

# Individuals with Autism: Addressing Barriers to Employment

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# Agenda

- Expectations
- What is Autism?
- Adults with ASD Outcomes
- Individual Barriers to Employment
- Addressing Barriers
- Case Studies

# What to expect..

- I may talk too fast-
- I will try to be as jargon-lite as possible
- I may go on tangents
- I may have longer pauses if I am thinking about case specific information
- Goals:
- By the end of this presentation, you will:
  - Have a better understanding of the intricacies that makes up ASD
  - Have real practical information on how to better serve clients with ASD
  - Have been exposed a bit to my own personal feelings/experience working with and around individuals with autism, (disclaimer: it includes bias)

# What is Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)?

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A lifelong neuro-developmental disorder

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Categorized by:

Varying degrees of difficulties with social interaction, verbal and nonverbal communication, and repetitive behaviors

A True Spectrum Disorder- Wide-range of strengths, differences and deficits for individuals diagnosed with ASD

# Changes in Diagnosing ASD

DSM-V: Lists one, (rather than four separate) disorder, identified as Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) which represents a single condition with different levels of symptom severity

Changes to core diagnostic criteria:

## DSM-IV Characteristics:

- 1) Language Challenges
- 2) Social Deficits
- 3) Stereotyped or Repetitive Behaviors



## DSM-V Characteristics

- 1) Communication and Social Deficits
- 2) Ritualistic or Repetitive Behavior

# Social Communication and Interaction

Persistent deficits in social communication and social interaction across multiple contexts, including (non-exhaustive list):

- Deficits in **social-emotional reciprocity**
- Deficits in **nonverbal communicative behaviors** used for social interaction
- Deficits in **developing, maintaining, and understand relationships**

# Ritualistic Behaviors and Sensory Issues

Restricted, repetitive patterns of behavior, interests, or activities, as manifested by **at least two** of the following, (examples are illustrative, not exhaustive):

- Stereotyped or repetitive motor movements, use of objects, or speech
- Insistence on sameness, inflexible adherence to routines, or ritualized patterns of verbal or nonverbal behavior
- Highly restricted, fixated interests that are abnormal in intensity or focus
- Hyper- or hypo- reactivity to sensory input or unusual interest in sensory aspects of the environment

# Prevalence

## The fastest growing Developmental Disability

- Among eight-year olds; 1 out of 68 children will be diagnosed with ASD (CDC, 2016)
- Autism is 4 to 5 times more common among boys than girls\*
- Children are likely to be diagnosed around age 4-5
  - Key diagnosis period around age 2-3
  - Current research shows effective diagnosis as early as 6 months-1 year (eye gaze, joint attention, response to name, etc.)
- For some, develop normally as infant and toddler, then regress and develop more “autistic” symptoms around age 2
- 2016 first time rate has not increased
  - report conducted every 2 years by CDC



# Prevalence

While there is no prevalence rate for adults with autism in the U.S., children included in the 2007 estimate will be 22 in 2014-2016, resulting in 1.5 million adults with autism in the United States.

(Sullivan, 2007)

# Cause of Autism?

- There is no known cause of Autism!
- Potential New Findings & Connections:
  - Genetics + environmental factors
    - Advanced parental age
    - Low Birth Weight
    - Premature Birth

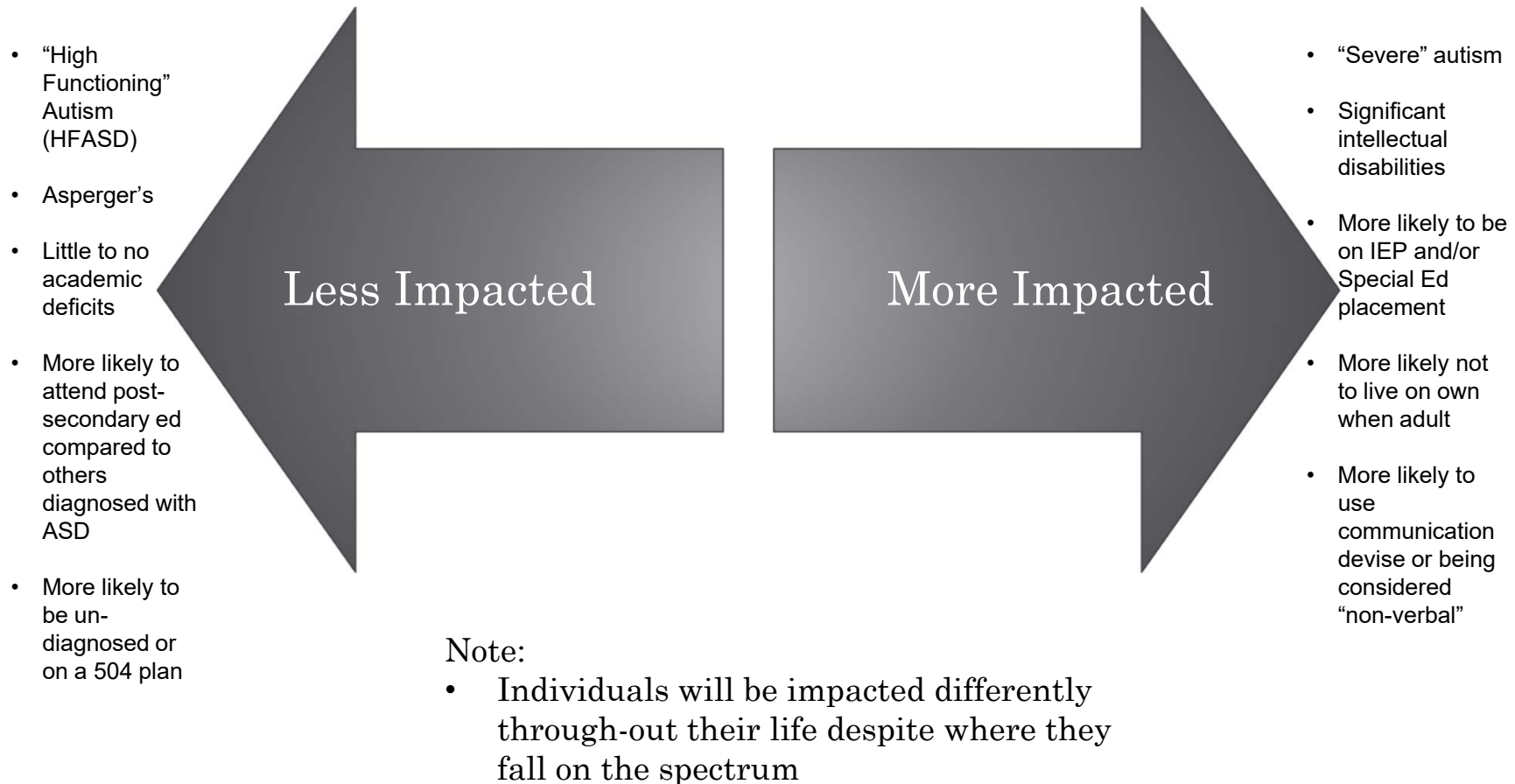
## Myths:

- MMR Vaccination
- “Refrigerator Mothers”

# What is Autism?

“A diverse continuum that spans an astonishing range of giftedness and disability” – Hans Asperger

# AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER



# The “Spectrum”

- 40% of individuals diagnosed with ASD have average or above average intellectual abilities
  - Many more may never be diagnosed and have average level of intellectual ability, yet have similar social difficulties or challenges as someone diagnosed with ASD, so this number may be less accurate for adults
- One-third of those diagnosed with ASD are nonverbal, but can learn to communicate by other means
- Only 10% or less of individuals with Autism may show “savant” abilities

# What is Autism?

- An Invisible Disability



# The “puzzle” of Autism



# Early Screening and Diagnosis

- Earlier getting diagnosed and access to services, the better
  - Knowledge about signs of typical development is key
  - When in doubt, get checked out!
    - If a parent doesn't feel right about something, check with a pediatrician- early diagnosis makes world of difference
- Diagnosis is best if by or around age 2-3
  - Early entrance to pre-school and IEP
  - ABA therapy
  - Evidence-Based Practices
- Behavioral-based treatments: can be effective at any age
  - Often change goals as students age



# Adults with Autism

- Adults with ASD are more likely than their neurotypical peers to have or develop:
  - Issues with Executive Functioning
  - Depression
  - Anxiety
  - Bipolar Disorder
  - Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder
  - Suicide Attempts
  - Immune Conditions
  - Gastrointestinal Disorders
  - Sleep Disorders
  - Seizures
  - Obesity
  - Diabetes

# Executive Functioning

- Often impaired with ASD diagnosis – but not all are affected
- Higher Order Processing responsible for regulation and controlling behavior
  - The “Thinking and Doing” Skills
- Makes it difficult to:
  - Keep track of time
  - Make plans
  - Complete deadlines
  - Multitask
  - Apply previous learned information to solve problems
  - Analyze ideas
  - Look for help or information when help is needed
  - Regulate emotions

# ASD Adult Outcomes

Individuals with ASD frequently experience difficulties:

- finding and maintaining appropriate employment
- participating in recreation and community leisure activities
- maintaining relationships with friends and family members

Literature cites a lack of supported employment programs for people with ASD

- results in higher unemployment rates
- increased dependence on publicly funded support programs
- less connection with community and networks often lead to more challenging behaviors and depression, among other issues

Lack of extended services has been identified as one of the major barriers to the successful employment of persons with ASD

- Effective vocational services, including social support in the workplace and well-trained counselors who understand the barriers to employment for an individual with autism, are critical for successful employment outcomes.

# Locally...

- 25% of our clients at UWEP have ASD listed as their main condition/disability
- Estimated cost of employment support, on average, is **\$133,200** over a 25 year span for individuals requiring low (3-6 hours/month) levels of on-going employment support (UWEP, 2013).
- Providing employment support results in a positive societal cost-benefit. UWEP clients with ASD work an average of 21 hours/week and earn \$12.75/hour (UWEP, 2013) for an estimated lifetime earning of at least **\$334,688**.

*What are some examples of individual barriers to employment for individuals with ASD?*

# Individual Barriers to Employment

Deficits in social-emotional reciprocity:

- **failure of normal back-and-forth conversation**
- May Look Like:
  - Interrupting
  - Talking too quickly, not allowing others to join
  - Not responding, or taking too long to respond
- May Lead to:
  - Being perceived as “rude” or “awkward”
  - Avoidance and Distance from Co-workers
  - Other’s making decisions for the individual
  - Being unable to request accommodations appropriately

# Individual Barriers to Employment

Deficits in nonverbal communicative behaviors:

- **total lack of facial expressions and nonverbal communication**
- May Look Like:
  - “Flat affect”
  - Seeming unemotional
  - Difficulty executing successful social conversations due to inability to process subtle nonverbal cues
- May Lead To:
  - Social Isolation, difficulty making friends
  - Misunderstood as not a “team player”
  - Seems “unhappy” with employment
  - Potential dismissal

# Individual Barriers to Employment

Insistence on sameness, inflexible adherence to routines, or ritualized patterns of verbal or nonverbal behavior; ranging, for example:

- **extreme distress at small changes**
  - **difficulties with transitions**
  - **rigid thinking pattern**
- **May Look Like:**
    - Triggering stereotypic behaviors or stimming when presented with change
    - Heavy or rapid breathing when changes occur
    - Feelings of being “stuck” and can’t move on
    - Panicked or anxious behaviors
  - **May Lead to:**
    - Social Isolation
    - Loss of employment (jobs inherently require flexibility)
    - Depression or feelings of incompetence



# Individual Barriers to Employment

Highly restricted, fixated interests that are abnormal in intensity or focus; ranging, for example:

- **strong attachment to or preoccupation with “unusual” objects**
- **excessively circumscribed or perseverative interests**
- May look like:
  - Repeatedly talking about subjects that have little social validity or general broad interest
  - Bringing “service items” to work
  - Collecting items, sometimes secretively
  - Excitement or stereotypic behaviors at site of items
- May Lead To:
  - Reduction in social conversations
  - Barriers to employment in allowing for access to items
  - Isolation leading to depression

# Individual Barriers to Employment

Hyper- or hypo- reactivity to sensory input or unusual interest in sensory aspects of the environment

- **excessive smelling or touching of objects**
- **adverse response to specific sounds or textures**
- May Look Like:
  - Avoidance to certain areas with bright lights or specific sounds
  - Very specific diet
  - RRBs involving specific items
- May Lead To:
  - Inability to complete jobs/tasks without accommodations
  - Health complications which may lead to missing work
  - Requiring additional time to complete “basic” tasks

*When deficits or differences attributed with ASD intrude on one's ability to complete a task or job, what can we do to support the individual?*

“Autism is a life-long polygenetic disability that  
requires *passionate* forms of *support and*  
*accommodations* over the course of one’s whole life.”  
–Hans Asperger

# Food for Thought:

- Let's take a look at our own behavior:
  - Who has sat in the same seat or area every day during this conference?
  - Do you: twirl your hair? Click your pen? Tap your foot?
    - When are you more likely to do these things?
  - What are some of the social things that you talk about with colleagues at work?
    - Sports?
    - Weather?
    - Travel or vacation?
  - Anyone regularly schedule meals for the week?

# Overcoming Barriers to Employment

First things first:

## **Awareness & Acceptance**

- Many of the behaviors exhibited by a person with ASD may only be a barrier according to the individual they are working with or the social setting they are in

SO-

- What is a reasonable amount of responsibility to place on the person with the disability, before asking those around the individual, including ourselves, to be understanding to differences?

# What would you do if you were expected to.....

$$n = \frac{c}{v} = \sqrt{\frac{\mu\varepsilon}{\mu_0\varepsilon_0}} = \frac{Z(\text{vacuum})}{Z(\text{dielectric})}$$

$$\frac{I_r}{I_i} = \left(\frac{E_r}{E_i}\right)^2 = \left(\frac{1-n}{1+n}\right)^2$$

$$\frac{I_t}{I_i} = \frac{Z_t E_t^2}{Z_i E_i^2} = \frac{4n}{(1+n)^2}$$



# Overcoming Barriers to Employment

Example: The employee may experience sensory overstimulation that requires accommodation on the worksite, e.g., sensitivity to florescent lights, noises or certain odors or textures.

- Preventative Options:
  - Making sure the job or position is something the individual is comfortable doing before they accept the position- Doing a run through during a time that the person would be working
  - Accommodations:
    - Sun Glasses
    - Face masks
    - Ear plugs
    - Gloves
- Other supports:
  - Identifying space for someone to go to that is quite and free of sensory items that cause stress, that is available to 'cool down' or take a break
  - Create code or universal signal that allows permission for individual to take break



# Overcoming Barriers to Employment

Example: Poor communication between the employee and the supervisor may result in barriers to maintaining employment.

- Preventative Options:
  - Find a more effective way for communication
    - Color Systems for clients with anxiety
    - Simple written feedback templates that clients can hand to employer
    - AT or AAC options
    - Explaining to employer “what to expect” with ideas around overcoming those barriers

## Other Supports:

- Requesting regular performance evaluations with employer
- Visuals of information, requiring less verbal responses
- Giving Clear & Concise Directions– LESS IS MORE

# Other Supports and Interventions

- Setting Expectations and Goals before beginning
- Social Stories
- Use of Visual Schedules
  - Whether written or picture
- Checklists
- Task Analysis
- Skill building in foundational areas that can lead to better outcomes
- Self-management
- Video-modeling

# Case Studies

# Questions?