

Summer 2023 Horizons Newsletter



Autism Support of Michigan
 P.O. Box 45
 Bannister, MI 48807
 517-882-2800

asminr@autism-mi.org

www.autism-mi.org

GUEST ESSAY – NYTIMES.COM

Temple Grandin: Society Is Failing Visual Thinkers, and That Hurts Us All

When I was younger, I believed everyone thought in realistic pictures the same way I did, with images clicking through my mind a little bit like PowerPoint slides or TikTok videos.

I had no idea that most people are more word centric than I am. For many, words, not pictures, shape thought. That's probably how our culture got to be so talky: Teachers lecture, religious leaders preach, politicians make speeches and we watch "talking heads" on TV. We call most of these people neurotypical — they develop along predictable lines and communicate, for the most part, verbally.

I was born in the late 1940s just as the diagnosis of autism was being applied to kids like me. I had no language until age 4 and was first diagnosed as brain damaged. Today, many people would say that I'm neurodivergent — a term that encompasses not only autism but also dyslexia, A.D.H.D. and other learning problems. The popularization of the term neurodivergence and society's growing understanding about the different ways that brains work are unquestionably positive developments for many individuals like me.

Still, many aspects of our society are not set up to allow visual thinkers — which so many of us neurodivergent folks are — to thrive. In fact, many aspects of our society seem set up specifically so we will fail. Schools force students into a one-size-fits-all curriculum. The workplace relies too much on résumés and G.P.A.s to assess candidates' worth. This must change not only because neurodivergent people, and all visual thinkers, deserve

better but also because without a major shift in how we think about how we learn, American innovation will be stifled.

When I was 7 or 8, I spent hours tinkering and experimenting to figure out how to make parachutes, fashioned from old scarves, open more quickly each time I tossed them into the air. This required careful observation to determine how small design changes affected performance. My single-mindedness, verging on obsession, was probably because I was autistic. At the time I loved a book about famous inventors and their inventions. It impressed me that Thomas Edison and the Wright brothers were so single-minded in figuring out how to make a light bulb or an airplane. They spent lots of time obsessively perfecting their inventions. It is likely that some of the inventors in that book also were autistic.

We hear a great deal about the need to fix the infrastructure in this country, but we are too focused on the things that need improving and updating rather than the people who will be able to do the work. For over 25 years, I designed equipment to handle livestock and worked with the highly skilled people who built the equipment. When I look back at all the projects I designed for large companies, I estimate that 20 percent of the skilled welders and drafting technicians were either autistic, dyslexic or had A.D.H.D. I remember two people who had autism and held numerous patents for mechanical devices they invented and sold equipment to many companies. Our visual thinking skills were key to our success.

Today, we want our students to be well-rounded; we should think about making sure that the education we provide is as well. At the same time, I wager that the people who will fix America's infrastructure have spent hours and hours on one thing, whether it be Legos, violin or chess — hyper-focus is a classic sign of neurodivergent thinking and it's critical for innovation and invention.

I often get asked what I would do to improve both elementary and high school. The first step would be to put more of an emphasis on hands-on classes such as art, music, sewing, woodworking, cooking, theater, auto mechanics and welding. I would have hated school if the hands-on classes had been removed, as so many have been today. These classes also expose students — especially neurodivergent students — to skills that could become a career. Exposure is key. Too many students are growing up who have never used a tool. They are completely removed from the world of the practical.

Despite my accomplishments, if I were a young person today, I would have difficulty graduating from high school because I could not pass algebra. It was too abstract, with no visual correlations. This is true for many of today's students who get labeled as bad at math, students who might otherwise pass alternative math courses such as statistics that would also apply to real-life work situations. There is too much emphasis in school on testing and not enough on career outcomes. The fact that I failed the SAT in math prohibited me from getting into veterinary school, but today I am a university professor in animal sciences and I am invited to speak to groups of veterinarians to advise them on their work. The true measure of an education isn't what grades a student gets today, but where they are 10 years later.

I am often invited to give talks at corporations and government agencies, and the first thing I tell managers is that they need a neurodiverse work force. Complementary skills are the key to successful teams. We need the people who can build our trains and planes and internet, and the people who can make them run. Studies have shown that diverse teams will outperform homogeneous teams. If you've ever attended a meeting where nothing gets solved, it may be because there are too many people who think alike.

Today, Taiwan produces the majority of the world's highest tech silicon chips. Much of the specialized mechanical equipment used for processing meat is made in Holland and Germany. When I visited the Steve Jobs Theater in California, pre-Covid, I discovered that the glass walls were created by an Italian company. The massive carbon fiber roof that looks like a spaceship was imported from Dubai. The reason this equipment is coming from outside the United States can be traced in part to differences in educational systems. In Italy and

the Netherlands, for instance, a student at about age 14 decides whether to go the university route or the vocational route. The vocational route is not looked down on or regarded as a lesser form of intelligence. And that's how it should be everywhere, because the skill sets of visual thinkers are essential to finding real-world solutions to society's many problems.

Temple Grandin is a professor of animal science at Colorado State University and the author of "Visual Thinking: The Hidden Gifts of People Who Think in Pictures, Patterns and Abstractions."

Summer Camps

(Click on the link for the camp's website)

- [Total Education Solutions](#) – Troy, MI Phone: 248-544-0360
- Camp Tall Tree - Howell, MI Phone: 734-249-8094 (no website available)
- [Friendship Circle](#) - West Bloomfield, MI Phone: 248- 788-7878
- [OUR Camp](#) - Northville, MI Phone: 734-516-0488
- [St. Francis Camp on the Lake](#) - Jerome, MI Phone: 517-688-9212
- [The Fowler Center](#) - Mayville, MI Phone: 989-673-2050
- [YMCA Camp Copneconic](#) – Fenton, MI Phone: 810-629-9622
- [North Star Reach Camp](#) – Ann Arbor/Pickney, MI Phone:734-680-8744
- [Camp Grace Bentley](#) - Burtchville, MI Phone: 313-962-8242
- [YMCA Camp Ohiyesa](#) - Holly, MI Phone: 248-887-4533
- [Kindergarten Readiness Camp](#) – Troy, MI Phone: 248-544-0360



Infodumping: Autistic Love Language

CHRISTOPHER WHELAN

Is there something that makes you feel passionate? Autistically passionate? Something you could read about or do every day, consuming as much information about it as you can? Experimenting with it as much as you can? Is there something that you could talk to somebody about for hours?

Many autistic people develop one or more Special Interests, which we fixate on as the most beautiful thing or things that life can offer us. We voraciously consume any information we can find having to do with our Special Interest(s) and play with it in new ways however we can think of.

My earliest memories of trying to make friends with other people are me talking for hours in class about my favorite Nintendo game in grade 3, Donkey Kong 64. I did not want to talk about anything except Donkey Kong 64. I did not want to do anything except play Donkey Kong 64. I had trouble making friends because I could not think of anything else to say, and I was subject to a lot of teasing in school because of it. While my Special Interests have shifted over time, this way of communicating with people, talking for hours about this one subject that the other person probably does not care to hear about, has been my socialization.

When I learned more about autism in my adulthood, I learned that this is such a common part of autistic communication that we have developed a slang word for it: Info dumping. Info dumping is when an autistic person exhausts all of the information about a focused topic that they know of. To me, info dumping is a love language; not only professing the love I have for a certain topic, I am also risking the rejection that comes with hearing somebody that I admire tell me that my favorite thing is meaningless to them, because I want to develop a connection with that person and this is my ham fisted attempt at developing that connection.

My autistic pride advocacy means that I need to develop connections with many other autistics, to build our community of pride and to work together on projects to promote autism acceptance. I have found that a great way to break ice between myself and a fellow autistic that I need to partner with on a project is to get an Infodump session out. We give each other one or two minutes to spill as much information about our favorite thing as we can, and then we listen to the other person spend one or two minutes spilling out as much information as possible about their favorite thing. This game has worked wonderfully because it requires no setup or supplies, and it can be done in person, over the phone (yikes!), or online. It is a disclosure of our autistic identities that gets seen by the other person and accepted. Bringing our Special Interests with us and showing them off with pride establishes a space where our autistic selves can be shown off with pride.

Differences in Autistic v. Allistic Communication

Posted by Ray Perry

In our latest tip sheet, we discuss how communicating with employees with autism can require some adjustments. This, of course, doesn't mean autistic people are bad communicators – simply that the way they process conversation is different than some of us may be used to. Here, we will further explore the differences between autistic and allistic communication.

Autistic and allistic people approach ideas differently but can learn to communicate effectively.

For those unfamiliar, “allistic” refers to people who are not on the autism spectrum and has become an increasingly popular term to help distinguish people from their autistic peers without using judgmental terms like “normal” in contrast to “autistic”. When interacting with an autistic employee, it's important to remember that there is no one “right” way to communicate, which of course is true regardless of whether one is on the autism spectrum or not. It's also important to bear in mind that misunderstandings are as frustrating for the autistic person as they are for you, and having a better understanding of autistic communication can prevent breakdowns for both parties.

While autism doesn't look the same in all people who are on the spectrum, there are a handful of common traits that can affect how autistic and allistic people communicate. One that often strikes allistic people right away is directness; autistic people can find implications and assumptions hard to interpret, and as such, often speak much more directly than allistic people may expect. This straightforward manner can be misinterpreted as rude, condescending, or aggressive, but autistic people highly value directness because it ensures mutual clarity. Similarly, autistic people also highly value honesty in communication, meaning things that are factual or true. This can be things that are objectively true (e.g., the earth revolves around the sun), or subjectively true (e.g., blue is a better color than red), as long as it can be backed up with “evidence” of some kind. For many autistic people, honesty and kindness are one and the same, whereas allistic people can interpret some things as “brutal honesty”. Another major difference has to do with non-verbal communication. Allistic people rely heavily on non-verbal communication, including facial expressions, body position and gestures, prosody, etc. However, autistic people may miss or misinterpret this unspoken information. Autistic people also usually don't like to make much eye contact, and may appear to be paying attention to something else or to be “tuned out” completely, even though they are still listening.

Other common autistic communication features that can leave allistic peers feeling confused are efficiency and timing. Autistic people often view communication as a simple exchange of information, and therefore may forego the usual small talk that many allistic people engage in before getting to the heart of the conversation. In the workplace in particular, autistic people may prefer brief and efficient communication so they can resume their tasks quickly. That said, autistic people often have “special interests” or favorite subjects, about which they can happily talk at great length; however, they may not want to have a conversation about their special interests at work because it's not part of what they are there to do. Additionally, autistic people often prefer slower-paced conversations, and may take a long pause to consider what was said before responding; some may even physically leave briefly before returning to respond.

Research shows that while autistic people communicate very well with each other, trying to communicate with allistic people can feel like trying to communicate with someone speaking another language, just as allistic people can find communicating with autistic people to be confusing. As such, it's not realistic to expect autistic people to bridge the communication gap to use allistic communication styles all the time, and it's not fair that the pressure is often entirely on autistic people; allistic people need to try to meet their autistic peers halfway by learning about how they communicate. It's also essential for allistic people to think of these merely as differences, not an impairment on the autistic person's part.

Kid Friendly Charcuterie Board



Build your own charcuterie board that is kid-friendly with these easy-to-follow instructions. Charcuterie boards are perfect appetizers for when you are hosting people or just want a simple fuss-free dinner. It will even encourage your picky eaters to try new foods!

MEATS:

ham slices
turkey slices
pepperoni slices
salami slices

VEGETABLES:

baby carrots
sliced cucumbers
grape tomatoes
celery sticks

CRACKERS:

Wheat Thins
Ritz crackers
pretzel chips
pita chips

OTHER FILLERS:

black olives
green olives
trail mix
apple & orange slices

Instructions:

1. Set out a large platter or cutting board.
2. Start by putting dips and food items that need to be contained in small bowls.
3. Spread the bowls out on the board.
4. Next, arrange the slices of cheese around the bowls.
5. Add the meats, spreading them around the cheese and bowls.
6. Add vegetables in empty spaces.
7. Add crackers, preferably by the cheeses and dips they go with.
8. Use fillers to fill in empty spaces left on the board.
9. Serve and enjoy!

Reprinted from: <https://www.sixsistersstuff.com/recipe/how-to-make-a-kid-friendly-charcuterie-board-step-by-step-instructions/>



summer bucket list

B I N G O

<p>sleep in a tent</p> <p>DATE:</p>	<p>make ice cream</p> <p>DATE:</p>	<p>read a book</p> <p>DATE:</p>	<p>random acts of kindness</p> <p>DATE:</p>	<p>have a pajama day</p> <p>DATE:</p>
<p>nature scavenger hunt</p> <p>DATE:</p>	<p>eat s'mores</p> <p>DATE:</p>	<p>make a new recipe</p> <p>DATE:</p>	<p>write summer letters</p> <p>DATE:</p>	<p>go to a barbecue</p> <p>DATE:</p>
<p>watch fireworks</p> <p>DATE:</p>	<p>go to the library</p> <p>DATE:</p>	<p>free space</p>	<p>build something</p> <p>DATE:</p>	<p>make a new friend</p> <p>DATE:</p>
<p>go to the movies</p> <p>DATE:</p>	<p>explore your city</p> <p>DATE:</p>	<p>make floam</p> <p>DATE:</p>	<p>watch the sunset</p> <p>DATE:</p>	<p>do a summer craft</p> <p>DATE:</p>
<p>make slime</p> <p>DATE:</p>	<p>try a new restaurant</p> <p>DATE:</p>	<p>watch fireworks</p> <p>DATE:</p>	<p>go swimming</p> <p>DATE:</p>	<p>unplug for 1 day</p> <p>DATE:</p>

With Special Thanks To:

In Memory of Gregory Schaefer:

Roberta Schaefer

In Memory of T.J. Staib:

Julie Perry

In Memory of Jeff Swagman:

Katheryn Rohrhoff

In Memory of Robert Wenzel:

Joan Hirschenberger & Joe Sienko

Linda & Daniel Klenk

Tim & Lisa Naessens

Gerard & Theresa Zolinski

In Memory of Carol Wozniak:

C. Gillespie

Beverly Kackmeister & Kristin Frost

Janice & Gerald Langley

Stephen Mcauliffe

Jennifer Rabaglia

Earl & Joyce Schindler

Debra Seder

General Donations:

Rickey & Linda Baker *Monthly

Jadein Black

Employees of Wildfire Credit Union

Mallory Handlon

Caitlyn Williams

United Way Donations:

Heart of West Michigan

Livingston County United Way

United Way of Greater Toledo

United Way of South Central Michigan

United Way of Southeastern Michigan

United Way of Southwestern Pennsylvania

Those Who Donated Through:

Accenture

Benevity

Blackbaud Giving Fund

Comcast Corporation

Frontstream

Political Action Committee (PAC) Program

Target Corporation/FrontDoor

YourCause Giving



Thank you for your generous donations!