

The **Neurodiversity**  
Movement & Evidence  
Based SLP Practices

MSHA Annual Conference  
March 23, 2023

Julie Roberts, M.S., CCC-SLP

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## Disclosures

- ✓ **Financial:** Julie Roberts received an honorarium for this presentation. She is Founder and CEO of the Therapist Neurodiversity Collective, Inc. owner of Bayou City Speech & Language, a consultancy agency. Julie works in the public school system.
- ✓ **Nonfinancial:** Julie is a late-identified Autistic CCC-SLP.
- ✓ **Content Disclosure:** This learning event does not focus exclusively on any specific product or service.

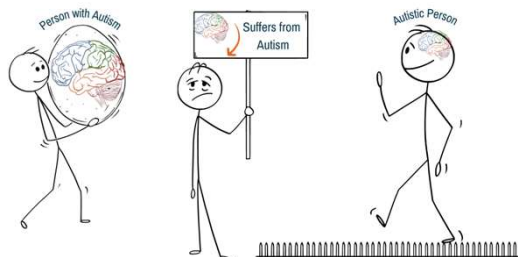
## Sources For this Presentation

- ✓ **Contemporary Autism Research** (including Sensory Reactivity, The Double Empathy Problem, Autistic Masking/Camouflage, Diversity in Social Intelligence)
- ✓ **Services Provision World:** ASHA Certified, State Licensed Speech-Language Pathologist since 1999
- ✓ **First Person World of Autistic Lived Experiences**

## Learning Outcomes

1. Participants will be able to identify the Neurodiversity Movement's primary objectives.
2. Participants will be able to list harmful practices and describe why.
3. Participants will be able to describe key considerations for ethical, trauma-informed and neurodiversity-affirming practices that are evidence-based.

## Why Do I Use Identity – First Language?



## Topics to be explored

- **The Neurodiversity Movement** as defined by the movement's self-advocates, including the history, important terminology, the movement's goals, and implications for allied service providers.
- **Contemporary neurodiversity-centered autism research** that should shape speech-language pathology therapy practices.
- **Trauma informed, evidence-based best practice guidelines** for neurodiversity-aligned speech-language pathologists: evaluations, goals, outcomes.

## ASHA Evidence-Based Practice (EBP)

- ❖ Clinical expertise/expert opinion: The knowledge, judgment, and critical reasoning acquired through **clinical training and professional experiences**
- ❖ Evidence (external and internal): The best available information gathered from the **scientific literature** (external evidence) and from **data and observations collected on individual clients** (internal evidence)
- ❖ Client/patient/caregiver perspectives: The unique set of **personal and cultural circumstances, values, priorities, and expectations** identified by patients, students, clients and their caregivers.

<https://www.asha.org/Research/EBP/Evidence-Based-Practice/>

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## Models of Disability

- **Medical Model of Disability**
- **Social Model of Disability**
- **Neurodiversity-Model of Disability**

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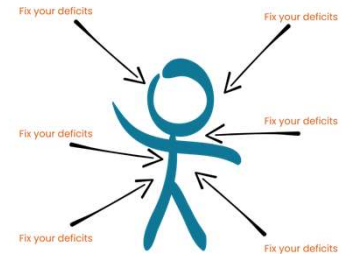
## Medical Model of Disability

The medical model of disability views disability as a **medical problem that belongs to the disabled individual**.

- Medical treatment encompassing curative measures is the solution to the person's disability.

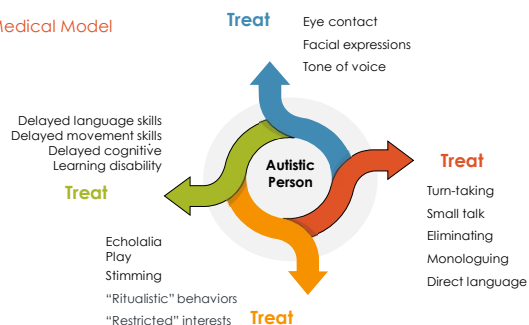
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How autism is defined through a **medical model** of disability



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Medical Model



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## SOCIAL MODEL OF DISABILITY

The social model looks at disability as a natural part of the human experience framed in terms of inclusion, equity and justice.

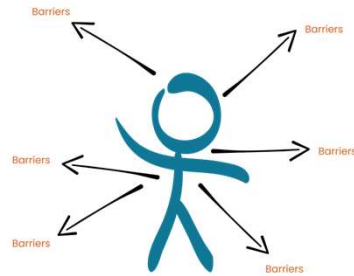
- The solution to disability is that **barriers are removed**, and the disabled person receives **accommodations, modifications, and supports**, which **eliminates** the person's disability.

<https://autisticadvocacy.org/2021/01/transcript-and-video-of-julie-bascoms-keynote-at-drexel-university/>

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## Autism within a social model of disability framework



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## Social Model

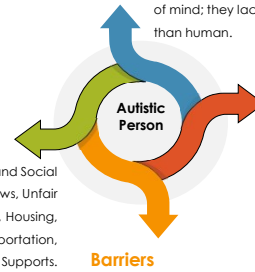
Societal attitudes and stigma; including from Services Providers, Educators, Families, Peers.

### Barriers

Disability and Social Justice Laws, Unfair Wages, Housing, Transportation, Supports.

### Barriers

Perpetuated Myths about Autistic People: They want to be "cured"; they lack theory of mind; they lack empathy, they are less than human.



### Barriers

Equitable Access/Inclusion to: School, Work, Activities

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## A THIRD MODEL - NEURODIVERSITY

Looks at neurodivergence as a natural part of the human experience framed in terms of inclusion, equity and justice.

- The solution is that barriers are removed, co-occurring conditions are treated, and education to neurotypical people is provided.

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## NEURODIVERSITY Model

### Social Barrier

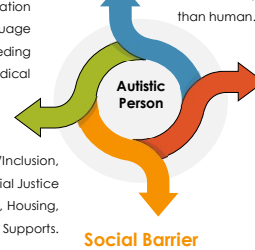
Communication Speech/Language Feeding Medical

### Treat

Equitable Access/Inclusion, Disability and Social Justice Laws, Unfair Wages, Housing, Transportation, Supports.

### Social Barrier

Perpetuated Myths about Autistic People: They want to be "cured"; they lack theory of mind; they lack empathy, they are less than human.



### Treat

Equitable Access/Inclusion to: School, Work, Activities

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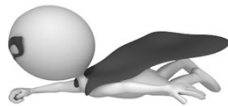
## Neurodiversity: "Neurodivergence is a Superpower!"

Disability: An interaction between social factors and an individual's required needs for varying levels of support across domains.

These challenges do not make life less valid or worthwhile.

Disability is a valid part of human diversity, especially in the subjective experience of disabled people.

Kapp SK, Gillespie-Lynch K, Sherman LE, Hufman T. Deficit, difference, or both? Autism and neurodiversity. Dev Psychol. 2013 Jan;49(1):59-71. doi: 10.1037/a0028353. Epub 2012 Apr 30. PMID: 22545843.



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## Neurodiversity: "Neurodivergence is a Superpower!"

### What's the problem?

- Not accurate. Neurodivergent people may have a skill that is easier for them than their other skills, but the skill may not be exceptional.
- Pressurizes neurodivergent people to possess and demonstrate unexpected and even extraordinary skills and talents, especially skills of commercial or academic value.
- Perpetuates stigma through "othering."

### Solution:

An inclusive environment that values the individual strengths and abilities of everyone in the environment.

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# Neurodiversity 101

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## Neurodiversity Terminology

**Ableism:** Discrimination against people with physical, intellectual, or psychiatric disabilities, and a belief disabled people need to be 'fixed'.

**Center for Disability Rights:** <http://cdmns.org/blog/uncategorized/ableism/>

**Ableist:** Social prejudice against people with disabilities based on the belief that typical abilities are superior and that disabled people need to be 'fixed.'

**Allistic:** A non-autistic person.

**Ally:** a person with privilege on a particular axis who makes a conscious choice to work against oppression on that axis.

**Neurotypical/Neuromajority:** A person who is not Autistic, ADHD, etc. Abbreviated as 'NT.'

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## Neurodiversity Terminology

**Neurominority:** a group of people that differs from the majority of a population in terms of behavioral traits and brain function

**Neurodivergent/Neurodivergence:** Differences in mental or neurological function. (Examples include Autistic, ADHD, Dyslexia, Dyspraxia).

**Neurodiversity Movement:** A social, political and human rights movement led by Autistic, Neurodivergent and other disabled people with the end-goals of acceptance. **It is a Cultural Movement.**

*"Nothing about us without us."*

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## What is neurodiversity?



Fletcher, S. 2020, June 3. Neurodiverse or Neurodivergent? It's more than just grammar. The University of Edinburgh, <https://dart.ed.ac.uk/neurodiverse-or-neurodivergent/>

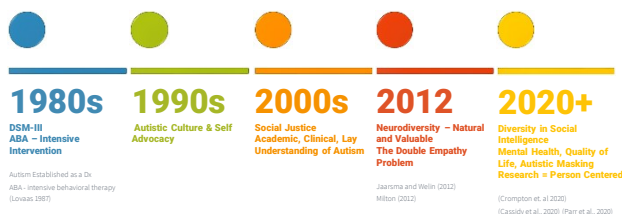
Neurodiversity acceptance is a reframing of ideology where 'neurological differences are recognized and respected as any other human variation rather than pathologized. These differences can include Dyspraxia, Dyslexia, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, Dyscalculia, Autism, Tourette Syndrome. Some definitions include learning disability.

- ✓ Born with neurological difference
- ✓ Not considered a medical condition or a disease
- ✓ Can be disabling

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## History of the Neurodiversity Movement



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## What is acquired neurodiversity?



Diatta H. Neurodiversity of work. In: BPS, ed. Psychology At Work: Improving Wellbeing and Productivity in the Workplace. BPS Psychological Society, 2017:64-62. ISBN 978-1-85433-724-2

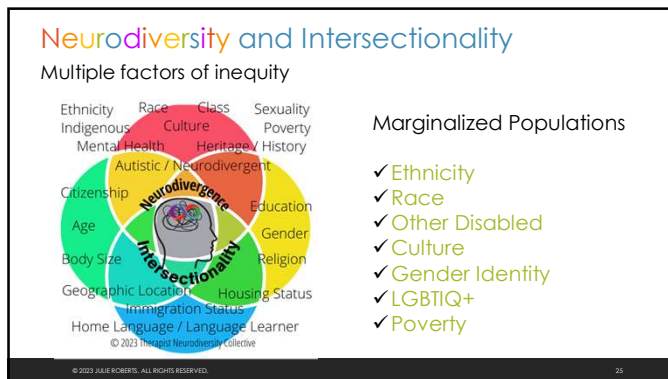
Leblond, J. et al. "Representing the consumer base for behavior-analytic services: meeting the needs of consumers in the 21st century." Behavior analysis in practice vol. 5.1 (2012): 4-14. doi:10.1007/978-94-007-9413-5

Mental health condition, neurological event (CVA) or illness, traumatic brain injury, dementia, Alzheimer's, Wernicke-Korsakoff syndrome, etc.

- ✓ Develops in response to a medical condition
- ✓ Potentially resolves as injury heals, or medical and pharmaceutical intervention

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**"Autistic people are people. We are human beings with thoughts, feelings, wants, needs, and dreams. We experience pain and joy, just like non-autistic people do. Our internal experiences and inner lives are important, even if they are different from those of non-autistic people. We have the same human rights as non-autistic people. We may struggle with things that non-autistic people do not but this does not make us less human. **Autism is not a justification to abuse us or subject us to harmful therapies against our will.**"**

- ASAN (Autistic Self Advocacy Network)

For Whose Benefit? Evidence, Ethics, and Effectiveness of Autism Interventions. Autistic Self Advocacy Network. (2021, December). <https://autisticadvocacy.org/policy/briefs/intervention-ethics/>

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## What is Neurodiversity Lite?

Performative Neurodiversity, also known as **Neurodiversity Lite\*\*\***, is the appropriation, commercialization and exploitation of the human rights / social justice movement.

**Why is this harmful?**  
**Neurodiversity lite** trivializes, sabotages, and undermines the neurodiversity movement, limiting and silencing the movement's real activists by **distorting the campaign's message** and its causes **in the pursuit of financial gain**.

Roberts, J. "Performative Neurodiversity - the appropriation and watering down of a human rights movement for profit". (2021, 3, 2021). Therapist Neurodiversity Collective. <https://therapistneurodiversity.org/advocacy/disability-rights-are-civil-rights/>  
\*\*\* Neumeier, S. "To Sit With Love" and the Problem With Neurodiversity Lite". Resilient News Group. (Feb 9, 2018) <https://resilientnews.com/articles/2018/02/09/to-sit-with-love-and-the-problem-with-neurodiversity-lite/>  
den Houting, J. Neurodiversity: An insider's perspective. Autism, 2019;23(2):271-273. doi:10.1177/1362241318802742 <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1362241318802742>

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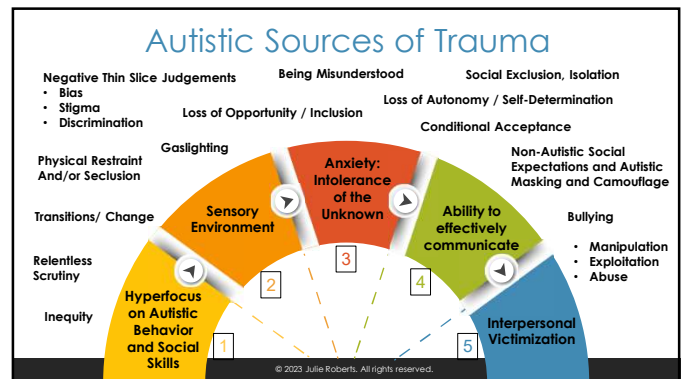
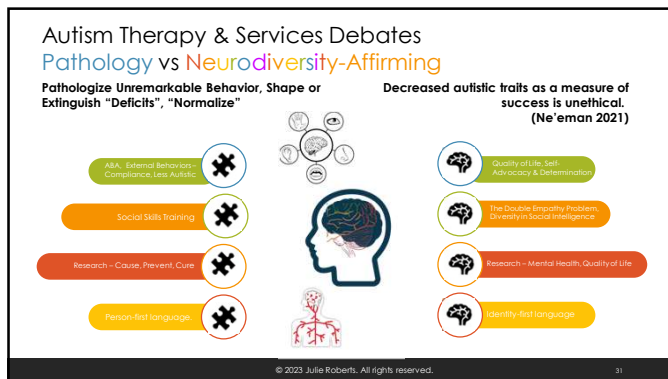
"Researchers and advocates have expressed concern that **individuals and organizations – including self-interested parties, such as for-profit companies seeking to market their products and services – have drawn on the rhetoric of the neurodiversity approach without understanding or committing to it** (den Houting, 2019; Neumeier, 2018; Roberts, 2021). **Those drawing on neurodiversity approach rhetoric and neurodivergent people's ideas should take care to fully understand and not misrepresent them, to use them in non-exploitative ways, and to grant appropriate credit to those who developed the ideas.**"

Neumeier, S. M. (2018). "To Sit with Love" and the problem with neurodiversity lite. *Neurodiversity*.  
den Houting, J. (2019). Neurodiversity: An insider's perspective. *Autism*, 23(2), 271–273.  
Roberts, J. (2021). *Performative neurodiversity: the appropriation and watering down of a human rights movement for profit*. Therapist Neurodiversity Collective.

Dwyer P. The Neurodiversity Approach(es): What Are They and What Do They Mean for Researchers? *Hum Dev*. 2022 May;64(2):73-92. doi: 10.1159/000533723. Epub 2022 Feb 22. PMID: 36158596; PMCID: PMC9261839.

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- ## Primary goals of the Autistic Rights Movement as encompassed within the Neurodiversity Movement
1. **Acceptance** of Neurodivergent and/or Autistic people's patterns of behaviors and social communication differences
  2. **Liberation** from the socially-constructed pathology paradigm
  3. **Education** that teaches neurotypical individuals about Autistic cognition and motivations, including communication skills for interacting with autistic peers; as well as education that teaches Autistic individuals about typical cognition and motivations, including communication skills for interacting with neurotypical peers
  4. **Creation of social networks**, events, and organizations that allow Autistic people to collaborate and socialize on their own terms
  5. **Recognition of Autistic populations as a minority group**
- The Autistic Collaboration Trust (2021, January 4). Introduction to autistic ways of being. Autistic Collaboration. Retrieved February 17, 2022. from <https://autisticcollaboration.org/therapistneurodiversity.org/therapistneurodiversity.org/>
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### Autistic Trauma

Ross A, Grove R, Molloy J. The relationship between camouflaging and mental health in autistic children and adolescents. *Autism Res*. 2023 Jan;16(1):190-199. doi: 10.1002/aur.2858. Epub 2022 Nov 23. PMID: 36418274.

Vicki Bliska, David A. Heyne, & Christopher F. Sharpley (2022). The inverse association between psychological resilience and emerging school refusal among bullied autistic youth. *Research in Developmental Disabilities*, 120, 104121.

Ullrich, Natalie & Knox, Aida & Engin, Selin & Geschwind, Daniel & Parish-Morris, Julia & Kasari, Connie. (2022). Personal victimization experiences of autistic and non-autistic children. *Molecular Autism*, 13, 10.1186/s13229-022-00531-4.

Kerns CM, Lokenou S, Shattuck PT, Robins DL, Newschaffer CJ, Berkowitz SJ. Exploring potential sources of childhood trauma: A qualitative study with autistic adults and caregivers. *Autism*. January 2022. doi:10.1177/13623613211070637

Bliska, V., Heyne, D.A. & Sharpley, C.F. Is Bullying Associated with Emerging School Refusal in Autistic Boys? *J Autism Dev Disord* 51, 1081-1092 (2021). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-020-04610-4>

Kalves, K., Fitzgerald, C., Norderliff, M., Wood, S. J., & Brangsten, A. (2021). Assessment of suicidal behavior among individuals with autism spectrum disorder in Denmark. *JAMA Network Open*, 4(1), e203365. doi:10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2020.33365

South M, Costa AP, McMorris C. Death by Suicide Among People With Autism: Beyond Zebrafish. *JAMA Netw Open*. 2022;4(1):e2034018. doi:10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2020.34018

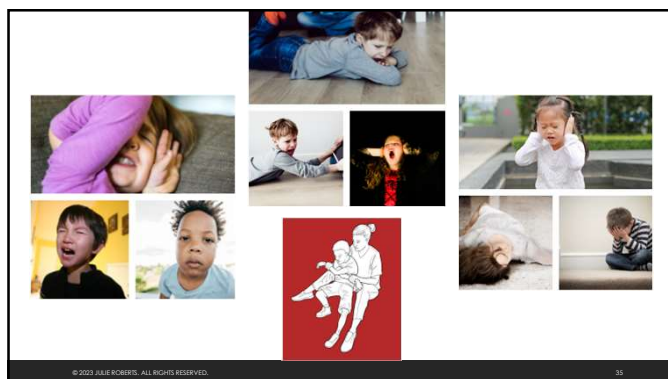
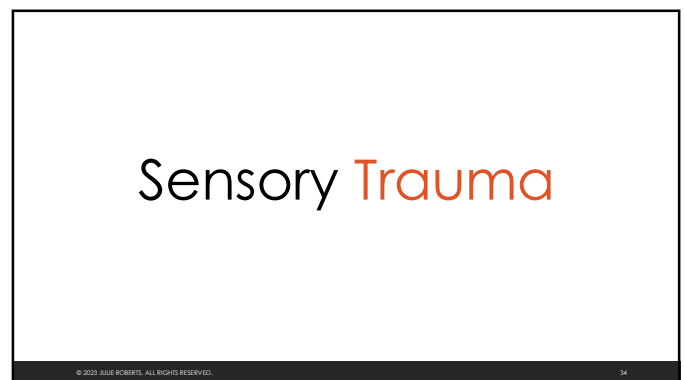
Park I, Gong J, Lyons GL, Hirota T, Takahashi M, Kim B, Lee SY, Kim YS, Lee J, Leventhal BL. Prevalence of and Factors Associated with School Bullying in Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder: A Cross-Cultural Meta-Analysis. *Tamam Med J*. 2020 Nov;4(1):111-129. doi: 10.3349/ymj.2020.41.11.909. PMID: 33107234. PMCID: PMC793096.

Cook A, Ogden J, Winslow H. The effect of school exposure and personal contact on attitudes towards bullying and autism in schools: A cohort study with a control group. *Autism*. 2022;26(8):2178-2189. doi:10.1177/1362361320939388

Rymer DM, Teo AB, Steckler NA, Lantz B, Schorer M, Delia Santori A, Kopp SC, Hunter M, Joyce A, Nicolaidis C. "Having All of Your Internal Resources Exhausted Beyond Measure and Being Left with No Clean-Up Crew": Defining Autistic Burnout. *Autism Adulthood*. 2022 Jun 12;2(1):32-43. doi: 10.1089/aut.2019.0079. Epub 2020 Jun 10. PMID: 32851254. PMCID: PMC7213434.

Weiss, Jonathan & Fardella, Michelle. (2018). Victimization and Perpetration Experiences of Adults With Autism. *Frontiers in Psychiatry*, 9, 10.3389/fpsy.2018.00203.

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## Sensory Processing Differences and Difficulties

- Heightened sensory signals
- Intense sensory signals
- Muted sensory signals

Fulton, Rorie & Richardson, Kate & Jones, Dr & Reardon, Emma. (2020). Sensory Trauma - autism sensory difference and the daily experience of fear.

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- Visual (Sight)
- Taste (Gustatory)
- Touch (Tactile)
- Sound (Auditory)
- Smell (Olfactory)
- Balance (Vestibular)
- Internal sensations (Interception) – hunger, thirst, tired, urinate
- Body positional awareness in space and time (Proprioception)

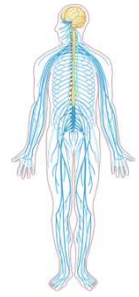
Autistic students can present with hyper reactivity or hypo reactivity to sensory stimuli

Resulting in **externalized behavior** – Meltdown, Shutdown = Trauma  
Resulting in **internalized behavior** – Shutdown, Burnout = Trauma

Neufeld, J., Taylor, M. J., Lundin, R., Remmelius, K., Jackson, J., Lichtenstein, P., Bölte, S. A co-twin control study of altered sensory processing in autism. *Autism*, 2007; 11(4): 421-432. doi:10.1177/1362644307319195

Stevenson, R.A., Russell, J., Sun, S.Z. et al. Visual working memory and sensory processing in autistic children. *Sci Rep* 11, 3640 (2021). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-021-82777-1>

Elizabeth K. Jones, Mary Hanley, & Deborah M. Riby (2020). Distraction, distress, and diversity: Exploring the impact of sensory processing differences on learning and school life for pupils with autism spectrum disorders. *Research in Autism Spectrum Disorders*, 72, 101515.



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## Heightened or Intensive Sensory Reactivity

### What it may look like:

- Covering Ears, Eyes
- Difficulty focusing, withdrawal, shutdown
- Crying, screaming, extreme irritability
- Melt-downs
- Resistance to transition
- Falling to the Floor or Running Away (Elopement)
- Aggression, Self-injury

### What it may feel like:

- Fight, flight, freeze
- Overwhelming
- Physically painful
- Terrifying, scary, stressful
- Disorienting
- Traumatic

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### Examples of Harmful Sensory Tolerance Goals (Behavioral Goals):

- Decrease outbursts or other undesirable actions when experiencing sensory overload.
- Tolerate "unpleasant" stimulus (fire drill, putting hands in gooey substance, being physically touched, body staying in the group during things like circle time)
- Tolerate clothing, textures, including food textures
- Demonstrate decreased auditory defensiveness by decreasing ear covering.

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**Sensory Exposure Therapy:** "The findings suggest that these autistic children would not benefit from 'exposure therapy,' in which a therapist gradually exposes a person to increasing levels of a troublesome stimulus."

MacLennan, K., Roach, L., Tavassoli, T. The Relationship Between Sensory Reactivity Differences and Anxiety Subtypes in Autistic Children. *Autism Research*, 07 January 2020 <https://doi.org/10.1002/aur.2292>

Green SA, Hernandez L, Lawrence EE, et al. Distinct Patterns of Neural Habituation and Generalization in Children and Adolescents With Autism With Low and High Sensory Overresponsivity. *Am J Psychiatry*. 2019;176(12):1010-1020. doi:10.1176/appi.ajp.2019.18121333

"The wrong kind of noise: understanding and valuing the communication of autistic children in schools." Wood, R. (2018) <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/00031911.2018.1483895>



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## What's the answer? Sensory Supports



**Conclusion:** Many autistic children have hypersensitivities to sound resulting in high levels of sympathetic nervous system reactivity, which associated with "problematic behaviors" (natural reactions to distress) and distress. The findings of this study suggest that the use of noise attenuating headphones for autistic individuals and hyperacusis may reduce sympathetic activation.

Pfeiffer, Beth et al. "Effectiveness of Noise-Attenuating Headphones on Physiological Responses for Children With Autism Spectrum Disorders." *Frontiers in integrative neuroscience* vol. 13 65. 12 Nov. 2019. doi:10.3389/fnint.2019.00065

Wood, R. (2019). *Inclusive education for autistic children*. London, UK: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Ikuta N, Iwanaga R, Tokunaga A, Nakane H, Tanaka K, Tanaka G. Effectiveness of Earplugs and Noise-cancelling Headphones for Coping with Hyper-reactivity to Auditory Stimuli in Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder: A Preliminary Study. *Hong Kong Journal of Occupational Therapy*. 2016;28(1):24-32. doi:10.1016/j.hkjo.2016.09.001

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## Sensory hyper reactivity – important note:

### Sensitivity to Tone of Voice:

Autistic children may be incredibly sensitive to other people's emotions. They may absorb or magnify them. This means that it's important to keep tone of voice neutral or positive when speaking with an autistic child.

What you may consider a "firm" kind voice may be perceived as hurtful and angry by an autistic student, and may lead to mistrust or a melt-down or shut down.

Markram H, Markram H. The intense world theory - a unifying theory of the neurobiology of autism. *Front Hum Neurosci*. 2010 Dec 21;4:224. doi: 10.3389/fnhum.2010.00224. PMID: 21191475; PMCID: PMC3010743.

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## Anxiety & Trauma

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## Autistic children are anxious children

Kathryn Ambrose, Kate Simpson, & Dawn Adams (2021). The relationship between social and academic outcomes and anxiety for children and adolescents on the autism spectrum: A systematic review. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 90, 102066.

Adams, D., Emerson, L.M. The Impact of Anxiety in Children on the Autism Spectrum. *J Autism Dev Disord* 51, 1809–1920 (2021). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-020-04673-3>

Mingins JE, Tarver J, Waite J, Jones C, Surtees AD. Anxiety and intellectual functioning in autistic children: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Autism*. 2021;25(1):18-32. doi:10.1177/1362361320933253

MacLennan, K., Roach, L. and Tavassoli, T. (2020). The Relationship Between Sensory Reactivity Differences and Anxiety Subtypes I

Vasa, R.A., Keeler, A., McDonald, R.G., Hunsche, M.C., and Kerns, C.M. (2020). A Scoping Review of Anxiety in Young Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder. *Autism Research*, 13, 2038-2057. <https://doi.org/10.1002/aur.2395>



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## Trauma - Autistic Intolerance of Uncertainty

Goodwin J, Rob P, Freeston M, et al. Caregiver perspectives on the impact of uncertainty on the everyday lives of autistic children and their families. *Autism*. 2022;26(4):827-838. doi:10.1177/13623613211033757

Fionnuala Larkin, Brianna Ralston, Sophie Jayne Dinsdale, Sakura Kimura, & Marianna Emma Haylou-Thomas (2022). Alexithymia and intolerance of uncertainty predict somatic symptoms in autistic and non-autistic adults. *Autism*. July 15, 2022. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13623613221109717>.

Oslvadjan, A., Halliwell, M.J., Magill, I., Happé, F., Bald, G., and Absoud, M. (2021). Is cognitive inflexibility a missing link? The role of cognitive inflexibility, alexithymia and intolerance of uncertainty in externalising and internalising behaviours in young people with autism spectrum disorder. *J. Child Psychol. Psychiatr.*, 62, 715-724. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcpp.13255>

Vasa, R.A., Kreiser, N.L., Keeler, A., Singh, V. and Mostafaei, S.H. (2018). Relationships between autism spectrum disorder and intolerance of uncertainty. *Autism Research*, 11, 636-644. <https://doi.org/10.1002/aur.1916>

Hodgson, A.R., Freeston, M.H., Honey, E. and Rodgers, J. (2017). Facing the Unknown: Intolerance of Uncertainty in Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder. *J Appl Res Intellect Disabil*, 30, 336-344. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jar.12245>



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Autistic people aren't afforded the basic human right of body autonomy. This inflicts trauma.

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## Body Autonomy Trauma

- "Autistic person) likes to play with his hair, but "they didn't like that, so sometimes they would **hold my hands**." Sometimes he "would be **physically escorted** between locations"
- (Autistic person) **touched without her consent**, such as "if I wasn't grabbing something, I remember they would take my hand and **make me grab it**" and that if she refused to go to a different part of the room for an activity, "I would be **dragged over**."
- "I felt like **didn't have the right to my own body**, and it still feels like that."

Anderson, L. K. (2022). Autistic experiences of applied behavior analysis. *Autism*, 0[0]. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13623613221118216>

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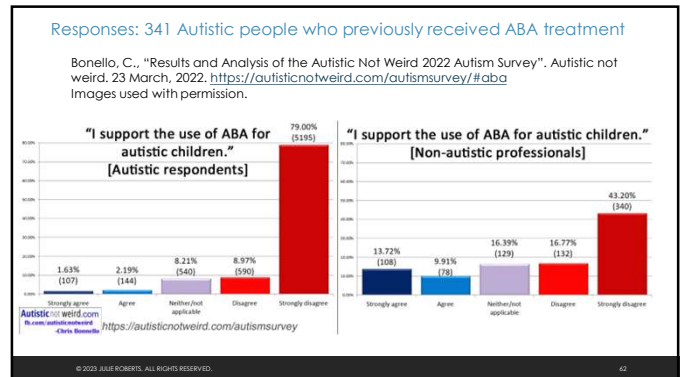
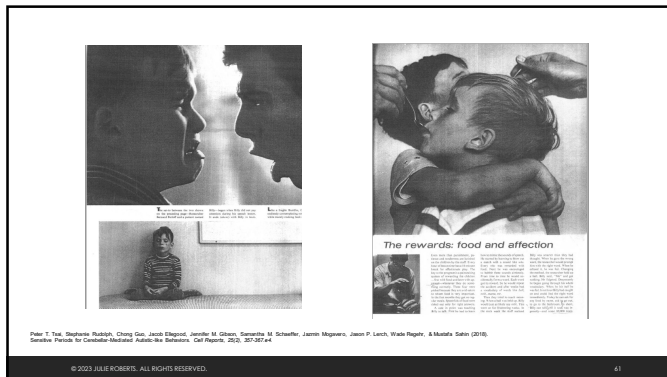
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## Trauma - How ABA Makes Autistic People Feel

"Autistic adults remember **traumatic events from applied behavior analysis**, do not believe that they should be made to behave like their peers, gained some benefits but **suffered significant negative long-term consequences**, believe that applied behavior analysis is an **unethical intervention**, and recommend that applied behavior analysis practitioners **listen to autistic people** and consider using interventions in place of applied behavior analysis.

Anderson, L. K. (2022). Autistic experiences of applied behavior analysis. *Autism*, 0(0).  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/13623613221118216>

## Trauma - How ABA Makes Autistic People Feel

Investigation of the long-term impacts autistic adults experienced from childhood participation in Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA)

- Behaviorist methods create **painful lived experience**
- intervention was contingent on repeating certain tasks in order to **avoid punishment**
- Trained like an animal** to perform
- Was **misunderstood** and communication was misinterpreted
- Erosion of self** and self-identity, "shutting down the real autistic me" "pretending to be someone else"
- Trauma to mental health and well-being** (PTSD, chronic anxiety, self-rejection and loathing)
- Lack of self-agency** within personal interaction (left voiceless and mute, "the focus on compliance made it harder for me to say no to people who hurt me later")

Robinson, Anna & McGill, Owen. (2020). "Recalling Hidden Harms: Autistic Experiences of Childhood Applied Behavioural Analysis (ABA). *Advances in Autism*, ahead-of-print. 10.1108/AIA-04-2020-0025.

## Trauma - How ABA Makes Autistic People Feel

"I am no longer capable of being myself around others. Outside of my own control I observe them and make a person that they will most likely enjoy. I actively change myself around others to a staggering degree"

"ABA made it much harder to make friends, because I was spending so much time **trying to pretend to be someone** I'm not that I could never really connect to people"

"I've turned into an **anxious person afraid of consequences (good or bad)**. And I got depressed and lost **my interests** which were **used as reinforcer**."

"Nobody can see the **emotional and mental scars** that have been caused by the trauma and damage done by ABA"

Robinson, Anna & McGill, Owen. (2020). "Recalling Hidden Harms: Autistic Experiences of Childhood Applied Behavioural Analysis (ABA). *Advances in Autism*, ahead-of-print. 10.1108/AIA-04-2020-0025.

Initiatives towards **banning conversion therapies** for all humans, including Autistic, Intellectually Disabled, and Non-speaking

1. **Australia**, **Stop ABA being taught to psychology students and ban ABA altogether** (2020)
2. **Canada**, **De-fund all IBI and ABA centres and redirect funding towards inclusive approaches** (2021)
3. **Aotearoa New Zealand**, **Ban on all forms of "conversion therapies", including ABA** (2021)
4. **South Africa**, **Ban of nonconsensual Applied Behaviour Analysis** (2021)
5. **United Kingdom**, **Ban Applied Behavioural Analysis for autistic people** (2021)
6. **United States**, **Ban ABA Initiative** (2020)
7. **United States, Texas**, **Don't Fund Behavioral Coercion in Texas!** (2021)
8. **United States**, **National Council on Independent Living** (July 2021)  
<https://advocacymonitor.com/ncl-resolution/resolution-opposing-applied-behavioral-analysis-aba/>

The Autistic Collaboration Trust (2022, January 4). Introduction to autistic ways of being. Autistic Collaboration. Retrieved February 17, 2022, from <https://autisticcollab.org/deep-translation/introduction-to-autistic-ways-of-being/>

Reiss, S. D. R. (2020, October 21). Why no autistic child should be in ABA therapy. Why No Autistic Child Should Be in ABA Therapy. Retrieved February 19, 2022, from <http://www.thefirststepinstitute.com/2020/10/why-no-autistic-child-should-be-in-aba-therapy/>

Smith, C. L. (2020, August 13). Invisible abuse: ABA and the things only autistic people can see. NeuroChic. Retrieved February 19, 2022, from <https://neurochic.com/invisible-abuse-aba-and-the-things-only-autistic-people-can-see/>

## A therapy should never be **traumatizing**...

**Human rights** are rights inherent to all human beings, regardless of race, sex, nationality, ethnicity, language, religion, or **any other status**.

– Universal Declaration of Human Rights - the United Nations  
<https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>

**To violate someone's human rights is to treat that person as though she or he were not a human being.** To advocate human rights is to demand that the human dignity of all people be respected. In claiming these human rights, everyone also accepts the responsibility not to infringe on the rights of others and to support those whose rights are abused or denied.

- International Bill of Human Rights

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## Autism Research: “The 17 Years Problem”

Trochim W. Translation Won't Happen Without Dissemination and Implementation: Some Measurement and Evaluation Issues. 3rd Annual Conference on the Science of Dissemination and Implementation. Bethesda, MD: 2010.  
 Diffusion theory and knowledge dissemination, utilization, and integration in public health. Green LW, Ottens JM, Garcia C, Hoff BA. Annu Rev Public Health. 2009; 30(1):151-74.  
 Practice-based research: “Blue Highway” on the NH road map. Westfall JM, Mold J, Fagnan L. JAMA. 2007; Jan 24; 297(4):403-6.

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ABA



The  
Evidence

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## Ethical Concerns about ABA Treatment

Out of **460 respondents** on demographics, intervention types, and current pathological behaviors with symptom severity scales. **This study noted PTSD in nearly half of ABA-exposed participants**, while non-exposed controls had a 72 percent chance of being asymptomatic.

Kupferstein, H. (2018). "Evidence of increased PTSD symptoms in autistics exposed to applied behavior analysis". *Advance*

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## Ethical Concerns about ABA Treatment

**How much compliance is too much compliance: Is long-term ABA therapy abuse?**

**“Compliance, learned helplessness, food/reward-obsessed, magnified vulnerabilities to sexual and physical abuse, low self-esteem, decreased intrinsic motivation, robbed confidence, inhibited interpersonal skills, isolation, anxiety, suppressed autonomy, prompt dependency, adult reliance, etc., continue to be created in a marginalized population who are unable to defend themselves.**

ABA proponents have utilized predominantly non-verbal and neurologically different, children who are not recognized under this paradigm to have their own thought processes, basic needs, preferences, style of learning, and psychological and emotional needs, for their experiment. These children are the population that was chosen to be the subjects of an experimentally intense, lifelong treatment within a therapy where most practitioners are ignorant regarding the Autistic brain—categorically, **this cannot be called anything except abuse.**”

Aileen Herlinda Sandoval-Norton & Gary Shkedy | Jacqueline Ann Rushby (Reviewing editor) (2019) How much compliance is too much compliance: Is long-term ABA therapy abuse? Cogent Psychology, 6:1. DOI: 10.1080/23311908.2019.1641258

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## Ethical Concerns about ABA Treatment

“...we argue that a dominant form of Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA

- manifests **systematic violations** of the fundamental tenets of bioethics
- the supposed benefits of the treatment not only **fail to mitigate these violations, but often exacerbate them.**
- from a bioethical perspective, **autism advocates are fully justified in their concerns—the rights of autistic children and their parents are being regularly infringed upon.**
- Employing ABA violates the principles of justice and nonmaleficence and, most critically, infringes on the autonomy of children and (when pushed aggressively) of parents as well.”

Wilkenfeld DA, McCarthy AM. Ethical Concerns with Applied Behavior Analysis for Autism Spectrum “Disorder”. Kennedy Inst Ethics J. 2020;30(1):31-69. doi: 10.1353/ken.2020.0000. PMID: 32336692.

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## Ethical Concerns about ABA Treatment

"When disability is defined by behavior, researchers and clinicians struggle to identify appropriate measures to assess clinical progress. Some choose the reduction or elimination of diagnostic traits, implicitly defining typical appearance as the goal of service provision. **Such an approach often interferes with more meaningful, person-centered goals; causes harm to people with disabilities; and is unnecessary for dealing with traits that are intrinsically harmful or personally distressing, such as self-injury.**"

Dawson M, Fletcher-Watson S. When autism researchers disregard harms: A commentary. *Autism*. 2021 Jul 22;36(23613211031403). doi: 10.1177/13623613211031403. Epub ahead of print. PMID: 34291651.

"Reflections from 10 participants were indicative of a **predominantly detrimental impact of ABA**. Reflections gave rise to a core theme **"recalling hidden harms of childhood experiences of ABA"**."

McGill, O. and Robinson, A. (2021). "Recalling hidden harms": autistic experiences of childhood applied behavioural analysis (ABA)". *Advances in Autism*, Vol. 7 No. 4, pp. 269-282. <https://doi.org/10.1108/AA-04-2020-0025>

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## Ethical Concerns about ABA Treatment

"Just as surgically shaping the eyes of people with Down syndrome to look normal is **now considered barbaric**, neurodiversity requires us to recognize as **unethical measures to enforce typical appearance solely to avoid stigma**. Suppressing autistic traits in order to promote typical appearance is problematic regardless of level of impairment, while reducing personally distressing or harmful behaviors or developing skills is not."

AMA J Ethics. When Disability is Defined by Behavior, Outcome Measures Should Not Promote "Passing" 2021;23(7):E569-575. doi: 10.1001/amaethics.2021.569.

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## Autism Research Ethics - reporting of adverse events

What? An investigation of 150 autism intervention research reports, only 11 (~7%) mention adverse events.

Our results indicate that, in non-pharmacological **intervention research for young autistic children, researchers are generally not actively seeking out adverse events** that could occur alongside intervention benefits, or routinely labeling adverse events/effects as such when they do occur.

**Types of Adverse Effects and Harms Relevant to Young Autistic Children:** the **children's dislike of the intervention** was a common theme among reported reasons for withdrawal, **child distress** (including the intensity and duration) **during intervention sessions**, as well as in a variety of other settings over the course of the intervention period and over the long term, could be an **important adverse event category to actively monitor**.

Bottemo-Beutel K, Crowley S, Sandbank M, Waynarski TG. Adverse event reporting in intervention research for young autistic children. *Autism*. 2021;25(2):322-335. doi:10.1177/1362361320965331

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## Autism Research Ethics - reporting of adverse events

What? 193 group and single-case design autism intervention studies, which tested effects on 1258 outcomes.

**Assess:** the quality of intervention research on autistic youth age 14–22 years **The majority were research on strategies that were behavioral**. (prompting and rewards to change autistic behavior).

**Found:** **significant threats to internal validity** for the majority of studies (inadequate randomization, unmasked assessors, and too few data points to infer functional relation)

**Found:** **Rare reporting of adverse events**. Of the 150 reports they reviewed, only 11 mentioned adverse events.

Bottemo-Beutel K, LaPointe S C, Kim S Y, Mohiuddin S, Yu G, & McKinnon R. (2022). An evaluation of intervention research for transition-age autistic youth. *Autism*. 0(0). <https://doi.org/10.1177/13623613221128761>

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## ABA – Poor Evidence

The What Works Clearing House reviewed 58 studies on the Lovaas Model for children with disabilities.

**One study** meets WWC evidence standards; **one study** meets WWC evidence standards **with reservations**; **the remaining 56 studies do not meet either WWC evidence standards or eligibility screens**.

"Lovaas Model of Applied Behavior Analysis". (August 2010) U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance. What Works Clearinghouse. [https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/Docs/InterventionReports/wwc\\_lovaas\\_082410.pdf](https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/Docs/InterventionReports/wwc_lovaas_082410.pdf)

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## ABA – Poor Evidence

**Project AIM:** Autism intervention meta-analysis for studies of young children **1,615** separate results from **150** reports representing **6,240** participants that compared an ABA intervention group treating autistic children ages 0 – 8 with a control group:

- When study quality indicators were not taken into account, significant positive effects were found for behavioral, developmental, and NDBI intervention.
- When effect size estimation was limited to studies with **randomized controlled trial (RCT) designs, or when outcomes measured by parent report were excluded**, evidence of positive summary effects existed only for developmental and NDBI intervention types.
- When effect estimation was limited to RCT designs and to outcomes for which there was **no risk of detection bias, no intervention types showed significant effects on any outcome**.

Sandbank M, Bottemo-Beutel K, Crowley S, Cassidy M, Dunham K, Feldman J L, Crank J, Albarrao S A, Raj S, Mahbub P, & Waynarski T. G. (2020). Project AIM: Autism intervention meta-analysis for studies of young children. *Psychological Bulletin*, 146(1), 1–29. <https://doi.org/10.1037/bu00000912>

Kohn, A. (21 January, 2021) "Autism and Behaviorism New Research Adds to an Already Compelling Case Against ABA". *Allie Kohn*. <https://www.alliejohn.org/blog/autism/>. [Retrieved January 30, 2021.]

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## Detection Bias in ABA Research

The failure to measure more real-time treatment response, particularly under a pre-post design, may lead to a **biased inference of treatment effects**. Moreover, while it is reasonable to "control for" static predictors of intervention outcomes, **the findings should be cautiously interpreted given the untested assumption that the predictors pose effects on the target outcomes that do not vary in strength over time**. This, however, may undermine the predictive accuracy of treatment response and **limit the generalization of findings to autistic populations with heterogeneous developmental profiles in real-world contexts.**"

Chen Y.J, Duku E, Georgiades S, Rethinking Autism Intervention Science: A Dynamic Perspective. Front Psychiatry. 2022 Feb 25;13:827406. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2022.827406. PMID: 35280173; PMCID: PMC8915252.

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## Detection Bias in ABA Research

Review of **56** peer reviewed studies of intervention **treatment for autistic adults over a 50 year period**. The majority were **applied behavioral analysis** and cognitive-behavioral techniques.

### Effectiveness of Interventions:

- **Low or very low effectiveness** for activities of daily living, aggressive/destructive behaviors, language/communication skills, self-injurious behaviors, stereotypy/mannerisms, and vocational skills and **high to very high risk of bias**.
- **Moderately reliable evidence** for emotional functioning and **moderate risk of bias**.

Davis KS, Kennedy SA, Dallavechia A, Skolasky RL, Gordon B. Psychoeducational Interventions for Adults With Level 3 Autism Spectrum Disorder: A 50-Year Systematic Review. Cogn Behav Neurol. 2019 Sep;32(3):139-163. doi: 10.1097/WNN.0000000000000201. PMID: 31517698; PMCID: PMC6749978.

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## Detection Bias in ABA Research

Results from early intervention autism research analysis (150 reports representing 6,240 participants indicate **detection bias" rated as high as 77.05 percent** of outcomes in behavioral studies.

Sandbank M, Bottema-Beutel K, Woynarowski T. Intervention Recommendations for Children With Autism in Light of a Changing Evidence Base. JAMA Pediatr. 2021;175(4):341-342. doi:10.1001/jamapediatrics.2020.4730

Reichow, B., Barton, E. E., and Maggin, D. M. (2018). Development and applications of the single-case design risk of bias tool for evaluating single-case design research study reports. Res. Dev. Disabil. 79, 53-64. doi: 10.1016/j.ridd.2018.05.008

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## Conflicts of Interest in ABA Research

"We tallied author conflicts of interest (COIs) in articles published over a 1-year period that tested, commented on, or reviewed ABA autism intervention strategies, extracted from eight journals devoted to publishing behavioral research. We coded included studies for COIs related to researcher employment as an ABA clinical provider or a training consultant to ABA clinical providers. **We found that 84% of studies had at least one author with this type of COI, but they were only disclosed as COIs in 2% of studies. Additionally, 87% of studies with statements claiming the authors did not have COIs, were authored by researchers found to have clinical/training consultancy COIs.** Pervasive, undisclosed COIs likely lead to researcher bias, and could at least partially account for persistent poor quality research in this area. **The high prevalence of COIs among this research corroborates the concerns expressed by many autistic people. The autism community – including autistic people, autism researchers, and other stakeholders – should be aware of the prevalence of undisclosed COIs in this literature and take this into account when using, providing, or recommending ABA services."**

Bottema-Beutel K and Crowley S (2021) Pervasive Undisclosed Conflicts of Interest in Applied Behavior Analysis Autism Literature. Front. Psychol. 12:676303. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2021.676303

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## Contemporary Autism Research



### The Evidence

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## Monotropism

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## Monotropic Interest Systems



Kourti M., (2021). A Critical Realist Approach on Autism: Ontological and Epistemological Implications for Knowledge Production in Autism Research. *Frontiers in psychology*, 12, 713423. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.713423>  
 Murray D., Lesser M., Lawson W., Apter, monotropism and the diagnostic criteria for autism. *Autism*, 2005;9(2):139-156. doi:10.1177/1362361305001398  
 Murray D. (2018) Monotropism - An Interest Based Account of Autism. In: Volkmar F. (eds) *Encyclopedia of Autism Spectrum Disorders*. Springer, New York, NY. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-493-99545-6\\_102995](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-493-99545-6_102995)  
 Poole, D., Gowen, E., Poliakoff, E., & Jones, L. A. (2021). No idea of time? Parents report differences in autistic children's behaviour relating to time in a mixed-methods study. *Journal of Autism*, 25(4), 1797-1808. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13623613211010014>  
 "... the final theme, monotropism, described how autistic children viewed their time as precious so they could maximise engagement in their interests."   
 Rebecca Wood (2021) Autism, intense interests and support in school: from wasted efforts to shared understanding. *Educational Review*, 73(1), 34-54. DOI: [10.1111/er.12663](https://doi.org/10.1111/er.12663)  
 Williams, Gemma L. et al. "Mutual (Mis)understanding: Reframing Autistic Pragmatic 'Impairments' Using Relevance Theory." *Frontiers in psychology* vol. 12 616664. 29 Apr. 2021. doi:10.3389/fpsyg.2021.616664

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### An introduction to monotropism

Jul 4, 2022 This animation was written and narrated by Kieran Rose ([www.theautisticadvocate.com](http://www.theautisticadvocate.com)) and animated by Josh Knowles Animation. It was commissioned by Health Education England and produced by AT Autism and Anna Freud National Centre as an accessible 4 minute introduction to the key ideas of Monotropism, originally as part of training aimed at Tier 4 mental health practitioners (@ttsk45c), led by Dr Pavlopoulou and Dr Moysse.

# The Autistic Advocate

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A typical occurrence in a school day for an autistic student...

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Another option...  
Empathy & Understanding

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Roberts, J. Monotropism. Therapist Neurodiversity Collective. 21, May, 2021. Free poster download

<https://therapistndc.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Monotropism.pdf>

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# Autistic Social Communication & Stigma

## Neurotypical Peers are Less Willing to Interact with Those with Autism based on Thin Slice Judgments

Sasson, N., Faso, D., Nugent, J. et al. Neurotypical Peers are Less Willing to Interact with Those with Autism based on Thin Slice Judgments. *Sci Rep* 7, 40700 (2017). <https://doi.org/10.1038/srep40700>

- Results: Observers' first impressions of autistic individuals engaging in real-world social behavior were found to be robustly less favorable than those of matched neurotypical controls.
- Adult and school-aged observers also report negative perceptions of autistic adolescents, indicating that negative first impressions persist even when observers are similar in age to those being evaluated.

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## Social Skills Training – Years and Years of training Autistic children and teens to imitate neurotypical social skills doesn't make them look less autistic.

Autistic children "generally receive the greatest amount of social skills intervention during this developmental period, which decreases precipitously after high school. Thus, despite being at an age when intense attention is often paid to social skills training, the children are nonetheless rated poorly by both adults and same-age observers."

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## Autistic Social Interaction vs. Non-autistic Social Interaction

"If our goal is to improve social interactions for (Autistic) individuals, it may therefore be equally important to educate others to be more aware and accepting of social presentation differences, rather than trying to change the many interwoven factors of self-presentation that mark the expressions of (Autistic) individuals as atypical."

Given the social cognitive difficulties in perspective taking associated with autism, some (Autistic) individuals may lack insight about how their social presentation is viewed by potential social partners. Others, however, may be more cognizant of these perceptions but are comfortable in their self-expression. For them, intervention strategies targeting **awareness and acceptance** among TD peers in their social environments may be a more sensitive and accommodating approach than encouraging impression management strategies.

Sasson, N., Faso, D., Nugent, J. et al. Neurotypical Peers are Less Willing to Interact with Those with Autism based on Thin Slice Judgments. *Sci Rep* 7, 40700 (2017). <https://doi.org/10.1038/srep40700>

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## Autism Bias and Stigma


These findings provide empirical evidence that autistic adults

- **detect and interpret** autistic social differences **similarly to typical adults**,
- but they **express greater inclusivity and less discriminatory attitudes** about these differences.

This study provides additional evidence that social opportunities for autistic adults are affected by the perceptions and **biases** of potential social partners.

DebraBandier KM, Morrison KE, Jones DR, Faso DJ, Chmielewski M, Sasson NJ. Do First Impressions of Autistic Adults Differ Between Autistic and Nonautistic Observers? *Autism Adulthood*. 2018 Dec 1;1(4):250-257. doi: 10.1089/aut.2019.0018. Epub 2019 Dec 13. PMID: 36601322; PMCID: PMC6972824.

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### Autism Bias and Stigma

(2022) "Adults and adolescents form negative first impressions of ASD adults and children. **Children with ASD are likely to be judged more negatively than their peers at the very start of their formal education.** Contrary to previous research, for primary school children, the content of the speech was judged as negatively as the delivery of the speech."

Stagg, S. D., Thompson-Robertson, L., & Morgan, C. (2022). Primary school children rate children with autism negatively on looks, speech and speech content. *British Journal of Developmental Psychology*, 00, 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.1111/bjdp.12430>

(2019) "...while individuals may self-report positive attitudes towards autism, **dehumanizing attitudes** (seeing Autistic people as less than human) may still prevail".

"Understanding, attitudes and dehumanization towards autistic people" Cage E, Di Monaco J, Newell V. Understanding, attitudes and dehumanization towards autistic people. *Autism*. 2019 Aug;23 (6):1373-1383. doi: 10.1177/1362361318811290. Epub 2018 Nov 21. PMID: 30463431.

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### Autism Bias and Stigma

In a recent survey of 195 autism researchers, 60% of responses included views about autistic people the study authors deemed **dehumanizing, objectifying, or stigmatizing.**

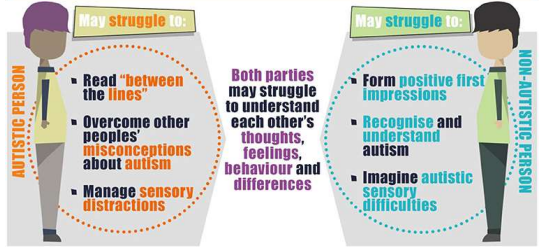
Botha, M., & Cage, E. (2022). "Autism research is in crisis": A mixed method study of researcher's constructions of autistic people and autism research. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.1050897>

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# The Double Empathy Problem

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## THE DOUBLE EMPATHY PROBLEM



**AUTISTIC PERSON** May struggle to:

- Read "between the lines"
- Overcome other peoples' misconceptions about autism
- Manage sensory distractions

**Both parties may struggle to understand each other's thoughts, feelings, behaviour and differences**

**NON-AUTISTIC PERSON** May struggle to:

- Form positive first impressions
- Recognise and understand autism
- Imagine autistic sensory difficulties

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## The Double Empathy Problem

### The stigma of being 'othered' and the normalisation agenda, and Implications for Service Providers:

"It is true that autistic people often lack insight about NT (neurotypical) perceptions and culture, yet it is equally the case that NT people lack insight into the minds and culture of 'autistic people...'"

One could say that many autistic people have indeed gained a greater level of insight into NT society and mores than vice versa, perhaps due to the need to survive and potentially thrive in a NT culture. Conversely, the NT person has no pertinent personal requirement to understand the mind of the 'autistic person' unless closely related socially in some way...

Differences in neurology may well produce differences in sociality, but not a 'social deficit' as compared to an idealised normative view of social reality."

Milton, Damian (2012) On the ontological status of autism: the 'double empathy problem'. *Disability & Society*, 27 (4), pp. 883-887. ISSN 0968-7599.

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## The Double Empathy Problem

### Outcomes of real-world social interaction for autistic adults paired with autistic compared to typically developing partners

"If autistic people were inherently poor at social interaction, you'd expect an interaction between two autistic people to be even more of a struggle than between an autistic and non-autistic person. **But that's not what we found.**"

These results suggest that social affiliation may increase for autistic adults when partnered with other autistic people, and support **reframing social interaction difficulties in autism as a relational rather than an individual impairment.**

- Dr. Noah Sasson, associate professor in the University of Texas, Dallas, School of Behavioral and Brain Sciences

Morrison KE, DeBruin-Kram KM, Jones DR, Faso DJ, Ackerman RA, Sasson NJ. Outcomes of real-world social interaction for autistic adults paired with autistic compared to typically developing partners. *Autism*. 2020 Jul;24(5):1067-1080. doi: 10.1177/1362361319892701. Epub 2019 Dec 11. PMID: 31823656.

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## The Double Empathy Problem

Social Cognition, Social Skill, & Social Motivation Minimally Predict Social Interaction Outcomes for Autistic and Non-Autistic Adults

Collectively, results suggest that reduced performance by autistic adults on standardized measures of social cognition, social skill, and social motivation **do not correspond in clear and predictable ways with their real-world social interaction outcomes.**

Morrison KE, DeBrabander KM, Jones DR, Ackerman RA, Sasson NJ. Social Cognition, Social Skill, and Social Motivation Minimally Predict Social Interaction Outcomes for Autistic and Non-Autistic Adults. *Front Psychol*. 2020 Nov 25;11:591100. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2020.591100. PMID: 33324295; PMCID: PMC7723837.

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Roberts, J. Social Cognition, Social Skills & Social Motivation Minimally Predict Social Interaction Outcomes for Autistic and Non-Autistic Adults. *Therapist Neurodiversity Collective*. 2, February, 2021

Download a free printable copy of this infographic:

<https://therapistndc.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Social-Cognition-Social-Skill-and-Social-Motivation-Minimally-Predict-Social-Interaction-Outcomes-for-Autistic-and-Non-Autistic-Adults.pdf>



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## The Double Empathy Problem

"Misunderstanding or lack of understanding is not a consequence of autistic "impairment" but **a mutual failure in reaching consensus through bidirectional empathy.**"

Williams GL, Wharton T and Jagoe C (2021) Mutual (Mis)understanding: Reframing Autistic Pragmatic "Impairments" Using Relevance Theory. *Front. Psychol*. 12:616664. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2021.616664

Williams, Gemma. (2021). Talking together at the edge of meaning: Mutual (mis)understanding between autistic and non-autistic speakers.

Figment Arts. (2022). Explainer Video. <https://vimeo.com/744545080>



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## The Double Empathy Problem

Beyond Single-Mindedness: A Figure-Ground Reversal for the Cognitive Sciences.

"Or consider the study of autism and other expressions of neurodiversity, long reified (if not fetishized) as special conditions that may shed light on classic topics like modularity, **theory of mind, and joint action coordination.** Recent work calls attention to the need to **respectify neurodiversity from relational and interactional perspectives.**

**This allows us to move away from deficit-based views toward more reciprocal contributions.** For instance, a careful study of neurodivergent interaction reveals how behaviors seen as "symptomatic of ASD" can be interactionally achieved and coproduced by both participants."

Dingemans, M., Liesenfeld, A., Rosenberg, M., Albert, S., Ameka, F.K., Bithane, A., Bolls, D., Cassell, J., Clift, R., Cuffari, E., De Jaegher, H., Novaes, C.D., Effland, N.J., Fusaroli, R., Gregoromichelaki, E., Hutchins, E., Korvinko, I., Milton, D., Raczabazek-Leonardi, J., Reddy, V., Rossano, F., Schlangen, D., Seibt, J., Stokoe, E., Suchman, L., Vesper, C., Whalley, T., and Witschko, M. (2023) Beyond Single-Mindedness: A Figure-Ground Reversal for the Cognitive Sciences. *Cognitive Science*, 47, e13230. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cog.13230>

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## Diversity in Social Intelligence

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# Autistic Empathy



## The Evidence

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Autism research is turning away from a focus on a lack of emotion recognition skills in autistic individuals and orienting toward the view that emotion processing depends on common representations of emotions between interaction partners.

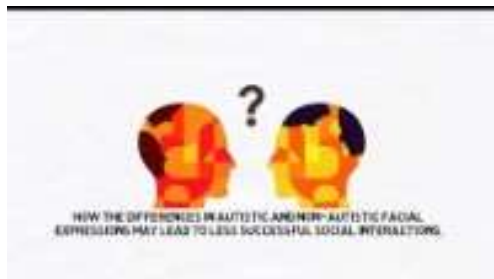


Keating CT, Cook JL. Facial Expression Production and Recognition in Autism Spectrum Disorders: A Shifting Landscape. *Child Adolesc Psychiatr Clin N Am*. 2020 Jul;29(3):557-571. doi: 10.1016/j.chc.2020.02.006. Epub 2020 Apr 9. PMID: 32471602.

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A Mismatch of Autistic and Non-autistic Facial Expressions  
Apr 22, 2020, Cook Lab, YouTube <https://youtu.be/Fi5GYcqkGBI>  
<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1056499320300183>



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## The shifting landscape of autism research and its relationship with facial emotion research

This means that what have previously been thought of as "social deficits" in autistic people may actually reflect a **mismatch in the facial expressions** produced by autistic and neurotypical people. This is really crucial as **it takes the element of blame away from the autistic person** and instead proposes that these difficulties are a product of **autistic and neurotypical differences**.

(Keating and Cook, 2020)

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Positive, negative, neutral-or unknown? The perceived valence of emotions expressed by young autistic children in a novel context suited to autism

- Autistic and typical children **did not differ** in positive, negative, or neutral facial emotions.
- Autistic children showed **differences in expressed "unknown" facial emotions** - facial expressions that were perceived as conveying emotions, but which observers could not interpret and thus could not rate as positive, negative, or neutral.
- In a context which suits their characteristics, autistic children do not show emotions that are too negative or not positive enough. They do show emotions perceived as unknown, which means **we need to improve our understanding of their full emotional repertoire**.

Jacques C, Courchesne Y, Mineau S, Dawson M, Mottron L. Positive, negative, neutral-or unknown? The perceived valence of emotions expressed by young autistic children in a novel context suited to autism. *Autism*. 2022 Oct;26(7):1833-1848. doi: 10.1177/13623613211068221. Epub 2022 Feb 16. PMID: 35146392; PMCID: PMC8948319.

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## Autistic children have empathy – they may show it in different ways.

- Autistic children have been shown to demonstrate heightened emotional empathy—the ability to directly feel others' emotions (Smith, 2009).
- Non-autistic children who perpetrate bullying exhibit reduced emotional empathy.

Smith A. The empathy imbalance hypothesis of autism: a theoretical approach to cognitive and emotional empathy in autistic development. *Psychol Rec*. 2009;59:489-510.  
van Noorden TH, Hoxeijger GJ, Cillessen AH, Bukowski WM. Empathy and involvement in bullying in children and adolescents: a systematic review. *J Youth Adolesc*. 2015;44(5):639-67. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-014-0135-4>.

DeGillis D, Brooks PJ, Obeid R, Alarcon M, Shone-Simpson C, Gillespie-Lynch K. Bullying and identity development: insights from autistic and non-autistic college students. *J Autism Dev Disord*. 2018;48(3):664-78. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-017-3383-y>.

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# Autistic TOM



## The Evidence

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## Autistic TOM – The Dehumanization of Autistic People

**"A theory of mind remains one of the quintessential abilities that makes us human."** By theory of mind we mean being able to infer the full range of mental states (beliefs, desires, intentions, imagination, emotions, etc.) that cause action... Difficulty in understanding other minds is a core cognitive feature of autism spectrum conditions."

Simon Baron-Cohen (2001). Theory of mind in normal development and autism. *Prisma*, 34.

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## Autistic TOM – The Dehumanization of Autistic People

**Those with autism can be thought of as mindblind in that they cannot imagine what others might be thinking, or even that others are thinking.**

... To them, it would be like looking at the headlights of a car to determine why the car just did what it did, or what information it is trying to convey to us.

—The Encyclopedia of Neuropsychological Disorders  
Soper & Murray, 2012

Psychopaths have long been of interest to moral philosophers, since a careful examination of their peculiar deficiencies may reveal what features are normally critical to the development of moral agency.

**What underlies the psychopath's amorality?**

**A common and plausible answer to this question is that the psychopath lacks empathy. Lack of empathy is also claimed to be a critical impairment in autism,** yet it is not at all clear that autistic individuals share the psychopath's amorality.

Jeanette Kennett, Autism, Empathy and Moral Agency, *The Philosophical Quarterly*, Volume 52, Issue 208, July 2002, Pages 340–357.  
<https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9213.00272>

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## Morton Ann Gernsbacher, PhD

**"the claim that autistic people lack a theory of mind is empirically questionable and societally harmful."**

Gernsbacher, M. A., & Yergeau, M. (2018). Empirical failures of the claim that autistic people lack a theory of mind. *Archives of Scientific Psychology*, 7(1), 102–118.  
<https://doi.org/10.1037/arc0000067>

- ✓ FAILURES OF SPECIFICITY
- ✓ FAILURES OF UNIVERSALITY
- ✓ FAILURES OF REPLICATION
- ✓ FAILURES OF CONVERGENT VALIDITY
- ✓ FAILURES OF PREDICTIVE VALIDITY

Critical Review of Autism and Theory and Mind - OSF  
<https://osf.io/2mzhg/download>



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## Theory of Mind & Perspective Taking

These analyses demonstrate the children's practical reasoning about how other people observe, recognize, and understand their behavior. Despite autism being linked to difficulties with ToM and perspective-taking, these autistic children manage perspective-taking through the provision of accounts in multiple sequential positions. **These findings challenge the emphasis on ToM deficit based explanations of autism,** while suggesting a stronger research focus on local, situated perspective-taking in social interaction.



Henderson, G. E., (2021). Autistic children's explanations of their own behavior: Evidence of other-attentiveness. *Journal of Interactional Research in Communication Disorders*, 10(2), 99–124. <https://doi.org/10.1558/jicd.20363>

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## Autistic TOM – The Dehumanization of Autistic People

Autistic insider perspectives not only empirically demonstrate and explicitly critique the **ToM deficit hypothesis**, but reveal the hypothesis as harmful to autistic experience by **reinforcing negative stereotypes, prompting acts of discrimination, and perpetuating autistic insider's exclusion** from the research concerning them.

Abigail Holt, Khadija Bounekhla, Christie Welch & Helene Palatjko (2022). "Unheard minds, again and again": autistic insider perspectives and theory of mind. *Disability and Rehabilitation*, 44(20), 5887–5897. DOI: 10.1080/09638288.2021.1949052

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## Theory of Mind & Perspective Taking

Alfie Khon - **perspective taking is useful, even necessary, "if you want to ruin somebody's life, if you want to seduce them or con them or torture them."**

it turns out that **perspective taking in the context of competition often leads people to act more unethically than those who don't engage in perspective taking.**

Nicholas Epley, Eugene M. Caruso, and Max Bazerman, "When Perspective Taking Increases Taking," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 91 (2006): 872-89; and Jason R. Pierce et al., "From Glue to Gasoline: How Competition Turns Perspective Takers Unethical," *Psychological Science* 24 (2013): 1986-94.

One series of studies **"found no evidence that the cognitive effort of imagining oneself in another person's shoes... increases a person's ability to accurately understand another's mind."**

Tal Eyal, Mary Steffel, and Nicholas Epley, "Perspective Mistaking: Accurately Understanding the Mind of Another Requires Getting Perspective, Not Taking Perspective," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 114 (2018): 550.

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## Autistic Masking Camouflaging Adaptive Morphing

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**Autistic masking** is the conscious or unconscious **suppression of natural responses** and adoption of alternatives:

- Social interaction
- Sensory experience
- Cognition
- Movement
- Behaviour

Pearson, A., & Rose, K. (2021). A Conceptual Analysis of Autistic Masking: Understanding the Narrative of Stigma and the Illusion of Choice.



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## Why do autistic people mask?

With a **pathologized status** comes the experience of **stigma, dehumanisation and marginalisation**. Stigma refers to the possession of an attribute which marks a person as disgraced or 'discreditable', marking their identity as 'spoiled'.

Stigmatised persons may attempt to conceal these spoiled aspects of their identity from others, attempting to 'pass' as normal.

Pearson, A., Dr. & Rose, K. (2020, July 15). A Conceptual Analysis of Autistic Masking: Understanding the Narrative of Stigma and the Illusion of Choice. <https://doi.org/10.31219/osf.io/ztwv5>

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The **dehumanization** of autistic humans.

"A diagnosis of autism is rooted in the specification that one must experience 'significant impairment' to be classified as autistic. As such autistic 'traits,' 'behaviours,' and experiences cannot be autism unless they are experienced negatively, or are said to cause 'impairment'.

As a result, autistic people are viewed as being on the **fringe of human normality** both in Academia and Society in general."

Pearson, A., Dr. & Rose, K. (2020, July 15). A Conceptual Analysis of Autistic Masking: Understanding the Narrative of Stigma and the Illusion of Choice. <https://doi.org/10.31219/osf.io/ztwv5>

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In the therapy world  
camouflaging  
looks like  
"Hide the Autism."



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Autistic masking may lead to negative outcomes or perpetuate a systemic adaptation to others' expectations, leading to...

Mental Exhaustion, Burn-out, Chronic Debilitating Anxiety, Depression, Low-Self-Esteem, Confusion or Loss of Identity, Suicidal Ideation, Suicide

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It is important that we acknowledge masking as a self-protective mechanism rather than a necessarily conscious choice, particularly when we consider the **link between masking** and negative outcomes like **autistic burnout and suicidality**. This negative impact suggests that the significant energy it takes to mask means that **it is only sustainable for a period**.

Pearson, A., & Rose, K. (2021). A Conceptual Analysis of Autistic Masking: Understanding the Narrative of Stigma and the Illusion of Choice

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## The relationship between camouflaging and mental health in autistic children and adolescents

**What?** An investigation of camouflaging in a sample of 733 autistic youth.

**Who?** 359 female and 374 male autistic children and adolescents between the **ages of 4 and 17 years** of age.

**Findings?** Camouflaging was a significant predictor **anxiety, depression, somatic complaints and symptoms**, when controlling for age, gender, and IQ.

Ross A. Grove R. McAloon J. The relationship between camouflaging and mental health in autistic children and adolescents. *Autism Res*. 2023 Jan;16(1):190-199. doi: 10.1002/aur.2859. Epub 2022 Nov 23. PMID: 36416274.

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**FREE: Download printables of these infographics:**

The Double Empathy Problem  
<https://therapistneurodiversitycollective.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/The-Double-Empathy-Problem.pdf>

Social Skills Training & the Research  
<https://therapistneurodiversitycollective.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Social-Skills-Training-The-Research.pdf>

Diversity in Social Intelligence  
<https://therapistneurodiversitycollective.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Diversity-in-Social-Intelligence.pdf>

Roberts, J. Therapist Neurodiversity Collective

- The Double Empathy Problem: 2020/10/09
- Social Skills Training & the Research: 2020/10/16
- Diversity in Social Intelligence: 2020/10/20

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## (2014) Social Skills Training and the Gold Standard of "Normality"

*"It is not a disabled person's responsibility to placate the abled, and all further premises would follow from that."*

McLaren, Karla. (2014). Interrogating Normal: Autism Social Skills Training at the Margins of a Social Fiction. 10.13140/2.1.1385.0406.

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## Autistic Camouflage Training - ABA Social Skills for Job Interviews

### WHAT?

Behavioral skills training, including error correction training, is used to train autistic adults "Appropriate" interview behavior: eye contact, social small talk, repress stimming because autistic social skills are deficient.

### WHY?

"social communication deficits may interfere with an (autistic) individual's participation in a job interview."

### WHO?

27 autistic university undergraduate students and 1 graduate were presented with the social skills training "opportunity."

Only 7 volunteered to participate. = **25% interest**

Only 3 actually complete the study = **10.7%**

Kahng, S., Butler, C., Kronfli, F. R., Zaki-Scarpa, C., Boraghi, B., & Scott, J. (2023). An individualized approach to teaching adults with autism to successfully navigate job interviews via remote instruction. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, 1-13. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jaba.977>

McLaren, A. (2023, February). Autism Research - What? View in February - Neurodiversity Connection. <https://ndconnection.co.uk/blog/autism-research-february-2023>

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## Autistic Camouflage Training - ABA Social Skills for Job Interviews

Each session reviews appropriate vocal and non-vocal skills:

Attire, grooming, small talk, eye contact, orientation, posture, smiling, hand gestures, stereotypic motor behaviors (e.g., rocking in chair)

- None mastered interview skills criteria following **group training**.
- 4 out of the 7 don't complete individualized training because "poor responses to the individualized training" including "comments throughout the sessions," and "complaints about repetitive treatment methods."
- Of the 3 that completed individualized training **only 1 met mastery of the objectives**.

Kahng, S., Butler, C., Kronfl, F. R., Zak-Scarpa, C., Borag, B., & Scott, J. (2023). An individualized approach to teaching adults with autism to successfully navigate job interviews via remote instruction. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, 1-13. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jaba.372>  
Mennin, A. (2023, February). Autism Research—What's new in February. *Neurodiverse Connection*. <https://ndconnection.co.uk/blog/autism-research-february-2023>

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## Autistic Camouflage Training - ABA Social Skills for Job Interviews

**Was the study harmful?** No adverse event reporting. (Bottema-Buel et al, 2021)

**Was the study ethical?** Masking/camouflage = poor to detrimental mental health outcomes. Participants complained about the treatment method.

**What happens next?** (After they get the job and can't camouflage autistic traits and behavior?)

### Autistic people

- Feel pressure to hide autistic traits to avert discrimination
- Report stress, anxiety, exhaustion and burn-out from camouflaging
- Want inclusive, understanding and accommodating employers

Kahng, S., Butler, C., Kronfl, F. R., Zak-Scarpa, C., Borag, B., & Scott, J. (2023). An individualized approach to teaching adults with autism to successfully navigate job interviews via remote instruction. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, 1-13. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jaba.372>  
Mennin, A. (2023, February). Autism Research—What's new in February. *Neurodiverse Connection*. <https://ndconnection.co.uk/blog/autism-research-february-2023>  
Finn, M., Fowler, R. S., Leong, H. M., & Hedley, D. (2023). "It's not just me, I doubt I'll get the job": A qualitative exploration of autistic people's experiences in job interviews. *Autism*, 0(0). <https://doi.org/10.1177/13623613231153480>

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Social skills training is not a "cure" for autism despite what the ABA and Social Skills Training industries would like us all to believe. All 'social skills training' does is teach autistic people how to mask their autism. And the potential harms of masking (exhaustion, anxiety, depression, frustration, decreased self-esteem suicidal ideation) are significant."

Roberts, J. (2023, February 15). "Why Perspective-Taking and Neurodiversity Acceptance?" (Part 2 of "Training" Social Skills is Dehumanizing: The One with the Therapy Goals). Therapist Neurodiversity Collective. <https://therapistndc.org/why-teach-perspective-taking-neurodiversity-acceptance/>

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"The true lesson of training social skills ("compliance training") teaches our students that **unless they learn to successfully mask their autistic traits, they are inherently less valuable members of the human race**. Social skills training communicates **conditional acceptance based on the conditions that non-autistic people determine.**"



Roberts, J. (2023, February 15). "Why Perspective-Taking and Neurodiversity Acceptance?" (Part 2 of "Training" Social Skills is Dehumanizing: The One with the Therapy Goals). Therapist Neurodiversity Collective. <https://therapistndc.org/why-teach-perspective-taking-neurodiversity-acceptance/>

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Social Skills Training trains Autistic people to mask and camouflage in exchange for inclusion.

Conditional acceptance is not acceptance.



Roberts, J. (2023, August 13). "On Willing Masking Goals for Autistic Middle-School Girls—Stop III!" Therapist Neurodiversity Collective. <https://therapistndc.org/masking-goals-autistic-middle-school-girls/>

Training Social Skills is Dehumanizing

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Just a few reasons why social skills training is not a **neurodiversity**-affirming approach to "autism intervention."



- ❑ Directly opposes the neurodiversity movement's fundamental goal of "acceptance".
- ❑ Trains autistic masking and camouflaging which has harmful and even detrimental mental health outcomes.
- ❑ Poor evidence; ignores contemporary autistic social communication research findings, disregard's autistic client perspectives.
- ❑ Demonstrates lack of cultural responsiveness, cultural competence, cultural humility.
- ❑ Oppressive - forced assimilation of a neurominority group for the comfort of non-autistic people.
- ❑ And if the provider or company advertises as "neurodiversity-affirming" it's a prime example of Neurodiversity Lite – **appropriation of a human rights movement for commercial gain**.

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Neuronormative communication skills are based on the empowered typicality and is nescient to the autistic system of interpretation. Therefore, it must be asked **why neuronormative communication skills**, notably enshrined through NT social communication, **are more important than autistic people's way of being and socializing**. (Keats, Waldoock, and Dewar, 2022)

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"Interventions which target or seek to extinguish stigmatized, but **not intrinsically harmful or personally distressing** disability-related traits, often fail to address more meaningful and relevant, person-centered goals."

He'eman, A. (2021). When disability is defined by behavior, outcome measures should not promote "passing". *AMA Journal of Ethics*, 23(7), E569-E575. doi: 10.1001/amaethics.2021.569

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**We recommend teaching not autistic people but rather non-autistic individuals about autistic sociality, in order to lower the burden on autistic interlocutors in cross-neurotype interactions and socialization** (as per previous literature, Bottema-Beutel et al., 2018). We provide recommendations to address difficulties in cross-neurotype interactions—for example, **bridging the neurotype gap through practice or psychosocial interventions for acceptance of autistic people** and their system of interpretation, as per Jones et al. (2021).

(Keats, Waldoock, and Dewar, 2022)

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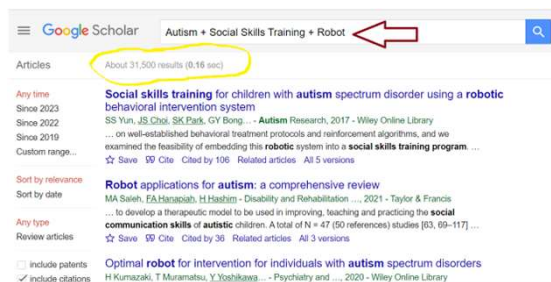


\$ocial \$kills Training for Autistic People

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Autism researchers are obsessed with using robots to teach autistic children how to be human. **31.5k** results!



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### Dehumanizing Rationales for Social Skills Training via Robots

**In general, the affinity of humans to another person is stronger than that to artificial objects.** For individuals with ASD, however, neither preference bias toward humans nor repulsion toward artificial objects (in contrast to real humans) is observed. In some instances, they show behaviors toward robots that individuals without ASD have toward humans.

Furthermore, an intervention for individuals with ASD requires long-term patience; therefore, a robot can perform consistently, which is a great advantage.

In the field of autism, an attempt to apply robotics has been made for the following target processes: assisting the diagnostic process, improving eye contact and self-initiated interactions, turn-taking activities, imitation, emotion recognition, joint attention (JA), and triadic interactions.



Kumazaki, H., Muramatsu, T., Yoshikawa, T., Matsuoka, Y., Ishiguro, H., Ebuchi, M., Sumiyoshi, T. and Minura, M. (2020). Optimal robot for intervention for individuals with autism spectrum disorders. *Psychiatry Clin. Neurosci.*, 74: 581-586. <https://doi.org/10.1111/pspc.12332>

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### "Autism Interventions" that **do not meet** the definition of Neurodiversity-Affirming:

- **ABA** (including, "play-based" and NDBIs)
- **Social Skills Training** (therapy that trains autistic people to perform with verbal and nonverbal non-autistic social behaviors.)

"Neurodiversity advocates critique interventions that seek to suppress autistic traits in favor of "passing" (ie, attempting to hide stigmatized identity by **pretending to be a member of the unstigmatized majority**). In both disability and nondisability contexts, passing has been associated with **significant harm**. Efforts to pass have been identified as a **risk marker for suicidality** in autistic adults. Such "camouflaging" is also associated with other **mental health challenges**."   
AMA J Ethics. 2021;23(7):E569-575. doi: 10.1001/amajethics.2021.569.

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### Examples of Ableist Therapy Goals that May Lead to Poor Mental Health Outcomes

- (Non medically relevant) Tone of Voice Modification
- Neuronormative conversation goals (turn-taking like a ping pong ball, asking social questions about things you have no interest in.)
- Eliminating stammering behavior, monotopism (focus or attention on a small number of interests in conversation)
- Topic Maintenance of communication partner's choosing for so many turn-takes
- Conveying emotions/feelings "appropriately" by making or fawning (Fawning - Walker, 2013: People-pleasing" or deferring to the needs and wishes of others, and surrendering one's own in order to "blend".)
- Learning and repeating socially expected "rote scripts" to use in social situations (sometimes self determined scripts can be helpful with self-advocacy)
- Identifying and using appropriate vs. inappropriate behavior (figure out the reason for the behavior and address THAT)
- Accepting compliments "appropriately"
- Eliminating echolalia
- Compliance with acknowledging communication initiated by others by giving "appropriate" responses
- Cooperation without complaint in group decisions when the student is not in agreement
- Forced eye contact
- Body Language (imitating neuromajority body language through masking)
- Facial Expressions (imitating neuromajority facial expressions through masking)
- "Active Listening" or "Whole Body Listening" (Quiet hands, sitting in the seat without movement, etc.)
- Interactive play skills with peers (based on the neuromajority what constitutes "play") rather than true Autistic play, free time, or recreational time
- Initiating play with peers on the playground (even when solo free time is preferred)
- Reciprocal play (turn-taking on a peer's terms)
- Compliance without complaint
- Responding to bullying or teasing in an "appropriate way"
- Increasing comfort levels in social situations or group activities (Hello! That's an inherent part of Autism. Don't force masking discomfort!)
- Tolerating changes (Sensory system is overwhelmed, demonstrating anxiety with unexpected changes in routine, tolerating auditory or physical distress)
- Tolerating unwanted touch (high five, shaking hands, hugs, kisses, arm around them)
- Extinguish problem behaviors (Figure out the reason for the behavior - change the environment, change the behavior!)

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### Why We Don't Train Social Skills

Roberts, J. (2020, August 30) Why We Don't Train Social Skills. Therapist Neurodiversity Collective.

72, 283 Impressions, 10,202 Engagements  
<https://www.facebook.com/NeurodiversityCollective/posts/4390821570991299>

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<https://therapistndc.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/We-dont-train-Social-skills.pdf>

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So, what's left?

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# Neurodiversity & Intervention



"... strive to **further the cause of Autism Acceptance** by educating the public, our professional peers, and especially our client families, while **promoting "acceptance"** and inclusion and changing the dialogue about autism from fear, pity, and tragedy to support, acceptance, and empowerment."

Roberts, J. (2022, January 11). "Training" Social Skills is Dehumanizing (Part 1). Therapist Neurodiversity Collective. <https://therapistndc.org/training-social-skills-is-dehumanizing-part-1/>

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Greater Social Interest Between Autistic and Non-autistic Conversation Partners Following **Autism Acceptance Training** for Non-autistic People



Jones, D., Morrison, K., DeBrabander, K., Ackerman, R., Pinkham, A., & Sasson, N. (2021). Greater Social Interest Between Autistic and Non-autistic Conversation Partners Following Autism Acceptance Training for Non-autistic People. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12, 4026.

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**Priority of the Autistic Rights Movement as encompassed within the Neurodiversity Movement: Acceptance**

**Priority of Allied Providers: Train acceptance to peer providers, educators, families and the public.**

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**Neurodiversity & the implications for SLP practices**

**Autism Treatment (Dehumanizing)**

- "Cure" or "normalize" autistic children
- Train autistic **masking** and camouflage
- Hide or **extinguish** autistic "characteristics that cause no harm to self or others"

**Neurodiversity-Affirming (Helpful)**

- Train **autistic acceptance**.
- Focus on **good mental health & well-being**.
- Promote "physical, sensory and emotional regulation" without expectations for extinction or toleration.
- Focus on **strengths**, passions, and happiness.
- Target **meaningful goals**.

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**Neurodiversity-affirming Goal Writing: In co-production with participants and families, allied therapists write therapy goals that:**

1. Protect **mental health** and improve the self-determined quality of life.
2. Target **effective self-advocacy**.
3. Develop and improve **autonomy and personal agency**.
4. Target self-determined client objectives that **solve real problems**, meet real needs, and achieve personal goals rather than eliminate perceived "deficits."
5. Develop **authentic, robust communication**.
6. Teach clients they have the right to say no, to protest, and to give or retract consent. (**Boundaries and Consent**)

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6. Teach participants how to establish and maintain their personal boundaries and what it looks like to respect the boundaries of those around them. (**Boundaries and Consent**)
7. In alignment with **The Double Empathy Problem**, teach autistic about Autistic and Neurotypical social communication differences **without the expectations for autistic masking and camouflage**.
8. Develop and improve authentic autistic identity. (**Autistic Identity**)
9. Teach what constitutes victimization, a friend, friendly, and non-friend; and harmful vs helpful. (**Social Naivety**)
10. Teach **safety** (emotional, physical, psychological; laws, rules, regulations, & consequences; safe/unsafe people, situations, choices).

Citation: Roberts, J. (© 2019 – 2023) The Neurodiversity-Affirming Conceptual Practice Framework of Social Communication: An evidence-based alternative model to social skills training for autistic populations. Therapist Neurodiversity Collective, Inc. <https://therapistndc.org/neurodiversity-affirming-therapy/>

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**Education:** For autistic students and clients, and the non-autistic people around them (family members, educators, peers, employers):

- Neurodiversity and Autism Acceptance
- Autistic Sensory Systems (individualized)
- The Double Empathy Problem
- Poor mental health outcomes of autistic camouflaging
- Risks of Victimization
- Need to acknowledge and react to self-advocacy attempts, honor all forms of communication
- Differences in autistic and non-autistic friendship making and maintenance

**Look for Opportunities:**

Authentic autistic social interaction without a therapy agenda.  
Autistic peer mentoring.  
Passions and interests - gather with like minded people.

Citation: Roberts, J. (© 2019 – 2023) The Neurodiversity-Affirming Conceptual Practice Framework of Social Communication: An evidence-based alternative model to social skills training for autistic populations. Therapist Neurodiversity Collective, Inc.  
<https://therapistdiv.org/neurodiversity-affirming-therapy/>

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**The takeaways:** The Neurodiversity Movement is Human Rights Movement even in your therapy setting...

Neurodiversity-affirming therapy is **trauma-informed**, **respectful** and **culturally competent**. Services should **focus on making autistic people's lives better**.

**There is no "right way" to socialize or to play.**

All autistic and neurodivergent people, including non-speaking people and intellectually disabled people, have the right to **body autonomy**, **informed consent**, **self-determination** and to be **treated with dignity as valued members of society**. **At all times**. Self-advocacy attempts should be respected, and honored with a reaction, even if the self advocacy through behavior.

**Autistic/neurodivergent prioritized outcomes** replace clinical neuronormative outcomes.

Mouth speech is not the only form of communication. **Assistive technology solves a lot of problems.**

Address the environment. **Accommodations, supports, modifications.**

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Look at your goals... What are the desired outcomes of the plan of care or IEP?

Is it to hide or wipe out autistic "behaviors" and/or "social "deficits"?

or

Is it focused on increasing communication, self advocacy and self-determination abilities?

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**"There's no normal child hidden behind the autism.**

Autism is a way of being. It is pervasive; it colours every experience, every sensation, perception, thought, emotion and encounter, every aspect of existence. **It is not possible to separate the autism from the person – and if it were possible, the person you'd have left would not be the same person you started with."**

– Jim Sinclair



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**FREE** Neurodiversity-Related Printables & Resources!

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**References: Neurodiversity-Affirming Practices**

Citation: For Whose Benefit? Evidence, Ethics, and Effectiveness of Autism Interventions. Autistic Self Advocacy Network. (2021, December). Retrieved January 2022, from <https://autisticadvocacy.org/policy/briefs/intervention-ethics/>

Roberts, J. (© 2019 – 2023) The Neurodiversity-Affirming Conceptual Practice Framework of Social Communication: An evidence-based alternative model to social skills training for autistic populations. Therapist Neurodiversity Collective, Inc.™

References: Roberts, J. (2019 – 2023)



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Download and print free copies of these infographics:

Roberts, J. (2020, September 5). IEP Makeovers for Neurodivergent Children. Therapist Neurodiversity Collective.

<https://therapistndc.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/IEP-Make-overs.pdf>

Roberts, J. (2020, September 10). IEP Makeovers for Neurodivergent Children Part 2. Therapist Neurodiversity Collective

IEP Makeovers 2: <https://therapistndc.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Part-2-IEP-Make-overs.pdf>

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**Free Downloadable Poster** (pg. 2)

What kind of therapist are you?

Roberts, J.  
2021/03/31

<https://therapistandcounselor.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Empathetic-Respectful-Therapy.pdf>

**We are a Collective for Speech-Language Pathologists, Occupational Therapists, & Physical Therapists**

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## Great Articles to share with Parents, Educators, and Professionals

"Are We Giving Autistic Children PTSD From School? When we don't understand autistic kids we create a toxic environment for them."  
<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/everyday-neurodiversity/202108/are-we-giving-autistic-children-ptsd-school>

"Study Challenges Assumptions About Social Interaction Difficulties in Autism"  
<https://news.utdallas.edu/health-medicine/autism-social-interactions-2020/>

"Double Empathy: Why Autistic People Are Often Misunderstood"  
<https://kids.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/frym.2021.554875>

"Camouflaging in Autism"  
<https://kids.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/frym.2019.00129>

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