

# Neurodiversity in the Workplace: Strategies to Support Inclusivity

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**UTAH CENTER**  
FOR EVIDENCE BASED  
TREATMENT

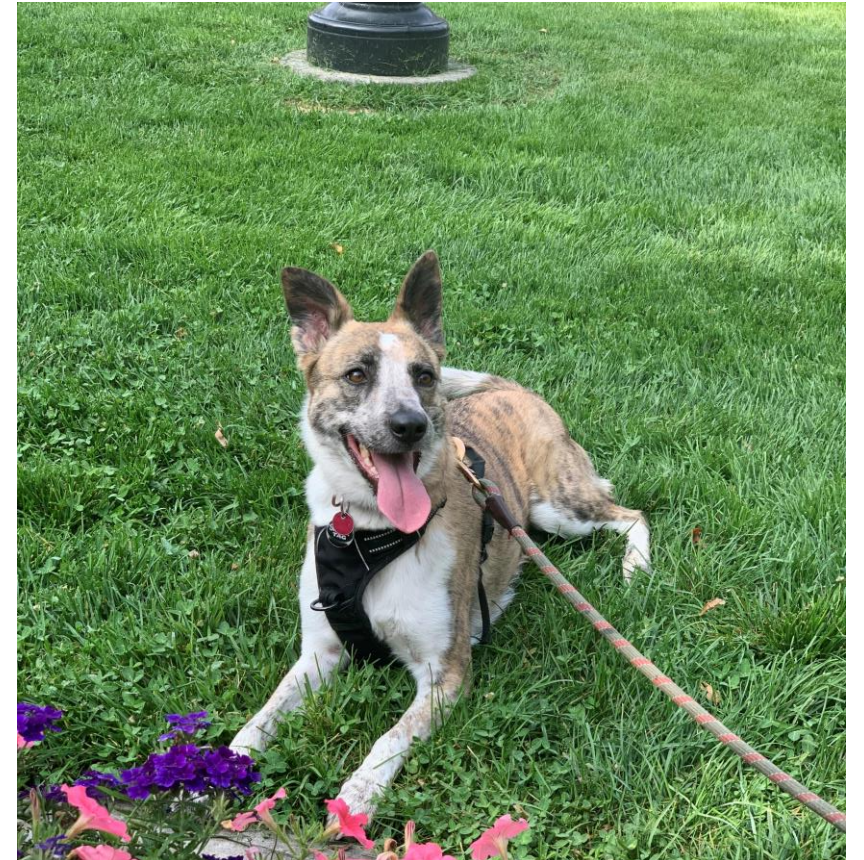
# Introduction

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Licensed Clinical Psychologist and Assessment and Testing Program Director with Utah Center for Evidence Based Treatment

Extensive training with assessment and intervention for neurodiverse populations across the lifespan

Personally valued area of work- family members with Autism and ADHD



# Overview

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What is Neurodiversity?

Importance of Understanding Neurodiversity

Strengths and Weaknesses

Inclusive Strategies

Q&A

# Inclusive Definitions

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Neurodiversity reflects natural brain variation that includes its own unique strengths and perspective

- Includes Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)
- Other presentations may be Learning Disabilities, like Dyslexia, and movement conditions, like Dyspraxia

Areas of weakness can be supported by inclusive practices and accommodation if needed

Neurodiversity initiatives seek civil rights, equality, respect, and full societal inclusion for these individuals

# Importance

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Individuals have a choice whether to disclose and employers cannot ask- therefore you may not know whether someone you are communicating with is neurodiverse or not!

Research indicates neurodiverse individuals are underemployed

Diverse perspectives helps prevent stagnation or continuation of ineffective practices due to “tradition”

Workplaces need to focus on all levels of hiring practices and workplace structure- not enough to attain neurodiverse individuals if systems don't support them

Communication is a two-way street- the responsibility of addressing communication gaps is not one individual

# Prevalence

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CDC reports 2.2% adults in the U.S. diagnosed with autism (or 5.4 million people aged 18 or older)

Estimated 2.5% to 4.4% of adults diagnosed with ADHD

Although most often diagnosed in childhood- these are lifelong conditions and can be diagnosed in adulthood

## Population variants

- Underdiagnosed in women/individuals assigned female at birth
- Underdiagnosed in racial/ethnic minority groups

# Autism Spectrum Disorder

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- DSM-5 Criteria outlines two core domains of deficits in Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)- Important to note these criteria may be limiting
- Social communication and interaction
  - Social emotional reciprocity
  - Nonverbal communication
  - Developing, maintaining, understanding relationships
- Restricted and repetitive patterns of behavior
  - Stereotyped/repetitive movements
  - Insistence on sameness, routines, rituals
  - Highly restricted or fixated patterns of interest
  - Low or high reactivity to sensory input and/or unusual interest in sensory aspects of environment

# Strengths of ASD

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Analytical thinking- mathematical and logical

Pattern recognition

Detail oriented

Tasks that are sequential, linear

Quality control



# Barriers to workplace functioning

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Overstimulated by sensory input

May not recognize indirect social cues- impacts “networking” and providing input in less structured settings

Difficulty adjusting to changes in routine and transitioning between tasks

High likelihood of burnout due to overwhelm and “camouflaging/masking” behaviors

# Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

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A Neurodevelopmental disorder with onset in the developmental period, presenting with 6 or more symptoms prior to age 12

Encompasses ADHD predominantly inattentive presentation, predominantly hyperactive presentation, and combined presentation

Affects the following areas:

- Inattention: attention, organization, planning, time management, memory, sustained effort
- Hyperactivity: inhibition, sitting still, monitoring behaviors

Nondiagnostic features: emotion regulation, sensory processing, hyperfocus

# Strengths

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Creativity

Openness to jumping into new experiences

Socially engaging

Intense focus on interests (hyper-focus)

Noticing patterns

Good in a crisis- thriving in “chaos”

High energy

# Barriers to Workplace Functioning

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Distractibility

Problems prioritizing tasks

Time management

Low tolerance for boredom

Sensitivities to sensory input

Listening to others

Regulating emotions

Inclusivity

# Strategies Enhancing Inclusion

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1. Adjust hiring practices

# Nontraditional hiring

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Write clear job descriptions for posting

- Clearly state your organization welcomes neurodiverse talent

Use task-based or objective assessments

- More effective at demonstrating on-the-job skills than interviews

Ask specific questions instead of open-ended ones

- What are your strengths? Vs. Describe a time when you added value to a project you worked on

Give opportunities for open disclosure

- “How can we help you be most effective at doing your job?”

Discuss accommodations

# Strategies Enhancing Inclusion

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1. Adjust hiring practices
2. Communicate clearly using straightforward language



# Clear Communication

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Avoid sarcasm, abbreviations

Make job descriptions and expectations clear: What is absolutely required, what is preferred, and what is just nice to have?

Give specific timelines for completing tasks- clearly label urgent tasks as urgent

Present information in multiple modalities- having text and a/v clips

# Strategies Enhancing Inclusion

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1. Adjust hiring practices
2. Communicate clearly using straightforward language
3. Challenge Assumptions

# Assumptions

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Neurodiverse individuals may speak directly, and it can be mistaken for rudeness

Ask for clarification if you're not sure of intention

Provide feedback on why you were offended by something, giving the other person the benefit of the doubt

Investigate problems completing work before making judgments

- Avoidance may be due to problems knowing what expectations are or prioritization of tasks

# Strategies Enhancing Inclusion

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1. Adjust hiring practices
2. Communicate clearly using straightforward language
3. Watch for assumptions about others
4. Pace information flow to ease understanding

# Pace Information Flow

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Strengths of neurodiverse includes detail-oriented, analytical thinking. However, prone to information overload

Present information in a logical and ordered sequence

Pause between sharing, ask for clarification before moving forward

Have structured agendas for meetings

# Strategies Enhancing Inclusion

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1. Adjust hiring practices
2. Communicate clearly using straightforward language
3. Watch for assumptions about others
4. Pace information flow to ease understanding
5. Accommodate sensitivities

# Sensory Friendly Environments

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Change lighting

Limit noise/distractions

Allow flexibility in remote work

Flexibility in time of day- focus on work performed instead of hours rendered

Accommodations are individualized- discuss with employees types of accommodations that would allow them to perform to the best of their abilities

# Strategies Enhancing Inclusion

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1. Adjust hiring practices
2. Communicate clearly using straightforward language
3. Watch for assumptions about others
4. Pace information flow to ease understanding
5. Accommodate sensitivities
6. Offer skills training



# Build Skills

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Orient new employees with training in social skills and expected workplace behaviors

Provide feedback that is:

- Timely: as close to the behavior in question
- Meaningful: gives actionable suggestions to change behavior
- Specific: behavior oriented
- Direct: tactful, but honest

# Strategies Enhancing Inclusion

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1. Adjust hiring practice
2. Communicate clearly using straightforward language
3. Watch for assumptions about others
4. Pace information flow to ease understanding
5. Accommodate sensitivities
6. Offer skills training
7. Build community partnerships

# Social Partners

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Many government and nonprofit organizations exist to support neurodiverse individuals in obtaining and retaining employment

Organizations address factors outside of work that workplaces may not have the expertise or role-expectation to address

North Carolina:

- North Carolina Council in Developmental Disabilities: [nccdd.org](http://nccdd.org)
- NC Department of Health and Human Services: [ncdhhs.gov](http://ncdhhs.gov)
- Linking North Carolina with Innovative Talent (LiNC-IT): [linc-it.org](http://linc-it.org)
- Autism Society of North Carolina: [autismsociety-nc.org](http://autismsociety-nc.org)

# Thank you!

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For more information regarding resources for neurodiverse individuals, consultation, or services\*, please visit us at

[ucebt.com](https://ucebt.com)

\*clinicians at UCEBT are PSYPACT certified, and can provide telehealth services to individuals in North Carolina



# Resources

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Stop Being Invisible: Overcoming Communication Barriers by William Lane

The Type B Manager: Leading Successfully in a Type A World by Victor Lipman

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: [CDC.gov](https://www.cdc.gov)

## Organizations

- Neurodiversity in the Workplace: [nitw.org](https://nitw.org)
- ADDitude: [additudemag.com](https://additudemag.com)
- Children and Adults with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder CHAAD: [chaad.org](https://chaad.org)
- Aspergers/Autism Network AANE: [aane.org](https://aane.org)
- Fair Play Talks: [fairplaytalks.com](https://fairplaytalks.com)