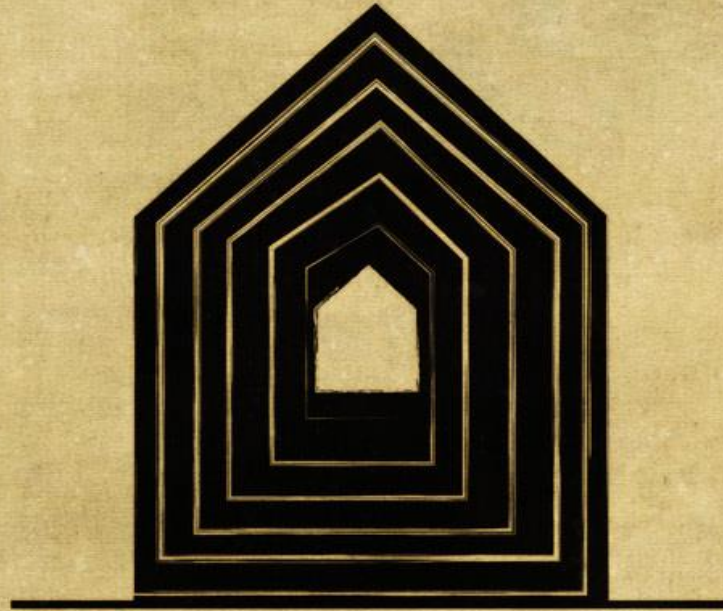


College and Beyond: Helping Students on the Autism Spectrum Transition

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ARCHIATRIC



AUTISM

Federico Babina

How can you tell if someone is on the spectrum (assuming they don't disclose)?

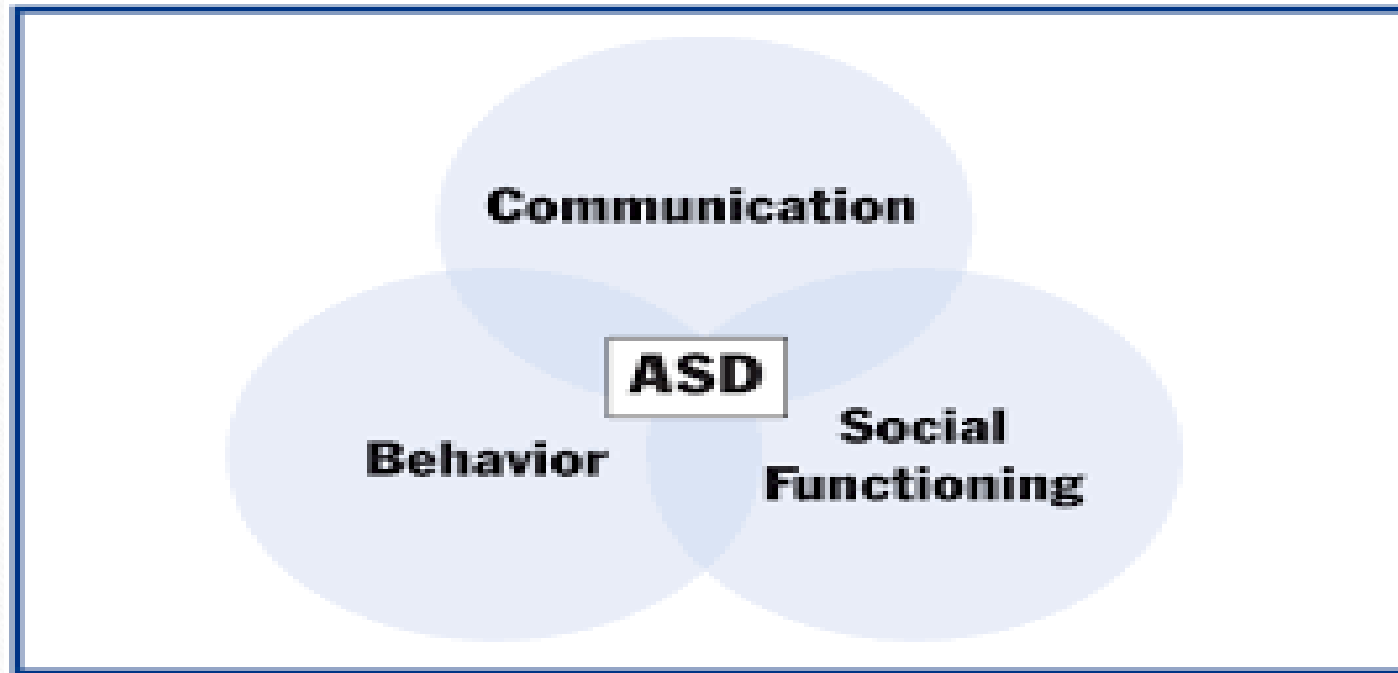


There is no clear sign, but if any combination of the following present themselves, the strategies in this presentation may prove useful

- Trouble with eye contact
- Irregular speech pattern – echolalia, stuttering, unusual cadence
- “stimming” - wringing hands, excessive knuckle cracking, covering ears, twirling objects, interacting with light
- Student may have difficulty sitting still – you may get a sense that the student is restless.
- Personal space issues

- Especially perseverative when it comes to a problem. Speech may speed up, may stumble over words
- Irregular conversation patterns – non-sequiturs, over-sharing
- Disorganization
- Off putting, opinionated
- Flat affect – seeming disinterest, anxiety

What are some difficulties or challenges you've experienced helping students on the spectrum?



Possible overlooked issues from POV of someone on spectrum:

- transition period
- working with narrow ranges of interest – may have difficulty finding relevance in unrelated subjects
- changing/disappearing accommodations
- not used to self-advocacy, more onus on them to make appointments, keep on top of their lives.
- Support networks are changing and likely haven't caught up yet.

- top down vs bottom up
- sensory issues in new environments
- need to expend energy.
- communication deficits, stilted social interactions, nonverbal cues not setting in
- depression- may be much more sensitive to feeling out of place, as if they don't fit in, or behind

- High functioning students on the spectrum are often very conscious of their progress in comparison to others and are hard on themselves.
- Students on the spectrum may feel a disproportional burden regarding interaction.
- Students on the spectrum can have a difficult time initiating, maintaining, and reading friendships, acquaintances. This means there may be a higher incidence of students on the spectrum over-stepping professional boundaries once they become close to teachers, advisors, staff
- Not so much a lack of empathy, but a difficulty interpreting social signals

Possible accommodations and general strategies within existing frameworks:

- Alternative arrangements for assignments – more staggering, allowance for more feedback
- More flexibility – example of worker who didn't “do” daylight savings time. possible individual arrangement in terms of tardiness or leaving early

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- More/different communication needed – reading between the lines is often not a strong suit.
 - Students on the spectrum do well with very clear communication. Almost over-communication in some cases.
 - develop signal, agreements, nods, etc. for breakdowns/episodes.

- May need to explain to the student the limitations you have as a teacher/advisor
 - students on the spectrum may have difficulty connecting with others, and so may develop close or even excessively close bonds with those they do connect with
 - this is also a transition to a greater degree of independence, and so while a support system is key, there may be some tough love involved (i.e. “I know you can do this on your own, so _____ is my suggestion for now, and I’ll check in at a later date”)
- Help student become aware of social clubs, meet up groups, events, etc.

- “making unfamiliar familiar”
- Let student know where assignment/day’s events fall in terms of larger schedule. “Today, we’re covering X, and tomorrow, Y, which will prepare you for test Z.”
 - “you can expect more of this in your other classes, as well”

Suggestions

- A freshman entry level college seminar course with a focus on psychological and sociological concepts such as theory of mind, the psychology of social interaction, life transitions study habits, as well as college resources.
 - this would be a course required for a larger group of students, with the idea that many autistic and neuro-normative students can benefit.
 - it would give students on the spectrum a distance from which to learn about and evaluate issues that are sure to come up
 - A required or highly encouraged seminar or workshop focusing on the experience of non-traditional students

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- Rigidity is a common issue with students on and off the autism spectrum. As students are encouraged to follow their interests, it becomes difficult for them to step out of the bounds of said interests.

- finding ways to encourage students to use their areas of interest as a means of connecting to required academic topics (e.g. a paper on the physics of Batman)

- may require extra conversations with teachers and advisors

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- A writing group for students on the spectrum
 - or more inclusively, students with disabilities, students with mental health challenges, or anyone who does not identify as neuro-normative
 - I've personally had success with this in my own life and with groups of students on the autism spectrum. Writing is an excellent tool for introspection, for a population that often struggles with just this
 - in person or digital

- Early/supplementary orientations

- in keeping with making the unfamiliar familiar, a chance to spend time on campus, run through student schedules, ask (possibly detailed) questions about expectations

- bringing in former students on the spectrum who have been successful to discuss their experiences with current/future students

Planning for the future

- Internships and co-ops.
- Networking and making most of support network
- Mock interviews
- First-hand research (aka: reverse interviews).
- Making moves that feel uncomfortable but that feel like they must be tried.

I would be happy to answer any further
questions

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