

# Autism Disclosure:

How, When & Why to Talk with Your Child about Autism and  
How it Affects Them

Presented by:

The PRC and the APS

Autism & Low Incidence Team



AUTISM ACCEPTANCE

# Welcome from the Autism/Low Incidence Team



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# Put it in the chat...

- Let's think about that first conversation about autism with your child...
- Is there something that would make you hesitate?
- What are you fearful of?



# When to talk with your child



- What does the research say?
  - Adolescents with autism who were told by their parents as young children report having a more positive self-image (Riccio et. al., Autism, Volume 25, Issue 2, 2021)
  - Autistic adults who were not told they were had autism as children reported feeling misunderstood, ashamed, and unsure what was wrong with them (Babaro and Camin, La Trobe University Journal, 2022)
  - ...*"autistic university students who learned that they were autistic when they were younger reported higher well-being and Quality of Life relative to students who did not gain access to this important information about themselves until they were older."* (Tomisin Oredipe et al., Autism, Volume 27, Issue 1, 2022)

# To Tell or Not to Tell Why it Shouldn't be a Question

A common debate...

[Autism Level Up](#)



## The Concrete and Observable

	Do Not Tell	Tell
What is it	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Withholding information about their brain and identity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Disclosure</li> <li>- Truth and transparency</li> </ul>
What is said	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- "You should be like everyone else"</li> <li>- Nothing at all</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- You're Autistic</li> <li>- Your brain and body works differently</li> <li>- Your experience might be different from your peers.</li> </ul>
Who typically endorses it?		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Autistic individuals</li> <li>- People who know embrace the neurodiversity spectrum</li> </ul>
Why?		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Knowledge is powerful</li> <li>- Supports self-advocacy</li> </ul>

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*Autism* Level UP!

# The Concrete and Observable

## Autism Level Up

## The Implicit Message

	Do Not Tell	Tell
To the individual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- You are not ok the way the way you are.</li><li>- We are ashamed of who you are</li><li>- That difference is not ok to talk about</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- That Autism is okay!</li><li>- Diversity is good</li><li>- Diversity is normal</li><li>- Neurodivergence and disability are an integral part of the community!</li></ul>

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# The Implicit Message

## Autism Level Up

## The Impacts

	Do Not Tell	Tell
To the individual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Changes concept of self</li><li>- Can lead to feelings of inadequacy or shame</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Self-awareness and understanding of strengths and challenges</li><li>- Empowered individuals with personhood intact</li></ul>
On the individual's daily experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Masking</li><li>- Overload</li><li>- Mental health impacts</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Differences are ok.</li><li>- Informed strategies can be used and applied.</li><li>- Mental health is supported and buffered.</li></ul>
On peers and society	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- The community does have an opportunity to learn</li><li>- Lack of understanding continues</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Authentic knowledge and appreciation of diversity</li><li>- Progress continues</li></ul>

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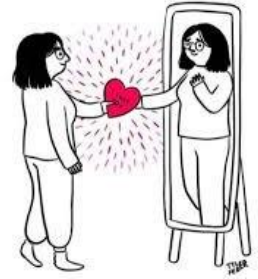
Autism Level UP!

# The Impacts

## Autism Level Up



# Why tell kids?



- Shows respect for who they are, their *identity*
- Models how to use positive, non-judgmental language to describe themselves
- Helps to foster a sense of self-love
- Provides "a framework for self-advocacy"
- Creates opportunities for connection/community



How I Realized That I Have Autism

# How I Realized I have Autism & My Diagnosis Story

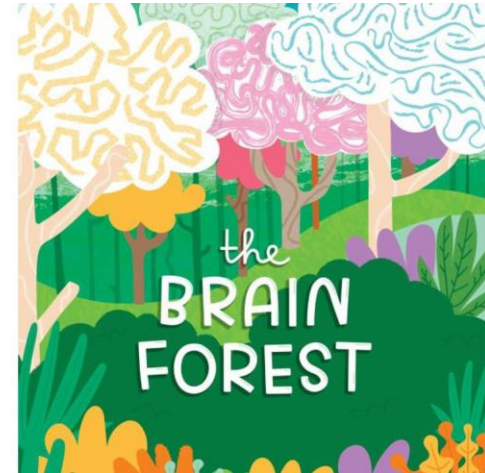
- Tyler McNamer

# When to start the conversation

- This will differ for everyone and depend on:
  - your child's age*
  - developmental/language level*
  - your own readiness*
- Sometimes the moment just "feels right"
  - on a walk or in the car,*
  - in a moment of calm vs upset*
  - when your child is questioning or talking about their differences*
- Hearing it first from a trusted parent/adult
- Can be a gradual sharing of information over time

# How to talk with your child

- Use positive language
  - brain difference vs disorder/disability*
  - challenges vs deficits/symptoms*
- Be factual/informative
  - neurodivergence*
  - sensory differences*
- Answer questions/validate differences & feelings
- Empower
  - disclosure (in their control)*
  - resources for their learning (books, internet, discussions)*





The Brain Forest is filled with unique brains, which makes it a **BEAUTIFUL** thing.

Can you imagine if there was only **ONE** kind of brain?

Well, that would be **BOOOORING!!**

So many types of brains, that's how I like this space.

Come with me, let's explore some more—they have strengths and differences to embrace.

# How to talk with your child

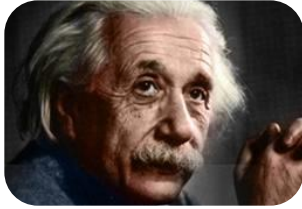
- Make it an ongoing conversation
- Use your child's strengths and interests
- Utilize resources to support the conversation
  - Books
  - Videos
  - Websites
- Provide autistic role models



# Some Famous Autistics



Temple Grandin



Albert Einstein



Breanna Clark



Heather  
Kuzinich



David Byrne



Satoshi Tajiri



Susan Boyle



Stephen  
Wiltshire



Elon Musk



Greta Thunberg



Shigeru  
Miyamoto



Daryl Hannah

# Social Media as a Platform or Community...Thoughts?

- Social Connections

*"I feel more comfortable expressing myself online"*  
*Not having to "worry about physical or in-conversation cues"*

- Sense of Belonging/Identity

- Information Sharing by Autistic Individuals

- Benefits vs Risks

- Safety





# Chat check in

- What platforms online are your children using?
  - Ex: Instagram, Snapchat, Xbox, Minecraft, Fortnite, video game chats



# How to talk with your child

## *Person-First vs. Identify-First*

- Some people with disabilities and neurodivergence prefer “*person-first*” language

Examples:

- Person with a disability
- Someone with a visual impairment
- Child with autism
- Man with Down Syndrome



- Some people with disabilities and neurodivergence prefer “*identity-first*” language

Examples:

- Deaf person
- Autistic woman
- Diabetic
- Asthmatic

Many adults with intellectual disabilities prefer person-first language

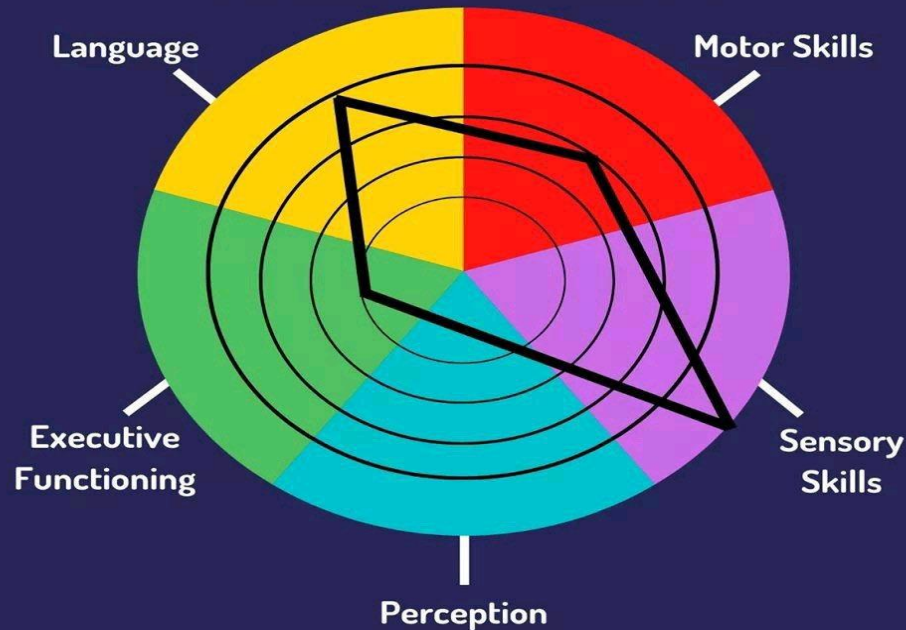
Many adults on the autism spectrum prefer identify-first language

# THE AUTISM SPECTRUM

What people think the autism spectrum looks like:



What it can actually look like:



# Explaining the "Spectrum"

# Benefits of Being Autistic Include:

Curiosity

Unique brains

Ability to stay focused on preferred

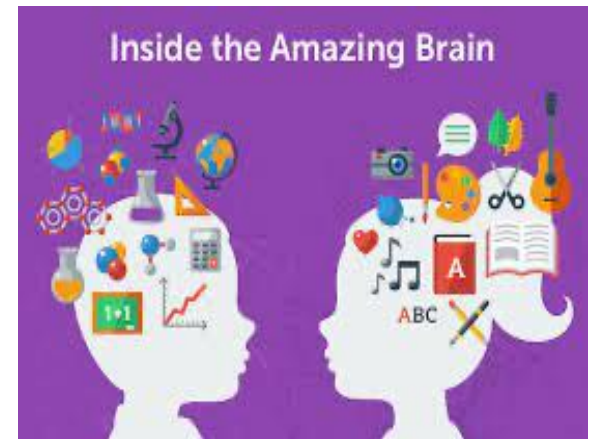
interests

Creative problem-solving skills

Passionate interests

Honest and direct communication

Skills prized by many employers



## Talk About Autistic Characteristics in a Neutral or Positive Way



I'm Autistic  
And I'm  
Awesome!

- ***Passionate*** rather than *Perseverative*
- ***Hyperlexic*** as opposed to *Having poor comprehension*
- ***Prefers consistency*** instead of *rigid*
- ***Loves technology*** rather than *obsessed with computer*
- ***High-support needs*** rather than *low-functioning*
- ***Self-regulating*** rather than *stimming*

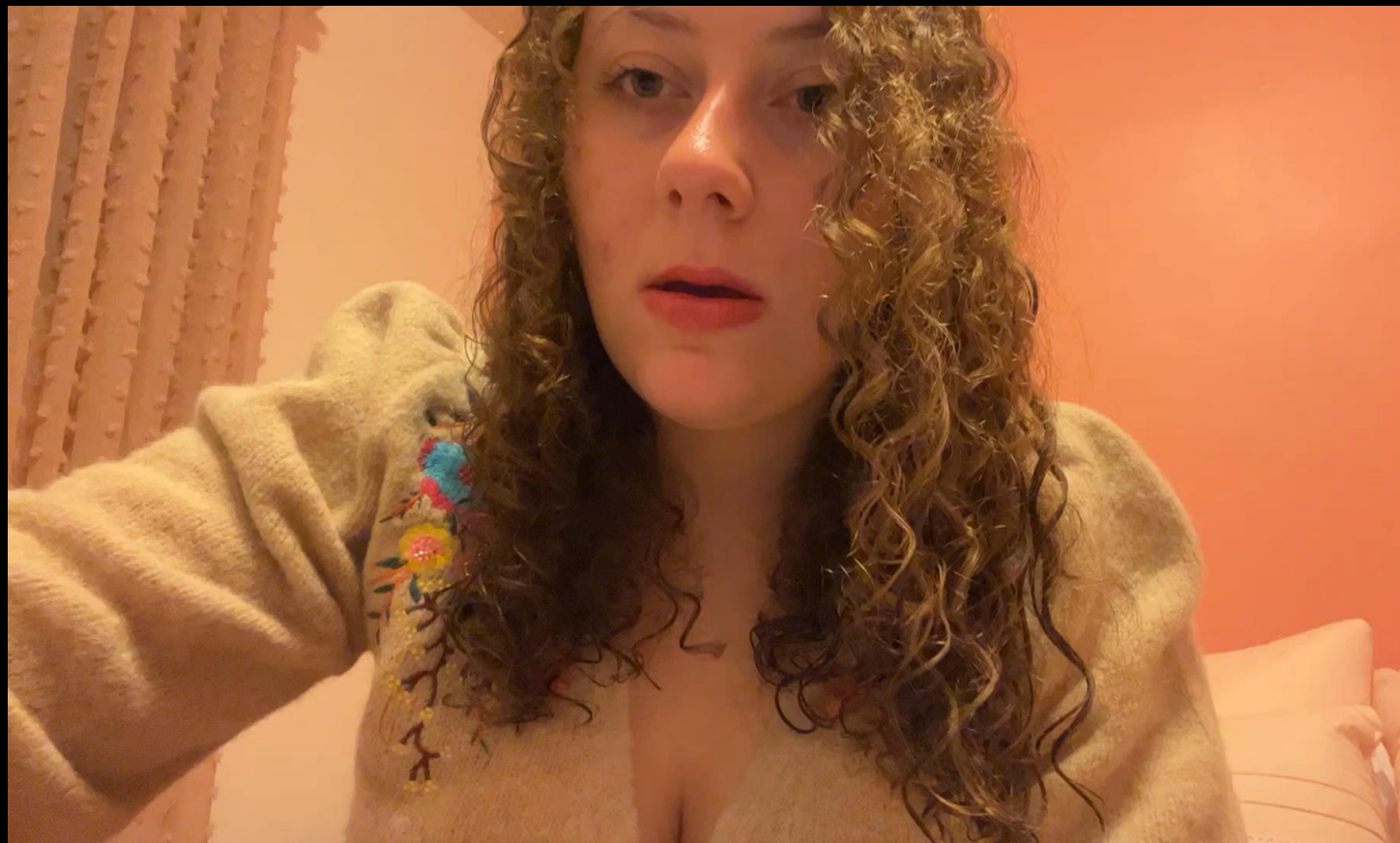
# Perspectives From Our Former Students

**Listen to  
Autistic Voices**

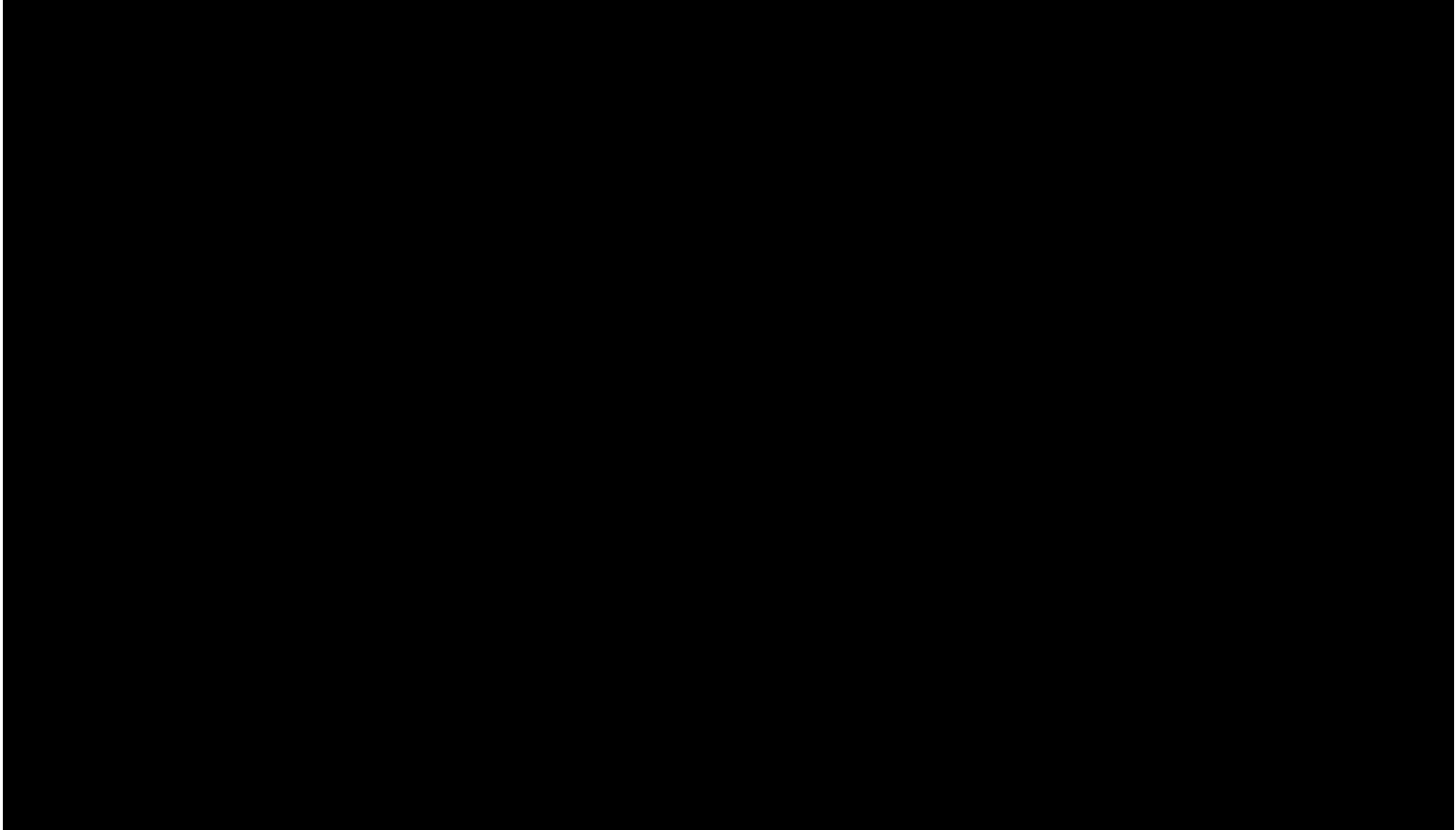


#actuallyautistic  
#redinstead  
#notapuzzle

# Ariel



Paul







# What You Should Know About Autism

by  
Sarah  
Cornett



*Super-focus can be a Superpower but  
Anxiety can be our Kryptonite.*

Anxiety can make me shy, defensive and stubborn. It is one of the biggest obstacles I deal with when I am trying to do new things or face challenges. I take medication, but I am also learning coping skills to work through my anxiety.

- # Sarah Cornett

- Sarah is a graduate of Wakefield High School and the PEP program
- She helped start the Order of Self-Determination and is now a volunteer mentor
- She is a college student at Northern Virginia Community College
- She belongs to Cool Aspies
- She works for the Arc of Northern Virginia
- She is an award-winning artist



Situational

School

Extra  
curricular

Medical

Community

Relationships

Friends

Family

Peers

Age

Child

Teen

Adult

Individual  
Choice

Can change  
over time or  
regularly

Individual  
decision

Individual  
Needs

Varying  
Support  
Needs

Disclosure  
How, when, why?

# Questions?



