

Neurodiversity in the Classroom

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Myth or Fact

Who am I?

- Bachelor's degree from MLC in Elementary Education, 2016
- Taught 3rd and 4th grade at Christ-St. John's in West Salem, 2016-2020
- Became the director of extended learning at St. Peter in Appleton, 2020
- Graduated with my master's in special education from WLC in 2022

Language around Neurodiversity

- Why “neurodivergent” or “neurodiverse”?
- Person with autism vs autistic person
- Functioning labels
- Asperger Syndrome
- Disability vs special needs, differently abled, etc.
- How do we know?
 - Ask and listen to people in the communities



Brain Differences

- ADHD and autism are both disabilities that affect the brain's structure and function.
- According to some research³, the hippocampus is enlarged in an autistic brain, which is responsible for storing memories.
- The cerebellum has been found to be smaller in autistic brains. The cerebellum is responsible for balance and motor functioning.³
- The frontal cortex of people with ADHD takes longer to develop, which controls decision making and reasoning.⁴

Autism

- Leo Kanner first used the term “infantile autism” in 1943. It was used to refer to babies and toddlers who were isolated and withdrawn socially.²
- 1 in 36 children have been identified with ASD according to the CDC’s Autism and Developmental Disability Monitoring Network.¹
- Autism occurs across different socio-economic and racial groups.¹
- Diagnosis is nearly 4 times more common in boys than in girls.¹
- Why are more children being diagnosed?
 - People are able to see more people who have an autism diagnosis.
 - Better access to diagnosis
 - Less inaccurate diagnoses (typically intellectual disability)
 - Diagnoses changed in 2013 with the DSM V

THE AUTISM SPECTRUM

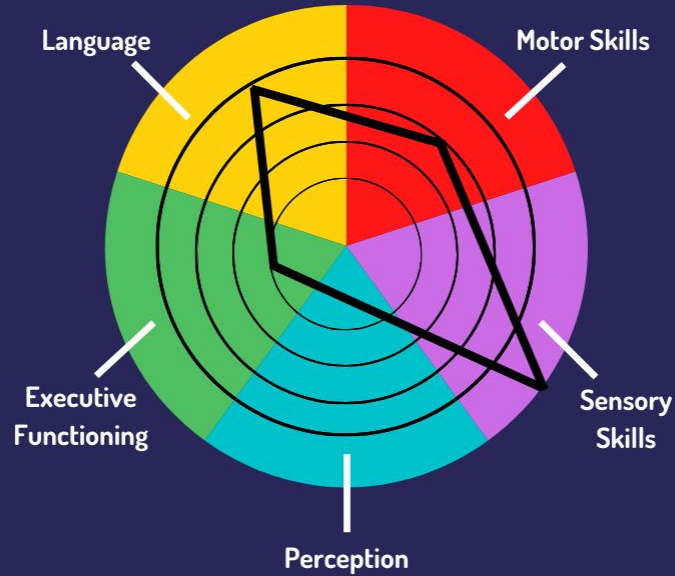
What people think the autism spectrum looks like:



Less
Autistic

More
Autistic

What it can actually look like:





ADHD

- Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
 - Hyperactive or impulsive
 - Inattentive
 - Combined
- Students with ADHD have trouble regulating their attention. They can hyperfocus on what they are interested in and struggle to focus in other areas.
- Students with ADHD can also struggle with emotional regulation and sensory issues for the same reason of being unable to regulate where they put their attention.
- A major struggle for students with ADHD is executive functioning skills.

Meltdowns

Don't:

- Tell them to “calm down”
- Try to reason or talk through things right away
- Change your tone of voice or body language
- Allow other students to crowd around or get involved

Do:

- Co-regulate with the student
- Give them time and space before discussing things with them
- Keep a calm voice and open body language
- Give the student a quiet space to work on regulating themselves



Tips for the Classroom



Communicate with parents and others working with the student about what their needs are.



Create accommodations to fit that student's needs.



Involve the student's strengths
and interests as much as
possible.



Provide and allow breaks. Make them intentional and routine.



Give them choices to make them
feel as though they are in control.



Question Time

Sources

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<https://www.spectrumnews.org/news/brain-structure-changes-in-autism-explained/>
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