Supporting Students on the Autism Spectrum through COVID-19

Jane Thierfeld Brown, Ed.D.  
College Autism Spectrum

Lorre Wolf, Ph.D.  
Boston University
Conference Civility Statement

We ask you to join us in creating a culture that reflects…
Access and Inclusion
and
Civility and Respect
…consistent with the AHEAD Statement of Civility during our conference and in all aspects of our organization.
“Neurodiversity may be every bit as crucial for the human race as biodiversity is for life in general. Who can say what form of wiring will prove best at any given moment?”

National Statistics

1 in 54 - 8 year olds (CDC 2020)

3 million Americans

Fastest-growing developmental disability

10 - 17% annual growth
NEURODIVERSITY SPECTRUM

SOCIAL SKILLS

EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING

LANGUAGE

SENSORY

ENVIRONMENTAL SENSITIVITIES

MOTOR SKILLS

PERCEPTION

TRigler, Rutherford-Moody, AHEAD, 2017
Sensory Overload

“The sun is too loud….it’s as if everything I can see has a corresponding auditory of high notes and crashes. Makes it difficult to concentrate—even to walk upright”.

“it feels like everyone is talking at once and you don't know who to listen to”
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Obstacles</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Adherence to rules</td>
<td>• Acclimating to new routines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Loyal, trustworthy</td>
<td>• Campus culture</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Reliable</td>
<td>• Social expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Avoids classroom politics</td>
<td>• Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Enjoys routine work</td>
<td>• Mastering college processes</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Direct communication style</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Attention to detail</td>
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</table>
Anxiety

• Anxiety interferes with Self Regulation
• Anxiety is a core feature of ASD
• Students need active coping strategies as part of the plan
Zoom fatigue

- “Zoom Fatigue” Gives Neurotypicals a Rare Glimpse Into the Experience of Autistic Adults
Chronicle of Higher Ed 7/5/2020

1,075 colleges

- Planning for in-person (60%)
- Proposing a hybrid model (23%)
- Planning for online (8%)
- Considering a range of scenarios (6%)
- Waiting to decide (2.5%)
Challenges

1. Unpredictability
2. Lack of Flexibility
3. Anxiety
Anxiety Action Points by Nick Dubin

• Consciously use healthy compensation to reduce anxiety levels. Feeling inferior is not a reason to compensate.
• Accept yourself for who you are and there is no need to overcompensate.
• True growth occurs when you put yourself in situations that are slightly beyond your comfort zone, creating slight stress. Try to challenge yourself.
• Find appropriate outlets for your stress without falling into the trap of developing unhealthy addictions.

• The parasympathetic nervous system’s job is to help you relax. Learn to let it do its job.

• P. 41 Asperger Syndrome and Anxiety: A Guide to Stress Management
Change

Barrier

• Students on the spectrum may react poorly to change in routine.

• students with autism may be anxious to know the plan for the coming weeks of class.

• Accommodations

• reassurance (when possible) to quell anxiety, is necessary for all students.
Course Work and Motivation

• Barriers.
  • Are students motivated to complete work independently, initiate assignments and study.

• Accommodations
  • Assisting with structure and schedules
Isolation

• Barrier
• forcing isolation with “social distancing.”
• Accommodation
• Encourage students to keep up social contacts online with skype or facetime. Study groups can meet online and multiplayer games can be suggested for social continuity. However…. 
Social Activities

• Group Netflix movie
• Virtual Cooking
• Psych
• Board Games (Life, Monopoly)
• Pictionary
• Cards Against Humanity
Screen and Game Addiction

• vulnerable to screen and game addiction with moving classes online

• Barrier
• even more screen time

• Accommodation –
• use a timer to take screen breaks, getting outside, eating, sleeping all are even more important now than ever (and for us too!)
Residence Halls

• Students may like the independence college has afforded them and not want to return to a restrictive home life where a variety of food and entertainment options are negligible and parents may be intrusive.

• Remind students of the temporary nature of the current crisis, they will be returning to their residence halls (at least in the fall.)

• Students may report a decrease in symptoms since moving to college. Ask them how they can continue a healthy lifestyle at home.
Adjusting your study habits during COVID

• We’ll get through this together.

• From the Center for Academic Innovation
  University of Michigan

1. Staying organized

• With so many things changing in your courses, you might be reliving that first-week-of-class confusion at finals-week pace.

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Comorbidities

- Sleep disorders/disruptions
- Gastrointestinal
- Anxiety, Depression
- Selective Eating
- ADHD
- Epilepsy
Comorbidities

- Sleep disorders/disruptions
- Gastrointestinal
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- ADHD
- Epilepsy
- Anxiety, Depression
The opposite of anxiety isn’t calm it’s trust
Autism is a Disability of Trust

When we return to our typical life:

• Remember the trust issues

• Be sensitive to PTSD
Parents

• This is a new role for them.

• Change in family dynamic.

• Family is worried about... everything!
Guide Parents

• Info from Parent Group last week
Thank you for all you do!

• For all the students
• For all the families – especially the ones who don’t, or can’t say thank you.

Please Stay Well
# Social Behavior and Self-Management

5-Point Scales for Adolescents and Adults

This award-winning tool now expanded for adults!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale to Rate Common Roommate Issues</th>
<th>This Is What It Might Be Like for You</th>
<th>This Is What It Would Probably Look Like</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rating</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
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<th>Scale to Monitor the Need for Support</th>
<th>This Is the Level Of Support I Need</th>
<th>This Is the Level Of Support I Want</th>
<th>This Is the Level Of Support I Expect</th>
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**Kari Dunn Buron, MS**
**Jane Thierfeld Brown, EdD**
**Mitzi Curtis, MA**
**Lisa King, MEd**

Foreword by Stephen Shore, EdD
Session Evaluation

- Link to Session Evaluation Form
  tinyurl.com/AHEAD2020-SessionEval

- Your feedback helps shape future programming.

- Thank you for attending!
Questions and Comments
Thank you for coming.

Jane Thierfeld Brown, Ed.D
Lorre Wolf, Ph.D

Jane@CollegeAutismSpectrum.com
LWolf@bu.edu

www.CollegeAutismSpectrum.com