

FLEXIBLE FRAMEWORK FOR HELPING CLIENTS ON THE AUTISTIC SPECTRUM

This presentation explores the clinical implications of working with clients on the autism spectrum, emphasizing the importance of individualized treatment planning. It highlights evidence-based approaches, the need for flexibility, and recent updates in language to foster better communication, promote inclusion, and improve outcomes in therapy and support services.

Language is important!

AVOID THIS

USE THIS

Person with Autism	Autistic person Autist On the Autism spectrum
Identifies as having autism	Is Autistic
"Special needs" "Differently abled" "Handi-capable"	"Is disabled" Has a disability
Normal	Neurotypical (NT) Allistic Non-Autistic
Low functioning High functioning	Has high support needs Has low support needs
Female Autism Asperger's High-functioning Autism	Masked Autism
Mute Dumb	Nonverbal Loses speech
Euphemisms, language that minimizes challenges, language that belittles or condescends	Direct language about what a person can or can't do, and what kind of support they need

What is autism spectrum disorder?

"Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a neurological and developmental disorder that affects how people interact with others, communicate, learn, and behave. Although autism can be diagnosed at any age, it is described as a "developmental disorder" because symptoms generally appear in the first 2 years of life."

(NIMH, 2024)

Common Mistakes Clinicians Make

- Assuming
- Sugar-coating
- Indirect Communication
- Focusing on "curing" ASD/helping the client be "less autistic"
- Focusing on differences the clinician can see rather than what the client feels
- Focusing on suppressing symptoms
- "Everyone is a little autistic."
- "You don't look autistic."

Treatment Planning

Common therapeutic goals and skills for clients with ASD at any level include:

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| • Self-advocacy and self-care | • Resource acquisition and referrals |
| • Communication in relationships and with emotions | • Vocational and occupational therapy |
| • Emotional identification and regulation | • Reducing impact from chronic trauma |
| • How to stop masking | • Learning ways to self-accommodate |
| • Navigating self-disclosure of symptoms | • Understanding their autism & the impacts of their symptoms |

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