

# Asperger's, Autism and the Student Conduct Process

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Association of Student Conduct Administrators Annual Conference

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# Agenda

- Some background on ASD/Asperger's
- Challenges on campus
- Strategies

# Why serve these students?

- Economic motivations (institutions and beyond)
- Political motivations (activism and legislation are pushing us forward)
- Moral (we have always led our institutions in making our campuses more inclusive, and we must do it now as well)



The Autism Spectrum



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High-Functioning Autism

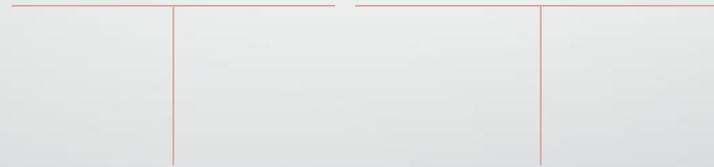


# The Autism Spectrum

High-Functioning Autism

"Asperger Syndrome"

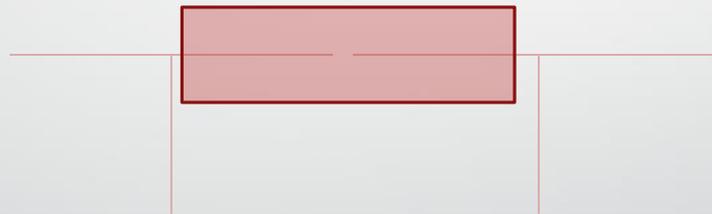
# High-Functioning Autism



Mansfield Hall

On campus

# High-Functioning Autism



Mansfield Hall

On campus

# Understanding ASD/AS

- Increase in reported cases (“1 in 68”-CDC)
- No two students are the same
- Common IQ profile: high language, low processing
- Students with other disorders may present in some similar ways

# What causes Autism?

- Brain research shows:
  - Likely genetic predisposition
  - Possible environmental influences
  - Parts of the brain “talk to each other” differently or not at all
- Diagnosis is typically by age of 5, but new research is lowering that age.

# Basically...

Autism is characterized by a set of adaptive responses to the way the brain perceives the world.



# Common Traits

- Social/Physical
  - Lacking “theory of mind”
  - Difficulty reading social cues and facial expressions
  - Sensory sensitivity
  - Hygiene issues
  - Repetitive motions
  - Motor deficits
- Language/Academic
  - Rigid thinking
  - Slow processing
  - Talking too fast
  - Odd prosody
  - Difficulty with metaphor, abstractions
  - Low tolerance for ambiguity, “gray areas”

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# Often heard:

- “S/he just doesn’t ‘get it.’”
- “S/he can’t get out of their own way.”
- “S/he can’t see the big picture.”
- “How did s/he not know that would happen?”



Are these “traits” a problem?

Only if they impede a student’s efforts to achieve one of their goals.

# Executive Function Deficits: (sometimes co-occurring, sometimes not)

- Organizational and planning abilities
- Working (short-term) memory
- Inhibition and impulse control
- Self-reflection and self-monitoring
- Time management and prioritizing
- Using new strategies

# How do these challenges show up on campus?

- Roommate difficulties
- Student organization interactions
- Classroom concerns
- Marginalizing due to lack of understanding
- Extensive use of campus services (advising, counseling, disability services)



# And...

- Student conduct matters:
  - Stalking/harassment
  - Disruptions of meetings, classes
  - “Bizarre” behavior
  - “Unreasonable” demands

# Very important when working with ASD/AS students:

- It is not a disorder of motivation.
- It is a brain-based, hard-wired way of interpreting the world.
- Transitions take longer.
- Stress exacerbates traits and related difficulties.

Depression and anxiety rates in *ASD/AS* population are extremely high—perhaps twice what the non-*ASD* population experiences



# Strategies

- Begin with understanding the rationale behind the behavior:
  - “What is the most important thing for me to know about you?”
  - “Can you tell me what you were hoping would happen when you \_\_\_\_\_?”
  - “What were you feeling when you \_\_\_\_?”
  - “Tell me what you are most proud of in your experience at \_\_\_\_ College.”

# Strategies

- Anticipate rigid thinking...but don't dismiss it or counter it with your own.
- Anticipate "fight or flight" stress in the conversation; know there may be a low tolerance for this kind of interaction.

# Strategies

- Be direct! Don't sugarcoat or soften the message.
- Provide "rules of engagement."
- Be patient in conversation and in effort (remember: transitions take longer).
- Don't dismiss environmental-based requests (to accommodate sensory issues).

# Strategies

- Policies must include VERY detailed definitions. E.g., “unwanted attention” is unclear.
- Train staff, faculty and student leaders
- Suggest to both ASD students and the staff who work with them:
  - TRY DIFFERENTLY, NOT HARDER!

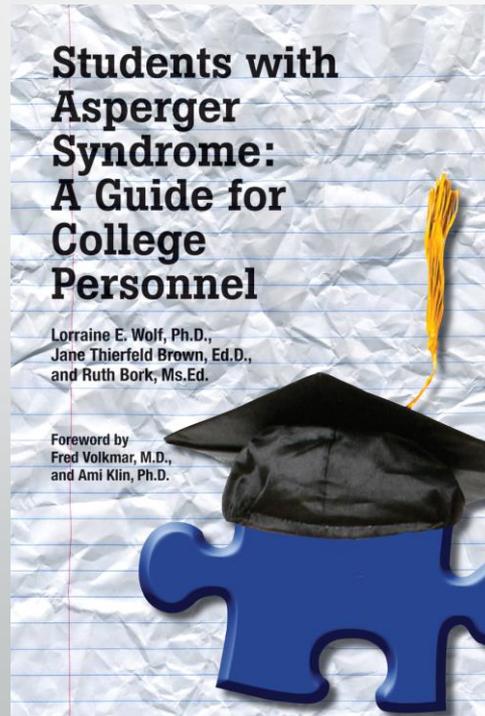


# Strategies

- Train staff, faculty and student leaders
- Suggest to both ASD students and the staff who work with them:
  - TRY DIFFERENTLY, NOT HARDER!
- Normalize, don't problematize

# A Great Resource:

[Collegeautismspectrum.com](http://Collegeautismspectrum.com)



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# Please contact me!

## Mansfield Hall Collegiate Partnerships:

- Staff and student leader training
- Resources
- Parent outreach

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[www.Mansfieldhall.org](http://www.Mansfieldhall.org)

Slides available at: [leeburdettewilliams.net](http://leeburdettewilliams.net)