FINDING YOUR WAY:

A College Guide for Students on the Spectrum

OAR
Organization for Autism Research

The views expressed in this publication are those of the authors, and may not reflect the official position of the Organization for Autism Research. The publication is designed to provide guidance concerning the subject matter covered. It is published with the understanding that the Organization for Autism Research, Inc. is not engaged in the rendering of legal, medical, or professional services. If legal, medical, or other expert advice or assistance is required, the services of a competent professional should be sought.

Copyright 2018 Organization for Autism Research, Inc. All rights reserved.

No part of this work may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying and recording, or by any information storage or retrieval system, without prior or written consent of the Organization for Autism Research, Inc., unless such copying is expressly permitted by federal copyright law. Address all inquiries to: Organization for Autism Research, Inc., 2000 N. 14th Street, Suite 240, Arlington, VA 22201.

Organization for Autism Research

Given the increasing number of individuals on the autism spectrum who are entering college after high school, it is more important than ever to provide support for them as they begin this major life transition.

When I was preparing to go to college in the late 1970s, there were few, if any, supports to students with ASD in higher education. My transition consisted of my parents arranging for me to take a few days off from high school to visit my older sister at college. Today, that would be considered the beginning of a transition to a higher education program, though it was a very meager beginning. Further, the "support program" I had upon entering college consisted of this same sister, who lived a few miles off campus, helping me navigate the system. Similarly, my transition out of college into employment was a bit rocky until I was able to find a job in my area of strength, which is teaching.

Finding Your Way: A College Guide for Students on the Spectrum prominently engages the voices of people on the autism spectrum as well as highly qualified professionals to provide information and tips vital to promoting success in higher education for people on the autism spectrum in three major areas: transition to higher education, attending college, and, finally, transitioning out of college into employment. I advise you to read and listen carefully to what they have to say. A guide like this would have been very helpful to me when I was a student in college.

The guide begins by highlighting differences between high school and college. For example, the structure that those of us on the autism spectrum crave is limited and more self-directed in higher education than in K-12. In college, it is the student's responsibility to get up for that 8am class, eat properly, attend class (where the professor may not even take attendance!), finish and turn in homework (without constant reminders from the professor), and get sufficient sleep to function well.

The remainder of the guide covers many other topics, such as establishing routines to achieve success, managing academic demands, working with the office supporting students with disabilities to address any issues, effective self-advocacy and disclosure, and understanding the ins, outs, and unspoken rules of social interaction on a college campus. Getting along with roommates, dating, and safe sexuality, as well as tips on paying for school through savings, earnings, scholarships, and loans are other areas addressed in this useful guide. The *Campus Life Quiz* on page 31 even will help determine if you are ready to live on campus or if it would be better to live at home for a while.

Finally, in preparation for transition out of college into the adult world of work, the guide provides useful information on seeking, obtaining, and keeping a job, which will be useful for employment both while still in school and after graduation. Like the rest of this guide, this section is chock-full of tips and advice with regard to dealing with the challenges of having autism in the workplace and topics such as self-advocacy and disclosure, as well as finding needed supports.

In summary, this guide presents easy-to-implement, practical solutions for promoting success on the way to, while attending, and then transitioning out of higher education. My hope is that it will help you on your college journey.

Sincerely,

Stephen M. Shore

Stephen Shore, Ed.D.
Clinical Assistant Professor, Adelphi University
Garden City, New York
www.autismasperger.net

Dr. Stephen Shore is a clinical assistant professor of special education, consultant, and workshop leader focused on improving the lives of individuals on the autism spectrum. Shore is a member of OAR's Scientific Council and serves on Autism Speaks' board of directors.

Organization for Autism Research

Board of Directors

James M. Sack, Esquire, The Sack Law Firm PC, Chairman
Lori Lapin Jones, Esquire, Lori Lapin Jones PLLC, Vice Chairwoman
Gregory L. Smith, Booz Allen Hamilton, Treasurer
Michael V. Maloney, Organization for Autism Research, Executive Director and Secretary
Christian Bates, Amazon Web Services
William Donlon, Eden II Programs
Cathy Schwallie Farmer, Schwallie Farmer Consulting
Anthony Ferrera, M.S., Hillsborough Township
Peter Gerhardt, Ed.D., EPIC School
Lisa Hussman, M.B.A., Lisa Higgins Hussman Foundation, President
Marie Kish, C.P.A., Ernst & Young
Susan Lauredo, Oliver's Cakes & Catering
Christine Searight, George Washington University Hospital
Maria Veve, LifeLink Tissue Bank

Scientific Council

Peter F. Gerhardt, Ed.D., EPIC School, Chairman
Joanne Gerenser, Ph.D., CCC-SLP, Eden II Programs, Vice Chairwoman
Jonathan Campbell, Ph.D., University of Kentucky
Kara Hume, Ph.D., FPG Child Development Institute
Denise Juliano-Bult, M.S.W., National Institutes of Mental Health
Gerald P. Koocher, Ph.D., DePaul University
Suzanne Letso, M.A., BCBA, Connecticut Center for Child Development
Michael Londner, M.D., M.P.H., M.B.A., Inova Health Systems
James A. Mulick, Ph.D., The Ohio State University
Brenda Myles, Ph.D., Autism Asperger Publishing Company
Daniel Openden, Ph.D., BCBA-D, Southwest Autism Research & Resource Center
Paul Shattuck, Ph.D., A.J. Drexel Autism Institute
Stephen Shore, Ed.D., Adelphi University
Mary Jane Weiss, Ph.D., BCBA, Endicott College
Patricia Wright, Ph.D., MPH, Rethink
Thomas Zane, Ph.D., University of Kansas

Staff

Michael V. Maloney, Executive Director
Kimberly Ha, M.S.Ed., Research and Programs Director
Saman Kamgar-Parsi, Programs and Outreach Associate
Diane Lingenfelter, Hire Autism Marketing and Outreach Manager
Kristen Essex, Business Manager
Sean Flynn, Endurance Fundraising Manager
Rachel Edrich, Run for Autism Coordinator
Sarah Rodis, Run for Autism Coordinator

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This publication is made possible thanks to the collaborative efforts of the following contributors.

OAR Project Team:

Michael V. Maloney, Executive Director
Kimberly Ha, M.S.Ed., Research and Programs Director
Saman Kamgar-Parsi, Programs and Outreach Associate
Rebecca Bradley, Programs and Outreach Intern
Kyleigh McGrail, Programs and Outreach Intern
Meghana Shetty, Programs and Outreach Intern

Graphic Design: Lisa Cain Design

In addition to the members of the Board of Directors, Scientific Council, and staff, special thanks go to the following people for their invaluable feedback during the development of *Finding Your Way: A College Guide for Students on the Spectrum:*

Julia Bascom, Peyton Berardi, Susan Berardi, Michael John Carley, Erin Clemens, OTR/L, Monique N. Colclough, Ph.D., Tucker Collins, Scott Fowler, M.Ed., Melissa Hochberg, M.Ed., Capri Kowsky, Eileen Krimer, Emma Lacombe, Russell Lehmann, Karen Levi, Beth Loughner, Jamie T. Malloy, Molly M., Haley Moss, L.O., Nika Peng, M.Ed., Tabitha Ramminger, M.S., BCBA, Elizabeth Roberts, Psy.D., Ron Sandison, Susan M. Schultz, Ed.D., Erick Soricelli, Amber Dorko Stopper, Shane Warren, Robin Weisman.

Photo Credits: iStockPhoto.com, Shutterstock.com, Flaticon.com, StockSnap.com

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

About *Finding Your Way: A College Guide for Students on the Spectrum* iv
How to Use This Guide iv
College 101 1

SELF-ADVOCACY

Changes in Disability Supports 5
What You Need to Know About the Office of Disability Services 7
Should I Disclose My Autism? 9
How I Self-Advocate 10
Supported Decision-Making 11
Rights in College 12
You Can Do It, Too! 13
Interview: Haley Moss 15
Overcoming Discrimination and Adversity Through Self-Acceptance 17

ACADEMICS

Changes in Academic Supports 19
Starting the Year Prepared: How to Establish Structure and Routines 21
Getting Ahead of the Curve: How to Manage Academic Demands 24
Study Smarter, Not Harder! 27
Interview: Jamie Malloy 29

CAMPUS LIFE

The College Lifestyle 30
Quiz: Are You Ready to Live on Campus? 31
Finding a Home at College 33
Quiz: Should You Have a Roommate? 35
The Horrible Freshman-Year Roommate 38
The Roommate Agreement 40
The Hidden Curriculum 42
Resolving Conflict With Others 49
Relationships and Sex on the Brain 52
Sexual Health and Safety Tips 54
You Are Not Alone: A Survivor's Truth 58
How to Stay Safe on Campus 60
Participating in Campus Clubs 62
Interview: Capri Kowsky 65

CAREER & MONEY

Student Loans and Financial Aid 66
OAR's Scholarship Program 69
Searching for the Right Job 70
Interviews 101 73
Hire Autism Resources 75
A Field Guide for Your First Office Job 76
Autism in the Workplace 78

ONLINE: COLLEGE CENTRAL

http://bit.ly/OARCollege

Organization for Autism Research

About Finding Your Way

Welcome to *Finding Your Way: A College Guide for Students on the Spectrum*. The purpose of this guide is to help you as an incoming or current college student with autism gain a better understanding of the academic, social, and financial supports, services, and resources needed to successfully navigate college.

Just like individuals on the autism spectrum, all colleges are not alike. They can vary in size, location, type, level of supports, and academic rigor. This publication provides the foundational knowledge you need to address common issues faced by students with and without autism spectrum disorder. Specifically, this guide contains personal accounts from people with autism about their challenges and successes; sound advice from students, researchers, and professionals in the field; as well as quizzes and resources.

How to Use This Guide

This publication is divided and color-coded into four main categories, or hubs: self-advocacy, academics, campus life, and career & money.

Depending on your specific circumstances and how far along you are in your college career, not all articles will be immediately relevant to you. Therefore, it is best to use this publication as a reference tool to address issues before and as they arise. To do so, first skim through the table of contents or flip through the pages until you find an article that interests you or is relevant to your immediate situation. After you have read the selection, you will find that articles that appear around it will likely cover similar topics.

Additional content is provided online at the Organization for Autism Research's College Central: http://bit.ly/OARCollege. Reminders to access the online College Central hubs are listed throughout the guide.

Want to share your story? We want to hear from you. Contact OAR at programs@researchautism.org to share your story on College Central.

Disclaimer

This publication is written for individuals on the autism spectrum with level 1 support needs. It is designed to serve as a primer to help students with autism understand and navigate the college environment; it is not intended to replace critical support programs or services. The views expressed in this publication are those of the authors, and may not reflect the official position of the Organization for Autism Research.

COLLEGE 101

Know what to expect as an incoming freshman

WELCOME TO COLLEGE!

There are many resources for young adults heading off to college, detailing what they should expect and how to prepare. But as a student on the spectrum, you may find there aren't many resources that address your unique needs. The goal of this college guide is to do just that. Getting adjusted to your new role and life as a college student will not be simple, but knowing what to expect beforehand will help make the transition smoother. The following article offers a preview of some of the exciting changes that lie ahead and what you can expect as you begin your college experience.

Freshman Orientation

All students are required to attend freshman orientation. It is an event that varies from school to school, but most are a couple of days long and take place during the summer before the start of your freshman year. Depending on the size of your school, orientation may involve upwards of hundreds of students, but you will be split into smaller groups for campus tours, academic advising and information meetings. If you do not attend freshman orientation, you could miss vital information. Freshman orientation is typically when students receive their student ID, create their first class schedule, and sometimes meet potential roommates. It is also a good opportunity to become familiar with the layout of the campus and visit the Office of Disability Support/ Office of Accessibility in order to begin the process of acquiring academic accommodations, if needed.

Meal Plans

If you live on campus in a dorm, your school may require you to have a meal plan. Every school varies, but college meal plans usually take one of two forms: (a) you have a certain number of "meal swipes" linked to your student ID per semester (or academic term lasting 15-18 weeks), so you can enter the campus dining hall a set number of times and eat without a limit; or (b) you have a meal plan account that is pre-filled with "dining dollars," and you are charged based on the items you purchase. Your school may also offer a combination of these plans, or alternative options for special circumstances. Typically with meal swipes, students may be required to eat all their meals in the dining hall and cannot bring food out. With a meal account where each item is paid for individually, however, there are usually "to-go" options available. If you have a restrictive diet, the dining hall will typically have options to accommodate your dietary needs. If not, you can talk to your school about being on a specialized meal plan.

At the beginning of the semester, it is wise to calculate how many meal swipes or dining dollars you can spend per week to avoid running out or having too many left at the end of the semester. At many universities, any remaining meal credits at the end of the semester are wiped off and do not roll over to the next semester. Check to see if this is the case for your meal plan.

Classes

Each semester, you may expect to take four or five classes, which probably sounds like a light load compared to the seven or eight classes you might have juggled in high school. These classes may only take up a few hours each day, whereas you used to sit in high school classes all day long. In college, you have much more freedom and flexibility in your schedule, but prepare for more work. College courses are more challenging and intensive than your high school classes.

Group projects

Group assignments are a big part of college academics; some of these projects can sometimes span an entire semester. Many students, particularly those with autism, do not like doing group work. The act of coordinating meetings, delegating tasks, and relying on peers for support might seem stressful. However, team work, group work, and collaboration are very common in the professional work environment, so colleges emphasize these skills.

Relationships

When it comes relationships, college is a big change; whether you're headed to a small campus or a large state university, it's likely that you're going to be surrounded by people who don't know you. Coming from a high school where you probably saw the same faces every day, this new environment can feel isolating and lonely at first.

Find comfort in the fact that a lot of your fellow freshmen feel the same way. College is a time when many students want to develop new, meaningful relationships. With that in mind…

- **Don't expect to be best friends with everyone you meet.** You're going to meet a lot of people at your new school, whether you like it or not. Because everyone is meeting so many other people, you're not going to become close friends with every one of them. And no one expects you to. Having a good relationship with your roommate is a great start and will make living together much easier, but even then you don't have to become best friends. Find people who you get along with, who you enjoy spending time with, and who make you feel comfortable just being yourself.

- **Expect that you will grow apart from some people.** This is an expectation for college as well as life! As you settle into life at college and meet new people, you may find that you drift apart from your friends from high school, or even some you met early on in college. Throughout your college experience, you'll be immersed in new experiences and develop your personal identity. As you learn more about yourself, you will gravitate more towards the meaningful relationships in your life, and let go of those that are not. If you want to reach out to an old friend or reconnect with someone, know that it takes a lot of effort, but also understand that growing apart from people is a natural part of growing up.

- **Put yourself out there.** Although you're meeting people all the time, college can sometimes feel lonely without close friendships. Making friends isn't easy for everyone, but that's okay. College is a fresh start, and offers many ways to meet new people.
  - **Join clubs or groups that interest you.** A fast way to meet people and develop friendships is to join social groups and clubs that interest you, as you will already have something in common with the people you meet there (see page 62).
  - **Make connections within your classes.** Developing connections within your classes or major is not only a fun way to make friends, but also a valuable skill (in the business world after college, it's called networking)! It's great to know people who are in your major because you can reach out to them to form study groups, discuss class and career options, and exchange homework tips.

- **Try to resolve conflicts on your own.** If you have an issue with someone, it's best to talk to them first before seeking outside help from a Resident Assistant (RA) or professor. For example, if your roommate is doing something that bothers you, try to work it out in private before talking to an RA. Publicly going to someone else before talking about it one-on-one often escalates the situation. When approaching this conversation, be considerate of your roommate's feelings. Being too blunt, like saying, "Your habit is disgusting," can hurt his or her feelings. See page 49 for more tips on conflict resolution.

> "Some courses have assignments that can be done both in person and online. This can potentially minimize the social fatigue that is common with face-to-face interaction. It's also possible to take a mix of on-campus courses and online courses, but doing so means that you need to be self-disciplined and deadline-conscious. It's been a life-saver for me."
>
> –L.O., student with ASD

Formal Policies and Deadlines

It is important that you meet all the required paperwork and scheduling deadlines. In high school, you could probably expect your parents or teachers to help you out if you didn't submit things on time. Now, the responsibility is yours. Any deadline notifications are sent directly to you to manage.

- **Paperwork, tuition, room and board, and other fees:** The consequences for missing important paperwork and fee deadlines can be severe. Complete and pay these on time to avoid extra fees, or even suspension from university housing or class registration.

- **Class scheduling:** You will have a large time frame to select and adjust your classes at the beginning of the semester. Nevertheless, try to register as soon as possible in order to secure the classes you want during the days and times that work best for you.

Alcohol Use and Rule-Breaking

This is college, after all, and it comes with a lot of freedom. It's an opportunity to grow; it also opens the door to explore, try new things, and, in some cases, make mistakes. Do not be surprised if you see students breaking campus rules or the law. Examples of rule-breaking include smoking and drinking alcohol in dorms, where such activities are not permitted. Examples of breaking the law include using fake driver's licenses to gain entry to clubs, drinking alcohol while underage, and using illegal drugs.

If some of this makes you uncomfortable, then remove yourself from the situation. Unless you are in danger, or think someone else is, it is best not to report your peers or get directly involved in other ways, as doing so may have long-term social consequences. If, however, it takes place at a dorm and the students' behaviors directly lower your quality of life, then discuss it with them. If the problem persists, ask your RA for help.

Campus Safety

Some schools offer free modes of safe travel after dark. If you ever find yourself or someone else in serious trouble (e.g., danger of physical violence or a life-threatening situation), contact campus police. For example, people driving under the influence put themselves and others in harm's way; someone pressuring a drunk person to have sex with them can potentially lead to rape. Many campuses have blue-light emergency phones every couple of blocks or so in case you don't have a phone and need police and surrounding people to take notice of your emergency situation immediately.

Health Services

Your school will likely have a Health Center that you can visit when you're feeling sick and need to see a doctor. It will also have a Counseling Center for students who want therapy, need emotional support from an expert, or experience difficulty coping and de-stressing. If you're looking to de-stress by exercising, expect that there will be Fitness Centers and gyms for recreational use.

Don't be surprised if it takes weeks or months to adapt to college life and academics. Just make sure you ask questions, take charge of your life, and enjoy yourself along the way!

What to Expect

- Changes in Disability Supports
- The Office of Disability Services

Disclosure and Independence

- Should I Disclose My Autism?
  - How I Self-Advocate
- Supported Decision-Making
- Rights in College

Personal Experiences

- You Can Do It, Too!
- Overcoming Discrimination and Adversity Through Self-Acceptance

Online Self-Advocacy Hub

- bit.ly/OARSelfAdvocacy

CHANGES IN DISABILITY SUPPORTS

Learn about your rights and responsibilities

Welcome to college! You'll be encountering a lot of changes as you adjust to your new life as a college student. Let's think back to high school for a minute. Every high school schedule, every day of class, and every assignment was governed by rules. These rules change once you enter college. While students with disabilities are ensured certain rights and services in high school, universities are not required by law to afford students all of the same services that high schools provide.

The structure and support of high school is replaced by more freedom, but also more schoolwork and responsibilities, so the transition isn't always easy. The chart on the following page provides an overview of general differences between legislation, services, and supports in high school compared to those in college. Review these differences to help you prepare for the college academic environment.

High School	College
High school is governed by the **Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)**.	Postsecondary education is governed by **Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act** and the **Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)**.
"**Entitlement" law:** Students with disabilities (ages 3-21) are guaranteed access to a **free and appropriate education (FAPE)**.	"**Non-discrimination" law:** Colleges and universities may not discriminate in recruitment, in admission, or after admission based on a disability. However, these are not entitlement laws, meaning they do not guarantee successful learning or mandate the creation of special programs for persons with disabilities.
School attendance is mandatory.	You should attend lectures to maintain grades, but class attendance is not always mandatory.
Schools must provide services designed specifically to meet students' needs (e.g., instruction, modifications, accommodations) based on their individualized education program (IEP).	Reasonable accommodations may be made to provide equal access and participation for students with disabilities; however, formal special education services comparable to those in high school are not available.
Counties are required to identify students with disabilities through free assessment and the IEP process.	Students are responsible for coordinating with staff and faculty in order to receive accommodations. This does not mean students are required to name a disability when discussing accommodations with their individual professors.
School officials monitor students' progress towards their IEP goals, and communicate openly with parents and the student.	There are no formal IEPs, so students are responsible for monitoring their own progress and communicating with their professors, academic advisors, and guardians themselves.
Depending on the transition needs laid out in the IEP, schools often help connect students to community support services.	Students are responsible for making their own connections with school-provided or external support services. Services for adults on the spectrum are often limited.

Bottom line, college is a depersonalized setting compared to high school. There is a greater expectation for you to communicate your needs and interests for yourself.

Did you know? Self-advocacy can be defined as a person's ability to understand, communicate, and negotiate his or her own interests, desires, needs, and rights. In other words, it means having the ability to understand and communicate who you are, knowing what you want and need, and knowing how to get them for yourself. As someone with autism, you have the right to make day-to-day decisions that impact your own quality of life.

How well do you advocate for yourself?

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THE OFFICE OF DISABILITY SERVICES

What is the Office of Disability Services? Most colleges have an Office of Disability Services (ODS) to ensure that their campuses are inclusive for all students. Other names for this office might be Disability Support Services (DSS), Resource Office on Disabilities (ROD), Office of Accessibility Services (OAS), or something similar. The ODS helps students identify campus support services and accommodations that they are eligible for based on the documentation and information they provide. The disability coordinators that work there can help ensure that you have equal access to the academic environment by providing accommodations and support. Unlike in high school, academic accommodations are not guaranteed or always available in college. If you are interested in taking advantage of your campus services, this office is the first place you should visit!

What services does the ODS provide? Each college varies in its range of supports, so the ODS will inform you of all the available programs, services, and accommodations your school offers. For example, you may be eligible for adjustments such as on-campus housing modifications. Other examples of services that colleges may provide include:

- Testing accommodations
- Audio recordings of lectures
- Note-taking services
- Seating accommodations
- Speech-to-text software
- Accessible testing locations
- Priority class registration
- Course substitution

Priority class registration means being able to register for classes earlier than other students. "In my son's case, his academic advisor helped him pick classes with professors that he knew would be supportive of his learning needs," says Susan Berardi, a mother whose son attends Southern Illinois University-Edwardsville.

What are my expectations of privacy? By law, disability support staff are not allowed to discuss or disclose your disability information with anyone other than you. Students over 18 years of age must give permission for their guardians to access their academic records and be a part of the conversation (see page 11 for more details). Do not assume that the ODS will inform your professors about your accommodation needs on your behalf.

That responsibility falls on you. Most of the time, they will hand you a letter at the beginning of each semester to pass along to your professors indicating that you're registered with disability services and entitled to certain accommodations.

Who discloses to my professors? The faculty won't know anything beyond the letter you give them, such as what disability or disorder you have, unless you choose to share that information with them. Some students find it helpful to approach professors on their own to explain their learning differences and how their autism impacts them in the classroom.

It is a reasonable expectation that the information you share with one professor will not be shared with another professor that works in a different department. So, you can decide whether to disclose your ASD to individual professors if you think it would help foster understanding and build a relationship with them. Some professors may be more or less willing to help than others, so if you have any difficulty receiving accommodations, ask a coordinator from the ODS to help resolve any issues. ODS services are available to support you throughout your college career, so reach out to them when you need guidance.

"Some professors may be more or less willing to help than others, so if you have any difficulty receiving accommodations, ask a coordinator from the ODS to help resolve any issues."

How do I get started? It's important to connect with disability services early. You are responsible for disclosing your disability and requesting the services you need. If you don't formally register with ODS, you won't be eligible to receive accommodations. The best time to do this is over the summer since the office can be very busy helping other students at the beginning of the academic year. It also gives you plenty of time to gather the necessary documents and collect everything you need before the first day of class. If you're well into the academic year and haven't visited the ODS yet, don't worry. It's not too late to talk to them.

When you're ready to apply for services, you will be required to submit documents related to your disability. Example documents include medical and health records, aptitude and achievement test results, IEPs, as well as reports from both you and a qualified professional describing your need for accommodations. You can expect these records will be kept confidential. Each school has specific requirements for paperwork, so be sure to check what exactly is needed. In addition, the service staff may want you to explain your academic needs in your own words so that they can get to know you on a more personal level. For example, they may ask you about your learning strengths and weaknesses, how they impact you as a student, and about the accommodations you've received in the past.

It's a good idea to register with disability services, even if you think you won't need any accommodations. If you do, you'll already be known to the office and have everything in place if something comes up and you change your mind.

SHOULD I DISCLOSE MY AUTISM?

This guide will help you reflect on whether you should disclose your autism to a specific individual

Disclosure, or the decision to tell someone that you have autism, is a sensitive process that varies from person to person. Telling someone may allow them to understand you and your behaviors better; however, it may also place you in a position of vulnerability and open you up to prejudice. In college, you might disclose to your counselor, Disability Support Services (DSS) advisor, and RA in order to procure the supports you need, knowing that your diagnosis will remain confidential should you request it. If you choose to pursue academic accommodations in class, you also have the responsibility of notifying your professors.

All of this makes sense and may be easier to decide with respect to academics and related supports, but how do you determine whether to disclose your diagnosis in your personal relationships? For example, when, if ever, should you disclose to your roommates, friends, or romantic partners?

Self-advocate Dr. Stephen Shore writes, "Creating a hard and fast rule for whom to disclose to is practically impossible." If you're struggling to decide whether or not you should disclose to someone, there are questions you can ask yourself to help. Psychologist and autism specialist Dr. Valerie Gaus suggests thinking about the following questions:

- **Why do you want this particular person to know about your diagnosis?** This may seem obvious to you, but think about your relationship and how disclosure could positively affect it.
  - Would disclosure help your roommate understand certain behaviors?
  - Will sharing this part of your identity with your friends or romantic partner foster deeper connections?
- **How do you think disclosure will improve your interactions with this person?** This is a good question to explore on your own, and then perhaps share with the person you are disclosing to. For example, if you want to disclose to your romantic partner because you think it will help you be more open within the relationship, you can explain this so your partner can be an active participant in the growth of your relationship.

- **Are you prepared to ask this person to support you in a different way because of this new information? If so, how are you going to tell this person specifically what you need?** If you are hoping disclosure will amend some conflicts within a personal relationship, it is important that you are able to explain how the other person can change his or her attitude or perceptions to help you or otherwise use this information. Specify if you want the person not to treat you differently but to simply be more understanding of your actions.
- **What are the benefits of disclosing to this person?** Hopefully, disclosing will be a positive experience for you. As mentioned earlier, benefits of disclosure include improving your relationship with someone, enabling someone else to understand you better, and allowing you to feel more comfortable within a relationship. Or, perhaps disclosure will lay the foundation for a previously unpleasant relationship to become more positive. Exploring the benefits of disclosure can help you feel more confident in your decision to disclose.

- **What are the risks of disclosing to this person?** It's never easy to predict how someone will react to disclosure, especially if you don't know that person very well. Be prepared to accept that your relationship may change, for better or for worse, a lot or a little, should you decide to disclose your autism. Exploring the risks and reactions associated with disclosing could help you anticipate and plan for the unexpected. Negative reactions may include pity, judgment, or sharing of information with others without your consent. If you are worried about any of these things, be sure to explain how you would like the person to respond.

As Dr. Shore suggested, it is impossible to develop a perfect rule or formula for deciding to whom and when you should disclose your autism. Every situation and relationship is different. But if you're stuck deliberating about whether or not to disclose to someone, these questions above can help you explore your thoughts and guide your decision-making process. If you still feel unsure after answering the questions, consider finding a close friend with whom you have already shared your diagnosis and ask for his or her opinion.

HOW I SELF-ADVOCATE

By Stephen Shore, Ed.D.

Successful advocacy begins with a firm foundation of understanding what autism means to you. For example, autism to me means having sensitivity to recessed lighting fixtures. Sometimes referred to as down lights, being under one of these fixtures is like staring into a spotlight. As a result, I need to engage in a three-step process to acheive effective self-advocacy:

1. **Scan the Environment:** Decide where and what challenges I face that need accommodation or greater mutual understanding. I must become aware of recessed lighting fixtures upon encountering them at work, school, home, the community, or elsewhere.

2. **Advocacy Effort:** Develop and implement an advocacy plan for accommodation or greater mutual understanding. I would tell my work supervisor or a friend that I need to wear a hat to shield my eyes from the bright lights.

3. **Disclosure:** Give a reason for requesting the accommodation to increase understanding.

Most of the time, only a partial disclosure is needed. In contrast to where a full disclosure means mentioning the diagnosis of ASD – which could be distracting – a partial disclosure focuses only on the specific aspect of ASD that is causing the challenge. In the case of recessed lighting fixtures, I would merely mention that the lights give me a headache, leaving open the conclusion that I must have sensitive eyes.

SUPPORTED DECISION-MAKING

Here's how you can make better-informed decisions for yourself

Sometimes, well-meaning guardians choose to make important decisions on behalf of their loved ones with disabilities, even when it's not necessary. Rather than giving up your ability to make decisions about things that directly impact your life, you can opt to have supported decision-making instead. **Supported decision-making** (SDM) is a formal way of identifying people whom you trust to help you make informed decisions and communicate your needs. These supporters can be friends, family members, or professionals. It's likely that you already turn to these people for guidance on a regular basis. If you need their help to make some of the more important decisions, however, such as when you're at the doctor's office, bank, or academic office, then it's helpful to have a form that explains the supportive relationship, the permissions your supporter has in accessing specific types of confidential information, and more. By having this documentation ready in advance, you are communicating to the administrator, doctor, or whomever, that the supporter has your permission to provide consultation, and that you retain your right to make the final decisions that affect you. If you wish to receive support in the decision-making process but want to retain your ability to make the final decisions, then SDM is the tool that helps you do that.

Did you know? The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) is a federal law that protects the privacy of your student records (academic, financial, health, etc.) if you are at least 18 years old. If you wish to waive that right so that your guardian can access your records and continue to support you in school, then you must submit a FERPA waiver. Colleges often provide these waiver forms at the Office of the Registrar or on their websites.

For more information on FERPA, go to: http://bit.ly/2rEyFGt

Model Form for Disclosure to Parents of Dependent Students and Consent Form for Disclosure to Parents**

****Under FERPA, a "parent" includes a natural parent, a guardian, or an individual acting as a parent in the absence of a parent of guardian (such as a grandparent, another relative, or a family friend).

To: Registrar, **[Postsecondary Institution]**

From: _____
Student's First Name Middle Initial Last Name

_____
Permanent Street Address City State Zip Code

Under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), the **[Postsecondary Institution]** is permitted to disclose information from your education records to your parents if your parents (or one of your parents) claim you as a dependent for federal tax purposes. Please indicate whether your parents claim you as a tax dependent.

Please check the appropriate box:

☐ Yes. I certify that my parents claim me as a dependent for federal income tax purposes.

☐ No. I certify that my parents do not claim me as a dependent for federal income tax purposes.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

If you are not claimed as a dependent or you do not know whether you are claimed as a dependent for federal income tax purposes, but you agree that **[Postsecondary Institution]** may disclose information from your education records to your parents, please sign the following consent:

I consent to the disclosure of any personally identifiable information from my education records to my parent(s), for reasons determined by the **[Postsecondary Institution]** as appropriate. This authorization will remain in effect for the [2017-2018] school year.*

Signature: _____ Date: _____

If parents live at the same address, please list both in # 1.

1. _____ Name(s)
_____ Address
_____ City, State, Zip
_____ Telephone

2. _____ Name(s)
_____ Address
_____ City, State, Zip
_____ Telephone

Students cannot be denied any educational services from the **[Institution] if they refuse to provide consent.*

For more information and tools on supported decision-making, go to:

- www.aclu.org/other/supported-decision-making-resource-library
- www.supporteddecisionmaking.org

RIGHTS IN COLLEGE

Get a quick overview of your rights as a college student

Colleges often provide a list of your rights as a college student on their school website. Be aware of your rights in order to advocate for yourself. If ever you feel you are being treated unfairly, or your rights as a student are being infringed upon, you can speak to an RA, professor, academic advisor, or DSS advisor. Here are some universal rights you are entitled to at all colleges:

Right to protection from discrimination*

Right to effective teaching and learning

Right to protection from written or verbal abuse

Right to accomodations in classroom and residence halls

Right to privacy of, and right to approve release of student records

*on the basis of gender, race, age, sex, and/or ability status in recruitment, admissions, instruction, discipline, or dimissal

YOU CAN DO IT, TOO!

Self-advocates share their college experiences and advice

Michael John Carley is the founder of Global and Regional Asperger Syndrome Partnership (GRASP), a school consultant, and the author of *Unemployed on the Autism Spectrum* (2016), *Asperger's From the Inside-Out* (2008), and the upcoming *The Book of Happy, Positive, and Confident Sex for Adults on the Autism Spectrum…and Beyond!* He also writes a column, Autism Without Fear, for *The Huffington Post*. He received his B.A. from Hampshire College and his M.F.A. from Columbia University.

Carley has won numerous awards and has appeared in the media widely, most notably in the New York Times, Washington Post, ABCNews, and BBC News.

In 2000, he and one of his two sons were diagnosed with Asperger Syndrome. Re-evaluated in 2014, Carley was diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder. He lives with his wife, Kathryn Herzog, and two sons in Green Bay, Wisconsin. More information about Carley: www.michaeljohncarley.com

Michael John Carley, founder of GRASP

What was your favorite class in college?

Theatre - Advanced Directing. Even though it was a tough course, we were left to our own devices to come up with projects rather than take on "assignments."

What did you like most about going to college?

Feeling appreciated, and having the clean slate to invent yourself.

What was a major challenge you faced in college, and how did you overcome it?

When little things went wrong, I would often overreact. I was lucky in that I was often given a free pass for overreacting, as people misinterpreted why I was overreacting.

It's worth mentioning that I went to college and grad school in the 80's—I was not diagnosed, and my symptoms weren't on anyone's radar—so my challenges at emotional regulation were misconstrued as "artistic integrity." Quite funny.

If you could go back in time and do it all over again, what would you do differently?

I wouldn't change a thing. You have to embrace your road. Only regret mistakes you repeat.

When did you start getting involved in the autism community and why?

In late 2000, both my (then) 4-year-old son and I were diagnosed with Asperger's within a week of one another (I was later diagnosed with ASD under the DSM-5 criteria in 2014). In 2003, I founded the largest membership organization in the world for individuals on the spectrum (GRASP), before writing books and consulting.

Do you have any advice for college students on the spectrum interested in learning how to better advocate for themselves?

1. Pick the right school for you. Prestige is nonsense these days, and that's a good thing, not a bad thing. It's better to be the smarter kid at an average college than the dumber kid at a tougher school. The latter plays negatively on your future confidence.
2. Understand—and numerous studies confirm this—that the aforementioned confidence means more to your success than the school you went to, the training you had, your body type, or the resources at your disposal. In my honest opinion, confidence is 80% of your success potential.

Anything else you'd like to share?

Go get 'em!

Diagnosed at a young age with "atypical development and strong autistic tendencies" and "too sick" for outpatient treatment, Dr. Shore was recommended for institutionalization. With much support from family, teachers, and friends, Shore is now an assistant professor at Adelphi University where his research focuses on matching best practice to the needs of people with autism.

Shore is internationally renowned for presentations, consultations, and writings on lifespan issues pertinent to education, relationships, employment, advocacy, and disclosure.

A current board member of Autism Speaks, president emeritus of the Asperger's Association of New England, and advisory board member of the Autism Society, Shore serves on the Scientific Council of OAR and numerous other autism-related organizations.

Stephen Mark Shore, Ed.D., Clinical Assistant Professor of Special Education at Adelphi University

What was your favorite class in college?

I was fascinated with how music works, so I majored in it. My favorite class was music theory. Understanding the small details and underpinning of compositions was just so unbelievably interesting.

What was a major challenge you faced in college, and how did you overcome it?

The biggest challenge came after realizing that my learning style was not conducive to passing doctoral-level comprehensive exams in music. Through getting a neuropsychological examination and talking with the disabilities office, I realized that they would not provide me with the necessary accommodations to achieve success. Although I knew that at least theoretically the Americans with Disabilities Act was on my side, I felt it would be better to start a new doctoral degree in a different area of the school – this time in special education with a focus on autism.

If you could go back in time and redo college all over again, what would you do differently?

There's not much I would change except for having a better understanding of the implications of my own processing and learning styles for doing doctoral-level work. By the time I had switched from music education to special education at the doctoral level, I had enough figured out to self-accommodate through the program.

What have you been doing since you graduated?

In a way I am *still* in college, but now as a professor of special education focusing mostly on autism. However, I did work as an accountant for a brief period of time. While I found the work itself interesting, the cultural expectations and conformity just made no sense to me. There seemed to be fewer opportunities for the creativity that goes along with an academic environment. I left accounting to teach at local vocational schools and colleges, earned my doctoral degree in special education, and returned to school.

When did you start getting involved in the autism community and why?

My involvement in the autism community began in the late 1990s. It was at this time that I became sufficiently aware of what being on the autism spectrum meant to me. I also wanted to give back to the autism community as I had the good fortune of having parents who accepted me for who I was but at the same time knew a lot of work needed to be done in order for me to lead a fulfilling and productive life.

Anything else you'd like to share?

The potential of those of us on the autism spectrum is unlimited—just like with everyone else. We need to use the widely varying skill set autism gives us to find our strengths to lead fulfilling and productive lives. The future in higher education is very bright for students with autism.

Increasing numbers of colleges and universities have—or are developing—programs for students on the autism spectrum that have the capacity to handle academic work but need additional support for all other aspects of life in higher education, such as executive functioning, social interacting, classroom decorum, etc.

HALEY MOSS
ON SELF-ADVOCACY

To whom did you disclose your ASD, and why?

I mainly disclosed to people whom I came in contact with socially. The first person I disclosed to in college was my Resident Assistant (RA). As a new resident who had never lived away from home or gone to sleepaway camp, I felt that having an older ally was a good thing, and that there would be someone I could have as a "point person."

I also disclosed to friends, or potential friends, because I wanted to be surrounded by cool, understanding people, and also, I didn't want to be judged or shamed if I decided a party or a social situation was not for me.

I was most open during a diversity retreat my freshman year. It was the most accepted I ever felt in college, since everyone was sharing their most intimate social justice-related thoughts and feelings. There was an extreme feeling of closeness amongst people who understood what it means to be different.

Academically, I only disclosed to my disability studies professors. Why? It wasn't to influence my academic performance, but my disability studies classes were relatively small, and I was a teaching assistant for one of them. I figured my autistic first-person perspective could valuably contribute to the classes I took, and it did.

What have been your biggest challenges in college, and how have you overcome them?

Being away from home. Thinking I can do it all on my own. It takes a village. It has always taken a village for people on the spectrum. Like most of my peers, I struggled with homesickness, wanted to be closer to my family, and needed more emotional and social support than expected. To overcome my challenges, I began coming home twice a month, and decided to live at home my senior year. I became more aware of what my limitations were. I realized it's okay to say "no" to things when it's in your best interest – your friends won't care if you don't always come and hang out, they'll be understanding.

Haley Moss

Age: 22

Hometown: Boca Raton, Florida

University/Program: University of Miami, Law, J.D. expected 2018

Go 'Canes: it's all about the U!

University of Florida, B.A. Criminology & Law, B.S. Psychology, 2015

Go Gators!

Autism Characteristics: learning to live independently; executive functioning skills

> “Know yourself, know what makes you feel comfortable, know your strengths and limitations, and know you don’t have to do this by yourself!”

What is the most important new skill or habit you’ve developed in college?

Knowing that I can do it after so many told me I couldn’t—that a big school might be too much, that it’s hard, etc. I’ve learned so much, like how to network and be social, but most importantly, that I am resilient and capable of being on my own and succeeding in a difficult environment. I learned the importance of taking care of myself, so I take time every weekend to do nothing, just to recharge. Whether it’s a nap or just chilling on the couch, it’s necessary for my overall well-being and health. Something I wish I knew before coming to college was how much responsibility comes with being an adult. I am still learning independent living skills, like how to clean my apartment better. I wish I had taken better care of myself when I was 18-19, and spared myself a lot of stress and weight gain. Sometimes I still joke that during finals week I regress to living like my freshman-year self.

Read the full-length interview at the Self-Advocacy Hub:
bit.ly/OARSelfAdvocacy

Haley learned how to relax between studying for exams and hanging out with friends.

OVERCOMING DISCRIMINATION AND ADVERSITY THROUGH SELF-ACCEPTANCE

A self-advocate explains why it's important to accept your autism and stand up for yourself

Be Yourself

It's something we hear every day. Yet, it seems that whenever we do something stereotypically "autistic," we are judged.

What's that weird girl over there doing?

Did anyone teach her manners?

So we ignore the advice to be ourselves.

College can be difficult, since it is our first time living on our own. This makes the discrimination, adversity, and judgment we face even harder to endure.

Honestly, the best thing I do to cope with—and combat—these challenges, as cheesy as it sounds, is to be myself.

Stand Up for Yourself

Being yourself is easier said than done. In college, you may be pressured to conform to fit in with the rest of your peers. However, this can take a huge toll on your physical and mental health. Instead, the best strategy is to stand up for yourself.

Learn to Say "No" to Uncomfortable Social Events

Sometimes, standing up for yourself simply means saying "no" to activities you don't feel comfortable with. For example, you may continually go to noisy, crowded parties even though they can cause sensory overload and you don't like being around people too often. If you do not enjoy these types of parties, give yourself permission to say "no" the next time a party comes around.

At first, some might try to peer pressure you into going and consider you a "loser" or "lame" for staying home, but as long as you are enjoying yourself, that is all that matters. Your wellness is more important than a party. After declining the invitation, suggest fun activities that take place in more controlled settings that you know you are more comfortable with, that way you continue to stay social and let others know you still enjoy spending time with them.

As I mentioned earlier, it is okay to say "no" to things that make you uncomfortable. However, you can't say "no" to taking an important exam or going to lectures. There are other strategies you can employ for required activities like classes and tests.

Seek Accommodations

Another method of standing up for yourself is asking for accommodations if you need them. For example, you may need to take a test in a distraction-reduced environment, or you may need an assigned note-taker so that your attention isn't divided between writing down notes and listening to the lecture. Such accommodations are important to help you stay on track and level the playing field with your classmates.

Figure Out What Works for You

Sometimes formal accommodations cannot be made, especially if you are outside the classroom. For example, my residence hall had quiet hours from 11 pm–7am most days, but sometimes my dorm mates were very loud outside of quiet hours. I came up with my own coping skills for this situation, such as putting headphones in or, if that didn't work, I would go down to the study room in my residence hall or the campus library.

If you are in a situation where you cannot use accommodations, figure out what works for you. Do you need a quiet place to work? Do you need to (healthily) stim? Do you need a break from a situation? Feel free to do anything that works for you as long as it doesn't hurt yourself or other people.

Love Your (Autistic) Self

Once you've found ways to stand up for yourself, you may find that you are much more confident. However, this does not change the fact that everywhere you go, you will still encounter discrimination and adversity. After learning to stand up for myself, I learned to love myself. Loving and embracing yourself for who you are can help you rise above negative people and experiences.

You Are Not Alone

Part of learning to love yourself is realizing you are not alone.

I was at Welcome Week when I met my now best friend from college during an activity. We weren't on the same team, but eventually we ran into each other at a club meeting and decided to go to the dining hall afterwards. It turned out that he was also on the autism spectrum! For once, I was not alone.

Unfortunately, not everyone is going to be lucky enough to run into fellow autistic self-advocates. See if your school has a support group for self-advocates, join your local chapter of the Autistic Self Advocacy Network (ASAN), or find online support groups.

In general, surround yourself with people who understand, love, and accept you for who you are, and you will eventually love and accept yourself. Once I learned to stand up for myself and love myself, discrimination seemed trivial in my everyday life.

So, to the person who asked, "*What's that weird girl over there doing?*"

My response is, "Come sit with me and I'll tell you about stimming. I'm 'weird', but I'm also intelligent, witty, and I love cats."

To quote Temple Grandin, prominent speaker on autism and animal behavior, I'm "different, not less."

KATHLEEN BURKHARDT *is a recipient of the Organization for Autism Research's 2015 Schwallie Family Scholarship and is a rising sophomore at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in Troy, New York. She is currently studying Computer and Systems Engineering in hopes of becoming a software engineer. She continues to advocate for herself and the rest of the autistic community.*

Academics

- Changes in Academic Supports
- Starting the Year Prepared: How to Establish Structure and Routines
- Getting Ahead of the Curve: How to Manage Academic Demands
- Study Smarter, Not Harder! Evidence-Based Strategies for Note-Taking and Studying
- Interview: Jamie Malloy

Online Academics Hub

- bit.ly/OARAcademics

CHANGES IN ACADEMIC SUPPORTS

How do academic responsibilities shift from high school to college?

By Monique N. Colclough, Ph.D.

In high school, you were likely afforded annual IEP accommodations, perhaps without much work on your end. Academic accommodations were a collaborative effort orchestrated by teachers, counselors, perhaps the principal, and your parents. Although you were entitled to participate in discussions about your academic accommodations, the adults that made up the IEP team were likely the principal decision-makers.

Administrative Support

Upon disclosure to the university, academic accommodations are provided to you, including, but not limited to, universal design of the curriculum, physical access to the school itself, and supportive technologies. In high

school, education accommodations are both a student-based and a school-driven process (Eckes & Ochoa, 2005). In college, however, you may notice that they are very different; the process is self-driven, requiring that you become your own best advocate (Troiano, Liefeld, & Trachtenberg, 2010).

For more information on FERPA, see page 11.

In college, different departments and faculty often work with limited communication among each other. In order to receive any accommodations in college, you need to initiate all interactions with disability support staff and professors, and to present current records of diagnosis and support recommendations as needed. Although you can continue to lean on your guardian for support, the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) will not allow your college to release information about your education records, including grades, without your expressed written consent. So, you are responsible for requesting academic accommodations through your college's disability support services.

Classroom Support

You may find that the college faculty have a different approach to teaching than your high school teachers did. Classes may occur in person, online, or as a hybrid, incorporating lectures, PowerPoint, group assignments, and self-guided projects. Professors often share important course documents with you online using Google Sites, Blackboard, or Open Source, which challenges you to balance multiple delivery methods. For example, one professor may require you to submit weekly assignments via email every Monday by midnight, while another only accepts materials in person. It is important to keep track of these communications.

In order to ensure that you understand exactly what your faculty expect in each course, you can ask questions by visiting office hours or sending succinct emails. If you communicate via email, be respectful by waiting patiently for a response if you don't receive one immediately. Some professors outline email and communication policies in the class syllabus.

Other Support

If you find that the resources on your campus are not adequate, the staff in the Student Affairs/ Student Services office can be great a resource. The Office of the Dean of Students, which serves as a support for general student concerns, and the university ombudsperson (a person who serves as a neutral mediator while preserving confidentiality) can also provide support if any issues arise. Lastly, establishing a relationship with an advocate outside of disability support services may help you problem solve academic issues that arise while also increasing your visibility as a person with multiple identities: college student, adult with ASD, person of color, first-generation college student, etc. (Gelbar, Shefcyk, & Reichow, 2015). Potential advocates include academic advisors, orientation leaders, or faculty advisors. Each of these persons can assist you in navigating the campus and identifying resolutions to any concerns you may have.

College is an amazing opportunity to explore your academic interests, prepare for a career, and develop your adult identity. Make the most of it by being prepared and not being afraid to advocate for yourself. As a college student with ASD, you contribute to your institution's "fabric of diversity," so seize the opportunity to become a student scholar!

References

Eckes, S., & Ochoa, T. (2005). Students with disabilities: Transitioning from high school to higher education. *American Secondary Education*, *33*(3), 6-20.

Gelbar, N., Shefcyk, A., & Reichow, B. (2015). A comprehensive survey of current and former college students with autism spectrum disorders. *The Yale Journal of Biology and Medicine*, *88*(1), 45-68.

Troiano, P., Liefeld, J., & Trachtenberg, J. (2010). Academic support and college success for postsecondary students with learning disabilities. *Journal of College Reading and Learning*, *40*(2), 35-44.

Zeedyk, S., Tipton, L., & Blacher, J. (2016). Educational supports for high functioning youth with ASD: The postsecondary pathway to college. *Focus on Autism and Other Development Disabilities*, *31*(1), 37-48.

MONIQUE N. COLCLOUGH, PH.D., *has worked in postsecondary education for over 10 years. While completing her doctoral research at Old Dominion University, she served as an Education Coach for a college student with ASD through the ACE-It-In College program. Dr. Colclough's research explores the social experiences of college students with ASD.*

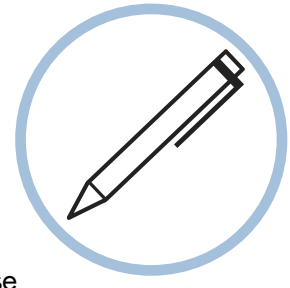
STARTING THE YEAR PREPARED: HOW TO ESTABLISH STRUCTURE AND ROUTINES

Gain control of your life by using these tips to establish routine in an unstructured environment

By Tabitha Ramminger, M.S., BCBA

College life brings a variety of new possibilities. Whether you are living in the dorms, or just taking a class or two, opportunities await to meet new friends, try activity clubs, watch events and concerts, and learn new things. But with these activities come important dates and deadlines. It can easily become overwhelming. To be successful, it is important to start the year prepared with structure and organization in your daily routine and home. Taking the time to create a few simple tools and tricks can help ensure you will have an exciting year.

Step 1 – Gather your tools



Before jumping into any new activity or adventure, it is important to collect your organizational tools and supplies. In college, your most important tool is your planner. A planner is a portable book you can use to record all of your upcoming activities, events, homework deadlines, and exams. Many students use a planner that includes the weekly view, so that there is enough room to write under each day of the week.

Once you have your planner, the next step is to collect information on major events and deadlines.

- One source of information is the **school academic calendar**. This calendar provides holidays and dates when school will not be in session.
- Another key source is **the syllabus for each of your courses**. The syllabus is an outline of the topics that you will learn in the course, and typically includes deadlines for large assignments and exams.

- Lastly, compile a list of **personal or family events**. These include birthdays, anniversaries, or other important dates that you should remember.

Step 2 – Prepare your planner

- **Use colored pens:** The planner will include course deadlines, school holidays, personal events (such as birthdays or doctor appointments), and school events. Assign a specific color to each of these categories. Use bright colors for school deadlines as these need to be easily identified and read.
- **Fill out the planner:** Work through the course syllabi, school calendar, and personal list of dates to fill out your planner. On the actual day in the planner, write out what the event is and the time that it is occurring. Write clearly and leave enough room for other events if needed. For example:
  - TEST – Algebra, 2pm
  - Grandma's Birthday – Call to wish her happy birthday
  - Country Concert – Student Union Center, 5pm
  - Thanksgiving – No Classes
- **Set benchmarks:** It is important to break down larger exams and projects into small, manageable steps. For a project, write reminders into your planner to work on the project every two weeks and on the same day. For large exams such as finals, schedule in weekly studying and training sessions to allow enough time to learn all of the necessary material and prevent last-minute studying.

Step 3 – Establish daily routines

Before classes begin, it is important to establish a consistent, daily schedule to ensure that you can complete your required tasks and activities. A visual schedule is a critical piece of a structured environment, and will help you remember what activities will occur in sequence each day. To create this schedule, map out a weekly overview and identify specific times, preferably the same each day, and deadlines to complete the following:

- **Morning Routine** and getting ready for the day. Set a deadline for getting ready by a certain time of the morning.
- **Day Routine**, including meals (breakfast, lunch, dinner, and emergency snacks), checking your mail, and class times.
- **Evening Routine**, which should include packing up your backpack for the next day in the event you oversleep. Set a deadline for when to go to sleep so that you get enough rest.

Make sure to overestimate how long an activity will take in case something unexpected happens.

Step 4 – Plan your weekly schedule

In addition to these daily tasks, there are several weekly tasks that need to be completed. With the gaps in your schedule, it is important to plan for time to study and relax. Use your studying as a motivator to access breaks and rewards for yourself. For example, you can make it a priority to study or complete homework for an hour before earning a 15-minute break to play video games.

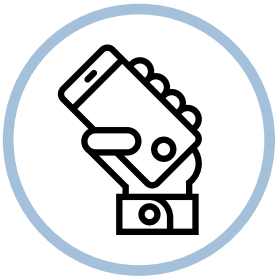
Also allow times in the week for the following:

- **Homework & Studying:** Plan at least three hours every weekday, and at least eight hours on the weekend for this task. The schedule should be adjusted regularly according to your class schedule and needs.
- **Laundry:** Allow approximately 2-4 hours on the weekends, depending on how many loads and machines you have.
- **Chores:** Schedule at least two hours on the weekend to complete routine chores such as sweeping, putting away belongings, and cleaning up messy areas.

When you have finished your schedule, it is important to make multiple copies. Keep a copy in your planner, posted in a general area in your room, and also by your computer. This way, you can easily access your schedule, which increases your success in following it. If you find that it is difficult to stick to your schedule, adjust it as needed. On the following page is an example of a weekly schedule.

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday
7am – Wake Up	7am – Wake Up	7am – Wake Up
7:30am – Breakfast	7:30am – Breakfast	7:30am – Breakfast
12pm – Lunch	8-9am – Algebra	9-10am – Psychology
1pm – Laundry	12pm – Lunch	12pm – Lunch
3pm – Study	1pm – Chemistry	1pm – Chemistry
6pm – Dinner	2pm – Break	2pm – Break
	3pm – Study	3pm – Study
	6pm – Dinner	6pm – Dinner

Let Electronics Help You



Paper planners are ideal for scheduling multi-step tasks and daily routines like those listed previously. However, electronics can be useful to remind you about both routine tasks and major one-time events. If you require medication, injections, or have other daily health needs, for example, use the alarm clock function on your phone or watch to set a daily reminder to finish this task. This reminder is helpful as it does not rely on you to look at your planner or keep a track of the time in order to remember the task. If your medication must be taken at a time that falls during a class, put the alarm on vibrate or talk to your doctor about moving the time when you take your medication.

Create a Daily Visual Schedule

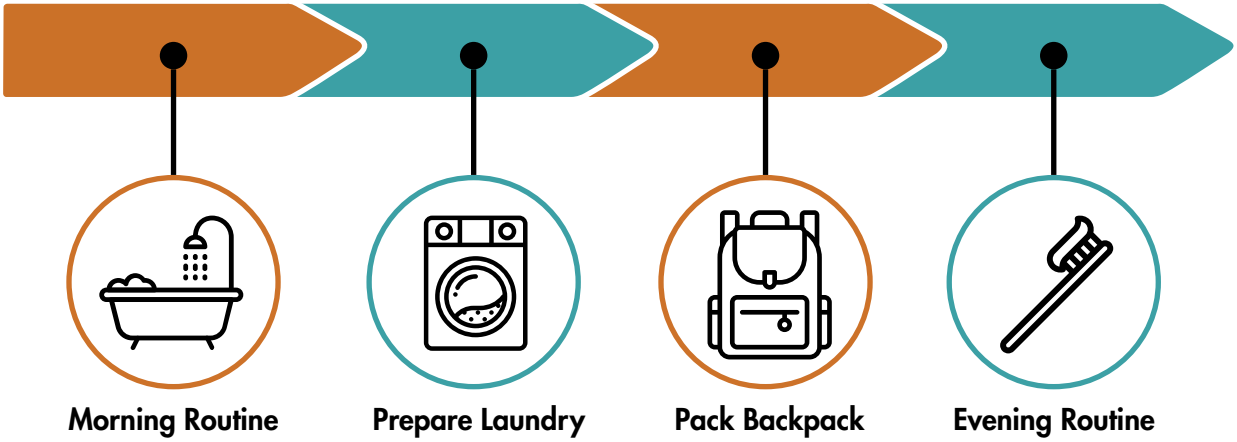
One last trick to prepare you for college is to set up multiple visual schedules in your room for daily use. Regular routines such as packing your backpack for class or getting dressed in the morning consist of a long list of small steps, and it is easy to overlook one or two. However, when a step is forgotten, it can impact your entire day. As mentioned previously, visual schedules create structure to your daily routines by creating visual reminders of all of the steps needed to finish the entire routine. These schedules are depicted vertically and can be written using pictures or text. It is important to place these visuals in a location that can be easily seen, such as by the front door, to easily remind you to complete the task.

Schedules can be created for any kind of task, and are recommended for the following tasks for at least the first 2-3 months of college:

- **Morning Routine:** taking a shower, applying deodorant, brushing teeth, getting dressed, etc.
- **Preparing Laundry:** sorting clothing into color piles, collecting quarters and laundry detergent, etc
- **Packing Backpack:** placing class assignments, textbooks, notebooks, planner, pen, pencil, and calculator in the backpack.
- **Evening Routine:** dressing into pajamas, brushing teeth, etc.

College life can be difficult for anyone because it is easy to get caught in the thrill of the college experience and lose track of necessary daily tasks and routines.

The use of simple visual schedules like these have been empirically shown to provide consistency and stability that will improve your success with your college experience (Hume, 2003).



References

Hume, K. (2009). *Steps for implementation: Visual schedules*. Chapel Hill, NC: The National Professional Development Center on Autism Spectrum Disorders, Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute, University of North Carolina.

Visual Tools Resource Library. Autism Speaks. Retrieved from https://www.autismspeaks.org/family-services/resource-library/visual-tools

TABITHA RAMMINGER, MS, BCBA, *is the Clinical Policy Section Chief for Wisconsin Medicaid and co-founder of Bright Feats Brevard, a free special needs resource guide for families in Brevard County, Florida. She is a Licensed Behavior Analyst and specializes in the elimination of challenging behavior that impact functional living in children and adults with ASD.*

GETTING AHEAD OF THE CURVE: HOW TO MANAGE ACADEMIC DEMANDS

Use these tips to strategically manage your academic responsibilities

By Ann Sam, Ph.D.

College can be very exciting and challenging at the same time. While your college might require you to take some core classes, you also have the opportunity to take classes that interest you for your major. So, you will be responsible for planning ahead and managing your various assignments on top of all the other exciting things about college life (participating in clubs, making new friends, and more).

Juggling coursework, assignments, papers, projects, and exams can be difficult. It can be hard to know where to start, but specific strategies can help you balance these demands. When you break assignments into smaller chunks and plan ahead, the assignments, projects, papers, and exams are more manageable. Follow the steps outlined below to help you begin.

Know the Basic Expectations for Each Course

At the beginning of each semester, your professors will give you a syllabus for the course. The syllabus is a document that provides important information about the attendance policy, tests, papers, due dates, office hours for the professor, and more. It is very important to review the syllabus closely.

Did you know?
Some courses have Teaching Assistants (TAs) that can be as valuable a resource as the professors. TAs are typically graduate students or advanced undergraduate students that have demonstrated mastery of the course content and are there to help both the professor and the students with course or lab work. Reach out to them first if they're available.

- Make a list of questions. You can either email your professor, go to your professor's office hours, or ask the professor during class time if appropriate.
- Highlight assignments to make sure you understand what projects are required for the course.
- Note key dates and mark them in your planner.

Break Down Major Assignments Into Smaller Chunks/Steps

While you need to make sure you complete smaller assignments such as readings or practice problems, you will need to think carefully about how to break down and prepare for larger assignments.

- **Re-Read the Syllabus:** When thinking about breaking down a larger assignment, re-read the syllabus. Think carefully about the requirements for each assignment and make a checklist.
  - **For an exam,** factors you need to consider when creating your study plan might include specific chapters/topics the exam will address, key terms, and question types (multiple choice, short answer, essay).
  - **For a paper,** possible requirements might include the length of the paper, topic covered, research required, points to address, writing a bibliography/crediting sources, and a schedule for completing the paper. Later, you can ask a friend or tutor to read the assignment instructions before double-checking your outline or first draft essay to help make sure you cover everything you need.

- **Schedule Due Dates for Smaller Steps/Chunks:** Once you have your checklist and a better idea of the smaller chunks of the assignment, schedule due dates for yourself to accomplish the smaller steps of the assignment.

  - **For an exam,** smaller chunks might include dates with times to review key terms and class notes.
  - **For a paper,** include dates for the following steps:
    1. Research
    2. Outline
    3. First draft
    4. Draft reviews (one or two times, preferably with someone else sharing their feedback)
    5. Final draft
  - By breaking down larger assignments into smaller chunks, assignments will be more manageable.

Prepare to Complete Assignments

Don't forget about final preparations. Reviewing and adding the finishing touches often take longer than you think. Plan extra time into your schedule for this so you aren't caught short in the days before an assignment is due.

- **For a paper,** this might include polishing your draft. This means making sure you have enough time to edit and revise it in detail. Don't wait until the last minute to do this.
- **For an exam,** you might re-read your notes or quiz yourself with flash cards.
  - Try to get a good night's rest before the exam. You will be better able to answer questions when feeling well rested.

Complete Major Assignments

- **Papers and Projects:** If the assignment is a paper or project, make sure you bring everything required to turn in with you to class.
- **In-Class Exams**: If the assignment is an in-class exam, follow these steps to make sure that you answer the questions accurately:
  - Read the question.
  - Re-read the question and highlight key terms and instructional words (such as *describe, explain*, or *define*).
  - Make sure you address all parts of the questions.
  - Use any time remaining to re-read the questions and your answers before turning in the assignment.

Reward Yourself for Your Accomplishments

Don't forget to reward yourself for working hard throughout the semester. This includes rewarding yourself as you complete smaller steps of a larger project, or when you do well on exams.

- Some people reward themselves by taking time to relax and watch a movie, playing an hour of a video game, or eating out. Choose anything that brings you joy.
- Reward yourself in a way that is reasonably proportional to your level of accomplishment. For example, if you take 30 minutes to complete a paper outline, you should not reward yourself by playing a game all night, because this would make you too tired to concentrate on work the next day. Instead, give yourself a 5-minute break before tackling the next step of the assignment.

Assignments and coursework can be very difficult. **Remember, you are an advocate for yourself.** Being an advocate also means asking others for help or clarification on an assignment when needed, so ask questions or seek help when things are unclear. There are lots of different people whom you can ask for help.

- ✔ **Contact professors.** Many professors are available to answer questions. During office hours, professors are available for students to come and ask questions. If the office hours are at a time you cannot make or you do not feel comfortable going to office hours, email the professor your questions, and be specific.
- ✔ **Seek out campus resources.** Your school's Office of Disability Services is a great place to start seeking out accommodations. But remember that your college will also have resources that are available to all students, even students who do not disclose a diagnosis. These resources, which include writing centers, math tutors, and science tutors, are often free. Check out what resources are available for you.
- ✔ **Join a study group.** Study groups can be very helpful and a great way to meet people in your class. Study groups might meet to review for exams, compare class notes, check understanding of class materials, and work on projects together. Study groups are formed in different ways. Sometimes, a professor might help organize groups for specific projects, while at other times, students may talk to one another in class to form an informal study group. You can ask your classmates if they are interested in forming a group.
- ✔ **Ask advice from parents, siblings, or friends.** In college, you will need to advocate for your needs and supports since you are more on your own than you were in high school. However, you can still ask parents, siblings, and friends for support and advice. Sometimes, when you talk about a problem you are having with an assignment or course with someone else, they can help you come up with new strategies or resources.

Balancing the academic demands of college can be difficult, but by breaking down assignments into manageable steps and planning carefully, these demands will be easier to complete. Remember to review the syllabus, use a calendar to plan ahead, reward yourself for successes, and ask for help when you need it.

ANN SAM, PH.D., *is an Investigator at Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute at UNC-Chapel Hill. She has worked on projects to develop transition programs for high school students with ASD transitioning to postsecondary education. Dr. Sam's current work includes the development of the Autism Focused Intervention Resources and Modules (AFIRM) for teachers of students with ASD.*

STUDY SMARTER, NOT HARDER!

Which of these evidence-based note-taking and study strategies work best for you?

Whether you're headed into your freshman year of high school or your senior year of college, studying is a part of your life—probably a part of your life you'd rather not think about, but a part of it nonetheless. Whether it's the next quiz, a big exam, paper, or project, as a student you have a lot that you need to manage. Sometimes, it's not so easy. You may think you're cursed to cram for your exams during late nights fueled by coffee or energy drinks. But there are techniques you can learn to avoid developing poor study habits and experiencing testing fatigue!

Take a moment to reflect on how you study. Do you read the textbook twice and review your notes from class? Do you rewrite your notes and read them over a few times? Do you strictly focus on your course readings? If you answered yes to these questions, you might be losing time and energy focusing on study methods that are not very effective. Change your study style, and you might see some phenomenal results!

Retrieval Practice (The "Testing" Effect)

Retrieval Practice is the act of testing yourself on information you have learned, or "retrieving" information. This strategy has been shown to be a very effective study technique. You can perform retrieval practice by using flashcards, online quizzes, and practice tests. These are all very effective for studying and can help you improve exam performance.

Karpicke, J., & Blunt, J. (2011). Retrieval practice produces more learning than elaborative studying with concept mapping. *Science, 6018*(331), 772-775.

Roediger, H. & Karpicke, J. (2006). Test-enhanced learning: Taking memory tests improves long-term retention. *Psychological Science, 17*(3), 249-255.

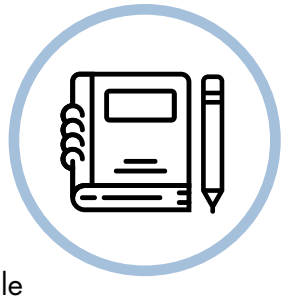
Spacing

Imagine it's midnight, and your exam is in eight hours. Your notes are scattered all over the table, and you've almost spilled coffee on your textbook three times. You'll undoubtedly be up all night cramming for this exam.

Most of us are familiar with this image. And while cramming may yield good results on an exam immediately afterwards, studies have revealed that studying consistently yields better long-term results than cramming. Admittedly, if you're looking to get an exam out of the way and don't need to retain information, cramming is fine. But if you need to learn the information and use it later (maybe on a cumulative final exam), spacing out your studying, and studying consistently is the direction you want to go.

Lorge I. (1930). *Influence of regularly interpolated time intervals upon subsequent learning*. (Teachers College Contributions to Education, No. 438). New York, NY: Columbia University, Teachers College.

Handwritten Notes



As it turns out, the pen is actually mightier than the keyboard! Researchers have found that students who write out their notes on paper, as opposed to typing them on a laptop, actually learn more. While students who use laptops tend to take significantly more notes, those who write their notes are more successful at understanding and applying the information from class on tests. Researchers believe this is because students who write out their notes cannot write down everything their professor says, so they have to listen, digest, and summarize the lecture material in order to write them by hand. This leads to better comprehension of the class material. So next time you're sitting down in class, think of reaching for a notebook instead of your computer!

If, on the other hand, you have trouble taking lecture notes, whether it's because a class is too fast-paced or you find it challenging to pull out the main ideas, ask your professor if you can audio record the lecture.

"During the first week of college, I met with the school's equity and assets department, which supports students with disabilities," says Shane Warren, a student at SUNY Delhi. "They helped me navigate technology tools such as the Smartpen." Smartpens are writing devices with digital audio recorders. They can be used to record and play back audio that is synced with hand-written notes recorded on special notebook paper. "The smartpen has been the best tool to help me in the classroom and when I'm writing and studying."

Mueller, P. A., & Oppenheimer, D. M. (2014). The pen is mightier than the sword: Advantages of longhand over laptop note taking. *Psychological Science, 25*, 1159-1168.

SQ3R Approach

"SQ3R" is an acronym for the five steps in this note-taking strategy. Make a SQ3R table before reading a chapter in your textbook, and use the chart below to guide you through the five stages. SQ3R is time-consuming, but research has found it to be an incredibly effective study tool. Plan to use SQ3R on a weekend or an afternoon when you have a few hours to devote to your reading.

Robinson, F. P. (1970). Effective study. New York, NY: Harper & Row.

	Stage	Goals
S	**Survey (or Skim)**	• Don't *actually* read yet • Develop a sense of how long the reading is—can you do it in one sitting? • Figure out how the reading is organized, identify headings, subheadings, other important features • Read summary, scan piece
Q	**Question**	Think of relevant questions based on titles or summaries surveyed, make sure each section of the reading has some designated questions. Some general questions include: • What is the main point of this reading? • What is each section about? • What does this reading have to do with class?
R1	**Read**	Read through each section of assignment • Answer questions developed in "Q" stage • Integrate new information with previous information
R2	**Recite**	Try to recall the key ideas of each section • Can be done orally, or written down • If forgotten, repeat R1
R3	**Review**	• Remember the main ideas from each reading section • Combine the main ideas to form a larger, key concept at the end of the reading

Remember! These study and note-taking strategies work better for some than they do for others. Your method of choice may also vary depending on the subject matter. Try a couple of these examples to start, and ask your classmates how they like to take their notes and study for tests. With a bit of patience, you can discover one or two approaches that make learning more enjoyable and effective!

JAMIE MALLOY
ON ACADEMICS

How do you cope with academic stress?

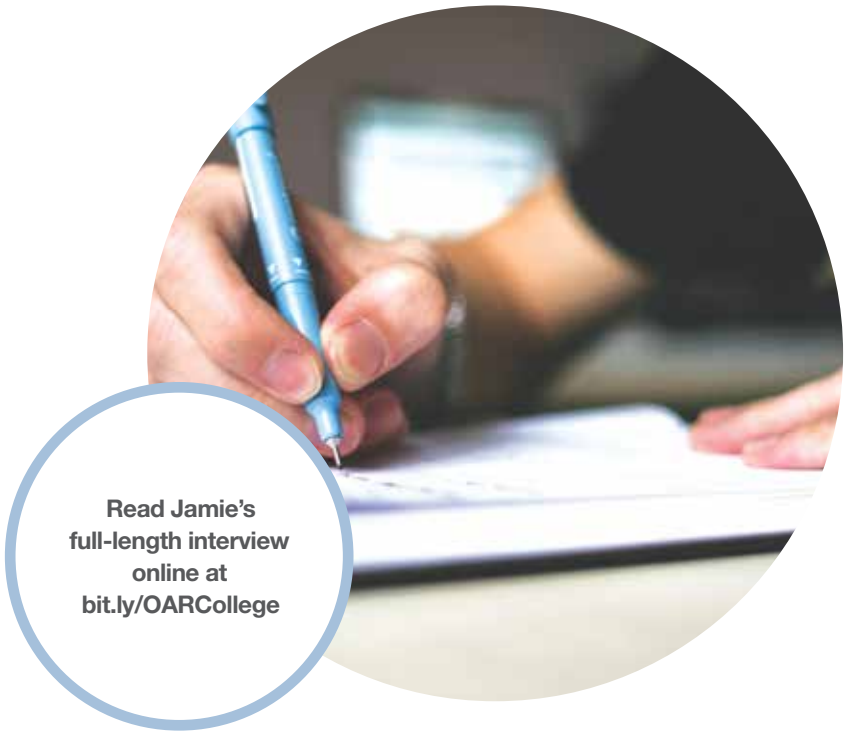
I cope with academic stress by seeing a counselor, periodically stepping outside of class for a breather, and stepping away from homework to take short breaks and regroup. I also work out regularly during the week, whether it is with my friends at my old high school or with my dad at Gold's Gym. Either way, I really enjoy working out, and feel this is the best way for me to relieve academic stress.

How do you keep track of assignments and classes in college?

I stay organized by using a homework track sheet, which allows me to stay ahead of my deadlines. I usually complete my homework ahead of schedule when I use it.

How do you maintain a comfortable routine in your daily college life?

I maintain a comfortable routine in college by completing my homework first thing every day before doing anything else. To end the week, I complete all of my homework on Friday, which allows me to have the entire weekend to myself.



Read Jamie's full-length interview online at bit.ly/OARCollege

Jamie Thomas Malloy

Age: 20

Hometown: Webster, New York

University/Program: Junior studying Communications at Monroe Community College; recipient of the Organization for Autism Research's 2015 Schwallie Familiy Scholarship

Autism Characteristics: stimming, verbal repetition

> "Do not hesitate to ask someone on campus for help! Please self-advocate and use the campus resources available."

Housing and Roommates

- The College Lifestyle
- Quiz: Are You Ready to Live on Campus?
- Finding a Home at College
- Quiz: Should You Have a Roommate?
- The Horrible Freshman Year Roommate
- The Roommate Agreement

Relationships & Social Activities

- The Hidden Curriculum in College
- Resolving Conflict With Others
- Relationships and Sex on the Brain
- Sexual Health and Safety Tips
- You Are Not Alone: A Survivor's Truth
- How to Stay Safe on Campus
- Participating in Campus Clubs
- Interview: Capri Kowsky

Online Academics Hub

- bit.ly/OARCampusLife

THE COLLEGE LIFESTYLE

The lifestyle in college is very different from the one you maintained in high school. When you live on campus, there isn't a supervisor, guardian, or boss who tells you what you should and should not do and when. For example, you'll need to decide whether you want go to that party on Saturday night or cram for an exam instead. For the most part, college students are treated like adults, and are expected to make daily decisions for themselves.

This newfound freedom presents a challenge for many students. This is true whether students have autism or not, particularly during the first year of college. The reason is that it may be difficult to focus on academic work as they learn to manage their time and juggle responsibilities.

If you feel overwhelmed by the lack of structure in your daily life in college, know that **it's okay—there is a learning curve that comes with growing up**. It is not okay, however, if you struggle and do nothing to address it. It's important to build a support network

of people (including peers, guardians, academic advisors, mentors, and tutors) with whom you can talk about the struggles and joys of campus life.

It is not uncommon for students with ASD to have nontraditional college trajectories. For example, some students may choose to attend school part-time, or even take one or two gap years. Others attend a two-year community college before moving on to a four-year institution. Others may live at home, graduate from undergraduate school, then go on to earn a master's degree. With self-reflection and advice from those who are close to you and supportive of your goals, decide what works best for you in the college environment.

ARE YOU READY TO LIVE ON CAMPUS?

Take this quiz to find out!

If you are attending a school near where you live, you may have to choose whether you want to head off on your own and live in a dorm or apartment, or stay at home and commute to school. You might feel like living on campus is necessary for you to have the "college experience." It's true that living on campus can be beneficial for multiple reasons, including being closer to classes, campus events, and your fellow students. However, with these on-campus opportunities come varied challenges in terms of self-management, independent living, and social functioning. While living at home could mean you meet fewer people and have a longer commute to school, it could be more affordable and allow your family to support you during your college transition.

The following is a list of questions you should consider before deciding whether to stay home or move on campus. Read each question and **select the answer that best fits your typical habits**. If this is difficult, think of your lifestyle **in the past two weeks** and use that to answer the questions. Keep track of your answers to calculate your score at the end of the quiz.

CAMPUS LIFE QUIZ

Do you shower, wash yourself, brush your teeth, and use deodorant on a daily basis?

Yes Sometimes No

Do you consistently clean up after yourself, with regard to your trash, your food waste and leftovers, and the dishes you use?

Yes Sometimes No

Do you consistently clean up after yourself on the same day?

Yes Sometimes No

Do you clean your room and keep your space tidy?

Yes Sometimes No

Do you help with household chores, such as cleaning the bathroom, doing the dishes, and taking out the trash?

Yes Sometimes No

Can you get out of bed in the morning without being prompted by a parent or guardian?

Yes Sometimes No

Do you handle your morning routine and get to school on your own, without help or reminders from a parent or guardian?

Yes Sometimes No

Do you manage your schedule with minimal help from others?

Yes Sometimes No

Do you complete or meet homework and assignment deadlines, and study for exams on time, without help or reminders from a parent or guardian?

Yes Sometimes No

Continued on next page.

CAMPUS LIFE QUIZ *CONTINUED*

Can you shop for groceries on your own?

Yes Sometimes No

Can you prepare your own food and meals, and maintain a comfortable eating schedule on your own?

Yes Sometimes No

Do you manage your own medications, and remember to take them at the prescribed times?

Yes Sometimes No

Do you manage your own bank account, or have access to your own money?

Yes Sometimes No

SCORING

Now, add up your answers using the scoring system below:

Yes = **2**

Sometimes = **1**

No = **0**

Once you have finished scoring the quiz, read the results below.

RESULTS

If you scored **8 or less**, now may not be the time for you to leave home. Your parents/guardians remain a key support in your daily activities. College is a new and challenging experience, and it might be beneficial for you to stay home so you can readily draw support from your family during this transition.

If you scored between **9 and 17**, moving away from home could be a good experience for you, but will come with some challenges. You have developed some independent skills on one hand, but still rely on your parents/guardians to help you with others. College could provide you with incentive to further develop your independence, but it will be a difficult transition. If you choose to leave home, you should prepare by working to improve your independent living skills.

If you scored **18 or more**, you should be ready to live on campus. You have developed the necessary independent living skills that will benefit you in college. Living on your own might still be challenging, as it is for many young college students, but if you continue to use and perfect your independent living skills you will thrive on campus.

Regardless of your score, the choice to live on campus or stay at home is yours. Living on campus is an exciting opportunity, but comes with its unique set of challenges. Stepping outside of your comfort zone and overcoming these challenges is an important part of growing up. However, if living on campus is not conducive to your academic success or overall happiness, or you aren't comfortable living on campus at this time in your life, then there are benefits to living at home and commuting.

Before deciding where to live, have an honest discussion with your family to evaluate your financial, academic, and independent living needs, evaluate your options, and determine what matters most to you. No decision is permanent; you can re-evaluate your circumstances each semester.

FINDING A HOME AT COLLEGE

By Anonymous College Student

Here are some lessons learned from one self-advocate's experience with on-campus housing and roommates

I spent a recent Sunday helping a close friend move out of a failed off-campus housing situation. Maybe it had been doomed to fail from the beginning: my friend had planned to live with two friends, but that fell apart suddenly when one friend's parents insisted she live at home instead. Now pressed to find another roommate, my friend rented a studio apartment with an acquaintance she thought at the time was suitable because they were both "tidy."

Things unraveled quickly. The roommate kept late hours, smoked marijuana, and invited overnight guests into the tiny studio apartment without asking her. By the end of the second semester, she spent a majority of her nights away from the apartment just to escape her roommate.

This friend was a "neurotypical" student. Can you imagine how hard roommate selection can be for people on the spectrum? As a rising senior, I'd like to share some tips on housing and roommate selection for those of us on the spectrum.

Housing Selection

One of the first things you should do when you select a school is meet with the disability services or equivalent department at your school. They often have a lot of experience and advice about which housing option is best for students on the spectrum.

For me, having a single room (a dorm unit for one occupant) was a must. A private room provides an escape from being overwhelmed by the constant contact with other college students, a sort of safe haven that you can retreat to if necessary. The privacy is great, plus the convenience of not having to adapt to a roommate and being able to have your own sleeping schedule is a major bonus for me.

Many schools have a policy that first-year students cannot have singles because they don't want students to be isolated going into the new college environment. I worried about isolation too, but it turned out that even with a single, there were plenty of people I could hang out with on my floor and in the other dorms.

In my freshman year, the singles were grouped together on one floor. It wasn't until well into the year that I realized that meant the other people in the singles also sought them out for a variety of sexual health, mental health, and physical health reasons. I really enjoyed meeting a very diverse group of people, and it enriched my freshman experience and world outlook.

During my second year I lived in my own room in a seven-person suite with a bunch of the friends I'd made freshman year. It was a great experience to have the solitude of a single when I needed it, but also the companionship of my friends right outside my door. That being said, suites vary in size, and the one I was in had only one bathroom, which led to some issues, so I'm looking forward to living in a four-person suite next year.

Roommate Selection

With regard to choosing roommates, there are several important things to look out for.

Cleanliness: You should choose a roommate who has similar ideas about cleanliness. I had several arguments with my suitemates this past year about keeping the suite clean, and I wish we had discussed our preferences in advance. This isn't just a college-age issue either: It's an extremely common issue among roommates everywhere. You can't control what your roommates do, so it is important to find roommates who have similar standards of cleanliness.

Sleep Habits: Another issue to look out for when choosing roommates is sleeping patterns. It's a major problem, for example, when you have an important exam the next morning and your roommate is loudly playing video games next to you when you are trying to get a good night's sleep, so plan accordingly. Similarly, if you know your roommate has an early class or exam, try to keep your volume down at late hours. Most students have variable sleep patterns, but an easy question to ask roommates is whether they are morning or night people, or if they have morning classes.

Living with Close Friends: One important lesson I learned is that living with friends can challenge friendships. In my sophomore year, I lived with one of my best friends from freshman year. It didn't turn out as well as I had hoped. We were really close that first year, and would hang out almost every day. But when we moved into the seven-person suite, our differences came to light in a way they never had before. We had several loud, angry arguments about cleanliness. Interesting, he also has Asperger Syndrome. His symptoms are different from mine; he needs to be left alone sometimes, and I like being social. This definitely played a role in our relationship.

Near the end of the year, we worked out a lot of our differences by having long talks about what made each of us uncomfortable and how to mitigate these issues, mostly by giving each other space. While our friendship took a hit, it has definitely improved since we started having these conversations. With that in mind, it is important to remember that if you are having problems with your roommates, have conversations with them on how to resolve these problems in a peaceful manner, as soon as possible, before things get worse. Initiating a tough conversation is far better than letting negative emotions stew, waiting to come out in ugly arguments.

Roommates can help you get through the stress of going away to college. If you plan ahead, they won't be the source of that stress. Try to choose a housing configuration that fits your needs as someone on the spectrum, whether that is a single room, a double room, or a room in a suite. Make sure you ask your potential roommates important questions about their lifestyles before you commit to living together. The more work you do ahead of time, the less likely you will find yourself in a bad housing situation.

BIO: *The author of this article is a senior at an engineering school in the Northeast, and a grateful recipient of an OAR Schwallie Family Scholarship.*

SHOULD YOU HAVE A ROOMMATE?

Roommates! Should you live with or without them? There are many benefits to sharing your space with another person in college. Your roommate might also be new to the school, and could become your first friend on campus. Since roommates are often pre-selected for freshmen and transfer students, it lifts the pressure of identifying a roommate by yourself. You may be comforted by the company, and have a lot in common. If you are an upper-level student, you may be considering moving in with some of your best friends, or a friend you're hoping to get to know better. What better way to bond than to watch TV together in your shared living space and discuss the day's events?

On the other hand, living with a roommate has its own challenges as well. Sharing a room means you'll be giving up a lot of privacy, and having to accept another person's habits, personality, and schedule. If you don't become friends, it can be hard to live together. Or worse, if you and your roommate have trouble communicating with one another or find yourselves having to make a lot of compromises to accommodate each other's conflicting lifestyles, it could potentially jeopardize your relationship and overall happiness.

So, you might be wondering, "Should I have a roommate?" The following questionnaire is intended to gauge how well you would respond to some typical roommate situations, and whether some of your qualities might make living with a roommate difficult. Read each question and select the answer that best fits you. Keep track of your answers to determine your score at the end of the quiz.

ROOMMATE QUIZ

How would you describe your sleep schedule?

a) Variable, my napping and sleeping hours change daily.

b) Predictable, but sometimes I have trouble sleeping, or have to compensate for exams I'm studying for and assignments I'm finishing.

c) Consistent, I usually go to sleep and wake up at the same times on weekdays.

What do you need to fall asleep?

a) I need complete darkness and silence; otherwise I can't sleep.

b) I need a room that is mostly dark and quiet, but I would be fine if my roommate needs to use a laptop and small lamp to study late.

c) I can fall asleep anywhere, anytime!

How much time do you think you'll be spending in your dorm room?

a) Almost all of it. I'll leave for classes and meals, but my room is my home base and I prefer to be there to "recharge."

b) I'll spend a good amount of time there, but I need variability. I will probably opt to study at the library or in a lounge, and I hope to spend some time out with friends or at club meetings.

c) My dorm room is just a place for me to sleep! I hope to spend most of my time out and about.

Continued on next page.

ROOMMATE QUIZ *CONTINUED*

You come home to find your dorm room filled with some of your roommates' friends; they're playing music, chatting, and having a good time. After a typical day, how would you normally react?

a) I would ask them to hang out somewhere else. Unexpected guests are not allowed.

b) I would leave for a quieter place like the library or student lounge. I'll talk to my roommates about their unexpected guests later.

c) I would introduce myself to my roommates' friends and join them.

Your roommates have a habit of leaving their dirty dishes by the sink, and it takes them a while to clean them. This bothers you a lot. What do you do?

a) I dread talking to them and seeing them. I clean their dishes when they aren't around, or demand they clean their dishes immediately.

b) I leave notes by the sink asking them to please clean their dishes.

c) I ask them politely to clean up after themselves more frequently.

Your roommates confront you one evening about how you never throw your spoiled food away. It's true, but when food spoils you hate throwing it out because the odors are overwhelming to you. How do you react to this confrontation?

a) I feel attacked, and must immediately retreat to calm down and avoid a meltdown. My roommate will never understand what I go through.

b) I don't respond at first, because this is a lot to process. It feels hurtful in the moment, but after thinking about it, I appreciate their feedback and agree to try and keep better track of my foods and throw them away before they expire.

c) I'm surprised because I didn't realize they felt this way. I thank them for talking to me about their concerns, and agree to throw away any food that spoils.

Your roommate is not tidy. He/she used to leave his/her clothes and belongings all over the bedroom, but you two had a talk about keeping the room cleaner. Since then, he/she improved by keeping the mess controlled to his/her side of the room; it doesn't cross over into your space. What do you think about this?

a) This is still unacceptable. I cannot deal with living in a messy room.

b) This is an improvement, but not ideal. It still bothers me sometimes, so I make a mental note to talk to them again.

c) This is fine with me! I can let a little mess on their side go; as long as my side is clean, that's all I need!

How would you feel engaging in self-stimulatory behaviors (e.g., hand flapping, rocking, pacing back and forth) around your roommates?

a) I would feel very self-conscious about it.

b) I would feel somewhat okay with it, and try to minimize it when I can.

c) I would feel fine. I would explain to my roommates why I do it and tell them not to mind it.

SCORING

Now, add up your answers using the scoring system below:

a) = **0**

b) = **1**

c) = **2**

Once you have finished scoring the quiz, read the results below!

RESULTS

If you scored **5 or less**, living with a roommate might not be for you right now. Your needs are better suited for a single dorm, where you can have complete control over your space and a lot of privacy. Many students choose to live in singles. Living in a single doesn't doom you to an antisocial life! If you want to live with other people, consider an apartment or suite where you have your own room; this will grant you more privacy and control over your space while sharing communal areas such as a living room or kitchen.

If you scored between **6 and 10**, living with a roommate could work for you. However, it might still be challenging at times. You should seek out a roommate who has qualities you appreciate, but still be prepared to communicate honestly with your roommate about your concerns and needs. You are capable of living with a roommate, but think about whether you would prefer to live in a single or an apartment with your own room instead.

If you scored **11 or more**, you will probably enjoy living with a roommate! You are adaptable, which is an ideal quality in a roommate. However, make sure you feel comfortable and safe in your room as well, don't let your roommate decide all the rules. Be clear about what you want, and if something is bothering you, do not let your roommate have all the power.

Regardless of what you scored, you will ultimately decide whether to live with a roommate or live on your own. If you want a roommate, find someone who shares some of your lifestyle preferences (such as study habits, sleep schedule), interests, and values. Also find someone you feel comfortable communicating with, as communication is vital in all roommate situations. If you come to decide that living with a roommate is not right for you, look into one-bedroom apartments and suites, or single dorm room options.

THE HORRIBLE FRESHMAN-YEAR ROOMMATE

A self-advocate shares tips and lessons learned from her housing experiences

By Molly M.

The *Horrible Freshman-Year Roommate* would easily be the title of a cautionary tale about many students entering college. As a student with ASD, it seemed to be a much larger concern for my mother and me because of the possibility that errors in communication would make the problem worse. At that point in my life, I didn't pick up on many social cues, had a great deal of anxiety (often resulting in panic attacks, which I treated by finding a solitary space), and also had chronic migraines, which I could only subdue by sleeping in a dark quiet room at any hour of the day. Given this situation, I came to realize that as much as I didn't want a horrible roommate, I would likely be a horrible roommate. So, I showed up as a freshman on campus with a single dorm room.

Make the Most of Your Situation and Adapt to Your Environment

There is much more to dorm life than whether or not you have a roommate. One of the things I learned very quickly was how LOUD college students could be, particularly when drunk. This meant that I had to figure out strategies for dealing with noises made by other people, particularly ones who were not at the "height of their rationality."

"One thing that helped me in college was living in the academic dorms," says Ron Sandison, an author and graduate from Oral Roberts University. Many colleges offer residential learning communities that revolve around academic and career interests. "I have severe sensory issues, so the academic dorms were way more quiet than the typical dorms."

I quickly discovered that my resident assistant (RA) would not be of much help – he was rarely around; I think I saw him maybe three times the entire year. However, one solution I did figure out was that there is always somewhere on campus that is quiet. Sometimes this is the library (especially on weekends), other times it is unused common rooms or the kitchen in my dorm. One thing that is super important for someone with autism to think carefully about, or get help understanding, is what you need to maintain control of yourself—for me that was silence and time alone. For others, that might be the time and space to watch your favorite TV show, play a video game, or engage in some other activity that you are passionate about and enjoy doing.

Make Friends Early

Another element of dorm life that can be somewhat difficult is finding or making friends. Despite living in the same building with possibly hundreds of other people around your age, sometimes it can seem difficult to meet people. This is particularly true after a couple weeks of school because people settle into routines, and aren't in the same "meet new people" mode they are in during the first two weeks. So, try to meet people early. Even if you are not particularly interested in

For tips on meeting people, see "Participating in Campus Clubs"

an event your dorm is hosting — go anyway. It may be boring, but you can try and meet people who live near you, and who may have some of the same interests as you do.

Respect Shared Spaces

One super important part of living in a dorm (or an apartment if you are living off campus) is to be careful about how you and others are using the shared spaces. This includes respecting others' rights to play games or study in common spaces, as well as keeping things tidy. Bathrooms and kitchens are major areas where it is especially important to be considerate of others. Nobody wants to have to cook in a dirty kitchen, or have to share a bathroom with somebody else's stuff all over the counters. In dorms, there may even be regulations about where you can leave your belongings, and the cleaning staff may throw away any personal items left sitting around. In an apartment, it is helpful to establish rules for who will clean what and when, and generally, cleaning up after yourself is a great idea.

I lived in a dorm during the first three years of college, and while I mostly enjoyed the first two years of dorm life, I didn't enjoy my third year very much. That was when I lived in a dorm with girls who enjoyed going out and binge drinking many nights of the week. I quickly grew tired of drunken squeals and giggles at four in the morning. When I cooked many of my meals, I also found it inconvenient having to constantly lug my dishes to and from the kitchen.

Because of these factors and the fact that I would be taking courses and working over the summer, I found that moving to an apartment was a wonderful solution. I looked for apartment roommates that held similar values about cleanliness, noise level, drinking, and having guests over as I did. I managed to find an apartment (where I still had my own room), with people who shared my values, which helped us stay free of major problems. I considered this quite a success, as I ended up living in a six-person apartment!

Communication Is Key

Finally, a huge area of concern for me was how to determine if, when, and how I should tell people I had autism. This is something that will differ for everyone. I am fairly comfortable and open with my diagnosis, but I still didn't want to disclose it to everyone I encountered. There were some situations where I'd wonder if I wasn't communicating with someone clearly, or where I felt someone was getting mad at me, which meant I probably sounded mean or angry and didn't realize it was happening. In these situations, it was often important to tell people, "Hey, I am sorry if I am being mean, I am not trying to, but I have autism and it is hard for me to understand social cues sometimes." People often get mad if they think you are purposefully hurting them or being mean, but if you explain that you don't have bad intentions, most people will try to understand.

> "Hey, I am sorry if I am being mean, I am not trying to, but I have autism and it is hard for me to understand social cues sometimes."

If you choose to live on campus, figure out what you need, what works for you, and how to avoid hurting others. Find someone you can talk to (your parents, a counselor, a friend, etc.) who can help you understand situations in your life when you might not be able to yourself. And remember, college is exciting but overwhelming. Living in a dorm can be hard for anyone; so if you feel it is hard for you, you are not alone.

BIO: *Molly M. is a recent college graduate who is currently working as a Research Assistant in a psychology lab. In her free time, she enjoys reading, playing obscure board games, swimming, and discussing all things Harry Potter-related.*

THE ROOMMATE AGREEMENT

Tips for creating a roommate agreement

By Tabitha Ramminger, MS, BCBA

College is an opportunity to move away from home and live in the dorms or an apartment. This also means that you may have one or more roommates. Your roommate will be one of the first people you meet at college and can turn into a life-long friend. But living with others can present unique challenges. Having a roommate requires learning how to compromise, divide housekeeping chores, tolerate others' behaviors, and share your home, all while learning about this new person in your life. Therefore, it is helpful to discuss and agree to some ground rules with your roommate from the beginning. A simple way to do this is through a roommate agreement.

"Should I tell my roommate I have autism?" See page 9

A roommate agreement is a contract between roommates. Its purpose is to establish rules and expectations about living together and a variety of living situations, and is ideally completed within the first month or so of cohabitation. It may take time to discuss and agree on multiple issues, so set aside sufficient time to discuss specific issues. You and your roommate can customize the agreement to address any major issues or concerns that you feel may arise. Here are some of the basic scenarios that can, and will, happen.

Sharing Items

While living together, you and your roommate will share a lot of things. Some will be yours; some will be your roommates. For example, think of things like a television and couch in the living room, kitchen cooking materials, maybe even plates and cutlery. You may not have the same interest when it comes to television shows or music, so it may be ideal to have a separate television in your bedroom for your own use if possible. If not, set up a schedule for these shared items. Plan out specific times that relate to your favorite shows and make sure the schedule is evenly divided and fair. If there are items you would rather not share, make sure to let your roommate know.

Temperatures and Lighting

People have varying sensory and comfort needs, so talk about how cold or warm the living room and bedroom areas need to be. Ask your roommate if he/she needs the room to be at a certain temperature in order to sleep well at night. Come to an agreement regarding night-time and day-time temperatures, and compromise with blankets or extra fans if possible. This also applies to lighting in the home. It is important to talk about any windows or lighting fixtures that are too bright for you to the point of causing discomfort or pain, particularly if you have sensory issues. Make an agreement regarding how bright each room in any common area should be, and understand that your roommate's bedroom does not apply to your agreement.

Food and Meals

Many people are particular about the foods and meals they eat. In the kitchen and refrigerator, you may want to divide the storage space into parts for each of you to store your food. In areas where this is not possible, keep tape and markers handy to write your name on your items. If you are interested in sharing food, make an agreement to take turns buying food. This also applies to cooking meals. Talk to your roommate – if you both like the same meals, then make a schedule and take turns cooking.

Housekeeping

The first step to establishing a chores routine is to come to an agreement with regard to the state of your home. Determine how much daily clutter is acceptable, and agree that food waste and garbage cannot be left out. You should also make a list of the weekly housekeeping tasks that need to be completed. These include washing your dishes, vacuuming, taking out the garbage, etc. Assign a specific date and person to each task, and agree on how often it should be done.

Guests

Social life is a big part of college and living away from home. So, it's important to agree on a guest policy. You and your roommate will have friends and family visiting; some may even stay overnight. Talk to your roommate about how comfortable you are with having guests. Agree on how many people can be over at the same time, how late they can stay, and how often visits can happen per week. When it comes to overnight guests, agree on whether guests can sleep in the living room area or in the bedrooms. You and your roommate may want to agree on a minimum time for advance notice before overnight guests arrive.

After defining these standard rules, decide with your roommate whether parties or large gatherings are allowed in the dorm or apartment (there may be restrictions based on your apartment lease or housing policy as well). If so, determine what party activities and areas are permitted and prohibited, and discuss any exceptions to standard guests rules that would apply during these events.

Identify Trigger Behaviors

No matter how well you get along with your roommate, there will be specific behaviors or situations that may push you beyond coping and result in you becoming upset or overstimulated. These triggers can be small "pet peeves" that build tension over time or issues related to your autism. Triggers can be anything from excessive coughing, a very loud laugh, a specific word, or bright lights. It is very important to identify these triggers for yourself and with your roommate. Talk about these triggers and how they make you feel.

It is also important to have an escape place such as your bedroom or outside. When you are overstimulated and beginning to feel out of control, go to this place to cool down. Use headphones with music or other coping mechanisms to regulate yourself and help address the triggers that upset you.

High-Stress Times

The roommate agreement will not cover everything. There will undoubtedly be times when the agreed-upon rules are vague, incomplete, or need to be temporarily changed. This usually occurs during those stressful times when projects or papers are due, exams or holidays are coming up, or something personal or simply unexpected arises. During these times, talk to your roommate to establish new or modified rules as needed. For example, you may decide to limit guests or set rules on loud music or television when you have finals coming up. It is important to identify any other unique days or times that lead you to become highly agitated or upset, such as when you have a group project or class presentation. Temporarily changing the agreement rules will allow for a calmer home environment.

The roommate agreement is a tool to be used to help establish basic rules and reminders for daily living. Consider it a "living document" that should be revised as needed. However, it is not a substitute for communicating with each other. When presented with a conflict or concern regarding your roommate, it is best to talk to him/her. Explain the situation and how it is affecting you. If conflicts arise with the agreement, discuss them. If the situation escalates to the point that you are unable to come to an agreement, consult with the campus RA or residence life counselors to help mediate the issue. The open communication and set of agreed-upon rules will help create and maintain a structured lifestyle for the both of you.

For example roommate agreements, go to the online Campus Life Hub at bit.ly/OARCampusLife

TABITHA RAMMINGER, M.S., BCBA, *is the Clinical Policy Section Chief for Wisconsin Medicaid and co-founder of Bright Feats Brevard, a free special needs resource guide for families in Brevard County, Florida. She is a Licensed Behavior Analyst and specializes in the elimination of challenging behavior that impact functional living in children and adults with ASD.*

THE HIDDEN CURRICULUM

Learn about these hidden social rules

By Brenda Smith Myles, Ph.D., Jill Hudson, and Hyo Jung Lee, Ph.D.

Many young adults with ASD possess characteristics that foster college success:

- The formal style required for academic essay writing is usually a lot easier to master than casual social conversation.
- Students with ASD have good precision and attention to detail.
- Students with ASD usually try extremely hard at what they are doing.
- Being single-minded and determined are useful learning traits when something has to be studied in depth (Blamires & Gee, 2001, pp. 10-11).

Despite these assets, however, many students with ASD experience challenges in the college environment. In many cases, the difficulties involve social understanding or misunderstanding (Golan, Baron-Cohen, & Hill, 2006; Lawson, Baron-Cohen, & Wheelwright, 2004; Schultz et al., 2003), such as understanding words with multiple meanings, recognizing sarcasm, interpreting facial expressions, or attempting to interpret others' thoughts. One area of social misunderstanding that is often neglected, despite its lifelong importance, is the hidden curriculum.

Definition of the Hidden Curriculum

The hidden curriculum is the set of rules or guidelines that are often not directly taught but are assumed knowledge (Bieber, 1994; Garnett, 1984; Hemmings, 2000; Jackson, 1968; Kanpol, 1989; Myles, Endow, & Mayfield; 2013; Myles, Trautman, & Schelvan, 2013). The hidden curriculum contains items that impact social interactions, school performance, and safety. The hidden curriculum also includes idioms, metaphors, and slang – items that most people learn through observation or through subtle cues, but that elude most individuals on the autism spectrum.

Because lists of hidden curriculum items are limited (it is doubtful that a comprehensive list can ever be created), it is difficult to recognize hidden curriculum items. One of the primary means of identifying a hidden curriculum item is when a hidden curriculum error occurs. If a professor or fellow student has said one of the following phrases to you, it is probably a sign that you have committed a hidden curriculum error:

1. "I shouldn't have to tell you, but …"
2. "It should be obvious that …"
3. "Everyone knows that …"
4. "Common sense tells us …"
5. "No one ever …"

The hidden curriculum is complex and elusive. Nevertheless, breaking a hidden curriculum rule can make a person a social outcast. For example, there is a hidden curriculum for nose picking. It is not "Don't pick your nose." Rather, it is "pick your nose in private and use a tissue." Not following this hidden curriculum can cause a person to be shunned.

The following examples illustrate the importance of understanding the hidden curriculum.

Professor Marks asked Lauren, a student with ASD, if she knew what time it was. Lauren replied, "Yes," and went back to reading her textbook. Dr. Marks' quizzical expression revealed that he thought Lauren was being curt, rude, or antisocial. Lauren, reading her book, did not notice his expression. Lauren committed several hidden curriculum errors.

1. When someone asks, "*Do you know what time it is*?" he or she does not want a yes or no response, but the actual time at the moment.
2. When someone responds to a question, it is usually best to look at that person to ensure that he or she understands the speaker's remarks. A facial expression can usually provide a cue.
3. When someone responds to a question, it is typical to maintain eye contact or orientation to allow the

other person the opportunity to respond (i.e., thank you or a nod [which can also mean thank you]).

4. Students generally should attempt to be perceived as respectful to their professors.

In the cafeteria over lunch, Mike and Jim were talking about whom they would ask to the dance Friday night. Mike said he would eventually ask Sally, but only after he had been able to talk to her a little more and become more comfortable with the idea. Jim, who has autism, did not realize that Mike needed time to warm up with Sally before asking the big question. When she came over to their table to say hello, Jim exclaimed in front of Sally, "Mike, now you can ask Sally to go to the dance Friday night. Sally, Mike wants you to go, okay?" Mike was embarrassed and just smiled.

While hanging out in the student union building, Zach wonders why he has to continue to get the attention of his peers by tapping them on the shoulder as they constantly turn away. He is trying to tell them about the newest developments in chemical engineering. He does not understand why they keep changing the subject even though they commented that chemical engineering was "real interesting." Zach did not pick up on the sarcastic facial expression or tone of voice used.

Every situation has a unique hidden curriculum, which is assumed and absorbed by almost everyone in the environment. The hidden curriculum constitutes those implied messages given and received over time that eventually set the boundaries for successful interactions. Without the ability to perceive and interpret those messages, students with ASD often fail to communicate effectively, ending up confused, frustrated, and misunderstood.

Common Hidden Curriculum Areas That Present Problems within College Settings

College students with ASD encounter countless situations that have a hidden curriculum. These go beyond interactions with professors and academic requirements and include (a) time management, (b) materials management, (c) procrastinating perfection, (d) financial management, (d) stress and anxiety, and (e) finding a niche.

Professors and academic requirements. Significant differences exist between high school teachers and colleges professors. While high school teachers' priorities generally focus on instruction and, to a great extent, helping students master content, many college professors expend their resources on their research and consider teaching a secondary or tertiary concern. In addition, traditionally they rarely focus on helping students organize and follow through on assignments.

The following hidden curriculum items may relate to the professors in your college.

1. Most professors will not remind you that assignments are due or tests are coming up.

2. Many professors will not focus on whether or not you understand their lectures. They assume that you understand unless you ask for assistance.

3. Some professors encourage students to ask questions; others do not. Also, it is important to know how many questions a student may appropriately ask during class.

4. If you wish to talk to a professor about her class, visit during office hours or make an appointment. Most professors post their preferences for student meetings on their websites, the class syllabus, or on their office doors.

See the Academics section for time management tips

Time management. In college, students often have more unstructured free time than scheduled time. This is a major adjustment for students with autism who are used to following routines and who thrive within a structure that is typically planned by others. Time management in college is key. College students must select classes, determine the amount of time needed to prepare for class, determine how long to spend on one homework assignment before

moving on to the next, and so on. Students with autism often focus on one task at a time and feel compelled to complete it before going on to the next. However, because of class demands, typically many tasks must be balanced at the same time, as in the following example.

Sam had three tests scheduled in the next week. Thursday through Sunday prior to the examinations, he studied for his first test and did little else. On Monday morning, he was satisfied with his preparation for the test and performed well. However, when he discovered that he had only Monday evening to study for his two tests on Tuesday, he panicked. He was overwhelmed and had trouble focusing on the material because he was preoccupied with the limited time left to study.

The following hidden curriculum items might assist in time management.

1. Establish a schedule for studying and stick to it. You are solely responsible for ensuring that you study.
2. Plan to study throughout the semester for each class. Even if the class only requires a mid-term and a final, it is best to study some each week.
3. Realize that it is likely impossible to complete a paper or other task in one sitting. You may need to leave an assignment incomplete during a study session if it is not due immediately.

Materials management. Dorm life can be exciting, but it can also be an organizational challenge cramming important possessions such as clothing, computers, television, and schools supplies into a small space. Understanding boundary lines of personal space, arranging belongings in a way that makes them easy to store, easy to locate, and functional for use are all challenges that need to be met.

Justin was late for class again because he could not find the right book and folder for his class. He tripped over his dirty clothes in the middle of the floor as he shuffled around searching for his supplies. He checked his desk, but it was overflowing with papers and books, and he could not sort out which materials went together. Finally, he saw an assignment sitting on the printer. He grabbed it, hoping it was the correct one.

Materials management can be problematic unless the hidden curriculum is understood, as suggested in the following:

1. If you have a roommate in a dorm or an apartment, identify which areas belong to you, which belong to your roommate, and which are communal.
2. If you tend to be messy and your roommate is not, you will probably have to change your habits.
3. Pack up your backpack the evening before class.
4. Consider having multiple backpacks for different days of the week.
5. Consider consulting an organizational magazine, such as *Real Simple*, for ideas on how to organize your desk and space. If you have adequate financial resources, talking with someone at a store that caters to organizational needs may be helpful.
6. Leaving towels and dirty clothes on the floor or out in the open almost always will upset your roommate.
7. Decide with your roommate which of his or her belongings you may use without permission and what requires prior permission.

Procrastinating perfection. Individuals with procrastinating perfectionist tendencies need every detail to be exact, regardless of any time or material constraints. This tendency can affect all areas of a person's life from class projects to social encounters. Procrastinating perfectionists invest too much time on details because they have a preconceived idea that must be carried through. It is their way or no way. This tendency is often a barrier – a task must be completed perfectly or not at all. As a result, they often end up not producing a product at all. Many people have a tendency to procrastinate or to be a perfectionist. While that can cause problem, it is the combination of these two characteristics that can be truly problematic.

Shannon anticipated Clare's birthday for weeks. She had finally decided on the perfect gift, how she would wrap it, and where she would give it to her. As Shannon began her hunt for the gift so specifically detailed in her mind, she discovered that it was nowhere to be found. In addition, she could not find the right color of wrapping paper to match the ribbon that she had picked out. She was unable to change the idea in her mind, so she spent all day searching for the present and wrapping paper. At the end of the day, Clare was so frustrated that all she could do was cry.

James' geology professor assigned a paper to be completed within two weeks. James almost immediately defined his topic and even decided how he would complete it. However, because he could not conceptualize an introduction, he did not write down a single word for over a week. Once he sat down and began to work, he started over five times, becoming increasingly frustrated. Each time he stopped, it was because the assignment did not appear exactly as he envisioned it in his mind.

As Becca began decorating her dorm room, she looked through magazines for ideas. However, because she did not know how to make her room a replica of the one in the magazine, she did not decorate at all. When it was suggested to her that decorating could be a process and items could be added until the desired look was achieved, Becca responded that she did not want to have her room half done and "look bad," so instead, she did nothing.

1. If you find yourself being a procrastinating perfectionist, seek help from a college counselor.
2. If you are stuck when doing an assignment, it is best to get a few words down on paper to begin the task.
3. Sometimes working with a study center to prepare an outline for an assignment or develop an introduction is an excellent way to stop procrastination.

Financial management. Budgeting is a common challenge for college students. It can be particularly difficult for students with ASD because money management is often an abstract concept.

Mary thought that as long as she had checks in her checkbook she had money in her account. In addition, she did not feel responsible for paying bills that she had not opened because she had not actually seen them.

For many students, managing their finances is an area where they have had little prior responsibility. Without understanding that a caretaker was always paying for the comforts of home, Mary simply enjoyed television, lights, and water, expecting them to work without considering who paid for the convenience.

In addition, with the ease of gaining and using credit cards these days, students can accrue debt quickly without understanding the consequence of swiping their card.

As long as the card was accepted at stores, Steven continued to use it. Unaware that his charges continued to pile up, he was shocked to receive his statement showing his purchases had reached the maximum limit. In addition, he did not understand why extra fees for being over his credit limit were charged to his account, when in the store he paid the amount just for the purchase. He was also puzzled by the 23% finance charge for any remaining balances.

1. Establish up-front with your roommate who is responsible for room-related expenses. If you order pizza without discussing it with your roommate, even if she eats a piece or two, she might think that you are paying for the pizza because you did not discuss this with her before ordering the pizza.
2. Have a budget. Decide in advance how much you should spend each month and try to stick to it.
3. Use debit cards and credit cards only in a planned manner.
4. Remember that all credit card debt and student loans must be paid.

5. Consult an adult you trust to help you establish a budget if this is the first time you have created one.

Stress and anxiety. The impact of stress and anxiety underlies and complicates many of the problematic interactions and situations encountered by students with autism. In every example throughout this article, social skills deficits and elevated stress/anxiety complicated already problematic situations. Whether in the dorm, in the classroom, hanging out with peers, or studying in a group, each situation demands an element of appropriate social behavior and stress management.

Mark became overwhelmed with his schedule of homework and his upcoming chess tournament and could not figure out how to budget his time. As a result, he became so anxious that he locked himself in his dorm room and did not come out for three days.

When Mary was working on a group project with four class members, she became increasingly frustrated with what she perceived as their level of stupidity. She did not know how to initiate her ideas in an effective manner, nor did she understand that the group needed to work collaboratively, while allowing everyone to make suggestions and accommodate each idea into one effective tactic. Because she was unable to voice her needs, Mary's stress level hit its maximum, and she ended up screaming out in frustration that she would do all of the assignment herself.

Understand that stress and anxiety can be debilitating and excessive.

1. People may not tell you that you are experiencing stress. However, if people use words such as "irritable," "difficult to get along with," or "gets upset about you," these may be indicators that you are under stress and that your stress is affecting your behavior.

2. If you're spending excessive time sleeping, you may be experiencing stress and anxiety and may need to see a counselor.

3. It is typical for college students to become stressed, and it is typical for college students to seek assistance from a counselor, so don't hesitate to take advantage of these services.

Finding a niche. College campuses attract diverse individuals with unique perspectives and genuine interests. You may find that students with ASD are not the only ones with a special or genuine interest in a particular topic.

The college years are often times in which students, including those with ASD, meet others who share their genuine interests. These interests help you make friends – some may become lifelong friends; others may be friends for a semester or year. In addition, exploring and sharing a genuine interest with others may provide an introduction to a potential career option.

1. Seek out clubs and activities that interest you.

2. Don't be afraid to approach others who you think may have interests similar to yours.

3. If you reach out to another person twice and he or she does not respond favorably, that generally means that it is time to find another potential friend.

4. If the same type of social mistakes occurs repeatedly with you and your friends, you may need to develop a new repertoire of social skills. A college counselor may be able to help. It may also mean that you may need to find a new friend who is more compatible with you.

5. This may be the time in your life when your genuine interest becomes a vocation. Work with a career counselor to identify coursework that can help you pursue a degree that matches your genuine interest.

Summary

College is a time of independence for young people. No longer living under the direct supervision of their parents, college students must independently structure every segment of their lives from brushing teeth to studying to budgeting money and time. In addition, they must balance social opportunities and academic requirements, allocating appropriate time and resources to each.

For even the most socially competent college student, these tasks can be daunting. Understanding the hidden curriculum that surrounds the multiple environments and activities in college can help make college an exciting time of growth and independence.

References

Bieber, J. (Producer). (1994). *Learning disabilities and social skills with Richard LaVoie: Last one picked . . . first one picked on*. Washington, DC: Public Broadcasting Service.

Blamires, M., & Gee, S. (2001). *Raising aspirations: Increasing the participation of students with autistic spectrum disorders (social communication difficulties) in higher education*. Canterbury, UK: Canterbury Christ Church University College.

Garnett, K. (1984). Some of the problems children encounter in learning a school's hidden curriculum. *Journal of Reading, Writing and Learning Disabilities International, 1*(1), 5-10.

Golan, O., Baron-Cohen, S., & Hill, J. (2006). The Cambridge Mindreading (CAM) Face-Voice Battery: Testing complex emotion recognition in adults with and without Asperger Syndrome. *Journal Autism and Developmental Disorders, 36*, 169-183.

Hemmings, A. (2000). The hidden curriculum corridor. *High School Journal, 83*(2), 1-10.

Jackson, P. (1968). *Life in classrooms*. New York, NY: Holt, Rinehart, & Winston.

Kanpol, B. (1989). Do we dare teach some truths? An argument for teaching more "hidden curriculum." *College Student Journal, 23*, 214-217.

Lawson, J., Baron-Cohen, S., & Wheelwright, S. (2004). Empathizing and systemizing in adults with and without Asperger Syndrome. *Journal Autism and Developmental Disorders, 34*, 301-310.

Myles, B. S., Endow, J., & Mayfield, M. (2013). *The hidden curriculum of getting and keeping a job: Navigating the social landscape of employment. A guide for individuals with autism spectrum disorders and other social-cognitive challenges*. Shawnee Mission, KS: AAPC Publishing.

Myles, B. S., Trautman, M. L., & Schelvan, R. L. (2013). *The hidden curriculum: Practical solutions for understanding unstated rules in social situations* (2nd ed.). Shawnee Mission, KS: AAPC Publishing.

Schultz, R. T., Grelotti, D. J., Klin, A., Kleinman, J., Van der Gaag, C., Marois, R., & Skudlarski, P. (2003). The role of the fusiform face area in social cognition: Implications for the pathobiology of autism. *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Series B, Biological Sciences, 358*, 415-427.

JILL HUDSON *works with the National, State, and Community Partnerships at the Ohio Center for Autism and Low Incidence (OCALI). She received her master's degree in autism from the University of Kansas and completed her child life clinical training from John Hopkins Hospital. Hudson was an invited participant at the 2011 Autism Awareness event held at the White House. She presents and consults internationally and has several publications in the field of autism, in addition to four books. Hudson co-coordinates OCALICON, is the co-chair of the National Autism Leadership Collaborative (NALC), and facilitated NASDSE's federal funded national Community of Practice on ASD.*

HYO JUNG LEE, PH.D., *is an associate professor at the Dongguk University-Seoul in South Korea. Lee is also a chief editor for* Journal of Persons with Autism*, the peer-reviewed academic journal of the Korean Association for Persons with Autism (KAPA). She works with Seoul Metropolitan Office of Education (SMOE) as a consultant for the SMOE Positive Behavior Support Project.*

BRENDA SMITH MYLES, PH.D., *is the president of AAPC Publishing and a Scientific Council member of the Organization for Autism Research (OAR). Myles has made over 1,000 presentations all over the world and written more than 250 articles and books on ASD; She is the recipient of numerous awards for her contributions to the autism community.*

RESOLVING CONFLICT WITH OTHERS

Learn how you can be more effective at handling disagreements with others

By Nika Peng-Wiebusch, M.Ed.

DON'T	DO
Talk over the other person	Listen to the other person
Make assumptions about the other person's thoughts, values, and intentions	Ask simple open-ended questions to start the conversation (ex: "How are you?" "How have things been?")
Criticize the other person or overanalyze why the other person behaved a certain way	Ask about the other person's feelings and opinions ("Has this been bothering you?" "How do you feel about this situation?")
Call the other person names, blame, or accuse him or her	Try to understand the other person's perspective
Multitask while trying to resolve a conflict	Give the other person your full attention
Tell the other person what you think he or she should do, or should have done ("You need to wake up on time, and then you wouldn't have this problem of throwing things everywhere")	Explain your feelings and thoughts with "I" statements, without blaming others ("I was hurt when…" "I feel like…" "I want to try…" "I thought you … but now I …")

In college, you have the exciting opportunity to engage and interact with roommates, classmates, friends, family, professors, co-workers, and doctors. Some interactions may be positive and strengthen your relationships with these people. However, other interactions may be more negative and need to be handled with care.

Conflicts may arise when at least one person's needs are not being met within a relationship. In college, the people you meet are likely to come from different backgrounds. They may have interests that differ from yours and values that you don't agree with. Sometimes, others are inflexible in their belief systems and have difficulty coming to a consensus with others. These individual attributes, as well as personality and lifestyle differences, may result in conflict.

For example, while sharing a dorm room during college, my roommate liked to study while listening to loud music. For her, the music increased her productivity, but for me, it was too distracting. Instead of addressing the issue directly, I just tried asking her to lower the volume when I heard it. She did so reluctantly, but the low volume was still irritating. I spent the semester avoiding the issue, ignoring my roommate, and studying in the library.

One day, I realized I was being unfair to myself for letting the problem escalate to the point where I avoided my own room. So I went to my room, waited for my roommate to come home, and "confronted" the issue. I started the conversation in a friendly way since I didn't want to attack her and make her feel uncomfortable. We discussed how we felt about the situation, our differences in study habits, and eventually came to the solution that she could listen to music through headphones when we studied in the

same room. From that point on, our room stopped being a war zone, and we were both able to study in the comfort of our own room. If I had known how to resolve that conflict sooner, I wouldn't have spent an entire semester dreading my dorm room.

What Is Conflict Resolution, and Why Is It so Important?

Conflict resolution is when two or more people find a peaceful solution to a dispute. It involves analyzing and observing an issue with someone using a fresh perspective. More than likely, you've already confronted interpersonal issues. You may have told yourself that they're not worth addressing because they seem small, but it's easier to resolve issues as soon as they happen rather than bottling them up and explode later. Some issues may be tolerable, others may drive you crazy. Know which type of issue you are experiencing. Resolving a conflict earlier can also minimize the stress of the issue, build stronger relationships, and promote growth.

Let's Be Proactive

You can minimize conflict by having open communication. For example, if you are upset about a grade you just received and then talk to your roommates about something else while stimming, they may wrongly assume that you are upset with them and not because of your grade. Many conflicts stem from misunderstandings. By expressing how you are feeling while being mindful of other people's needs, you can avoid a lot of conflict later down the road.

If you are confronted with an issue, talk it out. This can be difficult when emotions run high. Sometimes I write out my feelings and re-read them the next day when I'm calmer. I look for details I overreacted about or didn't consider so that I can better prepare to address the issue with a clearer understanding of the situation.

It's important to be sensitive to each other's values and ideas. Listen to what others have to say. The idea behind a healthy relationship is to respect and accept each other's ideas and interests. Even if they don't align with yours, come to a middle ground and appreciate their differences.

Step-by-Step

1. **Analyze the Conflict:** With a clear head free of emotion, think about a conflict you currently have with someone. What is the underlying cause of it? Does the conflict stem from miscommunication or a difference in opinion, values, or needs? Remember, everyone has their own ideas and points of view.

2. **Develop a Plan:** How should you approach the person given his or her personality and relationship to you? Would they respond more positively if you were nonchalant or serious? Direct or indirect? Write a brief outline on the topics, feelings, and ideas you want to express. Whatever you do, do not attack the person and put him or her on the defensive. Make sure to leave plenty of room for conversation and to listen to the other person's input. In order to solve a conflict, you'll have to understand the other person's viewpoints.

3. **Set the Date:** This isn't entirely necessary, but it is a good idea to set a specific time that is convenient for both of you to talk. That way, you can both be be fully engaged without feeling blindsided that the conversation is happening. For example, if you walk into the library to speak to your roommate about an issue, you may be interfering with his or her study time. This could potentially inflame the issue at hand. Call, text, or talk in person to set a time to speak. It can be as casual as a meeting in the lounge or as serious as a dinner meeting.

4. **Resolve the Conflict:** Once you've analyzed the conflict, developed a plan, and set a time to talk, you're ready to resolve the conflict. Make sure not to problem solve before your emotions are controlled. Weighing out risks, benefits, and solutions is difficult to do when you're preoccupied with emotions.

a. Listen: When heading into any conversation, remember American television and radio host Larry King's wise words: "We are blessed with two ears and one mouth, a constant reminder that we should listen twice as much as we talk." You may have a lot to say, but the more you talk, the less opportunity you will have to learn something. When you're speaking about a conflict, you only understand your side. The goal of conflict resolution is to work with the other person and come to a solution that benefits both of you; to do this, you must understand the conflict from the other person's perspective and listen to his or her needs.

b. Be Assertive: After listening to the other person's feelings and perspective, make your own feelings and perspective clear. In this phase of conflict resolution, both of you can work together towards a solution. Articulate your thoughts and needs using "I" statements, but be considerate towards the other person.

5 **Implement the Solution:** Successful conflict resolution should end with a solution. Summarize what was expressed during the meeting, and develop an accommodating solution that works for both people. Once the solution has been decided upon, don't assume the conflict is perfectly resolved. Make sure to try out the agreed-upon solution for a few weeks, evaluate whether or not it is working for both of you, and modify it if necessary. After a few tweaks, a reasonable and effective solution should be in place.

NIKA PENG-WIEBUSCH, M.ED., *is a Clinical Supervisor at Autism Learning Partners and Research Coordinator at Stanford University. She earned her Bachelor's of Science in Psychology and Social Action from Palo Alto University in 2015. Two years later, she graduated with her Master's of Education with an emphasis in applied behavior analysis from Arizona State University.*

RELATIONSHIPS AND SEX ON THE BRAIN

Sex and sexuality can be tough for anyone to navigate, but it can be more challenging when your brain's wiring is different from that of your partner

By s.e. smith

Many college students are excited about the chance to explore sex, sexuality, and relationships, possibly for the first time. These topics can be tough to navigate, so it's important to establish from the outset that there's nothing "wrong" with you if you are on the autism spectrum. You are who you are, and who you are is great! But it can make things a little tricky sometimes if you miss social cues, get overwhelmed by anxiety or sensory overload, or encounter people who think you're vulnerable and want to take advantage of you.

Be aware that when things are going great, neurotypical people may not think directly about your autism very much, or they may say it's not super important. You may need to remind them that your autism-related boundaries and needs are always present and always important.

Conversely, when things are going badly, the same people may suddenly think it's because of your autism — and that's not correct. While autism plays a role in how you interact with people and the world, it's not to blame for your relationship problems.

Relationships and Autism

People on the spectrum may have anxieties around sex and relationships, many of which revolve around feeling like they're missing cues or doing things "wrong." Sometimes that comes from within, sometimes it's the result of pressures from media and society, and sometimes it's the result of feedback from partners. Autism is incredibly diverse, and there's no one-size-fits-all answer to these kinds of questions, but we can take on a few of them — starting with the myth that people on the autism spectrum aren't perceptive or sensitive, and therefore miss glaringly obvious things. You already know that's wrong, but to remind you again: It's wrong.

Once you start exploring relationships and sexuality, one of the first questions you may have is whether to disclose your autism and when. Disclosure isn't an all-or-nothing deal: As you interact with someone and get a sense of who they are, you can decide how much you're comfortable telling them.

In the early stages of relationships, flirtation, or asking someone out, the layers of communication going on can feel fraught and stressful for neurotypical people, let alone you!

Some Things to Think About

- Nervousness is common for everyone when interacting with a new sweetie, and so is feeling awkward, like you're not sure how to behave, because you don't know each other well yet. Don't be afraid to be clear and direct, and to ask the same of your partner. Conversations about communication are critical for everyone, not just people on the spectrum. If you dislike or have trouble reading sarcasm, snark, teasing, flirtation, and other confusing tones and ways of communication, say so. If someone wants to make that about your autism, think again: Plenty

of neurotypical people don't like or have trouble picking up on things like that, even if they're too shy to talk about it.

- If you're worried about being perceived as pushy or awkward, ask clear, direct questions and accept the answers: "Do you want to get a cup of coffee?" "No." "Okay, maybe some other time — let me know!" If talking in person makes you feel anxious, it's also totally fine to send someone an email or a text instead.
- In college, especially, relationships may take different forms, like "hooking up," casual dating, or serious relationships. People (including you!) may be interested in different types of relationships, and your interests may change depending on what else is going on in your life and who your potential partner is. Most people don't know what kind of relationship they want when they are first getting to know someone, and that's fine! What's important is to make sure to communicate what you want and listen to what partners want too, so you can make sure everyone's needs are met.
- Not into small talk? Here's a little secret: Some neurotypical people aren't either. It's fine to plunge into interesting conversations about things that are meaningful to you. You might want to avoid politics, religion, and hot-button topics at first, or not — sometimes it's better for people to get to know each other as they are. If you're particularly fixated on something at the moment, keep in mind that other people might not be as interested as you are, just like you would in regular conversation.
- Take the time to conduct a little self-assessment. How does autism affect the way you interact with people and the world now, and what are some warning signs that things are getting a little too overwhelming for you? If you have depression, maybe you tend to retreat, withdraw, and get disinterested when you're not feeling good. If you have anxiety, maybe you're second guessing everything. Ultimately, you are responsible for your mental health and how you choose to treat people. It's not okay to take out your frustrations or fears on a partner, but it is okay to say "Hey, can you help me with…?" That's part of the give and take of any healthy relationship.

Remember that if someone doesn't like you as you are, they don't deserve to date you. Compatibility doesn't hinge on your autism status, either. Sometimes people just don't click, and that's okay.

Intimacy and Sexuality

Some people on the spectrum have sensory sensitivities and may need to lay down some boundaries about how and where they are touched; for example, it's okay to say you're not comfortable holding hands, or don't want to be hugged without warning. You have the right to bodily autonomy! Sensory sensitivities around food, the texture of clothing, scents, and other issues are also things you can bring up, because you deserve to be comfortable. You don't have to stress out through a meal of foods with horrible textures or nod and smile when someone gives you a reeking, perfumed candle!

When it comes to sex, clear, steady, constant communication is important for everyone — not just people on the autism spectrum. Your partners should get that, and if they don't, that's not a great sign. Sex can be silly and fun and dorky, and it may include some joking around, but communicating about what you do and don't like is no game. Tell your partner you want clear guidance from him or her, and provide the same. Some things to consider might include: Where you do and don't like being touched, the level of pressure you like, how fast or slow you want things to go, what kinds of sensations you enjoy, the light levels you prefer, and whether you have a "stop everything right now" word (a safeword), even if it's just "stop" or "red."

If any of this advice sounds … familiar, it should, because it's exactly the same advice neurotypical people need. Your needs aren't "special," they're just needs, and you have the right to assert them in your relationships and make it clear that this is a partnership and you want to work together.

The bottom line when it comes to dating and autism is the same bottom line you'll see with any relationships: communication. If you're as open as you can be about your anxieties, needs, fears, concerns, and worries,

you and your partner can work through them together. Good communications can be scary sometimes, but it's how you build healthy relationships based on trust and collaboration.

The complete, unadapted version of this article was originally published on scarleteen.com – you can visit the site for more information on health and sexuality.

***S.E. SMITH** is a Northern California-based journalist and writer whose writing has appeared in* Rolling Stone, The Guardian, Esquire, Time, Rewire, *and numerous other publications. smith's work focuses on intersectional social justice issues.*

SEXUAL HEALTH AND SAFETY TIPS

Make informed decisions about your sexual health and safety

Sexual Health and Wellness

…is an integral part of our overall health and wellness, and is as important as our attention to nutrition, physical fitness, and mental health. Many people begin learning about these topics in college, though your thoughts and values on them may change throughout your life as you learn more about yourself. Healthy sexuality spans a lot of different areas – you don't have to learn everything at once! Understanding the different parts of your sexual health can be a lifelong process. As a starting point, here are some things to think about:

- You deserve…
  - to feel physically, emotionally, and mentally safe in relation to sex and sexuality
  - to build and enjoy positive and respectful relationships
  - to make your own choices about sex, free from coercion or violence

- You should explore and understand…
  - how to maintain your physical and reproductive health
  - your values and beliefs about your body and relationships
  - your sexual desires and behaviors
  - your sexual orientation and gender identity
  - how to communicate your needs and desires

Remember, when it comes to sex, you make the choices about your own body!

You Choose What Healthy Sexuality Looks Like for You!

You (along with your potential partner) can choose whether or not to be sexually active. There is no wrong choice! Just make sure to respect one another's wishes, and practice safe sex.

These topics can be complicated for everyone, so it's important to seek out extra support and resources if you are confused or need help. Your campus health center may have resources and even peer educators to answer questions.

You can learn more about sexual health at https://www.plannedparenthood.org/learn or www.goaskalice.columbia.edu.

Understanding Sexual Assault!

Sexual assault is a form of sexual contact or behavior that happens without explicit consent. It can include many different actions, such as groping (unwanted sexual touching) or rape (forced penetration of another person's body). It can happen with people you know or with strangers. If you are a survivor of sexual assault, you are not alone. Instances of sexual assault are never the survivor's fault, and though it may take time and support, survivors can enjoy happy, healthy sex lives.

You may have heard that rates of sexual assault and abuse are higher among people with disabilities, including autism. There are many reasons for that, one of which is that some people might think autism makes you vulnerable, and want to take advantage of that. Another reason is that people with disabilities are often denied information about sex, and therefore about sexual assault. It's hard to ask for help if someone doesn't know what is happening or what to do when put in that situation.

That's why it's so important to learn about healthy sexuality and sexual assault, so that you can better distinguish healthy situations from dangerous situations.

If you're sexually active, both you and your partner should feel safe and comfortable. That means consent is vital! But what exactly is consent? How do people give consent during physical intimacy?

Consent…

Should be freely given, without pressure or coercion (coercion can be physical force, but can also involve emotional coercion, psychological force, or manipulation). Consent should be affirmative, for example, a clear and enthusiastic "yes"! You or your partner can change your mind and withdraw consent ANY time you feel too uncomfortable to continue!

Consent is *not* given if someone:

- Says "no"
- Says "I'm not sure"
- Says nothing or is silent
- Is crying or otherwise appears upset
- Is squirming or physically trying to move away from you

How Do You Practice Good Consent?

If you feel good and your partner feels good, then you're on the right track. If you are unsure whether you have consent from your partner, it is a good idea to pause and ask.

- Communicate during sexual activity with phrases like "How does this feel for you?" and "Are you okay with this?"
- Explicitly agree to certain activities by making affirmative statements like "Yes!" and "I'm open to trying this!"
- Use physical or predetermined cues to let your partner know you're comfortable with certain activities
- Bottom line, positive consent is given when both partners are mentally, emotionally, and physically prepared to engage in sexual activity with one another.

If you experience sexual assault and want to reach out to someone:

- Seek advice from friends, family, your support networks, or an RA. Most RAs and college staff are "mandatory reporters," meaning that they are required to report any campus assaults they hear of to the Title IX Coordinator, so keep in mind what you say may not be kept confidential.
- Local or national crisis hotlines can and will talk you through your concerns, help you with the next steps, and keep your conversation completely confidential. If you call within 72 hours of an assault, they can also direct you to medical care if you wish to have a sexual assault forensic exam (or "rape kit"). This can be used by law enforcement if you decide to press charges, but having the exam does not obligate you to report to police.

National Sexual Assault Hotline
Free and confidential, and available 24 hours a day:
800.656.4673

- Call 911 or campus/local police. You can open a police investigation or press charges against the person who assaulted you. For a variety of reasons, some people choose not to do this. You may want to consult with someone you trust before choosing this option, since it can be complicated and laws defining consent and sexual assault differ from state to state.
- Visit this site for more resources and advice: https://www.knowyourix.org/survivor-resources/

Remember: If you experience sexual assault or harassment, it is NOT your fault. Do not be ashamed to seek help.

If you have a friend who is a survivor of sexualassault:

Keep your friend's information confidential and respect his or her privacy. Do not ignore the problem or isolate your friend in a time of need. You can offer options and suggest they seek help, but do not force them to do anything. Unless they are in immediate danger and you need to call 911, do not force them to take action. You can seek professional advice about what you should do to help by calling a crisis hotline, or visiting your campus mental health or crisis clinics.

For more advice on supporting a friend after an assault, visit https://www.knowyourix.org/for-friends-and-fami/

References

American Sexual Health Association. (n.d.). *Statistics*. Retrieved from http://www.ashasexualhealth.org/stdsstis/statistics/

Association of American Universities. (2015, September 3). *AAU climate survey on sexual assault and sexual misconduct*. Retrieved from https://www. aau.edu/key-issues/aau-climate-survey-sexual-assault-and-sexual-misconduct-2015

Autism Speaks. (n.d.). *Recognizing and preventing sexual abuse*. Retrieved from https://www.autismspeaks.org/family-services/autism-safety-project/sexual-abuse

Connecticut Alliance to End Sexual Violence (n.d.). *Developmental disabilities and sexual assault*. Retrieved from https://endsexualviolencect.org/resources/get-the-facts/developmental-disabilities-and-sexual-assault/

National Sexual Violence Resource Center. (2015). *Statistics about sexual violence*. Retrieved from http://www.nsvrc.org/sites/default/files/publications_nsvrc_factsheet_media-packet_statistics-about-sexualviolence_0.pdf

Obinna, J., Krueger, S., Osterbaan, C., Sadusky, J., & DeVore, W. (2006, February). Understanding the needs of the victims of sexual assault in the deaf community. Retrieved from https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/212867.pdf

Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network (RAINNN). (n.d.). *Sexual assault*. Retrieved from https://rainn.org/articles/sexual-assault

YOU ARE NOT ALONE: A SURVIVOR'S TRUTH

A self-advocate shares her story about a dangerous situation she experienced in college, and shares tips and advice on what to do if you need help. Before reading, you should know that this essay contains descriptions of sexual violence that might make you uncomfortable.

By Anonymous

I wasn't diagnosed with Asperger's until my early 30s, so the experiences I had back in college were not filtered through an ASD diagnosis. I've always had trouble socializing and maintaining relationships, but at the same time, I've always been optimistic that everything would work out.

At the age of 18, I went away to college. I read a lot, so I was familiar with the kinds of dangers that lurk on college campuses. However, it's sometimes difficult to recognize when you're actually in one of those situations.

Blindsided

One Saturday night, I went out with my roommate and her friends. I think I was just "tagging along," but I didn't think of it that way at the time. They always seemed to have fun, and I wanted that, too. They decided to smoke marijuana before they went out that night, so I joined in. I wanted them to like me. We went to a party and some guy I didn't know kept literally pulling me around by my arm. It was really crowded and I had been drinking, so it didn't seem like a big deal. Near the end of the night, we ended up at a different party in a house off-campus. That same guy was there and he pulled my arm again, this time leading me upstairs to a bedroom. I lost my roommate and her friends after we got to the party, or maybe they lost me. Either way, no one was looking for me.

Upstairs, the guy forced me to do things that I didn't want to do. He even left the door partially open so his friends could watch. Thankfully, this was before everyone had a cell phone with a video camera. At some point, he left the room for a minute to talk to his friends. I got dressed and ran out of the house all the way back to my dorm room, looking back every few seconds to make sure I was alone.

I was already prone to depression and anxiety and had been battling both since I was 12 years old. After that episode, I was terrified to leave my room because I didn't know who the guy or his friends were and I was scared they would recognize me walking to my classes. I stopped going to classes altogether and ultimately flunked out, losing my scholarships and my spot in the engineering degree program.

I felt totally alone and didn't know what to do. I had never been close to anyone in my family since we were so different from one another and didn't understand each other. I didn't have any good friends to turn to either. I eventually told my roommate and RA, and even went to a clinic at a nearby hospital, but I kept the shame and the emotional burden hidden inside me for years.

Reaching out for Help

It's important to remember that everyone needs help sometimes. Reaching out for help is a sign of strength, not weakness. I lived much of my life believing that asking someone for help was akin to admitting failure. I didn't like feeling vulnerable or exposed. I still struggle with this, but I'm working on it. I'm a very guarded person because many relationships have ended badly for me, and it's devastating each and every time. At the

same time, I have been lucky enough to find a couple of people along the way who were worthy of my trust. I would have never found these supportive people had I not taken the risk to reach out to them.

Being on the autism spectrum often means living with an invisible disability, one that has a way of making our journeys a bit bumpier than they need to be. We have worries, concerns, and obstacles that others struggle to understand and we struggle to explain. Some of us can mask or hide our symptoms, but I know I can't hide from the inner toll it takes to do so. Even a short while of acting "normal" is exhausting and stressful for me. I definitely need a lot of alone time afterwards to try to recover from the experience. Once I feel a bit better, I have to go back out in the world and do it all over again.

Achieving our goals may be more difficult, but it's not impossible. After I left school, I felt like a failure. I didn't see how I could ever get my college degree. It took a long time, but I did graduate from college in my mid-thirties with a 4.0 GPA. I think the challenges I endured made that victory more meaningful and fulfilling than it would otherwise have been.

I'm currently working my way through graduate school, facing some of the same challenges that I dreaded in the past. Group projects and presentations are particularly difficult for me. I also work full-time, am married, and have a son. Balancing my responsibilities can be difficult, and I have to be very careful not to let myself get overwhelmed. When planning which courses to take each quarter, I have to take into account my capacity to handle the specific course requirements at that time. I also allow myself to change my schedule if needed. If I don't take care of myself in that way, I end up depressed and anxious about getting everything done.

Take Care of Yourself

If I could go back to freshman year of college, I would do many things differently. I wouldn't worry so much about having the "college experience" that you hear so much about. I would find people who fit into the way I want to live rather than trying to make myself fit into the way other people are living. Everyone is unique, and one person's lifestyle may not work for another. No one knows you better than you do, so follow your own path and trust your own instincts.

If you do choose to go out at night, stick with people you know and don't go off on your own. Make a plan to watch out for each other. Arrive as a group and leave as a group.

If you'd rather have a quiet night to yourself, it would still be helpful to make sure other people – family, friends, roommate, RA – know where you are and where you plan to go. Walking around an empty campus at night can be just as dangerous as going to a party with drinking and lots of strangers.

One thing I've learned living with Asperger's – and is true for anyone really – is that you have to figure out what your strengths are and use them to overcome your obstacles. For example, I have a really hard time talking to people, even those that are close to me. I do much better sorting out my thoughts in writing when I'm alone. Without the pressure of timing and the presence of other people, I can think at my own pace without worrying that I'm not living up to the expectations of others. Sometimes I write just for myself or to explain something that I otherwise wouldn't be able to. I also find it helpful to draw when I struggle with words or feel too overwhelmed to organize my thoughts.

Let your strengths empower you to overcome the challenges you face, but know this doesn't mean you have to do everything on your own. It is also a strength to be open and honest about the things you struggle with, and accept any help that is offered.

Of course, this is all easier said than done. Sometimes it's difficult to get out there and interact with others, but you will learn and grow from the experience, regardless of the outcome. It's okay to stumble along the way. It may take many tries to find something that works for you, and this can be frustrating. However, if you only do things in life that are comfortable and easy, you will never grow as a person. Challenge yourself. You may be surprised by just how much you can accomplish.

BIO: The author has chosen to withhold her name, but can be reached at LO314159asd@gmail.com. She has a Bachelor's in psychology and is currently working on a Master's degree in computer science. She enjoys coding and learning in her free time.

HOW TO STAY SAFE ON CAMPUS

You deserve to feel safe and have fun in college! Still, it's important to take precautions to prevent dangerous situations from happening. Here are some guidelines on what you can do to stay safe on campus.

During Walks

✔ **Don't Walk Alone After Dark:** While some colleges provide safety travel options after dark, as a college student, walking around campus at night will be inevitable. Whether you're heading home from a late class or the library, or heading out to dinner on a weekend, you will eventually find yourself maneuvering campus at night. Whenever you are in these situations, try to be with a friend or in a group. This will make the walk both more enjoyable and safer. If you find yourself in a situation where you have to walk alone at night, make sure you know your route before leaving, and try to walk along well-lit paths that have Blue Light emergency phones. Let friends, know about your plan to walk alone, and ask them to check in and call for help if they don't hear back from you by a certain time. It is best to have a fully-charged phone with you in case you need to contact a friend or use navigation.

✔ **No Tailgating:** Do not let others follow behind you (or "tailgate") into your dorm or building. If someone is waiting outside of a building and hoping to tailgate in behind you, ensure that they are a student at your university by asking to see their campus ID. If they cannot prove they are a student, or you don't feel comfortable letting them in for another reason, simply close the door behind you and alert the RA or student staff member on duty in your building.

Parties

✔ **Travel and Stay with a Trustworthy Group of Friends:** Going out in groups is an excellent safety tip, regardless of whether alcohol is involved. Within a group, more people are looking out for one another and keeping each other safe, and there are more people to notice if something suspicious or dangerous is happening. There is also strength in numbers if a group has to intervene to help a friend.

✔ **Have a Plan:** Before heading out for a fun evening, develop a plan. Here are some questions to ask yourself and your group:

1. Where are we going tonight?
   - Location 1: _____ Time: _____
   - Location 2: _____ Time: _____
   - Location 3: _____ Time: _____
2. How will we get home?
   - Is there a designated driver who will remain sober throughout the night?
   - Will we order a taxi or split a ridesharing service? If so, how much will it cost?
3. Are we all coming home together?
   - How is everyone getting home safely?
   - Does everyone have everybody's phone numbers?

4. Things to bring:
   - ☐ Charged phone
   - ☐ Wallet (cash for cover fees/other)
   - ☐ Campus and state ID
   - ☐ Keys
   - ☐ Other: _____
   - ☐ Other: _____

It is always a good idea to have a designated driver or person who will stay sober during an evening of partying. This person would be trusted to handle situations and keep everyone safe without alcohol impairing his or her judgement. If your designated driver drinks at all, even one drink, call a cab or an Uber instead. Before you leave each destination, make sure you have all the members of your original group. If anyone in your original group is not leaving with you, make sure you know who they are with and how they are getting home safely.

✔ **Stay Healthy:** While drinking is often associated with fun nights of dancing on tables and eating pizza at 1am, it is also associated with horrible hangovers the following morning. If you choose to drink at a party, make sure you have a healthy, protein-enriched meal in your stomach beforehand. This will slow the absorption rate of alcohol and decrease your likelihood of getting sick. Along with eating a substantial meal, make sure you stay hydrated throughout the evening by drinking water, and bring snacks with you. The body can only process one alcoholic drink per hour; pace yourself to avoid throwing up or becoming incapacitated.

✔ **Don't Accept Drinks or Substances From People You Don't Know or Trust:** Abstaining from consuming any drugs and alcohol is the safest way to protect yourself; however, experimentation with drugs and alcohol is very common in college. If you are going to participate in activities involving drugs or alcohol, it is important to educate yourself on the legal repercussions, health risks, and potential side effects. Do not accept any drink or other substance you didn't make yourself or watch a trusted friend make. Furthermore, always keep track of your drink at social gatherings. Following both of these rules will enable you to keep track of how much you are drinking, and also ensure others do not put foreign substances, like extra alcohol or drugs, into your drinks.

Bystander Intervention ("If you see something, say something")

Staying safe in college isn't only about keeping yourself safe, but also contributing to a safer campus community. If you witness a situation that doesn't look right to you, do not hesitate to intervene or find someone else to intervene. This could be as simple as asking someone who looks intoxicated if they are alright or need help, or as significant as notifying the police or security if you think someone might be in danger. Surveys conducted at three large universities revealed that bystander intervention is appropriate in situations including alcohol abuse, hazing, assault, mental health crises, and discrimination, among others.

It's important to recognize the difference between fun college partying and potentially dangerous behaviors. The following chart shows examples to help distinguish the two. If you're still unsure whether a situation requires intervention or not, ask a trusted friend to help you assess the situation before taking action.

Potentially Dangerous Situation	Typical College Partying
Someone is speaking incoherently or throwing up heavily	People are drinking and laughing
Someone is stumbling around uncontrollably, and needs physical help from others to walk straight	Friends and couples are sitting together or dancing happily
People are shouting angrily and cursing at each other	People are shouting to be heard over the loud music
At some point during or after the party, your roommate is passed out and unresponsive on the floor	After the party, your roommate eats a late-night snack before doing his or her usual nighttime routine and heading to bed

“

Trust your gut. Peer pressure is incredibly hard to overcome at times, but if you always follow you heart and trust your instincts, you can’t go wrong. You know what’s best for you, so don’t be ashamed or afraid of taking care of yourself first and foremost!

-Russell Lehmann, 26, www.theautisticpoet.com

”

PARTICIPATING IN CAMPUS CLUBS

Let’s learn how to make the most of campus clubs

By Melissa Hochberg, M.Ed.

Activity fairs can be crowded or noisy as clubs try to get students’ attention—if this overwhelms you, don’t worry. Most clubs are listed online or on social media, so you can contact the organizers for more information.

You’re a college student, congrats! How are you feeling? Excited? Nervous? Overwhelmed? All of those are completely normal emotions. You’re surrounded by new people, and no one knows you. This is a great opportunity to start fresh, try new things, and make friends. Making connections can make your new college campus feel more like home, but where do you begin?

Join a Club

Sometimes the best place to start off your college career is at a club that interests you! There are so many clubs, groups, and activities happening on campus. You can attend the Student Activities Fairs that most colleges

hold at the beginning of the year, and look at flyers posted around campus to learn about new activities. It's also important to check your college email daily, as there will be invitations to social opportunities and other college-related events.

College events can be a lot of fun. Many serve free food and sometimes there's even free SWAG (Stuff We All Get), including t-shirts, drink cups, lanyards to wear around your neck, pens, etc. That said, these new situations can also be overwhelming, but there are two standard rules that will benefit you in any setting: be prepared, and be yourself.

Be Prepared

It's normal to feel apprehensive about trying new things. Most people are nervous when they go to places where they have never been and experience new activities. It is helpful to have a plan in place before you leave your dorm room by gathering all of the information about the event or meeting. Follow this checklist to make sure you're prepared before leaving:

- ☐ Do I know where the meeting is?
  - Location: _____
- ☐ Do I know what time I should arrive?
  - Meeting time: _____
  - Travel time: _____
- ☐ Should I eat beforehand?
- ☐ Should I bring anything?
  - Notebook/computer
  - Phone, wallet, keys
  - Food
  - Equipment for activity
- ☐ What do I want to get out of this meeting?
  - Questions to ask:
    - How often does the group meet?
    - What are the responsibilities of joining the club?
    - Are there expenses involved in participating?
  - Goal(s):
    - Meet new people
    - Experience a new activity
    - Make a friend

Be Yourself

Clubs are a great way to meet people and make friends. Here's advice from one self-advocate for joining in at club meetings:

"People should understand that it's normal to feel awkward in a new situation but to still believe in themselves and try to overcome any nervousness they might feel. They should expect to have fun and actively seek out new friends. They should also introduce themselves with a smile and talk about things they might have in common, like movies, or places they might like to go. They can ask other members how long they've been in the club. Most of all, they should enjoy themselves."

Another self-advocate shares, *"When I saw a group that sounded interesting and attended a meeting, everyone was very helpful and friendly to me. I think if people are looking for a way to be included in a group, the best way is just to try it!"*

It's important to be yourself when trying new things and meeting new people. That means being honest with yourself, so if there are activities happening at the meeting that make you uncomfortable, it's absolutely okay to say "No," or leave. Having a trusted friend with you is helpful in this type of situation. If you are comfortable with your roommate, you can ask your roommate to attend with you and then you could go with your roommate to a club or meeting he or she is interested in. It's easier to attend a new event with a friend, but it's not a requirement.

Interact with Club Members

Social scripts and protocols vary depending on what club meeting or activity you're attending on campus. When you attend a club or meeting, there will be upperclassmen as well as other students who are new to the group, the students who are running the club, and returning members. It's likely that any club you attend will have an executive board, including a President, Vice President, Secretary, Treasurer, and possibly other more specialized leadership roles. At the beginning of the school year or semester, there are often openings for leadership positions; you may have the opportunity

to vote for members, or even run for a position yourself. It's important to gain experience with the club as a member before taking on a larger role in the group.

At the meeting, there may be members of different ages and with different majors within the college. You can watch their behaviors to get an idea of how people typically act at the meetings; it may be a very relaxed setting or more professional. There will probably be a lot of laughter and even some "inside jokes" from past meetings or events. Inside jokes are people reminiscing about funny or interesting things that happened at previous events. When you become a member of the group, you will learn about these things and you can ask questions to learn more, too.

Make sure you listen to what others have to say and do your best not to monopolize the conversation, even if you know a lot about the topic. If others are trying to add to the discussion, pause and hear what they have to say. You can always add a comment after others share their thoughts and opinions, too.

Stay Committed

Some clubs have required meetings, and some are more relaxed. If you commit to a future meeting or activity, it's important to keep track of the commitment in a calendar on your phone or written down so you can attend the upcoming events.

The great thing about exploring the clubs on campus is that you are not obligated to join or maintain any of them. The first few weeks of school are a time of exploration, and if a club interests you, you should continue to attend the meetings; if not, you don't have to go back. At some point you may need to make a commitment. For example, if you are joining the video gaming club, you can probably drop in and play video games without a serious commitment. However, if you are joining the fencing club, you might need to make a significant commitment to attend the practices requirements, financially and timewise, before you sign up and commit to the group or activity.

So, go ahead and join a club! Try new things, meet new people, and make new friends. Most important: Don't forget the importance of balancing academics with social experiences. Your courses and professors will teach you a lot, but if you allow yourself to try new things, some of the most valuable life lessons will be learned outside of the classroom.

References

Anne, P. (July 6, 2016). Personal interview.
Valerie, M. (June 29, 2016). Personal interview.

MELISSA HOCHBERG, M.ED, *is the Resource Specialist at the JCCNV's Early Childhood Learning Center and coordinates the Going Places! social clubs for persons with Level 1 Autism and Social InNOVAtions, a social club for college students of any abilities. Hochberg received her master's degree in Special Education from the University of Virginia.*

CAPRI KOWSKY
ON CAMPUS LIFE AND RELATIONSHIPS

What has your experience been like with social events and college parties?

I usually went to small outings with close friends and did not attend many college events or parties. The ones I did were usually obnoxious and loud, so I would end up leaving early to spend quiet time with friends instead. It might be worth it to go to one if you are with close friends who can help you through the experience, but even so, it's not worth it if you aren't having fun. Spending your valuable time doing things you consider to be fun is much better for your overall college experience.

Where do you find peace and comfort on campus, and why?

The student lounge was usually loud and full of rowdy students, so I would retreat to the interview rooms that were much quieter and usually empty after school hours. Empty, unscheduled classrooms were also free for students to use, so I took advantage of those to both study and recharge. It's a good idea to learn what places around campus are usually free and uncrowded. They make great safe spaces for when you need time alone or when you are going to have a meltdown.

How have the relationships you've developed on campus impacted your college experience?

The friends I ended up making on campus helped keep me safe, happy, mentally calm, and stable, all while keeping me motivated and on track with schoolwork. I had one or two close friends and many acquaintances, so don't worry if you don't have a large group of friends, as what will matter the most at the end of your experience will be the friends that you were close with and could count on to accept you for you.

Read the full-length interview and more personal stories online at: bit.ly/OARCollege

Capri Kowsky

Age: 22

Hometown: Batavia, Ohio

University/Program: Studying Media Arts and Animation at the Art Institute of Ohio-Cincinnati; recipient of the Organization for Autism Research's 2014 Lisa Higgins Hussman Scholarship

Autism Characteristics: echolalia, stimming, routine dependence

> "Whether you want to be open about your autism or not, take care of yourself and be proud of who you are!"

Financial Support

- Student Loans and Financial Aid
- OAR's Scholarship Program

Career Development

- Searching for a Job
- Interviews 101
- Hire Autism Resources
- A Field Guide for Your First Office Job
- Autism and the Workplace

Online Career & Money Hub

- bit.ly/OARCareerMoney

STUDENT LOANS AND FINANCIAL AID

Let's cover some basic things college applicants should know about financial aid

It's no secret that college can be expensive. On top of tuition, fees, and room and board, you also have to pay for books, personal items, and travel expenses. Whether you are in the process of applying to your first college or transferring to a different school, it's important to research your options and make sure your family can afford it. Part of this process is determining how much financial aid you're eligible to receive.

Financial aid is money that is either gifted or loaned to students to help them pay for college. This type of aid typically comes from the state and federal government, as well as private institutions. To determine if you're eligible to receive financial aid from the federal government, the first step is to complete the *Free Application for Federal Student Aid* (FAFSA). This form is comprehensive and requires detailed financial information about you and

your parents, so **give yourself several weeks to collect the materials and fill out the form**. Don't be surprised if you have to ask clarifying questions from your parents.

Once the FAFSA is submitted, and if no additional information is requested, you will receive a financial aid package that tells you what kind of aid you are qualified to receive. If you notify the college that you accept the financial aid package in a timely manner, you can expect the funds to be disbursed, or made available, before the start of the academic term.

There are generally three types of financial aid:

1. **Grants and Scholarships** – "gift aid" or financial aid that doesn't have to be repaid.
2. **Work study** – part-time jobs provided to students that demonstrate financial need. These jobs supplement other forms of aid, but are also available for students who pay for tuition out of pocket.
3. **Student loans** – borrowed money that must be paid back with interest that accrues over time.

What is the difference between grants and scholarships?

Federal Grants	Scholarships
These are typically awarded to students based on need.	These are typically awarded to students based on merit.
Federal Pell Grants are available for undergraduates that demonstrate financial need.	Thousands of organizations offer scholarships. Most scholarships are awarded to students that demonstrate unique qualities or abilities. Some scholarship programs are specifically offered to students with autism. Search for opportunities at your school's college resource center or online.
Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grants (FSEOG) are available for students that demonstrate exceptional financial need.	

What federal loans are available?

Stafford Loans are direct loans from the U.S. Department of Education:

- **Direct Subsidized Loans** – Available to undergraduate students with financial need. Interest does not accrue while you are in school at least half-time and during a grace period of 6 months after the first time you leave school.
- **Direct Unsubsidized Loans** – Available to undergraduate, graduate, and professional students that do not need to demonstrate financial need. Interest accrues immediately.

- **Direct PLUS Loans** – Available to graduate or professional students and parents of dependent undergraduate students to help cover additional education expenses not covered by other financial aid. They typically have a higher interest rate than Direct Subsidized or Direct Unsubsidized Loans.
- **Federal Perkins Loans** – School-based loan for undergraduate and graduate students that demonstrate exceptional financial need.
- **Direct Consolidation Loans** – Combine all eligible federal student loans into a single loan with a single loan servicer. This makes payments easier to manage and track.

For full and updated information about eligibility, interest rates and payments, and borrower responsibilities, go to: www.studentaid.ed.gov

Should I apply for private loans?

Some families turn to private student loans to take care of costs not covered by federal aid. However, compared to federal loans, private loans may be riskier and more expensive. As with all types of loans, it's important to research loan details and borrower responsibilities for each.

Compared to private loans, federal loans typically have lower, fixed interest rates, and provide flexible repayment options. Some don't have to be repaid until after college. These benefits are not necessarily guaranteed by private loan providers. It's generally advisable to exhaust your federal aid options before turning to private loans.

How do I pay off my loans?

Taking out loans is a huge responsibility. After you graduate, you will be expected to pay back all debt and accruing interest on a monthly basis. To make your loan payments more affordable, federal student loan repayment plans can give you more time to repay your loans. These plans offer repayment periods that can last anywhere from 10-30 years. Repayment plans for private loans vary—some may even require you to start repayments before graduating.

Keep in mind that interest continues to accrue until your loan is paid off, so loans with longer terms accrue more interest over time. To save the most money in interest, pay off your loan as soon as possible and make your payments on time. When the time comes, you can work with your loan servicer to choose the best repayment plan for you.

Additional informational resources:

http://www.finaid.org

https://studentaid.ed.gov

https://www.fafsa.gov

https://studentloanhero.com (interest calculator)

Organization for Autism Research's Scholarship Program

OAR is proud to support the postsecondary, undergraduate education of qualified individuals with an autism spectrum diagnosis through its $3,000 scholarships. Since 2008, OAR has awarded scholarships to over 200 students across the United States! OAR offers two scholarships – you can learn which one is right for you below!

Who can apply?

Anyone with an established autism diagnosis and who will be attending an undergraduate program in the United States during the school year following the application process may apply. Students must be enrolled full time at an accredited postsecondary institution of higher education. There is no age limit!

When can I apply?

Applications are open annually from early December to early May.

Where can I apply?

Applications are only accepted online – learn more at bit.ly/OARScholarships

Which scholarship should I apply for?

- The Schwallie Family Scholarship is for students attending two- or four-year undergraduate colleges or universities
- The Lisa Higgins Hussman Scholarship is for students attending two- or four-year universities, life skills or postsecondary programs, or vocational, technical, or trade schools

FOUR-YEAR UNDERGRADUATE COLLEGE OR UNIVERSITY

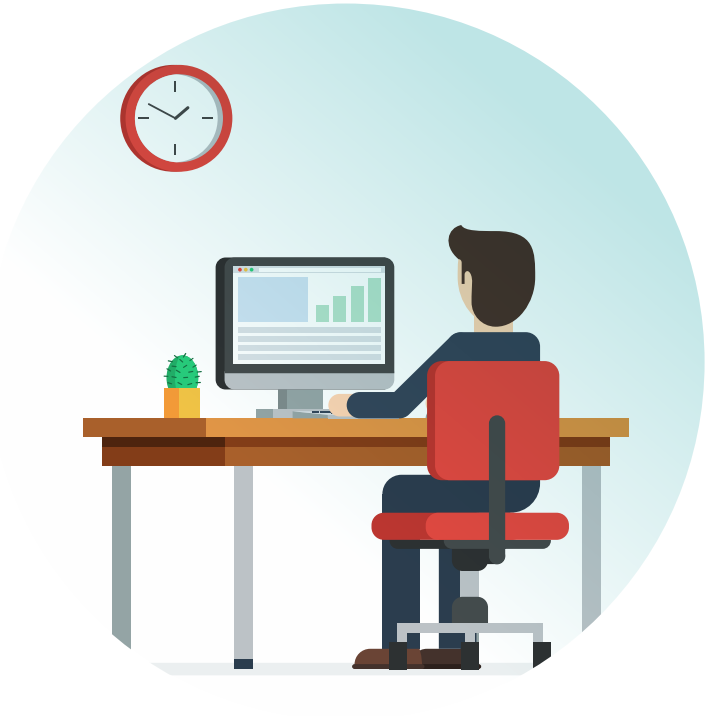
TWO-YEAR UNDERGRADUATE COLLEGE

TRADE, TECHNICAL, OR VOCATIONAL SCHOOL

COOPERATIVE LIFE SKILLS PROGRAMS

Questions? Call OAR at 866.366.9710 or email scholarship@researchautism.org
www.researchautism.org

SEARCHING FOR THE RIGHT JOB



Maybe you're looking for experience in your desired career field. Or maybe your parents said it's time for you to pay for some things on your own. Or maybe you just want to make some money over the summer to open a savings account. Whatever the reason, searching for a job – especially your first job – can be intimidating. We're going to talk about different employment options, what to look for in a job, how to search for a job, and how to navigate the application process.

Soul Searching

Do you want a part-time job during the academic year? If so, can you balance classes and employment?

If not, are you looking for a full-time internship during the semester? Would you be able to get class credit that counts towards graduation?

Are you eligible for a work study program? If so, how do you make the most of it?

Employment Options

There are different types of employment options available to you as a college student:

- Part-time jobs
- Federal work study
- Internships

All of these employment options are available during the summer (a seasonal position), academic year, or year-round. Unlike jobs, some internship positions are unpaid and/or completed for college credit. Unpaid internships are offered to students interested in gaining work-related skills in a particular field.

Part-Time Jobs

As a student, a part-time job is perfect – you aren't tied to the commitment of a full-time position, and you have some flexibility to schedule work around your classes.

For a part-time job, consider the following:

- **Time frame** – Do you want to work part-time for a single semester, the entire academic year, or year-round? Would you rather work just over the summer?
- **Hours** – Be honest with yourself about how many hours a week you can work. Part-time positions for students usually range anywhere from 8-25 hours per week. How much time would your academic commitments allow you to work? Do you take more time studying than your peers?
- **Availability** – What days and hours are you available for work? Are you available to work night shifts or during regular business hours? Are you open to working on the weekends? It's important to find a position that is accommodating to your class schedule.
- **Transportation** – Do you prefer to have a job on campus? Are you able to commute (via car, bus, or metro) to a position that is off-campus? How far are you willing to travel?

Work Study

Work study is a way for students to earn money to pay for school through part-time jobs.

With work study, it's important to know that even if you've been awarded work-study funds, you still have to find a job. Some schools may assist you in the process, but most expect you to conduct your own job search and application process. However, the school will usually provide you with a list of work study positions available.

It's a good idea to apply early to increase your chances of securing one of the more desirable positions since jobs differ in compensation, schedule flexibility, and setting. Depending on your school, students can work all kinds of jobs as a part of the work study program, from offices within the university to the dining halls.

To qualify for work study, you have to fill out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). Schools may award work study funds on a first-come, first-serve basis, so it's important to fill out the FAFSA early.

Not all students qualify for federal work study. You may not receive work study funds if you don't qualify based on need, don't file the FAFSA early enough, or don't attend a school that participates in the work study program.

Internships

What are internships?

Internships are opportunities offered to students that are interested in gaining work experience in their desired field. As an intern, you may work part-time for a few hours a week, or you may work full business hours (typically 9 to 5). Internships can take place at any time during the year, including the summer, and some students may choose to complete semester-long internships or even year-long internships. Depending on the company you work for, your internship may be paid or unpaid. You may also be eligible to receive credit from your school for your internship, or be required to complete an internship to graduate.

Where can I complete an internship?

You can complete an internship in your hometown, in another city, or even internationally. Colleges and universities often have professional connections around the globe. Check with your school, especially within your chosen department, to see what kinds of internship opportunities and housing programs they can help you find. For example, Auburn University's College of Human Sciences works in collaboration with Stenden University in South Africa, and offers semester-long study abroad experiences that include housing.

What will I be doing?

The work you'll be doing as an intern ranges widely, from running errands and making coffee to leading projects and becoming an integral part of the organization.

Why should I complete an internship?

Internships can be extremely valuable because they allow you to apply what you've learned in the classroom to the real world and vice versa. Students who complete internships typically stand out on post-graduate job applications, as well as build strong networks within their field.

What to Look for In a Job

It's important to find a job or internship that suits your needs, strengths, and interests:

Career Development

- Are there positions available that would allow you to explore a career field of interest? For example, students who major in psychology may have an opportunity to work in research labs through the work study program. Exposing yourself to entry-level positions can help you determine your career goals as well as develop your resume.

Duties and Compensation

- What type of duties are you willing to perform in an entry-level position? For example, you may not want to work as a line cook if you get flustered easily in a fast-paced kitchen. Find positions that both build on your strengths and comfortably give you an opportunity to gain new skills.
- What is the minimum hourly rate you are willing to be paid given your financial need, the duties you are expected to perform in the position, and other commitments? If the job or internship takes place during the academic year, remember that the opportunity to study will be lost. Make sure the compensation is worth the commitment.

Environment

- What work environment would you best thrive in based on your personality, preferences, and strengths? For example, you may be perfectly happy performing administrative duties such as data entry in a lab where expectations are clear and human interaction is minimal. Or, you may want to be a library assistant because you enjoy the quiet pace, helping others, and reading.
- Is it important for the employer to demonstrate a history of disability supports and accommodations? Remember that longer periods of employment reflect positively on you on your resume, so it's best to find a work environment where you can feel comfortable.

How to Look for a Job or Internship

1. See if your school has a student employment office, or something similar. For internships, visit your department and see if they have an internship coordinator who can assist you in finding an internship to meet your needs.
2. Check to see if your school has a website or resource to help students find on-campus jobs, internships, and post-grad jobs. For example, many universities have an online resource called Handshake that allows you to create a profile, search jobs, find out about career fairs on campus, and more. Your school may offer something similar.
3. Keep an eye on bulletin boards around campus, like lecture halls or the library, that typically have information about part-time employment opportunities on campus or in the surrounding area.
4. Ask at restaurants and shops you like or frequent. Even if they don't have a "help wanted" sign in the window, they may be looking to hire. Ask to speak to the manager to show you're interested and ambitious.
5. Network with peers and professors, and ask them to let you know when they hear about new positions.

How to Apply for a Job

There are three main ways employers will have you apply with them:

Email: Some job postings ask that you email your resume and sometimes a cover letter. Your email message should be professional.

Online: For some opportunities, you may be required to fill out an online form and upload your resume.

In-person: To apply in-person, employers will make a paper copy of their application available in their store or office, or sometimes online. You will be responsible for filling it out, attaching your resume and cover letter (if necessary), and returning the packet to the store or office. Today, more employers are moving towards email and online applications, and in-person applications are less prevalent (although you will probably need to go for an in-person interview, whether you applied via email or in person).

No matter how you apply for the job, you'll most likely need to write a resume and complete an interview.

Go Forth and Find a Position!

Overall, you'll have to put in a lot of work to find a job or internship position. But once you do, the opportunities for you are limitless. Besides earning money or class credit, you can gain teamwork skills, learn how to build a strong work ethic, and hopefully improve upon career-specific skills in your chosen field.

INTERVIEWS 101

If potential employers or campus organizations are impressed by your resume, you may be invited for an interview. The interview is an opportunity for you to expand on your resume and qualifications, learn more about the position, ask questions, and explain to your potential employer or campus organization why you are the best person for the position.

No idea what to expect? No worries – this article will help you prepare and present yourself in the best way possible.

Steps to Take Before, During, and After an Interview

Before

- Research the company or organization. Make sure you are familiar with the job or position description so that you can relate your past experiences and skills to what the company or organization is seeking.
- Practice your "Tell me about yourself."
  - "Tell me about yourself" — This is a short 30-45 second presentation on yourself and why

you are right for the job or position. "Tell me about yourself" is often the first question asked during an interview. Just like your resume, your response should be tailored for the position you are applying for.
    - You do not have to disclose your disability during an interview if you do not want to. It is illegal for an interviewer to inquire about a disability. The decision to disclose is entirely yours to make.
- Ask around to see if anyone you know has ever interviewed for the same campus organization or on-campus job. They might be able to tell you what kinds of questions to expect, and may even be willing to practice with you beforehand.
- Prepare a copy of your resume, application, and other related materials to bring with you to the interview for quick reference.

During

- Arrive 5 to 10 minutes before the scheduled interview time.
- Do not give demands about what you want from the job, but instead focus on what you can offer the company or organization.
- Avoid being too blunt or negative in your responses. Your goal is to make a good first impression, after all.
- If you get nervous and tend to fidget, discreetly play with a paper clip or coin during the interview.
- Be prepared to ask one or two questions at the end of the interview to demonstrate interest and that you did your research.

After

- Follow up with your interviewer with a thank – you note or thank you email within 48 hours after the interview.
- Reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of your interview to help you improve on your interviewing skills. If you are not accepted for the position, thank the interviewer and ask if he or she is willing to provide feedback on why you were not selected.

Helpful Hints

- Practice interviewing with a family member or friend
- Prepare a short list of questions to ask the interviewer
- Silence your phone
- Don't chew gum
- Shake hands with your interviewer(s) before the interview begins and again after the interview ends
- Keep your interview responses as brief and focused as possible to avoid going off topic

What to Wear

- It is important to look professional during an interview. If you aren't told what the dress code for your interview is, aim for "business professional" (blazers, slacks, dress pants, and dress shoes). It's always better to be overdressed than underdressed.
- ***Make sure your…***
    - Outfit is clean and wrinkle free
    - Hair is neat, brushed, and styled. If you have long hair, it may be a good idea to pull your hair back so you aren't tempted to play with it during the interview
    - Fingernails are clean and clipped

Tip: If your interview is across campus or immediately after a class, it might be a good idea to bring your interview clothes with you in a garment bag, then change in a nearby bathroom. This way, you can prevent sweat stains and wrinkles from setting into your clothes throughout the day.

While there are many things you can do to improve your interviewing skills, one of the best way to prepare is to role play. Remember to visit the Career Development Center on campus. There, you will have access to additional resources and, more important career coaches who may be willing to guide you throughout the application process. The university wants you to succeed, so ask about structured opportunities for you to practice interview skills with someone.

The job search can be complicated and confusing.
Need some help? Look no further.

The Hire Autism Resource Center

has information that will help you be successful at work.

Access the Organization for Autism Research's (OAR) Hire Autism Resource Center to find lots of useful information and tips, including:

Types of employment opportunities

Disability benefits (SSDI and SSI)

Creating the best resume

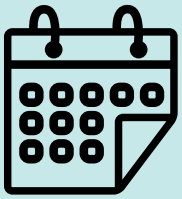
Preparing for an interview

Interview questions

Workplace 101

How to dress

Maintain long-term employment



Accommodation tips for employers

Hireautism.org/resource-center

A FIELD GUIDE FOR YOUR FIRST OFFICE JOB

Whether it's a work-study position or your first job post-graduation, here are some things you can expect working in an office environment

By Erick Soricelli

So, you made it. Congratulations! You have your first office job. Now what?

It is safe to assume you may be the only person with autism on your team or maybe in the entire company. These are a few guidelines to help you get through your workdays successfully:

Be careful when explaining yourself to co-workers and supervisors.

A 2010 psychology study noted that whether or not to disclose a disability is a complex and sensitive decision and that disclosing can bring both positive and negative responses. Though positive results are not guaranteed, the study found that co-workers tend to be more positive in their attitudes toward, and more willing to work with people with autism if they share their diagnoses.

When in doubt, overdress.

It is better to dress more professionally than the dress code requires, rather than less. If you have any doubts about whether your attire is appropriate, take a look at what your co-workers are wearing. If you're still unsure, ask your supervisor or human resources (HR) department.

It is okay to be shy. It is not okay to refuse to respond.

You are not required to make eye contact all the time with coworkers or talk with them when you are upset. But not answering questions, failing to say "hello" back to a coworker, or speaking up in meetings may bring you negative attention. If you feel uncomfortable talking, write your responses down.

You will need to attend meetings and presentations.

Most meetings are scheduled at least one day in advance. If you feel nervous about an upcoming meeting, look for a meeting agenda and a list of names next to the agenda topics. If you are called into a meeting without advance notice, tell your supervisor or the meeting host that you are nervous and may need extra time to prepare.

Bring earbuds and headphones to the office, but shut everyone out.

If you are allowed to have earbuds or headphones, keep the volume low enough to hear other co-workers calling your name.

Your co-workers may be friendly but will not always be your friends.

It is a workplace, so don't expect to have someone to talk to throughout the day. Staying for longer than 15 minutes at another co-worker's space if you are not working may be distracting, even annoying, for your co-worker.

Slow down when writing and editing e-mails and documents and going through training.

Reread and carefully edit an email or document before sending it. Pay attention when you are in a training session. Misspelled words, grammar mistakes, or skipping over training steps can have negative, unexpected effects later.

Do not assume that your conversations and internet history are private.

Even if you are outside with only one co-worker, that person has the right to share your conversation with your supervisor, his or her supervisor, or both. Also, what you view or post to social media or the internet on company equipment can be tracked and shown to managers.

Do you dislike your supervisor? Do you wish you worked at a different company? Do not express these opinions at your workplace or online. Someone in your company may hear what you say or see what you post, and this could have serious consequences, even loss of your job.

Be careful when expressing personal views.

While most companies do not have problems with employees expressing their personal views, be careful not to be seen as forcing your ideas on your co-workers. Respect others' points of view.

There are many kinds of harassment, and none of them is acceptable.

You cannot expect everyone to get along. If taken to the extreme, sometimes lack of harmony among co-workers can lead to harassment of some kind. If you have questions about what is and what is not considered harassment, contact your company's HR department. Just because a person has a disability doesn't mean he or she has the right to harass others (or be subjected to harassment him/herself).

Invited to lunch, a bar after work, or a company party? That's great! Right?

These are opportunities to relax and talk more about yourself. Rules about proper dress, safe topics, and personal space still apply. Though you may not be required to be there, try not to skip every social event. You may be skipping an opportunity to develop meaningful connections with your peers.

These are just a handful of lessons that I learned from experience. You can expect to learn even more on the job. It's okay to make a few errors when you're in a new position, as long as you learn from your mistakes and continue to grow.

BIO: *Erick Soricelli is a writer, artist, and self-advocate living in the Washington, DC, area.*

AUTISM IN THE WORKPLACE

Tips on navigating the workplace with autism

By Courtney Thompson

Thinking over my college experience, at the heart of my struggles was my inability to envision a future for myself. If you are worried about what you'll encounter in the years ahead, you are not alone.

I became known at my university for changing my major not once, not twice, but seven times. Each time I switched into another department, I wasn't so much running toward the future as I was fleeing from it. It seemed no matter where I turned, I felt destined for failure. I couldn't visualize myself attaining independence or building a career because I had internalized the message that in order to move forward, I needed to fix myself first. The limited career advice I could find centered on overcoming disability – but not so much on the messy reality of living with disability. As encouraging as it was to read accounts of people who were able to shed their symptoms as they crossed the threshold to adulthood, I worried that I would never find a field where I could function just like everyone else, when I should have focused on taking care of myself to be the best that I could be – imperfections and all.

In the words of disability advocate Amy Thompson, "I wish there were more room in our conversations for journeys that don't end with an unqualified victory. Because sometimes the path is the victory."

Here are some tips from my experiences treading that path:

Focus on symptoms, not just your diagnosis

There are many resources online that list majors and jobs recommended for specific disabilities based the assumption that sharing a diagnosis means sharing strengths. The problem is that they don't take into account co-existing disorders that may amplify certain challenges, or the fact that even within one label, there is tremendous heterogeneity.

I've received advice from neuropsychologists and my family doctor that I should consider a career in computer science because I am on the autism spectrum - and people on the autism spectrum are stereotyped as mathematically inclined. In reality, however, not only do I have a limited interest in technology (I just got rid of my flip phone last year), but my visual-processing challenges and lack of math aptitude would make such a career a poor fit.

If you consult with a professional about career options specific to your disability, the conversation will be more fruitful if you explain your specific symptoms and how they impact you, rather than simply stating your diagnosis. Above all, clearly articulate your interests—and don't let somebody else's perception of your disorder tell you what you can or cannot pursue.

Recognize the power (and the limitations) of accommodations

For a list of workplace accommodations, go to bit.ly/OARCareerMoney.

Workplace accommodations can have a transformative effect on our job performance, and most important, our self-esteem. Access to simple supports such as a white noise machine or assistance with note-taking during meetings can make the difference between being fired and being able to flourish. However, it is important to remember that accommodations won't solve everything. While they allow us to address some of our weaknesses, they don't eliminate them entirely.

In the past, I've put perhaps too much faith in accommodations, which led me to pursue jobs that were a poor fit. For instance, I worked as a cashier/bagger at a local supermarket, a position that centered on two of my most significant challenges: math and motor skills. Accommodations like extra training sessions and reminder lists helped, but they couldn't fix the underlying issue: I was extremely slow at operating the cash register, and I couldn't bag groceries without dropping items on the ground.

Does that mean those accommodations are useless? No. Extra training and reminder lists have been very useful at other jobs, like office positions, that didn't involve as much math or motor skills.

Evaluate disability-specific job programs on a case-by-case basis

A growing number of employment initiatives are targeted toward people with disabilities in the fields of technology, government, and business. The quality of these programs varies, with some extending a wholehearted commitment to an inclusive, empowering workplace and others seeking token employees with disabilities for the purpose of getting tax credits from the government.

Ask questions to get a sense of how much support is embedded in the fabric of the program: Are positions rigid, with pre-set tasks that you are expected to perform? Or is there flexibility to develop a customized opportunity based on your unique profile of strengths and weaknesses? Ask to get connected with current members or alumni of the program if you need more information to make a decision about whether or not it is the right fit for you.

It's okay if you need to rely on a safety net

As a society, we fixate so much on the ability to triumph over hardship that we inadvertently silence anything that doesn't fit that narrative," wrote Amy Thompson, a disability advocate.

People with disabilities are capable of so much, and I am excited to live in an era where our potential is finally being recognized. But true disability empowerment shouldn't focus on shattering our limitations. It should be about recognizing that even when we aren't able to achieve our goals, we still have dignity. While I feel fortunate that at the moment I am able to earn an income, I have sought out government benefits in the past.

It takes tremendous courage to apply for Social Security and to share with lawyers, judges, medical examiners, and government bureaucrats the most vulnerable parts of yourself. **If you need government benefits, you aren't giving up on yourself – you are pursuing the level of wellness and stability that you deserve.** Symptoms ebb and flow, so I stress that anyone who needs to leave the workforce and receive Social Security is not a failure. Independent or not, the lives of people with disabilities are still meaningful.

Know that it gets better

I almost gave up the opportunity for a government job because I thought I would be inadequate in the position. After all, if I couldn't handle low-wage, so-called "basic jobs" like bagging groceries, how could I possibly take on more responsibilities? But much to my surprise, I am thriving.

Jobs that require more education and are more intellectual in nature tend to have more flexibility built into their framework. Opportunities like telework, customizable start times, and paid leave are sometimes available to all employees, which is great for everyone, especially those with disabilities. When I worked in retail I would get berated for excessive fidgeting, but this is not a big deal now that I have my own cubicle!

The ability to structure your workspace and your workday may lessen your need for accommodations. **Even if your current employment options seem bleak, know that a few years of college under your belt open up possibilities for jobs with higher levels of autonomy.**

Consider posting about your experiences online (even if anonymously)

"How many blaze trails along well-trodden paths, oblivious to the work done by those who came before? How many cannot even begin to imagine the trails?," asked Cal Montgomery, writing to fellow members of the disability community.

While we don't need to constrict our employment options to those already pursued by people with disabilities, it is comforting to know that others with similar challenges are on the same path. I've spent a lot of time researching firsthand accounts of disability in various fields, sometimes with limited results. It can be disorienting not to know anyone with a similar learning profile in our fields of interest. It also is useful to anticipate possible roadblocks in the years ahead by learning from other people's stories.

If you feel comfortable, anonymously share your employment experiences–good and bad–on an online message board, blog, or with people with disabilities (avoid referencing specific names or organizations, as being explicit may lead to trouble with your existing or future employer).You will be adding to a body of knowledge that could make the world a bit easier for others in the disability community, and learning from others along the way.

When we get frustrated in the workforce, what can we do to help keep us going? Knowing that we may play some small part in laying the trail for the next generation of young adults with disabilities.

Thank you for being a trailblazer.

References

Hinsburger, D., Montgomery, C., Sobsey, D., & Wilkins, D. (2000). *Four sight: the disability community contemplates fate, future, and fear.* Montreal, Canada: Diverse City.

Thompson, A. (2015, December 4). When people want your special needs journey to have a 'storybook ending' [Blog post]. Retrieved from The Mighty: http://themighty.com/2015/12/when-people-want-your-special-needs-journey-to-have-a-storybook-ending/

COURTNEY THOMPSON *attends Temple University in Philadelphia, where she will receive a Bachelor's in Liberal Studies with a concentration in Sociology. In her spare time, she enjoys Russian language and culture, reading, acrylic painting, and raising her house rabbit, Angus. Her hope is to continue her disability advocacy by pursuing a career in public policy or social work. Feel free to connect with her at courtney.thompson@temple.edu.*

College Central

College Central is OAR's companion microsite for this publication. It contains four hubs that will continue to help you navigate the various aspects of self-advocacy, academics, college life, and career & money. Go online to explore more content or share your story. Discover helpful tools such as checklists, personal stories, advice columns, and more.

SELF-ADVOCACY
Take control of your own college experience by advocating for yourself.

ACADEMICS
Check out tips and resources to help you acheive academic success.

CAMPUS LIFE
Learn how to deal with housing relationships, and social activities in college.

CAREER & MONEY
Know how to manage your finances and prepare for the workforce.

Access more information at http://bit.ly/OARCollege

All students deserve a fulfilling college experience, including students on the autism spectrum. OAR's *Finding Your Way: A College Guide for Students on the Spectrum* is intended to help students with ASD become better prepared for college life and academics. The guide addresses challenges that are both universal and unique to college students with autism by providing information, guidance, and resources that address them. *Finding Your Way* offers practical advice from autism experts; powerful narratives from self-advocates; and relevant resource tools. It is intended to help readers anticipate and improve their academic and social situations by advocating for themselves.

More specifically, this guide covers topics such as:

- Transitions from high school to college
- Self-advocacy and disclosure
- Academic supports and accommodations
- Strategies to establish and maintain daily routines and structure
- Social relationships and conflict resolution
- Jobs, internships, and financial aid

The Organization for Autism Research (OAR) is a national non-profit organization dedicated to promoting research that can be applied to help families, educators, related professionals, and individuals with autism spectrum disorders find the much-needed answers to their urgent questions. Committed to excellence in service to the autism community, OAR funds applied research that will make a difference in the lives of individuals; provides accurate and useful information; and offers opportunities for the autism community to collaborate and make advances together.

www.researchautism.org

Organization for Autism Research