

Supporting College Students with Autism

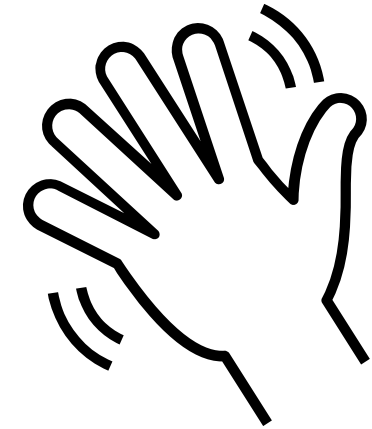
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Introduction and Background

- Welcome and thanks for being here! 😊
- PhD candidate in School Psychology
- MA in Clinical Psychology and MS in School Psychology
- Worked at OALA for the past 4 years while completing doctoral coursework
- Provide academic, behavioral, emotional, and social support to students with autism through individual and group sessions as well as evidence-based curriculums



Agenda

- **Welcome and Overview**
- Baylor's Mission Statement
- Diversity at Baylor University
- Projected Rates of ASD at Baylor
- Statistics and Outcomes
- My Role at OALA
- Common Issues and Barriers
- Tips for Working with Students on the Spectrum
- Resources
- Discussion

Baylor's Mission Statement

The mission of Baylor University is to educate men and women for worldwide leadership and service by integrating academic excellence and Christian commitment within a caring community.

Diversity at Baylor University

- Baylor's overall student body is the most diverse ever at the University, with overall minority enrollment rising to about 34%
 - Where do we stand with other kinds of diversity?
 - Neurodiversity
 - How does our campus accommodate differences in cognitive processes?



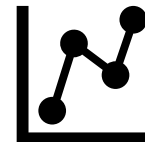
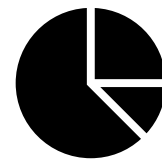
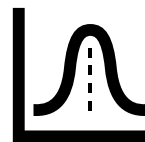
Projected Rates of ASD at Baylor

- Rates of ASD in the US are around 1 in 44 (CDC, 2022)
- Baylor officially enrolled 20,709 students as of Fall 2022
- Based on the CDC's rates, roughly 470 students at Baylor are on the spectrum!
 - About 45 are registered with OALA to receive services for ASD
 - About 20 request either weekly or biweekly meetings
 - Others check in 2-3x a semester



Statistics and Outcomes

- Students with ASD are attending college at higher rates each year
 - Increased risk for academic and perceived personal failure during their college years
 - Decreased graduation and employment rates
 - Increased chance of developing comorbid psychological disorders
 - Primarily anxiety and depression
- The core features and the psychological characteristics of ASD, coupled with new pressures and demands of higher education, bring significant challenges to students with ASD
 - Increasing independence, living in residence, navigating new social situations, adjusting to new classroom/lecture styles, etc.



My Role at OALA

- Provide mental, social, behavioral, and academic support for college students, specifically those on the spectrum
- This can take many forms:
 - PEERS for Young Adults
 - Weekly/Biweekly skills building with “homework”
 - Weekly check-ins
 - Social skills group
 - Collaborating with other departments and professors
 - Title IX, Counseling, Health Services, Engineering
 - Working through adaptive skills
 - Thinking about what’s next
 - Graduate school, career planning

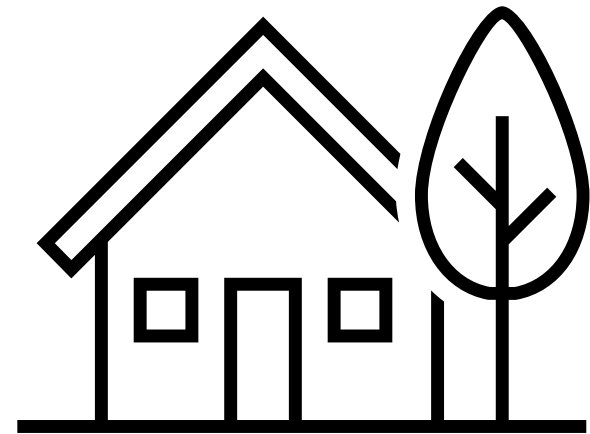
Common Issues and Barriers

- Identity and not wanting to “out” themselves as someone with ASD
- Lack of a script for university life
 - K-12 and college have vastly different structures
- Social dynamic
 - Peer acceptance/rejection and dating
- Adaptive skills
 - Laundry, cooking, hygiene, transportation



Common Issues and Barriers (cont.)

- Lack of primary support system
 - Integrating the family while maintaining the autonomy of the student
 - Finding a “chosen” family
 - Finding community
- Proper documentation
 - Late diagnosis, misdiagnosis, etc.
- Graduation and employment rates
- Religion and LGBTQ+



Tips for Working with Students on the Spectrum

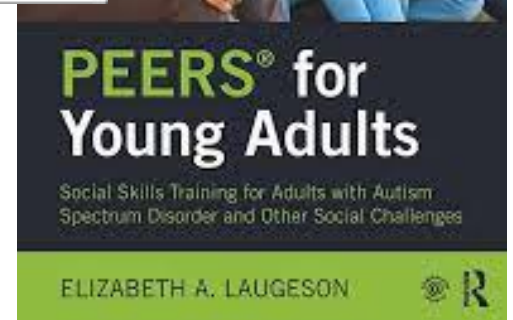
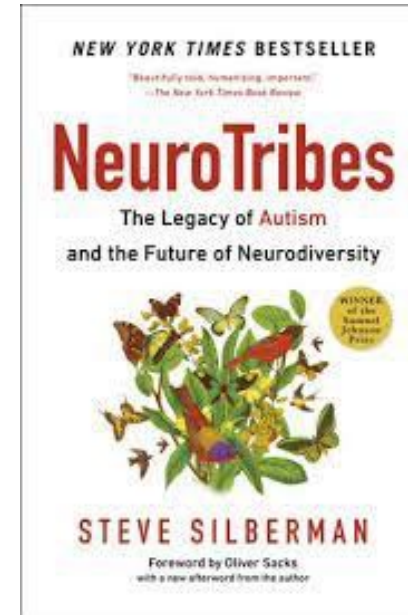
- Reason for referral
 - This may be obvious, but their autism isn't always the reason they are seeking help
 - Sometimes it can even function as a protective factor
- Ask about preferences on person-first language
 - I approach this similarly to asking someone their preferred pronouns
 - When in doubt, mimic their language
- Trying using neutral terms such as atypical or neurotypical
 - The neurodiversity movement has been great about introducing new, more empowering terminology
 - Avoid using terms like normal or high or low functioning, as these are not accurate and can be offensive

Tips for Working with Students on the Spectrum (cont.)

- Check that your space sensory-friendly
 - Lights, textures, and smells
- “What does autism look like for you?”
 - This acknowledges the variability within the spectrum and really opens the conversation such that the individual to express themselves instead of just describing a diagnostic label
 - Can also give you a clearer idea of what resources may be most helpful (e.g., social, academic, behavioral)
- Reassess therapeutic techniques
 - Research has shown that some common therapeutic/rapport-building techniques such as mirroring can have reverse effects on those with atypical cognitive processes
 - I’ve found that being straightforward and literal is often the best approach
 - Open-ended versus closed-ended questions
- Offer them a script of what a meeting typically looks like and lay out each session beforehand

Resources

- *Autism in Adulthood*
- *Research in Autism Spectrum Disorders*
- Morgan Harper Nichols
 - Autistic/ADHD artist
- Temple Grandin
 - TED Talk: The world needs all kinds of minds
 - The autistic brain: Thinking across the spectrum
- NeuroTribes
 - The Legacy of Autism and the Future of Neurodiversity
- PEERS for Young Adults
 - Social Skills Training for Adults with ASD and Other Social Challenges



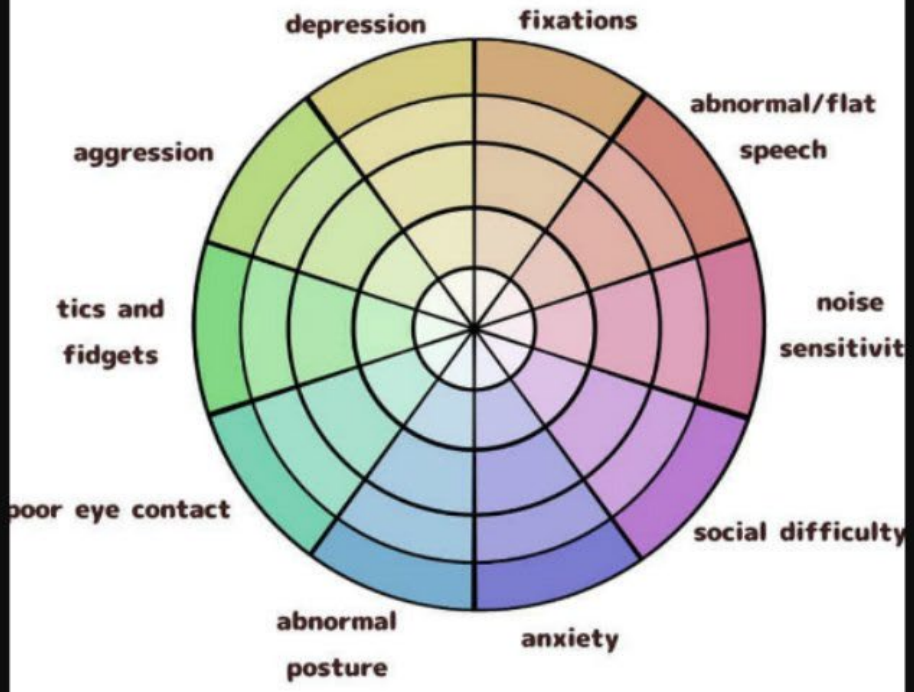


what people think the autism spectrum looks like:



^ ^
"less autistic" "more autistic"

what it can actually look like:



What are your experiences?