
Understanding and Supporting People With Autism in the Workplace and Community

Presented by:



FOCUS
Center for Autism

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Meet the Panel



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Population We Serve

- FOCUS primarily works with individuals with autism, who also experience anxiety, depression, PTSD, and other mental health issues
- Although they may have great cognitive ability, their behaviors can sometimes be misinterpreted as defiant or oppositional
- Due to the less obvious nature of autism, understanding and services are often lacking
- This can lead to social isolation and difficulty finding and sustaining employment

What is Neurodiversity?

Neurodiversity is the concept that neurological differences, such as autism, ADHD, dyslexia, and others, are natural variations of the human brain rather than deficits or disorders.

This means recognizing and valuing that person's unique neurological profile, and includes understanding their specific cognitive processes, strengths, challenges, and how they experience the world.

A neurodivergent individual might think differently, learn in unique ways, or process sensory information distinctively but that does not make them less able to be successful in a work environment.

Our Definition of Autism

**Creatively Wired
and
Socially Challenged**

Donna Swanson, 2000

WHAT ANXIETY CAN LOOK LIKE...

PHYSICAL:

Dizziness

Stomach issues

Tired

Headaches

Sweating

Muscle tension

Restlessness

Aggression

Shakiness

MENTAL:

Overthinking

Brain fog

Intrusive thoughts

Getting stuck

Feeling
overwhelmed

Difficulty
concentrating

Automatic
negative thoughts

EMOTIONAL:

Irritable

Crying

Guilt

Depressed

Exhaustion

Impatience

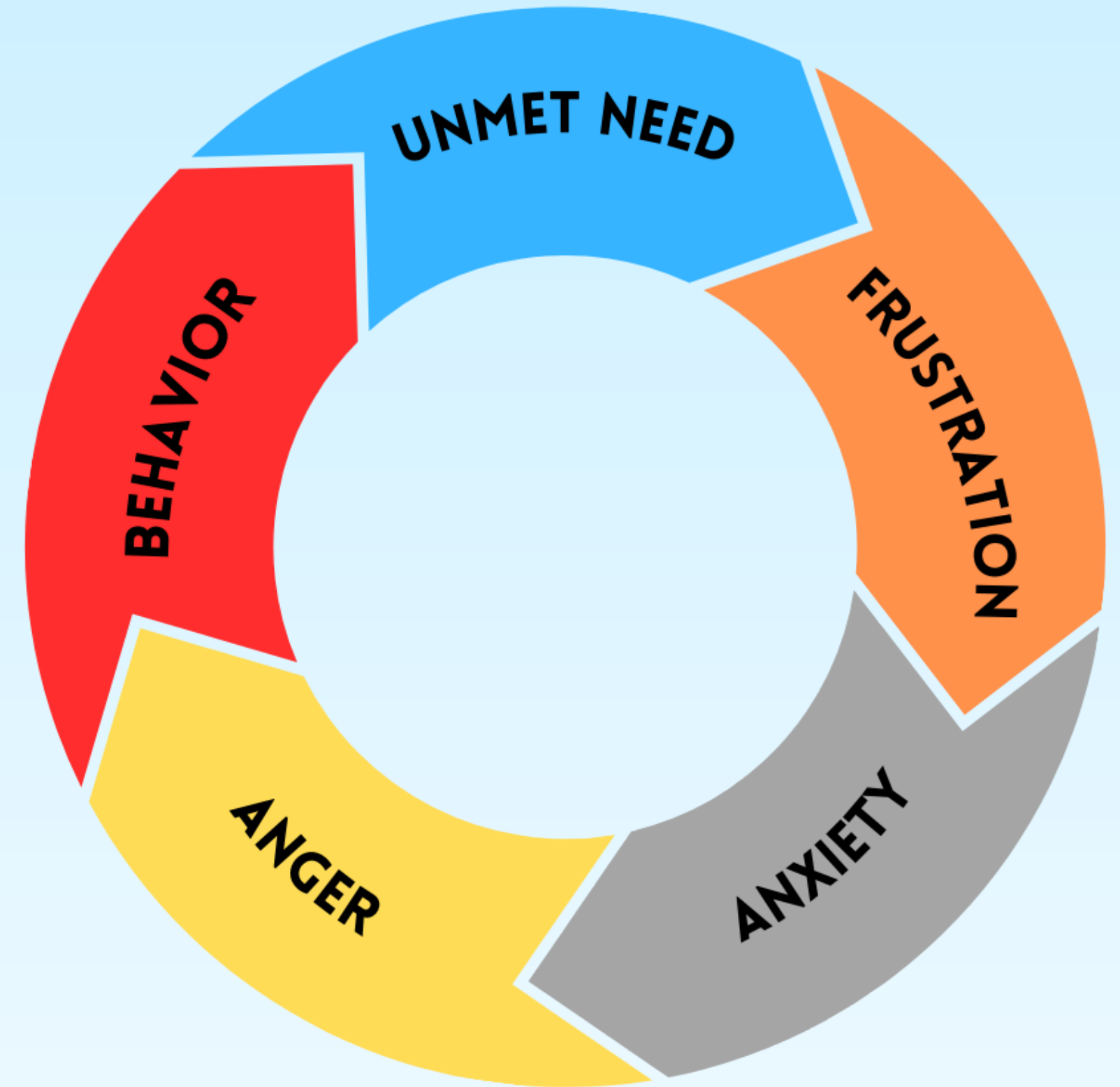
Anger

Shutdown

Need to isolate

Circle of Anxiety

- Behaviors of those on the autism spectrum are often fueled by anxiety
- One way we understand anxiety is through the circle of anxiety



Challenges This Population Faces In General

- Can feel misunderstood
- Difficulty reading social cues or understanding social norms
- Can be overwhelmed by social situations
- All of this can lead to loneliness, isolation, and feelings of not belonging

Strengths of this Population

- Dependable
- Loyal
- Routine-based
- Responsible
- They know their strengths and abilities
- Straightforward and direct
- Good memory

Programs That We Offer

- Fresh Start School, an Approved Private Special Education Program for ages 10-22
- DCF Level II Therapeutic Group Home for adolescent boys
- DMHAS Supportive Housing for young adult males
- Adult Supportive Housing
- Adult Support Services
- Autism Spectrum Unplugged Panels
- Consultations & Workshops

Job Placements

We find placements in our local community that offer our students different types of work and skills in order to help them find their niche and build community connections.

We have found that over time, students and employers can learn to feel more comfortable with each other.

You too can be a Job Placement. Contact us if interested.

We can also consult on how to make your organization more neurodiverse.

Phone Number: 860-693-8809

American Flatbread Pizza Company



Larson's Garden Center



Avon Senior Center



Habitat for Humanity ReStore



Lessons from Student Job Placements

- It can be overwhelming for students to start somewhere because of past experiences
- Once students feel comfortable and understood, they are able to learn and connect
- Structure is very important, but the students may also require flexibility
- When students feel understood, their anxiety lessens and their confidence increases
- Our job placements have truly embraced the students and have allowed them feel part of a larger community

Challenges in the Workplace

- Not being understood
- Anxiety
- Misprocessing and misreading cues/body language
- Social challenges
- Difficulty transitioning
- Problems with their social filters
- Online applications can be confusing– better to apply in person

Some of our Successes

With our approach of meeting people where they are at we have been able to guide them to what success looks like for them

We have students who have gone on to be college grads (one with a PhD in Chemistry), a truck driver, a production assistant at Nickelodeon, an assistant archivist, grocery/warehouse workers, farmers, artists, entrepreneurs and even some who have become employees at FOCUS.



Why Would Someone Want to Hire Someone with Autism?

- Loyalty
- Black and white thinking can be an advantage when combined with clear rules and guidelines
- Able to follow directions and maintain routines
- Often willing and able to do repetitive tasks that other people may not want to perform

What Helps People with Autism Succeed in the Workplace?

1 of 3

Understanding

- Fostering an open and inclusive culture that values diversity and accepts neurodivergent perspectives

Flexible work arrangements

- When possible, flexible expectations for employees with autism helps them feel more secure and confident in the workplace

Clear Communication and Expectations

- Using clear and concise language when communicating tasks and expectations can be very helpful when processing information

What Helps People with Autism Succeed in the Workplace?

2 of 3

Visual aids

- Use of visual aids, diagrams, or checklists helps support understanding and reduces confusion

Inclusive Hiring Practices

- Adapting hiring practices to accommodate neurodivergent candidates, such as using flexible assessment and interviewing methods

What Helps People with Autism Succeed in the Workplace?

3 of 3

Create a welcoming environment

- Ensure the interview process is inclusive and accommodating of neurodivergent needs

Celebrate Neurodiversity

- Acknowledge and celebrate the unique contributions of neurodivergent employees

Education and Awareness

- Right fit
- Right environment
- Build a relationship



Question and Answers



Appreciations



THANK YOU for being a wonderful audience!

Enjoy the rest of the conference!



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