

Neurodiversity Affirming Practices: Addressing Autistic Individuals' Needs within Community Corrections

Multi-System Navigation Center
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About OCALI

Vision - Why We Do What We Do

People with disabilities have the opportunity to live their best lives.

Mission - What We Do

OCALI inspires change and promotes access to opportunities for people with disabilities.

Action - How We Do What We Do

OCALI informs public policy and develops and deploys practices grounded in linking research to real life.

About the Autism Center

The Autism Center at OCALI serves as a clearinghouse for information on research, resources, and trends to address the autism challenge. The center offers training, technical assistance, and consultation to build professional and program capacity to foster individual learning and growth.

About Language

Person-first language emphasizes the person before the identity or disability, such as person who is deaf or a child with autism.

Identity-first language puts the identity or disability first in the description, as in deaf person or autistic person, recognizing the culture or community.

When referring to learners in this presentation you may notice the use of both person-first and identity-first language to ensure that all people have their preferences respected and represented.

OCALI Centers

Find out more about OCALI centers and services on the [OCALI Website](#)

Autism Spectrum Disorder

- Persistent deficits in social communication and social interaction across multiple contexts
- Restricted, repetitive patterns of behavior, interests, or activities (including sensory differences)
- Symptoms must be present in the early developmental period (but may not become fully manifest until social demands exceed limited capacities or may be masked by learned strategies in later life).
- Symptoms cause clinically significant impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of current functioning.

Resource: Diagnostic Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders 5th Edition (DSM-5), 2013

Prevalence Rate of ASD

- 1 in 36 children in the US diagnosed with ASD (CDC, 2023)
- 4 times more likely in males
- Estimate more than 4% of incarcerated individuals are autistic

Characteristics of ASD

- Social
- Behavior, Interests, and Activities
- Communication
- Sensory
- Cognitive Skills and Executive Functioning
- Motor
- Emotional
- Known Medical or Other Biological Factors

Characteristics of ASD Underlying Characteristics Checklist

Version	Who
UCC- Early Intervention	3-82 months of age
UCC-Classic	Intended for those who are significantly below average cognitive functioning
UCC- High-Functioning	Intended for high-functioning individuals 6+
UCC- Self-Report- Adolescent	12-18 years old
UCC- Self-Report Adult	Ages 18+

Dr. Ruth Aspy and Dr. Barry Grossman www.zigguratgroup.com

Signs of Autism Spectrum Disorder

Video Resource: 7 Signs of Autism in Men (DSM-5 Symptoms of Autism/Aspergers in High Functioning Autistic Adults)

Communication Differences (UCC-SR-Adult)

- Difficulty with conversation skills
- Find it hard or fail to ask for help
- Take things too literally
- Say or ask whatever I am thinking
- Difficulty in understanding nonverbal cues, including facial expressions and gestures
- Difficult to provide or accept verbal feedback/praise/criticism
- Difficulty following or remembering instructions/directions and accepting feedback
- Make comments that are irrelevant to others
- Difficulty talking about others' interests

Social Differences (UCC-SR-Adult)

- Difficulty understanding what others may be thinking
- Stands too close to others
- Appear rude to others
- Difficulty using eye contact or facial expressions
- Inappropriate peer interactions/Often taken advantage of
- Engage in few or no social interactions
- Often do things for other people
- No sense or feeling of personal space/
- Lack understanding of when personal contact is socially, culturally, legally permissible or impermissible

Considerations for Communication and Social Differences

- Speak simply and clearly to individuals
 - Avoid using figures of speech
- Use visuals when possible
 - The use of pictures and written words
- Provide time for processing
- Understand "mindblindness"

Interests, Activities, Thoughts (UCC-SR-Adult)

- Needs routines for most day-to-day activities or find change to be distressing
- Experience fear or anxiety about trying new things
- Difficulty with transitions; sense of closure
- Described as obsessive or compulsive
- Has interests that differ from most adults.
- May prefer to spend as much time as possible engaged in one activity or interest
- May spend a lot of time engaged in roleplaying games or in fantasy worlds
- Display repetitive motor movements, including hand flapping, whole-body rocking, clapping, etc.

Considerations for Interests, Activities, Thoughts

Establish predictable daily routines.

- Unexpected events can be a massive disruption.
- Prepare in advance for known changes to routine/schedules
- Understand what repetitive behaviors provide to the individual
- Use special interests as motivators

Sensory Differences (UCC-SR-Adult)

- Very high/low tolerance of pain
- Difficulty identifying source or severity of pain/illness; reading body signs
- Over- or under-sensitivity related to one or more sensory processing systems, including touch, balance, body awareness, sight, hearing, taste, smell
- May sing, talk to self, or hum frequently
- Avoid certain clothes because of their texture/fit
- Noticeable physical over-activity or extreme under-activity

Considerations for Sensory Differences

- Be aware of each person's sensory differences/preferences
- Be aware of environmental concerns and how you can adapt or prepare the person for the differences
- Provide time for sensory needs to be met

Cognitive (UCC-SR-Adult)

- Wide range of cognitive and learning abilities. Has difficulty setting realistic goals and/or achieving them. May forget previously learned information.
- Train of thought becomes frozen or stuck at times

- May have slower processing time. Find it difficult to solve everyday problems (e.g. What to do when something breaks). Get confused about what people mean when they explain something.
- Learning styles may be very specific. May have difficulty identifying what is important and what is not. May have difficulty applying newly learned skills in one setting to other settings.
- Has difficulty understanding the connection between behavior and resulting consequences.
- May be excessively organized (nothing out of place)

Considerations for Cognitive Differences

- Understand how the individual processes and responds
- Match how we teach/talk to how they learn
- Provide time and support for processing and problem solving
- Use areas of interest

Emotional Differences (UCC-SR-Adult)

- Lack of awareness of own and others' feelings
- Can become easily stressed, anxious, worry excessively
- Exhibit "meltdowns" or "shutdowns"; emotionally overwhelmed
- Have low frustration tolerance; difficulty tolerating mistakes in self and others
- Have reactions that don't match the situations
- Become very angry frequently

Considerations for Emotional Differences

- Don't assume individuals are doing these behaviors intentionally; Don't take personally.
- Identify root causes of dysregulation.
- Refer to other underlying characteristics in other areas

Differences in Males and Females

- Masking/Camouflaging
- Intensity/types of Interests (females with lower level of restricted interests)
- Females appear "less autistic" than males
- Females show different and less severe communication and social challenges
- Males tend to be more hyperactive and aggressive

Albion State Correctional Institution

Video Resource: [Albion prison program helps autistic offenders](#)

Simple Strategies

- Use interests
- Prepare for what's coming up
- Use visuals
- Provide time
- Speak simply and clearly

Testimonial #1: Impact of ASD Characteristics

One of the things with my autism is that I always do what other people tell me to. One time someone told me I should visit another country. I spent nearly 3 months in Japan. After 3 months, I didn't know what to do next until I called my mom (contact with parents was irregular and infrequent) who said I should come home. So, I went home. While in Japan, I began smoking marijuana because I got accepted by people and when they offered me a smoke, when I said yes, they were my friends.

Testimonial #2: Impact of ASD Characteristics

I'm 25 years old and have Autism Spectrum Disorder. I am very uncomfortable in groups and talking to people face to face. I saw an online add about chat rooms and thought I could meet people that way. I can spend up to six hours at a time talking to people. I especially enjoy talking to a 14-year-old girl named Sarah. She seems to like me as she shares private things with me, and I share private things with her. Recently, she stopped chatting with me because her mom said she wasn't allowed to communicate with me anymore. I don't understand what I did wrong.

Testimonial #3: Impact of ASD Characteristics

An adult male with ASD likes a woman who lives in his condominium development. He frequently goes to her condo when she is outside on her patio painting. She is kind and says "hello" and then continues to paint. He misses the social cues (her turning her back to him and working painting). He begins following her daily when she walks to the local market, art supplies store, etc. She begins to feel very uncomfortable and shares with her sister that she feels like she is being stalked. Her sister says she should file a restraining order. She files one, which makes the man upset, so he buys her a card and a candy bar and puts them on a chair on her patio. She sees him from the window and reports to the police that he is violating the restraining order and, consequently, is arrested.

Testimonial #4: Impact of ASD Characteristics

An autistic young adult takes the community bus system to his place of part-time employment. On the way to work one morning, the bus is very crowded, and he is required to sit in a different seat than normal. This makes him very uncomfortable. He becomes very agitated and gets rather loud, requesting the person in his seat to move. When that person doesn't, he becomes very angry and starts shouting at the person. The bus driver radios his supervisor for help. The driver proceeds to keep the bus stopped at the bus stop until the police arrive.

Questions

OCALE

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