

Neurodiversity in the Workplace

Virginia Inclusion Summit – September 2025

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It's Nice to Meet You

- **Preferred Name:** Giovanni
- **Pronouns:** She/Her/Hers
- **Neurodivergent Credentials:**
 - **Autistic, ADHD, CPTSD, Depression, Anxiety, AVPD**

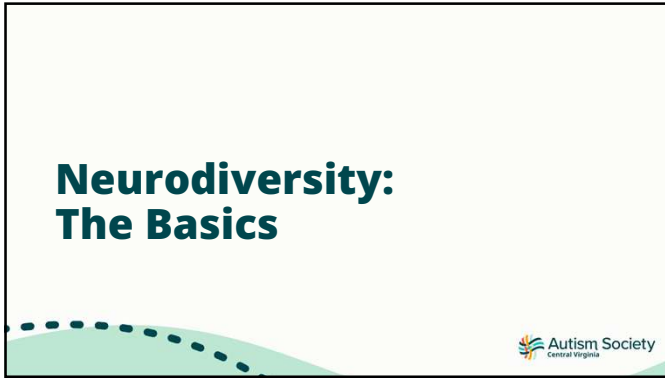


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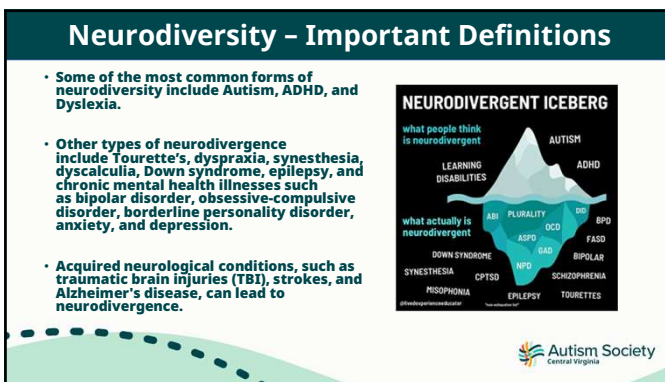
Neurodiversity: Brain Dump



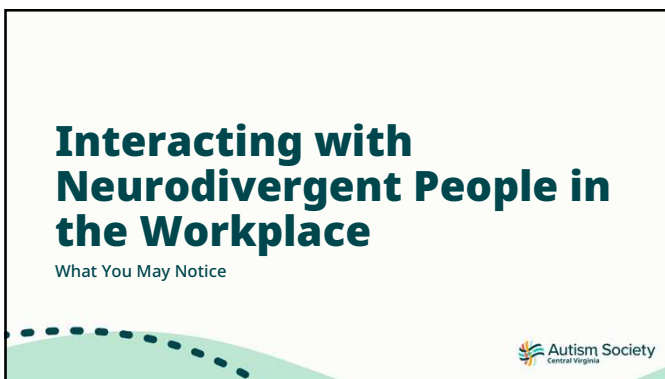
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What You May Notice...

- Strengths
- Social Differences
- Communication Differences
- Interests and Behaviors
- Executive Function Differences
- Sensory Differences



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Discuss: Strengths

- What strengths do you tend to notice about others?
- Are these your strengths?
- Are these strengths you want to have?



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Strengths – You May Notice...

- Creative ways of interpreting information from the environment
- Pattern recognition
- Memorizing and learning information quickly
- Thinking and learning in a visual way
- Unique problem-solving skills
- Strong adherence to the rules, schedules, and routines
- Honest and reliable
- Great long-term memory
- Ability to concentrate for extended periods of time when motivated



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Discuss: Social Behaviors

- What social behaviors do you tend to notice about others?
- How do they differ from the way you tend to socialize?



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Social Differences – You May Notice...

- Challenges developing and maintaining relationships with colleagues
- Might have a hard time relating to others, taking another person's perspective, and displaying empathy* (*as expected)
- Might not see shared enjoyment and/or interests with others
- Might not show anticipatory behaviors
- Might not share joint attention
- Might excel working independently
- Might have different preferences for social interactions with colleagues/teammates



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Discuss: Communication

- What's the best way to communicate with you?
- Is this method of communication easy for others to adopt?
- Where do you experience friction, if any, when trying to communicate with others?



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Communication Differences – You May Notice...

- Difficulty with back-and-forth conversations – may jump from topic to topic
- Challenges with using/interpreting nonverbal behaviors - eye gaze, gestures, body language, etc.
- Limited or little use of gestures to communicate
- Limited facial expressions or over exaggerated facial expressions
- Might avoid eye contact or looking at people
- Might use echolalia
- Unique tone and/or intonation when speaking – “robotic” or “singsong”
- Can recite information but has challenges applying information
- Might use Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC)



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Discuss: Interests and Behaviors

- What interests do others have that baffle you?
- Why might these different interests confuse you?



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Interests and Behaviors – You May Notice...

- **Repetitive movements**
 - Hand flapping, finger flicking, rocking, pacing, hand clapping, grimacing or eye gazing
 - Repetitive and/or “uncommon” use of language
- **Distress with transitions or changes in the routine**
- **Established rituals**
 - Strong preference or insistence on following routines in precise detail and/or arrangement of space or self
- **Special interests**
- **Focus on small details rather than the big picture**
- **“Info dumping”**



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Discuss: Executive Functioning

- What tasks do you struggle to get done/started?
- Why do you struggle with these tasks?
- How does it feel when others struggle with tasks that come easily to you?



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Executive Functioning – You May Notice...

- **Struggles with creative problem solving**
 - When faced with problems, it can be hard to quickly come up with creative solutions. It may take longer to develop feasible creative solutions or review options and determine approaches.
- **Shifting between tasks, quick pivots**
 - When wearing multiple hats and playing various roles, having to quickly move from one existence to another can be overwhelming and challenging.
- **Distinguishing time expectations**
 - Knowing how long a task should take versus how long it will take you would make establishing time expectations difficult.
- **Rule bound thinking**
 - It can be hard to shift from one's perspective. Shifting from plans already set can be challenging. One may get stuck in a loop of trying the same solution over and over even if it's not working.



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Discuss: Sensory Differences

- What textures, smells, sights, tastes, or sounds are unappealing to you?
- What happens to you when those unappealing items meet your senses?



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Sensory Differences – You May Notice...

- Over- or under-reactivity to sensory stimulation
- Sensitivity to lights, sounds, touch, smell, taste, or temperature
- Sensory Seekers and Sensory Avoiders
- Marked distress over changes in seemingly trivial aspects of the environment
- Synesthesia



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Masking – You May Notice...

What is masking?

the practice of concealing or suppressing aspects of one's neurodivergent traits or conditions, to fit in with the norms of the workplace or society.

For working professionals, neurodivergent masking can involve **hiding** certain behaviors or characteristics that may be perceived as unusual or inappropriate, such as avoiding eye contact, struggling with social interactions, or having difficulty with multitasking. **This can be particularly challenging in work environments that prioritize neurotypical social skills, communication, and multitasking abilities, which can put neurodivergent individuals at a disadvantage.**

We're working with adults, not children, who have had years learning how to mask because of negative social experiences. The expectation that someone disclose or "just stop masking" is not realistic.



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Interacting with Neurodivergent People in the Workplace

Supports & Strategies



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The Value of Neurodiversity in the Workplace

- Business benefits & employee benefits!
- Adds a perspective that most of your workforce might not consider
 - "I didn't think about that!"
- Adds another layer of diversity - beyond something you can SEE
- "Bring your whole self to work" - more empathetic and compassionate workplace when you are understanding and accepting
- Positively impacts the experience of all members of your team (*regardless of neurotype*) as well as the experience of your clientele - bringing and validating different perspectives



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Supporting Neurodiversity in the Workplace

- **Job descriptions**
 - Inclusive language
 - Alternative formats
- **Interviewing**
 - Intentional questions that consider varying communication styles
 - Skills-focused approach to recruitment
- **Evaluation**
 - Collaboratively set goals
 - Intervals and overall structure of performance evaluations
 - Inclusive feedback processes
 - Team forming and management



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Consider the Physical Environment

- Reduce visual distractions and unnecessary noise
- Make space for and encourage movement
- Provide a variety of seating options
- Temperature changes
- Have sensory supports available
- Create a "Quiet Area"



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Consider the Virtual Environment

- Reduce visual distractions and unnecessary noise
- Include buffer in between meeting times
- Record meetings to be reviewed later, when possible
- Provide closed-captioning and transcript of meeting, when possible
- Use cameras when possible - facial expressions, reactions, connection
- Build in breaks into meetings



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Setting Everyone Up For Success!

- Presume competence!
- Focus on strengths and interests, not just challenges and/or limitations
- Ask questions about personal preferences
- Break tasks down into easy steps
- Explain expectations and have clear boundaries
- Consider communication and comprehension needs
- Build in time for breaks, as needed



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Setting Everyone Up For Success!

- Develop a workplace culture of self-care AND community care
- Establish routines
- Use visual supports
- Consider different learning styles and communication styles when preparing materials, facilitating meetings, etc.
- Build strong rapport and establish open communication
- Consider WHY things are done the WAY they are



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Workplace Accommodations



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What are Accommodations?

- Reasonable adjustments to assist employees with documented disabilities and religious beliefs to perform the essential functions of their job
 - Required by law: Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Civil Rights Act of 1964
 - Providing devices or equipment that allow an employee to perform the essential job functions
 - Offering a flexible work schedule to allow an employee time off for a religious observance



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Cost & Benefits of Accommodations

- Over 50% of accommodations that Autistic employees request cost \$0
- Other accommodations have a 1-time cost, usually less than \$500
- People with and without disabilities request and benefit from accommodations
 - No significant difference in costs to support either group
- Employers report financial benefits
 - Reduced insurance and training costs
 - Increased productivity




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Accommodations for Autistic Employees

Workplace Skills that Often Require Support	
Following task list & transitioning independently	Handling frustration
Following break & lunch schedule	Recognizing public vs. private conversation topics
Initiating tasks	Accepting correction
Interacting with public & co-workers	Communication
Staying on task	How to ask for help
Professional relationships & behavior	Adjusting to changes in routine
Personal hygiene	Adjusting to demands of work/supervisor expectations



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Areas of Accommodations

- Pre-hiring and recruitment
- Interviews
- Onboarding
- Day-to-day



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Pre-hiring and Recruitment

- Consider Sensory Accessible Job Fair, targeted outreach
- Inclusive language and representation in job postings, on website
- Clear, concrete communication in job postings
 - *Required* skills and experience
 - "Team player" vs. "Ability to collaborate and share/accept feedback"
- Application includes option for interview accommodations



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Interviews

- Check your biases
- Provide information about interview process
- Minimize sensory input and interruptions
- Keep communication related to the job position
- Ask direct, concrete questions
- Allow for processing time
- Help individuals stay on track
 - Provide examples of what you're asking for
 - Let candidates know if they have answered sufficiently
- Consider skills-based or different interview format



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Onboarding

- Incorporate the individual's support team
 - Transition coach, People Management Leader, mentors
- Standardized process for requesting accommodations
- Simplify orientation to tasks
 - Incorporate visual supports
- Train on other workplace expectations
 - When to socialize, where to take breaks, emergency procedures
- Facilitate familiarization with other team members
 - Mentorship model
 - Who to ask for help






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Day-to-Day

- Effective communication
 - Literal language, close ended questions
 - Avoid reliance on non-verbal communication
- Giving and receiving instructions
 - Break down tasks into simple steps
 - Checklists, kanban boards
- Support performance feedback
 - Open communication and regular feedback
 - Collaborate on goals
 - Be direct about job related and social expectations



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Day-to-Day

- Sensory accommodations
 - Work space, soft lighting options, headphones, remote work, flexible work schedules
- Support social connections
 - Provide info about activities in advance
 - Employee training
 - Structured activities
- Self regulation
 - Maintain routine, notify about changes
 - Quiet room, spaces for movement
 - Incorporate breaks and transition buffers







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Resources



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Additional Resources

- Autism Society of Central Virginia (ASCV) - www.ascv.org
- Autistic Self Advocacy Network - <https://autisticadvocacy.org/>
- Autistic Women & Nonbinary Network (AWN) - <https://awnnetwork.org/>
- Employer Assistance and Resource Network on Disability Inclusion (EARN) – Neurodiversity in the Workplace Toolkit - <https://askearn.org/page/neurodiversity-in-the-workplace>



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Autism Society of America Affiliates

- Get connected to affiliates in your area!
 - 68 affiliates



<https://autismsociety.org/contact-us/#affiliate-list>



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Questions? Comments? Reflections?

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