

Autism and Neurodiversity-Affirming Support

Autism is a natural variation in how people experience the world, think, communicate, and process senses. The neurodiversity view holds that autistic ways of being are differences to understand and support, not defects to fix. Our job is to support autistic people to live the lives they choose, on their own terms.

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A note on language. Many autistic people prefer identity-first language, autistic person, rather than person with autism, because they see autism as part of who they are. People First language is our default, but the respectful move is to follow each person's own preference. When you can, ask.

What helps in practice.

- Presume competence. Communication differences are not the same as an inability to understand or decide. Speak to the person as a capable adult.
- Honor communication. Some autistic people speak, some use devices, some communicate in other ways. All of it is valid. Give time, and do not rush or finish sentences.
- Respect sensory needs. Bright lights, loud rooms, and strong smells can be genuinely painful. Offer quieter options and let people regulate without judgment.
- Be clear and predictable. Plain language, clear steps, and advance notice of change reduce stress for many people.
- Do not punish difference. Avoiding eye contact, moving to self-regulate, or needing routine are coping strategies, not problems to correct.

What to avoid. Speaking about the person to a companion, assuming a person cannot decide for themselves, or treating autism as a tragedy. Lower expectations are their own barrier.

The principle. Nothing about us without us. Autistic people are the experts on autistic experience. Follow their lead, and build support around the life they want.

Respect sensory needs. Bright lights, loud rooms, and strong smells can be genuinely painful. Offer quieter options and let people regulate without judgment.

Choose the relevant guidance, verify fit and currency, and apply it to the work product using Autism and Neurodiversity-Affirming Support.

Confirm the current purpose, audience, and decision authority before using Autism and Neurodiversity-Affirming Support to choose the relevant guidance, verify fit and currency, and apply it to the work product.

Choose the sections of Autism and Neurodiversity-Affirming Support that match the situation; do not apply unrelated guidance as a blanket rule.

Document the action taken from Autism and Neurodiversity-Affirming Support, the people affected, unresolved questions, and the responsible follow-up owner.

Check the stated limitations and evidence status for Autism and Neurodiversity-Affirming Support; escalate when current authority or individual context is missing.

Review the result with the affected person, team, or community and revise the find and apply guidance approach when it creates a barrier or unintended effect.

For all staff, use Autism and Neurodiversity-Affirming Support to choose the relevant guidance, verify fit and currency, and apply it to the work product; use the guidance in the immediate task, check impact and access, and ask for help when authority is unclear. Start by respect sensory needs. Bright lights, loud rooms, and strong smells can be genuinely painful. Offer quieter options and let people regulate without judgment.

Do not replace official legal, policy, clinical, supervisory, program, or Tribal authority.

Do not infer an individual's identity, preferences, needs, or experience from group-level information.

State uncertainty, use current authoritative sources, and escalate when the decision exceeds the user's role.

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