know what you are angry about, if you haven't explicitly stated it, no matter how obvious you think it is.

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Direct Communication

- Do not say: "You look unprofessional".
- Say: "I want you to wear a black suit and sort out your co-ordination problems – have you considered learning the Alexander Technique?".
- Do not say: "I want you to be more professional".
- Say: "I want you to remove the sign by your desk saying 'Warning, trainee under stress!'"

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What helps us at work

- Interacting with people requires bravery, due to a lifetime of rejection.

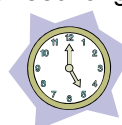


- Interacting with business clients (e.g. telephone calls, meetings) is even harder due to the pressure to have exceptional social skills and to maintain an "image".

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What helps us at work

- We might need longer to develop these abilities.



- Or, you might need to adjust our jobs to involve less of these things.



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Effect of employment

- Working is exhausting due to the huge amount of mental effort required to function.
- This causes misery and lack of work-life balance. All my social interaction energy can easily be used up by working.
- Working part-time is a good option, but this is not available as of right. It ought to be.



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What I need to work

- Support inside work: I need one trusted, reliable person who I can go to for advice.
- Support outside of work: I would like access to regular appointments with an ASD professional to check-in and discuss difficulties.



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Work mishaps...

- Punching my boss on the arm because I couldn't think of a quick retort to his teasing.
- Putting my hand over someone's mouth to stop them speaking.
- Saying to an Irish person that I dislike all Irish accents.
- Not ignoring a conversation that I wasn't supposed to be hearing.

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Effects of bad experiences

- Most aspies/auties have had many rejections and other bad experiences, which destroys self-esteem and confidence.
- We tend to remember the bad more strongly than the good.



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How can you help?

- Anything you can do to increase the person's self-esteem will be an enormous blessing.
- Be as encouraging as possible.
- Try to deliver any critical feedback as CLEARLY and gently as possible. Criticism really hurts. The worst is criticism that we cannot understand or use.



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What does a spectrum person look like?

- Some people have visible autism. They will stick out.
- Some people have invisible autism. It might be invisible to themselves too.



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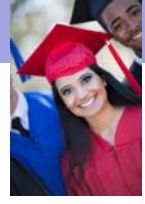
Diagnosis



- Nowadays, only ~50% of spectrum children are spotted and diagnosed.
- My generation is mostly undiagnosed.
- Many people are only diagnosed in adulthood (sometimes in their 70s) and many more never receive a diagnosis.

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Diagnosis



- Girls and clever people are two groups who are particularly likely to be undiagnosed.
- A non-diagnosed aspie is still an aspie.
- Sometimes you have to ASSUME a person is on the spectrum even if they don't come to you with that label attached.

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Diagnosis



Diagnosis as an adult turns
your world upside-down.

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Pros and Cons of Diagnosis

- 
 - Self-understanding and a means to explain to others why you cannot be exactly like everyone else.
- 
 - You have a pervasive developmental disorder defined by a “triad of impairments”, and which means you are not normal, you can never be normal and there is no cure.


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Diagnosis

- When a person gets a diagnosis, others may notice changes in behaviour, mood, mental state, communication and assertiveness.

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No Diagnosis?

- I aspie-spotted some people and tried telling four of them they are on the spectrum. They did not want to know.
- The prevailing view seems to be NOT to tell non-diagnosed people who are apparently functioning that they live on the spectrum. 

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Too much tact?

If everyone is tactfully NOT telling you that you are autistic, how do you ask for support or special allowances due to a disability that you do not know that you have got?

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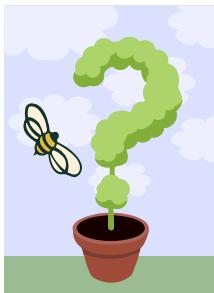
Celebrate difference!

- I don't want to be known as a walking Triad of Impairments.
- I am not better than you.
I am not worse than you.
Different is cool.



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Any Questions



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Contact me

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