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How I know ASD



OT Background - Degree in science with minor in psychology BS, MS, PhD

Occupation is defined as the active or doing process of a person engaged in goal directed, intrinsically motivating, and culturally appropriate activities.

Occupational therapy practitioners work across the age span (birth-death) within the appropriate activities of daily living.

Occupational therapy intervention uses everyday life activities (occupations) to promote health, well-being, and your ability to participate in the important activities in your life. This includes any meaningful activity that a person wants to accomplish, including taking care of yourself and your family, working, volunteering, going to school, among many others

Started in mental health, then moved into home health, then pediatric outpatient, then schools, Developed Autism Leadership Team, now private LLC

ASD- Autism Spectrum Disorder, or simply autism, is a neurodevelopmental disorder characterized by repetitive, restricted, and inflexible patterns of behavior, interests, and activities, as well as difficulties in social interaction and social communication. [Wikipedia \(link to great information\)](#)

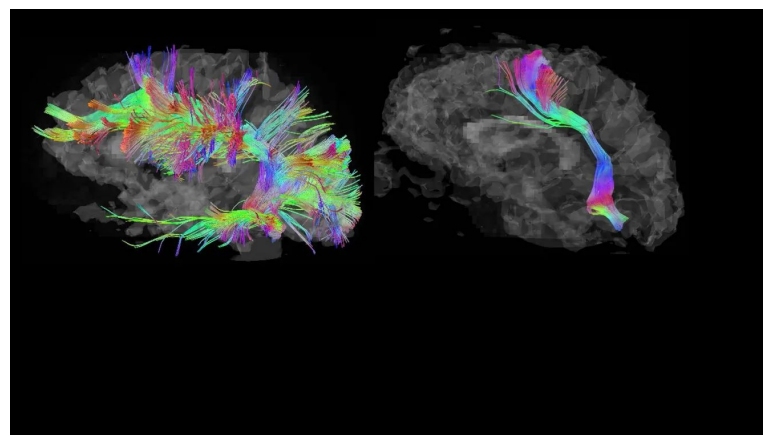
Neuro Diverse - Temple Grandin

Temple

Temple's brain is left visual output much larger

There is a lot of synapses firing!

We know that the Autistic thinks differently, For instance, some studies have found that functional connectivity in adolescents and adults with autism is generally *reduced* compared with their peers who do not have the disorder, while functional connectivity in younger children with autism appears to be *increased*. Currently, scientists are exploring autistic brain circuitry in order to understand more precisely how it performs... or fails to perform.



Social

- The child/person displays significant difficulties or differences or both in interacting with or understanding people and events.

Communication

- The child/person displays significant difficulties or differences which extend beyond speech and language to other aspects of social communication, both receptively and expressively.

Repetitive Activities and Restricted Interests

- The child/person seeks consistency in environmental events to the point of exhibiting significant rigidity in routines and displays marked distress over changes in the routine, and/or has a significantly persistent preoccupation with or attachment to objects or topics.

Characteristics of ASD - Possible signs include but are not limited to:

- *No babbling or fewer vocalizations with limited range of sounds
- *No pointing or gesturing
- *"Out of sync" with caregiver
- *Lack of smile or social response to a smile
- *Delayed response to name - at times appears to ignore or not hear
- *Poor social orienting
- *No single words by 16 months & no phrases by 24 months
- *Lack of spontaneous imitation
- *Poor coordination of eye gaze & decreased eye contact
- *Failure to follow another person's gaze or point (interest of others)
- * Decreased play skills (imaginative as well as limited repertoire)
- *Sensory differences
- *Prefers objects over people
- *Prefers to play alone
- *Transitions and changes are often difficult
- *Behaviors can be challenging BECAUSE of communication and neuro differences

The Rise of ASD

CDC prevalence in 8 year olds with ASD

2020 - 1 in 36

2010 - 1 in 68

2000 - 1 in 150

More common in boys, masking, late female diagnosis

Increased Awareness and Reduced Stigma:

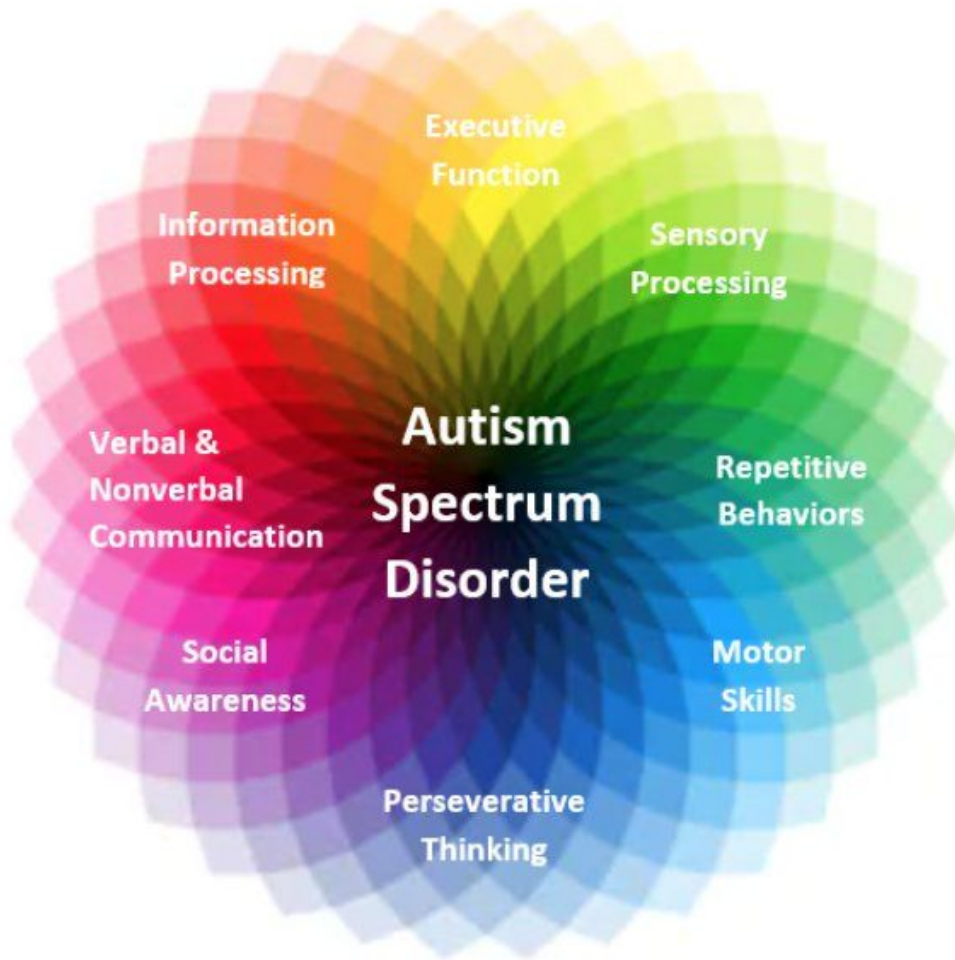
Greater public awareness and understanding of autism, along with reduced stigma, mean that more individuals are seeking evaluations and diagnoses, leading to more autism diagnoses.

Broader Diagnostic Criteria:

Diagnostic guidelines have evolved, broadening the definition of autism, including people with lower support needs who might have previously been overlooked or misdiagnosed.

Improved Screening Tools and Procedures:

The development and widespread use of more effective screening tools, like the Modified Checklist for Autism in Toddlers (M-CHAT), have enabled earlier and more accurate identification of autism in young children.



The spectrum overlaps and can look different from day to day or from moment to moment...

Level 1 - mild

Level 2 moderate

Level 3 maximal support in all areas

Besides characteristics: Social, communication, sensory, behaviors, restricted interests, executive functioning, perseverative thinking, anxiety, behavioral challenges, gut, stomach and feeding issues, as well as transitions and fitting into the norms of school and everyday life.

Because it is a spectrum disorder - if you've met one person with autism, you've met one autistic

Therefore - the needs also vary, and each has a unique mapping of the individual make up of characteristics

Philosophy is changing with many growing attitudes for embracing the autistic and focusing on strengths rather than trying to teach them how to fit into typical societal norms.

What Services and supports are recommended for Autistics?

Board Certified Behavior Analyst **RBT** - Registered Behavior Technician

Clinical Therapies - SLP, OT, PT, play therapy, social skills training

School Based Services

Home Based Services

All of which are limited in capacity (funding, staffing, training)

[Local resources](#) (link) Huge shortage, not just in the 4 corners area

Diagnosis - Difficult (sometimes Denver, sometimes Farmington, Sometimes Denver is coming to Pediatric centers)

Services - Diagnosis, early intervention, clinical, school based, mental health, medication and medical care

EARLY Interventions - Mainly falls on community connections - cutbacks in funding & one service delivery model is the current reality

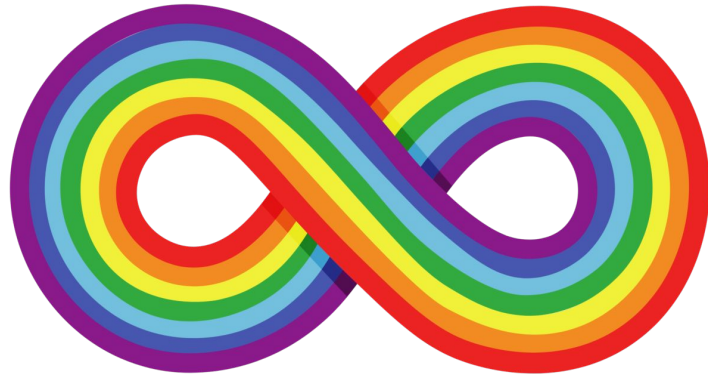
Clinical services (OT/SLP) ongoing services is limited- many services have a waitlist

BCBA/RBT's : Shortage with not enough and don't always get consistent therapist

SPECIALIST - someone who knows and gets ASD

ARC, Grants, Summer programs

We all have differences, We all are unique!!!!



April is Autism
Awareness
month.

Read a book,
watch a movie,
listen to a
Podcast, talk to
autistics and
families

Neurodivergent Flag-The infinity loop doesn't stop. And that's the heart of it. Autism, neurodivergence in general, doesn't work in straight lines or perfect boxes. We're talking about different brains navigating a world not built for them. Every curve of that symbol is a recognition that autism is diverse, fluid, and—*brace yourself*—not a deficit.