



# **AUTISM CULTURAL RESPONSIVENESS**

## **Improving Communication & Understanding**

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University and Corporate Trainer & Consultant, Autistic at Work  
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# AGENDA

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Introductions

---

Language Use and Definitions

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Your Experiences

---

Autism as a Disability

---

Potential for Bias

---

The Role of Intersectionality

---

Autistic Culture & Cultural Expectations

---

Communication Considerations and Tools

---

Resources & Tools for Continued Learning

# INTRODUCTIONS

Please share anything about yourself that you'd like to in the chat!

**Sara:** NeuroDirect,  
NeuroKind,  
NeuroSparkly



# SHARE YOUR EXPERIENCES & CURRENT PRACTICES



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# LANGUAGE USE & DEFINITIONS





# LANGUAGE USE



## Identity First: “Disabled, Autistic”

- ✓ Grammatically correct
- ✓ Includes disability as part of person
- ✓ Embraces disability
- ✓ Many autistic people prefer identity first language

## Person First: “Person with ...”

- ✓ Awkward syntax
- ✓ Separates disability from person
- ✓ Shows a desire to be distant from disability
- ✓ Parents and professionals often prefer person first language

[Listen or ask the person which they prefer if you find you need to use terminology.](#)

# AVOIDING EUPHEMISMS

a mild or indirect word or expression substituted for one considered to be too harsh or blunt when referring to something unpleasant or embarrassing

On the spectrum

Challenged

Differently Abled

People of All Abilities

Special Needs

disAbility

Diffability

# #SAYTHEWORD



**Ettie (she/her)** @ettiebck · Jul 6

“Having a disability is not something to be ashamed of, and such euphemisms deny the existence of disability and reinforce the stigma surrounding disability rather than embracing it as a valued aspect of diversity” says **#SayTheWord** Campaign founder **@AnjaliFP**.

[Anjali Forber-Pratt, Ph.D.](#)

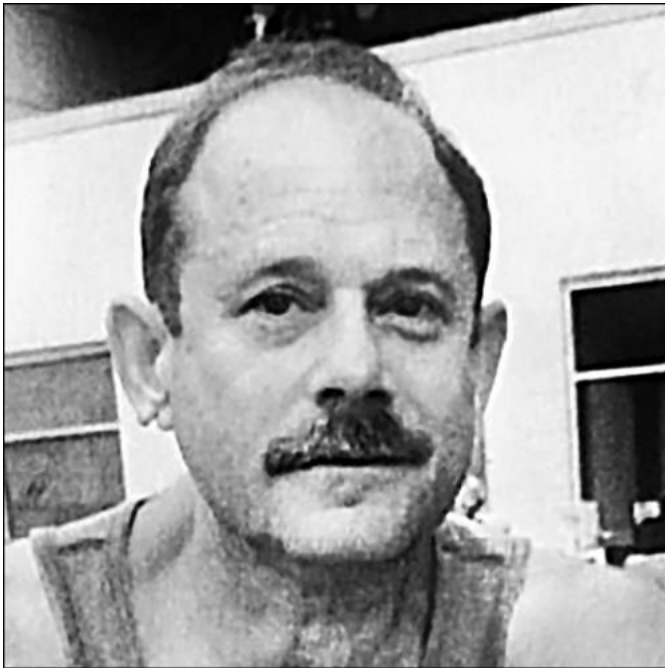




# WHAT IS NEURODIVERSITY?

- **Biodiversity** – refers to every living thing, including plants, bacteria, animals, and humans. Sometimes in a particular region or ecosystem.
- **Neurodiversity** – refers to the virtually infinite neuro-cognitive variability within Earth’s human population. It points to the fact that every human has a unique nervous system with a unique combination of abilities and needs.
- **Neurodivergent (ND)** – an individual who has a brain that functions in ways that diverge significantly from the dominant societal standards
- **Neurotypical (NT)** – an individual who has a style of neurocognitive functioning that falls within the dominant societal standards.

## HARVEY BLUME



“Neurodiversity may be every bit as crucial for the human race as biodiversity is for life in general.

Who can say what form of wiring will prove best at any given moment?”

[Neurodiversity: The Atlantic](#)



# AUTISM AS A DISABILITY



## Deficit / Medical Prescriptive Model

- Seeks to “fix”
- Sees person as the problem
- Believes there is one “correct” or “typical” way of being
- Embraces cultural constraints

## Social Justice / Descriptive Model

- Seeks to empower
- Sees barriers to access as the problem
- Believes there are many acceptable ways of being in the world
- Questions cultural constraints

## DEFINITION & IMPACT: AUTISM

- Communication differences, especially in the use of nonverbals: using and understanding
- Sensory processing sensitivities
- Executive Functioning differences
- Motor and other processing differences
- Differences in socializing
- Innovative problem-solving skills

## DEFINITION & IMPACT: ADHD

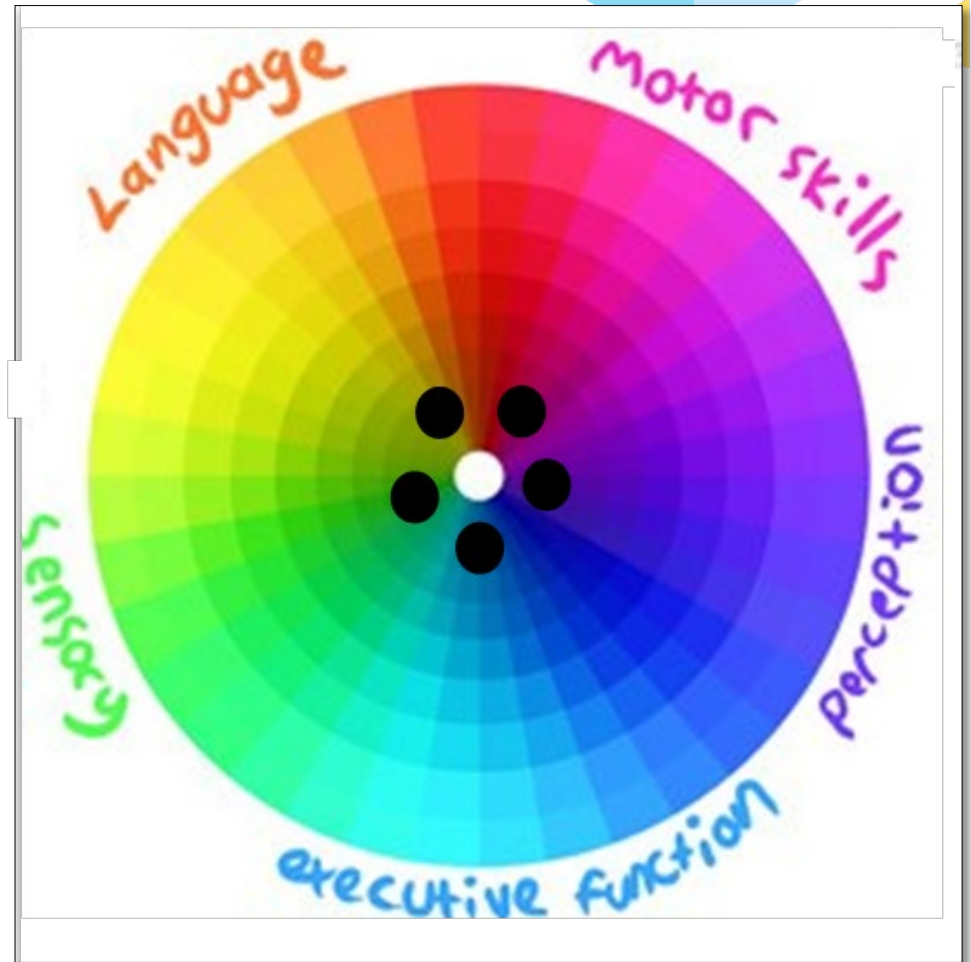
- Executive Functioning differences, including attention differences
- Some communication differences
- May complete work in unconventional ways
- May be acutely responsive to feedback
- Ability to hyper-focus



# UNDERSTANDING THE AUTISM SPECTRUM

The fluctuating levels of  
capability of  
neurodivergent people

By Rebecca Burgess  
([Theoraah on Tumblr](#))



# CO-OCCURRING NEUROLOGICAL DISABILITIES

- Non-verbal Learning Disability
- Auditory Processing
- Dysgraphia
- Visual Processing
- Rejection Sensitive Dysphoria
- Obsessive Compulsive Behaviors
- Expressive Language
- Alexithymia
- Prosody variances
- (Anxiety, Depression)

# CO-OCCURRING PHYSICAL DISABILITIES

- Crohn's Disease
- Irritable Bowel Syndrome
- Ehlers Danlos Syndrome
- Fibromyalgia
- Mast Cell Activation Syndrome
- Postural Orthostatic Tachycardia Syndrome (POTS)
- Other connective tissue disorders, autoimmune disorders, and dysautonomia conditions



## **POTENTIAL FOR BIAS**

# ABLEISM

'A system of assigning value to people's bodies and minds based on societally constructed ideas of normalcy, productivity, desirability, intelligence, excellence, and fitness. These constructed ideas of normalcy, intelligence, and excellence are deeply rooted in eugenics, anti-Blackness, misogyny, colonialism, imperialism, and capitalism.

This systemic oppression leads to people and society determining people's value or worth based on their culture, age, language, appearance, religion, birth or living place, "health/wellness", and/or their ability to satisfactorily re/produce, excel & "behave."

You do not have to be disabled to experience ableism.'

[a working definition by @TalilaLewis](#)

# ABLEISM: THINGS TO CONSIDER

- Word / phrase choices
- Attitudes – over-helping, feeling uncomfortable, ?
- Inspiration Porn
- Activity choices
- Environmental barriers





## UGLY LAWS



“No person who is diseased, maimed, mutilated or in any way deformed so as to be an unsightly or disgusting object or improper person to be allowed in or on the public ways or other public places in this city, or shall therein or thereon expose himself to public view, under a penalty of not less than one dollar nor more than fifty dollars for each offense.”

Chicago Municipal Code, sec. 36034  
(1974)

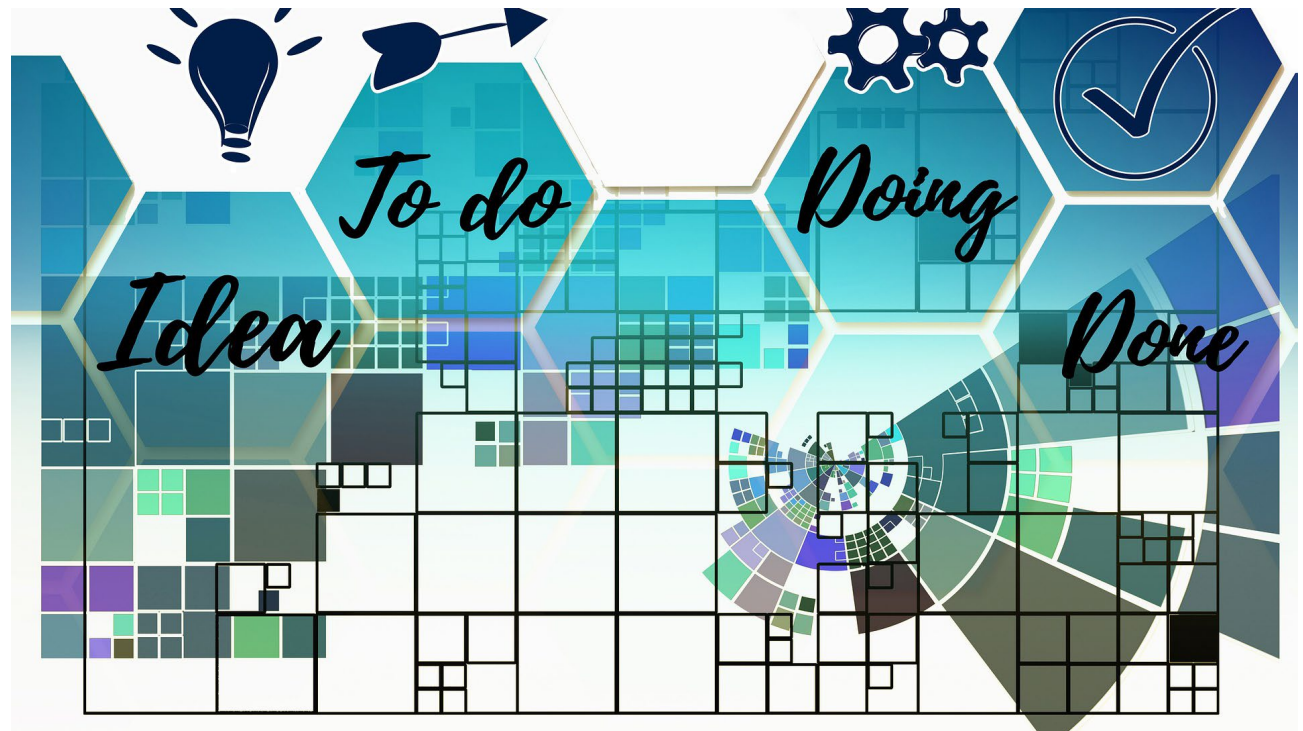
# IT'S OKAY TO BE WEIRD IN PUBLIC



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# ABILITY PRIVILEGE

Ability privilege is an advantage that someone has because they do not have physical or cognitive limitations on their daily activities and interactions.







# THE ROLE OF INTERSECTIONALITY

# DISABILITY JUSTICE & INTERSECTIONALITY

## The Framework of Disability Justice

by Patty Berne, Sins Invalid

“The first, a primary principle of Disability Justice, is *Intersectionality*. We know that each person has multiple community identifications, and that each identity can be a site of privilege or oppression. The fulcrums of oppression shift depending upon the characteristics of any given institutional or interpersonal interaction; the very understanding of disability experience itself being shaped by race, gender, class, gender expression, historical moment, relationship to colonization and more.

# THE ROLE OF POWER AND PRIVILEGE

- Societal markers and lived realities determine access to resources
- People who are perceived to belong to privileged groups are rewarded for their group memberships while others are disenfranchised and subject to regulation and violence
- The role of intersectionality

(Castañeda & Peters, 2000)



# ADDRESSING INTERSECTIONALITY & POWER



- Age
- Disability
- Religion
- Ethnicity
- Social Class
- Sexual Orientation
- Indigenous Backgrounds
- National Origin
- Gender



## GENDER AND OTHER IDENTITIES

- Use names & pronouns; model pronoun use
- Support students in changing names & pronouns in campus systems
- Educate & advocate; call out microaggressions



# AUTISTIC CULTURE & CULTURAL EXPECTATIONS



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# THE CULTURAL ICEBERG

Food

Language

Literature

Music

SURFACE CULTURE

Food  
Flags Festivals  
Fashion Holidays Music  
Performances Dances Games  
Arts & Crafts Literature Language

## THE CULTURAL ICEBERG

Edward T. Hall, Cultural Anthropologist





# DEEP CULTURE

## Communications Styles and Rules:

Facial Expressions   Gestures   Eye Contact  
Personal Space   Touching   Body Language  
Conversational Patterns in Different Social Situations  
Handling and Displaying of Emotion  
Tone of Voice

## Notions of:

Courtesy and Manners  
Friendship   Leadership  
Cleanliness   Modesty  
Beauty

## Concepts of:

Self   Time   Past and Future  
Fairness and Justice  
Roles related to Age, Sex,  
Class, Family, etc.

## Attitudes toward:

Elders   Adolescents   Dependents  
Rule   Expectations   Work   Authority  
Cooperation vs. Competition  
Relationships with Animals   Age  
Sin   Death

## Approaches to:

Religion   Courtship   Marriage  
Raising Children   Decision-Making  
Problem Solving

# DEEP CULTURE BREAKDOWN

- Communication Styles & Rules
- Facial Expressions, Gestures, Eye Contact, Body Language
- Conversational Patterns in Different Situations
- Handling & Displaying Emotion
- Tone of Voice
- Notions of Courtesy & Manners, Friendship, Leadership
- Concepts of Self, Time, Fairness
- Attitudes toward Work, Authority
- Approaches to Religion, Decision-making, problem-solving
- And more



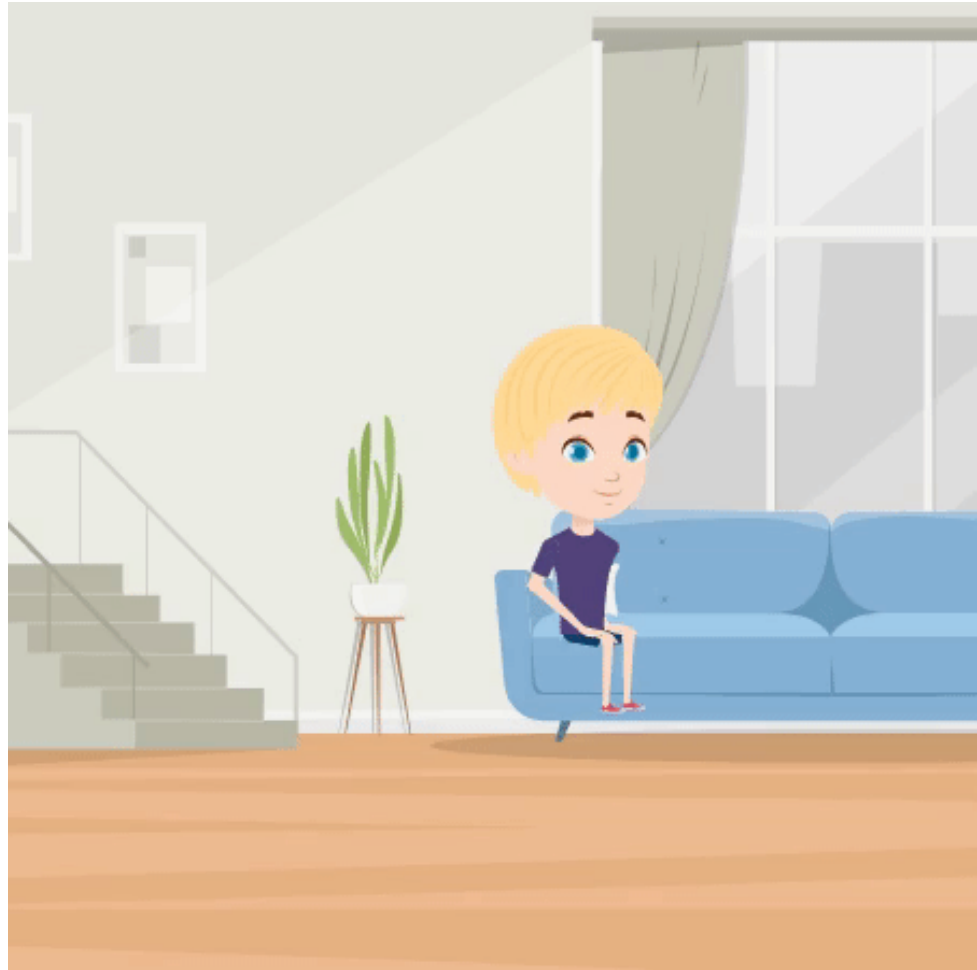
# DEEP CULTURE: POTENTIAL CONFLICTS



## DEEP CULTURE: LIFE EXAMPLE

Teaching “social skills” to a select group can be counter-productive.

Self-advocacy is a better skill to learn!



# CULTURAL RULES ARE FLEXIBLE

Cultural expectations are different in every:

- Family
- Friend group
- Educational Facility
  - Classroom
  - Sports Team
- Corporation
  - Team / Crew
- Country
- State / Province
- City, Town, Village

Learning self-advocacy, ethics, perspective taking, and critical thinking will support all learners.



# COMMUNICATION CONSIDERATIONS & TOOLS

# CULTURAL ICEBERG: ACTION STEPS



## Most Respectful Interpretation

- “Give the benefit of the doubt”
- Assume the best



## Manage Your Stories

- Ask Clarifying Questions
- Re-word your statements



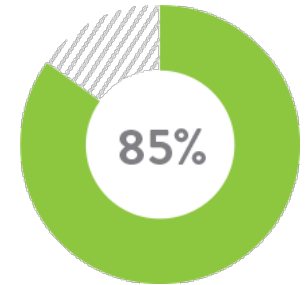
## Own Your Boundaries

- Move or leave if needed
- Change yourself not others



# NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION

- Facial expressions
  - Gestures
  - Paralinguistics (tone)
  - Body Language & Posture
  - Proxemics (space)
  - Eye Gaze
  - Haptics (touch)
  - Appearance
  - Artifacts (objects)
  - Humor
- Needing to “read between the lines.”
  - *This varies across cultures and within cultures.*
  - Unspoken, implied, or hidden meaning within spoken communication.

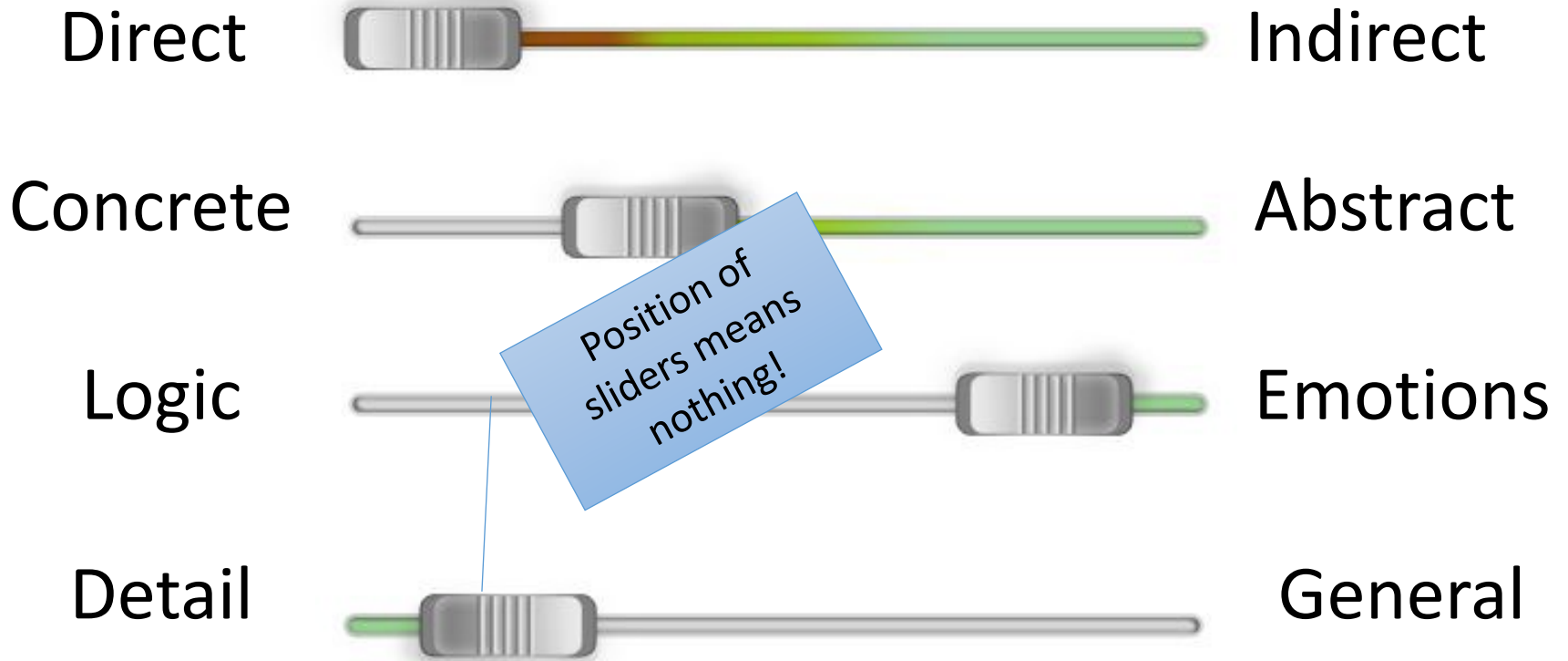




*Clear*  
*is* **UNCLEAR  
IS UNKIND.**  
*kind.*



# WAYS TO COMMUNICATE





# AUTISTIC PEOPLE MAY HAVE...

- Differences in conversational language styles
- Excellent problem-solving skills
- Ability to hyper-focus
- A strong visual memory *or* need to record
- A need for others to reach out to include them
- High energy and drive
- A deep knowledge & enthusiasm in areas of interest and problem solving in general
- High empathy; possibly shown unconventionally
- Strong pattern-recognition and superior attention to detail
- Strengths and weaknesses along a continuum like all people







# COMMUNICATION DIFFERENCES



## Showing Empathy

- ✓ Sharing experiences
- ✓ Asking questions
- ✓ Problem-solving
- ✓ Giving a favorite item

## In Class & Meetings

- ✓ Discussion Q's ahead of time
- ✓ Participation options
- ✓ Step forward, step back

## Socializing

- ✓ Side-by-side (parallel play)
- ✓ Shared interests and experiences
- ✓ Cooperative Overlapping
- ✓ Communicating in pictures, memes, songs, and more

## Directions & Making Requests

- ✓ Be direct and kind
- ✓ Explicit steps
- ✓ Include visuals
- ✓ Check for understanding



# THANK YOU FOR COMING!



Connect with me

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Email: [sesgardner@gmail.com](mailto:sesgardner@gmail.com)

Web: [autisticatwork.com](http://autisticatwork.com)

# RESOURCES

- [APA Grammar Style Guide: Disability](#)
- [Anjali Forber-Pratt, Ph.D. \(#SayTheWord\)](#)
- Sins Invalid: [Disability Justice – a working draft by Patty Berne](#)
- Judy Singer: [Reflections on Neurodiversity](#)
- Autistic Self Advocacy Network: [About Autism](#)
- [A Qualitative Investigation of Successful Adults with ADHD](#)
- [Dysgraphia: Hidden Talents Masked by a Learning Disability](#)
- Theoraah: [Understanding the Autism Spectrum](#)
- [Social Communication Animated Video \(Autistic at Work LLC\)](#)
- [Celebrate Neurodiversity Stickers / Buttons](#)