

# Winter 2023 Horizons Newsletter



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## 20 Things I Wish People Understood About Neurodiversity

I want to raise awareness as an autistic woman with a neurodiversity approach, as well as challenge some myths.

1. Autism is a neurobiological difference, not an illness.
2. Autistic people possess a difference in communication and processing, which can make communication with others who are not autistic challenging.
3. Some people have alexithymia, which can make it difficult for the person to recognize emotions in themselves and in others. This does not mean the person lacks empathy; in fact, some of us possess hyper-empathy and feel for others very deeply.
4. Not all of us are good at math, collect things or have obscure interests. In fact, autistic women are more likely to be interested in topics that neuro-typical women are, making it difficult to tell us apart on the surface.
5. Some of us can and do make eye contact. I personally do not like doing so, but can do it as part of the mask I adopt to blend in.
6. Not all autistic people have a genius IQ or severe learning disabilities. We are just as different as everyone else.

7. We're not antisocial. Just like everyone else, some of us are introverted and some extroverted.
8. Due to issues with sensory processing, we may experience extreme overwhelm, by way of shutdown or meltdown. It's a bit like a computer crashing from too many requests. A meltdown is not a tantrum and has nothing to do with wanting attention — quite the opposite. We need patience, compassion and removal from the source of distress.
9. You cannot force us to process and communicate information the way you do. We understand that you do things differently and we are doing our best to adapt. Please be as clear, methodical and direct as you can be with us.
10. Women seem to be more likely to camouflage their autistic traits, leading to physical/mental health issues and burnout. Burnout is serious, and we are so used to hiding behind a mask that you won't see how severe it is.
11. Please do not patronize us with the assumption that we are struggling intellectually. We may struggle with things you find easy, but may also be very good at things you find incredibly difficult. Many of us are at the top of our fields, even in subjective areas such as psychology.
12. No one is a little bit autistic. We're all on the human spectrum, not all on the autistic spectrum. You either are or you aren't. Saying this trivializes the challenges we face.
13. Autism is not caused by vaccines. This myth has been disproven and is also very offensive.
14. Many autistic people find the labels high and low functioning as well as mild and severe to be inaccurate. One, it may suggest the notion that autism is an undesirable illness and two, it can minimize the struggles of those of us who camouflage our traits. The variation in our individual environments and personality traits will affect our ability to manage daily life in different ways. Some people may also have learning disabilities and conditions that impact how they manage.
15. You can't tell if someone is autistic by looking at them.
16. Autistic people can be a jerk as much as anyone else can. We are just as imperfect as you are.
17. There is no cure, because it's not an illness.
18. We might be slow to get abstract jokes, but we have a sense of humor. Some of us are comedians.
19. As is commonly cited: If you've met one autistic person, you've met one autistic person. Despite what I believe is outdated literature out there, I don't see autism as a disability in the same way others may interpret. My personal experience is that I feel like I'm operating on Linux, whilst the majority are on Windows and it is the discrepancy that causes me distress and disempowerment.

The way we categorize people with differing neurobiology as disordered should be reevaluated in my opinion. The medical model of disability focuses on the person with the diagnosis as disabled and needing professional help, whereas the social model places emphasis on the person being disabled by the environment. The latter model, to me, is most helpful.

If society accepts our differences and embraces our strengths, many of the barriers we face on a daily basis would be reduced.



## What Tantrums Don't Mean:

- I hate you.
- You are mean.
- You are a bad parent.
- I'm a bad child.
- I'm manipulating you.
- I need you to meet every demand that I'm yelling.
- I need you to punish me.

## What Tantrums Do Mean:

- I'm overwhelmed.
- I'm trying to tell you about a need I have.
- I'm possibly hungry, tired, overwhelmed, lonely, or angry and I don't know how to handle that yet.
- I need to learn a new way to ask you for this need when I am calm.
- I'm new at figuring out big feelings.
- My brain can't understand you when I'm feeling this much emotion.
- I need you to be calm so I can figure out these feelings.
- I don't want to be acting this way.
- I'm watching how you respond to my big feelings so I know how to respond next time.
- I love you and feel safe with you.

*Our Mama Village*



## The Right to Privacy for Nonspeaking Autistics

*Nick Berry*

Imagine being back in fifth grade. Your mom comes to pick you up from school. “How was your day?” she asks. You think about stuff that you read. And every word the teacher said. The kids you ate lunch with. Good things you tried.

The words to tell about your day are all in your head, but you can’t get them out.

Instead, an aide answers for you. “He got mad when recess ended, so he ran away.” And just like that, your day has been reduced to the tiny bad moment in an otherwise lovely day.

The ability to communicate information about natural topics for parents and kids eluded me for years. The feeling of not being able to control your own narrative is crushing. The story evicted me from the role of author and cast me as a marionette, acting according to how the adults in my life pulled the strings of my story.

Everyone wants to control the story of their life that is shown to the people they love. They embellish certain truths and hide others. They make choices about what to share and with whom and what stays private.

This agency has been absent in my life until recently. It really sucks.

Through the keyboard, I shape the thoughts I share. Not every word I type is the truth. I shape what I do share, so much like the people all around me do. The version of a story my brother shares with my sister is usually less filtered than the version he tells my parents. And today, I can do the same thing.

What I discuss with one person can differ from what I share with someone else.

This is something speaking people take for granted. But when they feel like their words are shared without their permission, they are furious.

Still, they do this to autistic spellers all the time.

**Editor’s note:** *“Spellers” is a term used to describe people who spell to communicate, either by pointing to letters on a letter board or typing one letter at a time on a keyboard or AAC device.*

These well-meaning people share things their kids type without considering if the typer wanted their exact words shared. Having the exact thing you typed about someone in a moment of frustration shared with them can get hairy.

The most respectful teacher I type with has made life-changing constant work of putting me back in control. She reads me every word in her texts to my mom and asks for my approval before she sends it. When she does this, she says as she is typing, “We won’t send this until you’re ready.” This reassurance prevents my worst anxieties.

Lots of the frustration in my life comes from being misrepresented by those supporting me. The life-changing act of controlling my own life story is not something I take for granted. My very hard won agency is my introduction to feeling more respected as an intelligent human who deserves privacy.

Have a hard look at yourself. Do you let nonspeakers control their communication choices? Give the control back to them. They will always be grateful you did. The total ownership of my communication is priceless.

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Report cards should include:

Bravery for coming to school today.

Courage for trying something new.

Applause for being authentic.

Praise for enduring sensory input.

Joy of Autism

High five for interacting.

Pat on the back for not giving up.

Smiles for self-advocating.

Stars for initiating friendship.

# Frosty the Snowman Smoothie

By Heather of Kitchen Concoctions: [www.kitchen-concoctions.com](http://www.kitchen-concoctions.com)

2/3 cup vanilla yogurt  
2 tablespoons honey  
2 tablespoons milk  
1/2 cup rolled oats  
2 frozen bananas, sliced  
Dash of cinnamon, for topping

In blender, combine all ingredients. Blend until smooth. Pour into glasses and serve.



# GROWTH MINDSET

SUCCESS BEGINS WITH BELIEVING YOU CAN

I CAN'T DO THIS



I AM STILL LEARNING,  
I WILL KEEP TRYING

I AM AFRAID OF  
MAKING A MISTAKE



MISTAKES ARE HOW I  
LEARN & GROW

THIS IS TOO HARD



WITH MORE PRACTICE,  
IT WILL GET EASIER

I GIVE UP



I WILL TRY A  
DIFFERENT WAY

I DON'T KNOW HOW



I CAN LEARN HOW!

I AM NOT GOOD AT THIS



WHAT CAN I LEARN TO  
GET BETTER AT THIS

THEY ARE BETTER AT IT  
THAN I AM



WHAT CAN I LEARN  
FROM THEM?

## *With Special Thanks To:*

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Warm Winter Wishes!**