

AUTISM, MENTAL HEALTH, & SELF-CARE

Aliki Koumenis, B.S., CAPS
Robert Schmus, LCSW

Presented by:

LIFE ON THE SPECTRUM

A WORKSHOP SERIES DEVELOPED BY AND FOR AUTISTIC PEOPLE

01 Understanding Mental Health and Wellness

02 Neurodiversity, social factors, and mental wellbeing

03 Self-Care, wellness tools, and resources

04 Audience Q&A

OUTLINE

MINDFULNESS
EXERCISE

UNDERSTANDING MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLNESS

-A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF KEY CONCEPTS

COMMON CO-OCCURRING CONDITIONS WITH AUTISM

It is estimated that approximately 70% of the autistic population has at least one, if not multiple, co-occurring mental health issues. (Roux and Kerns, 2016)

These can include diagnoses like:

- Anxiety disorders
- Mood disorders such as Depression and Bipolar
- Schizophrenia
- Substance Use Disorders
- Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)
- Personality Disorders
- Post-traumatic Stress disorder (PTSD)
- and others

THE EIGHT DIMENSIONS OF WELLNESS



The 8 Dimensions of Wellness

NEURODIVERSITY, SOCIAL
FACTORS, AND IMPACTS ON
MENTAL WELLBEING

NEURODIVERSITY

It's a big word for a simple idea!

neuro
brain



diversity
range of different kinds



= a range of different kinds of human brain

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Neurodiversity recognizes and embraces neurological variations in the population.

It can include: Dyspraxia, Dyslexia, ADHD, Dyscalculia, Autism Spectrum, Tourette's Syndrome, OCD and more.

Medical Model

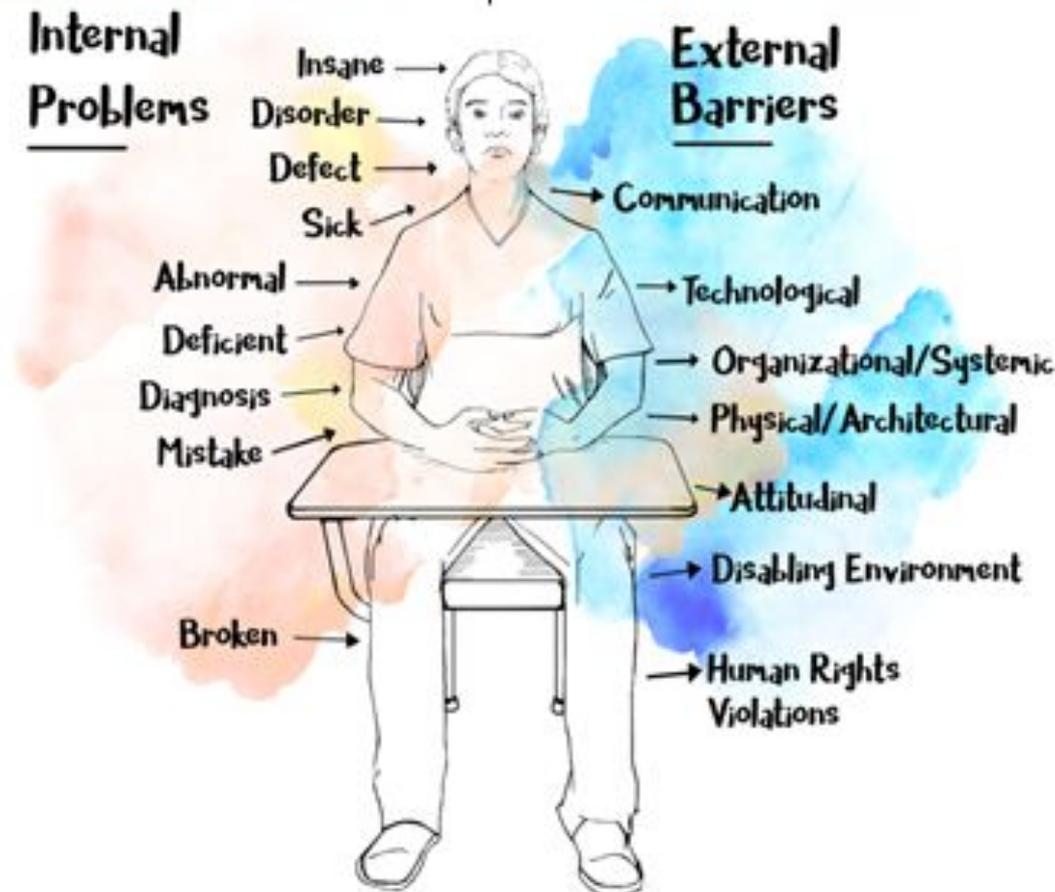
Social Model

Internal Problems

Insane →
Disorder →
Defect →
Sick →
Abnormal →
Deficient →
Diagnosis →
Mistake →
Broken →

External Barriers

Communication →
Technological →
Organizational/Systemic →
Physical/Architectural →
Attitudinal →
Disabling Environment →
Human Rights Violations →



MASKING/CAMOUFLAGING- ANXIETY AND DEPRESSION

- Having to hide certain characteristics of being autistic.
- Such characteristics include stimming, scripting, avoiding eye contact, etc.
- Also forcing autistic to present “neurotypical” traits.
- Masking/camouflaging has been mandated in the past by schools and society.
- Was for many years thought to be the perfect way to help autistics.....**but did it help??**

MASKING/CAMOUFLAGING- ANXIETY AND DEPRESSION

- Characteristics have been seen as coping mechanisms.
- Masking/camouflaging such characteristics have led to anxiety and depression.
- According to a 2017 study, the autistic adults who masked felt mentally, physically and emotionally drained, as well as had a sense of loneliness.
- Anxiety caused by masking shown to be prevalent in women, especially those undiagnosed.
- This shows how masking shows more harm than good.
- Social connectedness is key to ending this.

IMPORTANCE OF SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS

- Social connectedness is important
- Gives autistics a sense of belonging, a feeling of importance and acceptance.
- Focus on the interest of autistic and listen.
- Giving autistics a chance to be in social areas.
- Educating others about the autistic.
- No need to sacrifice autism characteristics and no need to mask.
- This can help with decreasing isolation.
- One step at a time.

ANXIETY AND AUTISM

Some anxiety-activators include:

- Change in routine, life changes
 - Difficulty predicting what will come next
 - Difficulty applying learned skills to new settings
- Communication differences - not being understood
- Past negative experiences
- Having to mask what's needed to do to feel calm (like stimming)
- Sensory sensitivities
- New and unfamiliar experiences we don't have a plan or script for

What can help: Support, trust, reliability, and safety

ANXIETY AND AUTISM

Anxiety can feel Like:

- **Fight:** tensed muscles, frustration, restlessness, anger
- **Flight:** wanting avoid a situation, racing heart, low appetite, unable to relax, fear
- **Freeze:** shutting down, unable to move, speak, or think, staring off into space, 'zoning out'
- Racing thoughts and worries
- Perseveration: ruminating/getting stuck on one thing or problem
- Strange, confusing, or detached sensations in the body
- Difficulty communicating and understanding new information, and more...

What can help: Wellness plans, patience, non-judgmental support, sensory soothing, and other tools

AUTISTIC BURNOUT

Masking/Changing Behavior

- Trying to look like others
- Forcing eye contact
- Not stimming
- Sitting still for a long time
- Doing things we don't feel comfortable with



Socializing

- Too much socializing for too long
- Scripting our words
- Trying to understand what others are saying
- Talking to strangers or being in large groups

Overstimulation

From too much:

- Sensory stimulation
- Socializing
- Information
- Change

Stress and Pressure

From too many:

- Responsibilities
- Tasks
- Activities in one day
- Expectations

Too much pressure to push beyond our natural limits can lead to Autistic Burnout

It can feel like depression and anxiety, but is different

Symptoms:

Losing motivation, energy, not remembering things, anger/frustration, inability to speak or move, 'zoning out', feeling very tired, missing/canceling appointments and tasks, not wanting to do things with others, etc...

What can help: time alone, reducing a busy schedule, quiet/safe places, sensory tools, rest, coping tools (like music, writing, hobbies, etc..)

SELF-CARE, WELLNESS TOOLS, AND RESOURCES

SELF-CARE TOOLS

There are a number of self-care tools:

- Mindfulness techniques (ex: grounding)
- Calming activities
- Stimming
- Interests (great part in this)
- Nature
- Talk therapy
- Creative methods (art, drawing)

It should be noted that the effectiveness of these tools vary based on the autistic.

SELF-CARE TOOLS

- Peer support and Autistic Community
- Wellness planning
- Empowerment & Self-Advocacy
- Creating structure/feeling in control
- Safety (environmental, emotional, and social)
- Storytelling/Creatively expressing life experiences
- Support networks
- Time alone with interests, hobbies, and passions

SPOON THEORY

EXPLAINED

MY DAILY ENERGY SUPPLY IS REPRESENTED BY SPOONS, LET ME EXPLAIN:
I HAVE 12 SPOONS TO GET THROUGH THE DAY.



WAKING UP

WHEN I AM STIFF AND IN PAIN THIS IS A SLOW PROCESS.

SPOON COST: 



SHOWERING

SORE JOINTS MAKES THIS EXTRA DIFFICULT

SPOON COST: 



GET DRESSED

SORE HANDS? BUTTONS ARE OUT OF THE QUESTION

SPOON COST: 



BREAKFAST

TAKING MEDS ON AN EMPTY STOMACH IS A BAD IDEA

SPOON COST: 



WORKING

I HAVE GOOD AND BAD DAYS, THIS IS A GOOD DAY

SPOON COST: 

REMAINING SPOONS: 

I WILL USE THESE THREE TO GET HOME, EAT AND CHANGE INTO MY PJS
KEEP IN MIND I CAN USE TOMORROWS SPOONS TO DO EXTRA,
BUT WILL HAVE LESS SPOONS TO GET THROUGH THE DAY.

AUDIENCE Q&A