

Supporting Neurodiversity in Pharmacy Practice

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Pharmacy Forward: Advancing Practice for a
Healthier Tomorrow!

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Disclosure Statement

- Briana Wukovich has no relevant financial relationship(s) with ineligible companies to disclose.
and
- None of the planners for this activity have relevant financial relationships with ineligible companies to disclose.





Learning Objectives

At the completion of this activity, the participant will be able to:

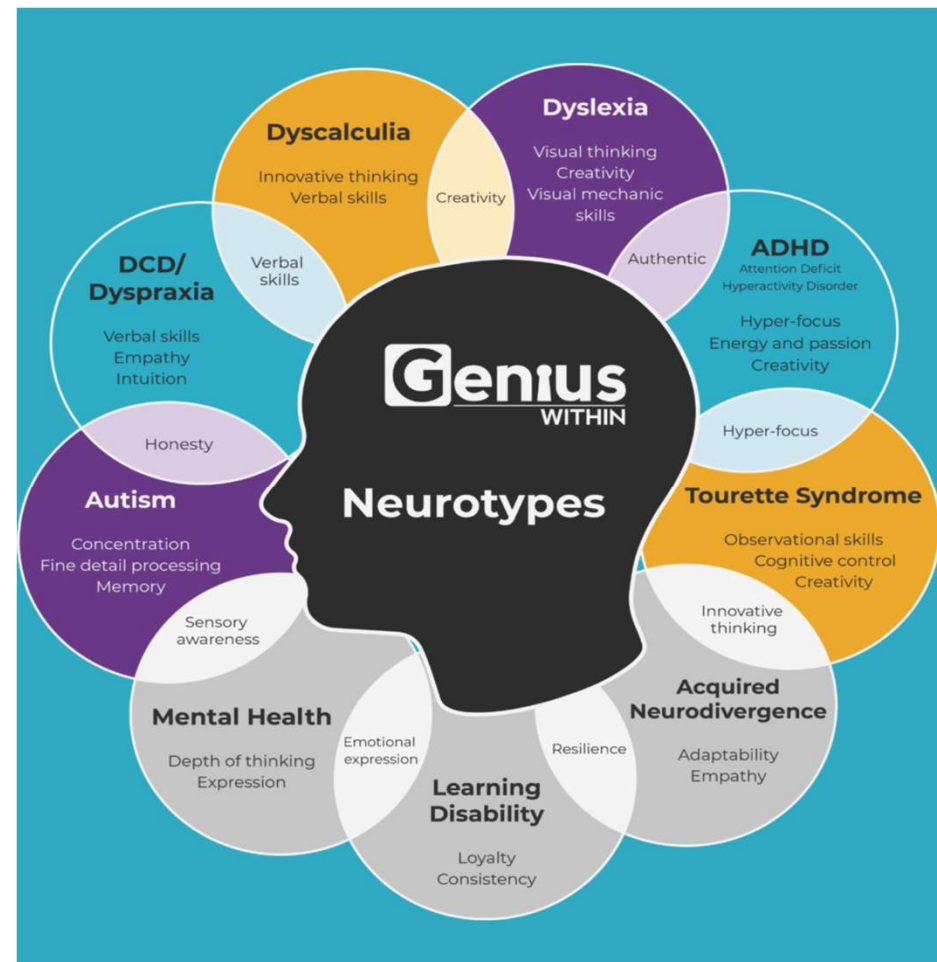
1. define the terms Neurodivergent and Neurodiversity;
2. identify the unique challenges and strengths of individuals with ADHD, Autism, Dyslexia, and related conditions;
3. develop awareness and reduce barriers faced by neurodivergent colleagues and patients; and
4. create a culture of support and understanding in pharmacy practice.

What is Neurodiversity?



Neurodiversity

- Term originally coined by Judy Singer in late 90's
- Natural Variation in how the human brain thinks, learns, and behaves
- Embrace differences instead of seeing them as “deficits”
- Growing movement online, promoting acceptance of different neurotypes



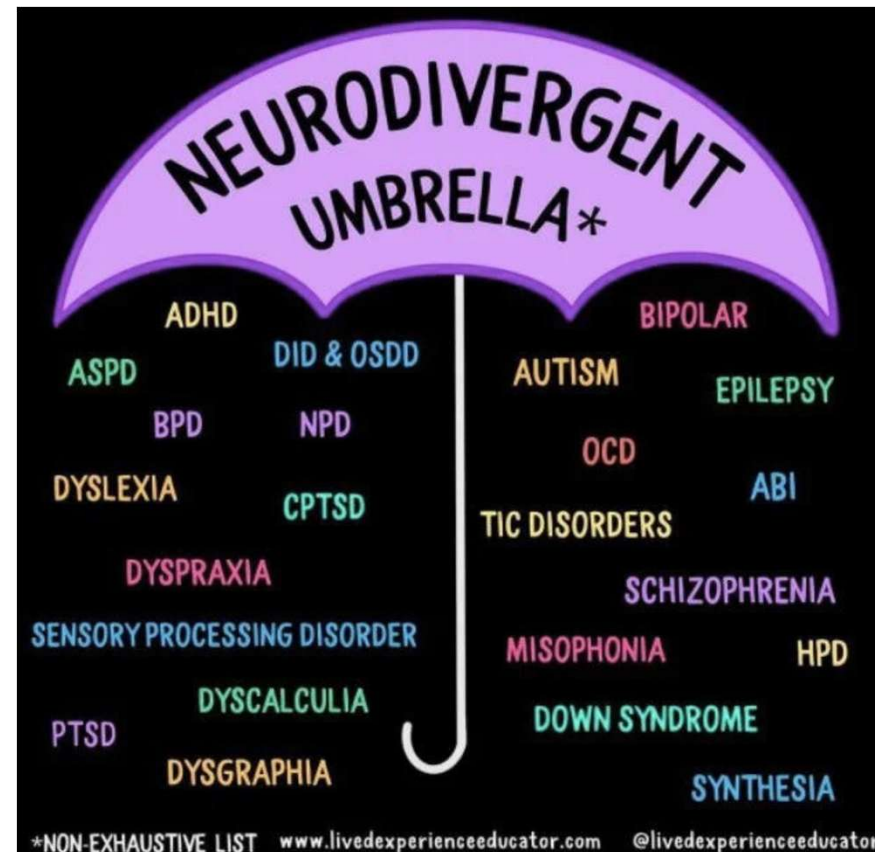
Neurotypical



- “Neurotypical” is a nonmedical term that describes people whose brains develop and work like most people’s brains do
- Neurotypical people make up most of the world’s population, about 80% to 85%

Neurodivergent

- Kassiane Asasumasu originally coined the term “Neurodivergent” in 2000
- “Neurodivergent” is a nonmedical term defined as “those whose neurocognitive functioning diverges from dominant societal norms in multiple ways.”
- Reframing Neurodevelopmental conditions as not “disordered” but diverse ways that the human brain works

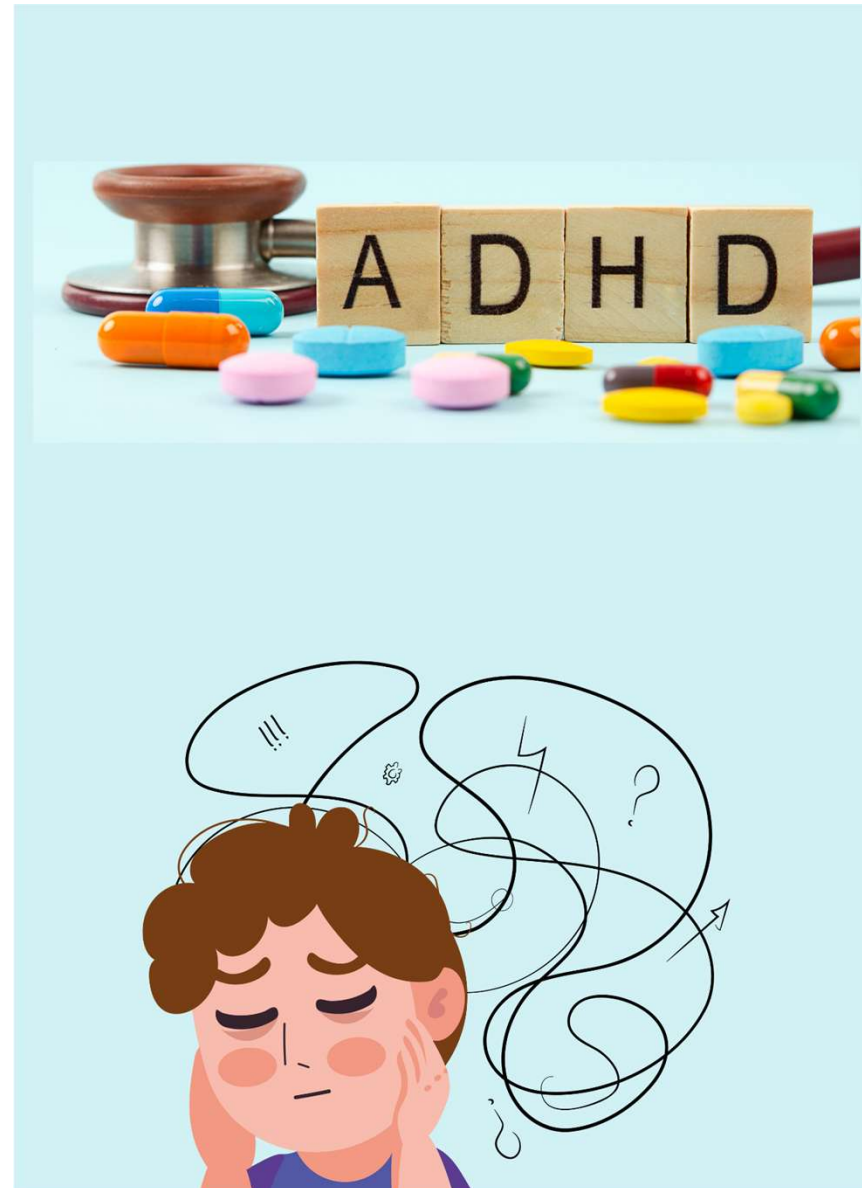


What is ADHD?

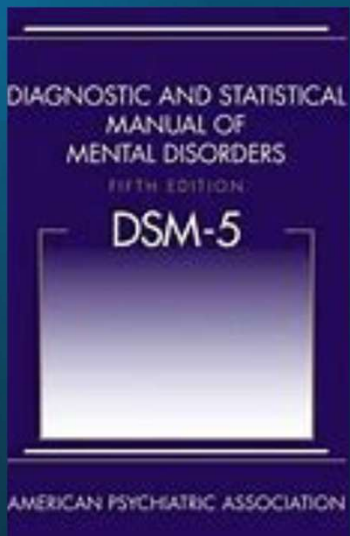


Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) Overview

- A neurodevelopmental condition/impairment
- Executive Dysfunction in working memory, flexible thinking, and self-control
- Interest Based Nervous System
- Easily distracted by environment
- Not an actual lack of attention, difficulty with regulating it
- Exact causes still unknown
- Highly heritable



ADHD DSM-5 Criteria Hyperactive Type

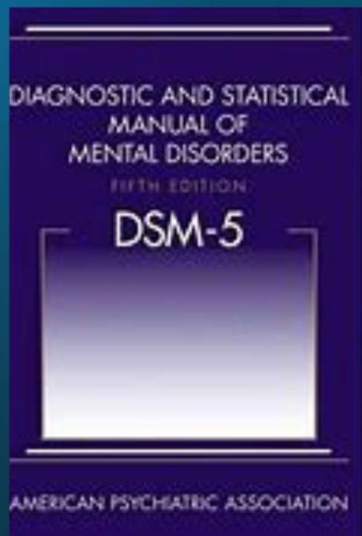


Adults 17+ must exhibit ≥ 5 symptoms in one or both category's for ≥ 6 mos.; age of onset is ≤ 12 years; symptoms must negatively impact life significantly in 2 settings (home, work, and or school); and not better accounted for by another mental disorder

Hyperactivity/Impulsivity

- a. Fidgetiness (hand or feet)/squirms in seat
- b. Leaves seat frequently
- c. Running about/feeling restless
- d. Excessively loud or noisy
- e. Always “on the go”/uncomfortable sitting for long periods of time
- f. Talks excessively
- g. Blurts out answers
- h. Difficulty waiting their turn
- i. Interrupts or intrudes on others

ADHD DSM-5 Criteria Inattentive Type



Inattention

- a. Often lacks attention to details/makes careless mistakes
- b. Difficulty sustaining attention
- c. Does not seem to listen when spoken to
- d. Does not follow through on instructions/tasks (easily side-tracked)
- e. Difficulty organizing tasks and activities/poor time management
- f. Reluctant to engage in tasks that require sustained mental effort
- g. Loses and misplaces objects easily
- h. Easily distracted by external stimuli or own thoughts
- i. Forgetful in daily activities

Common ADHD Struggles

Rejection Sensitivity Dysphoria

Perfectionism

Imposter Syndrome

Sensory Overload

Time Agnosia

Common ADHD Strengths



Creativity & Out of the box thinking



Good at problem solving



Empathetic & Resilient



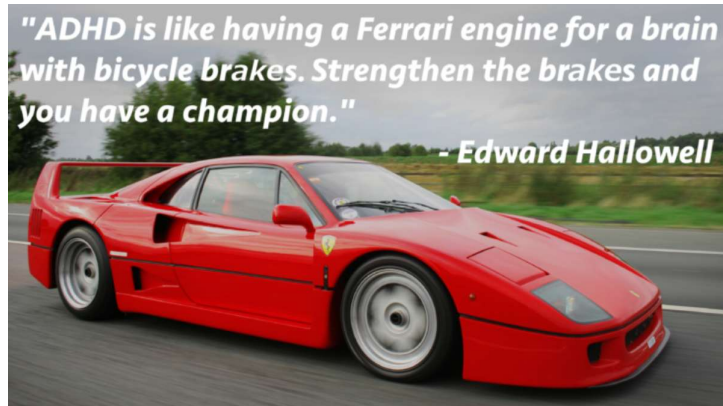
Passionate



Energetic



Innovative



What is Autism?



Autism Spectrum

“Disorder”/Condition Overview

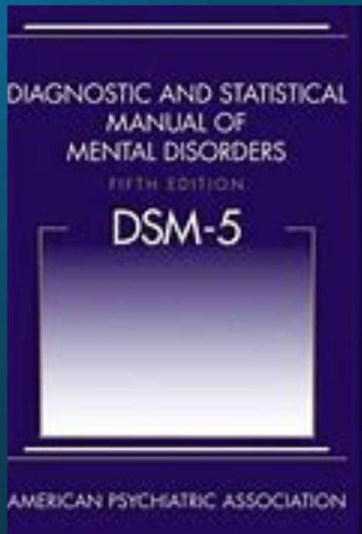
- Complex developmental condition involving persistent challenges with social communication, restricted interests, and repetitive behavior.
- several genetic factors may increase the risk of autism
- Highly heritable

3 different Levels based on support needs of the individual

- **Level 1** - requiring support
- **Level 2** - requiring substantial support
- **Level 3** - requiring very substantial support



Autism DSM-5 Criteria



- **Category A: Social Communication & Interaction**
 - “Deficits” in:
 - Social-emotional reciprocity
 - Nonverbal communication (e.g. eye contact, gestures)
 - Developing and maintaining relationships
(All 3 required)
- **Category B: Repetitive Behaviors & Interests**
 - At least 2 of the following:
 - Repetitive movements/speech
 - Inflexible routines/sameness
 - Highly focused interests
 - Sensory sensitivities
- **Category C: Symptoms present from early development**
- **Category D: Significant impact on daily functioning**
- **Category E: Not better explained by intellectual disability**

Common Autistic Struggles

Sensory sensitivities (smells, noises, tastes, light, and touch)

Restricted areas of focus

Social differences

Difficulty dealing with change

Shutdowns and/or meltdowns

Hypersensitivities

Common Autistic Strengths

Ability to
Hyperfocus on one
task for a long
period of time

Strong pattern
recognition and
problem-solving
skills

Strong attention to
detail

Creativity

Out of the Box
Thinking

What is Dyslexia?

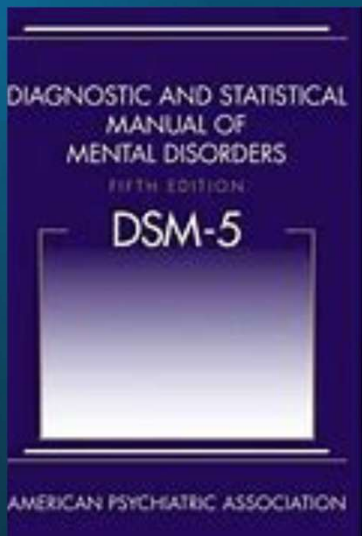


Dyslexia Overview

- Learning disability that disrupts how the brain processes written language.
- difficulty in phonological processing (the appreciation of the individual sounds of spoken language)
- Affects ability to speak, read, spell, and learn a second language.
- Occurs at all levels of intelligence



Dyslexia DSM-5 Criteria



Classified in the DSM-5 under specific learning disorder (SLD) alongside dysgraphia (difficulty with writing) and dyscalculia (difficulty with mathematics and numbers)

In order to be diagnosed an individual must meet all four criteria below

1. Have difficulty with at least one of the following areas, for at least six months despite targeted help
 - Difficulty reading
 - Difficulty understanding the meaning of what is read
 - Difficulty spelling
 - Difficulty with written expression
 - Difficulty understanding number concepts, number facts or calculation
 - Difficulty with mathematical reasoning
2. Academic skills substantially below what is expected for age, and cause problems in school, work, or everyday activities
3. Difficulties start during school age, even if they don't experience significant problems until adulthood
4. Learning difficulties are not due to other conditions, such as intellectual disability, vision or hearing problems, neurological condition, lack of instruction, or economic or environmental disadvantage.

3 levels of severity

- **Mild:** Individuals may experience some reading and spelling difficulties but can compensate these challenges with support and accommodations.
- **Moderate:** Individuals require more intensive interventions and accommodations to address significant reading and spelling challenges.
- **Severe:** This is the most challenging level where difficulties with reading and spelling severely impact various academic areas.

Common Dyslexia Struggles

Slowed reading due to difficulty processing and understanding words

Difficulties writing and spelling

Trouble forming sentences and communicating complex topics

Common Dyslexia Strengths

Strong
problem-
solving skills

High levels of
creativity

Big-Picture
thinkers

Three-
dimensional
thinking

Prevalence and Co-occurring Conditions



Prevalence in the Population

- According to the National Center for Health Statistics Rapid Surveys System collected during October–November 2023, **15.5 million adults (6%)** in the United States have a current diagnosis of **ADHD**
- About **1 in 31 (3.2%)** children aged 8 years has been identified with **ASD** according to estimates from CDC's ADDM Network
- **Dyslexia** affects **20%** of the population and represents 80–90% of all those with learning disabilities. It is the most common of all neuro-cognitive disorders



Common Co-occurring Conditions

ADHD

- Can often occur alongside Autism and/or Dyslexia
- 25%-40% of those with ADHD also have dyslexia and vice versa
- AuDHD is a term used when an individual has both Autism and ADHD, 50 to 70% of individuals with Autism also meet the diagnosis criteria for ADHD

Depression

- 70% of people diagnosed with ADHD may also experience Depression in their lifetime.
- 40% of autistic adults, and 8% of youth, have had depression.

Anxiety

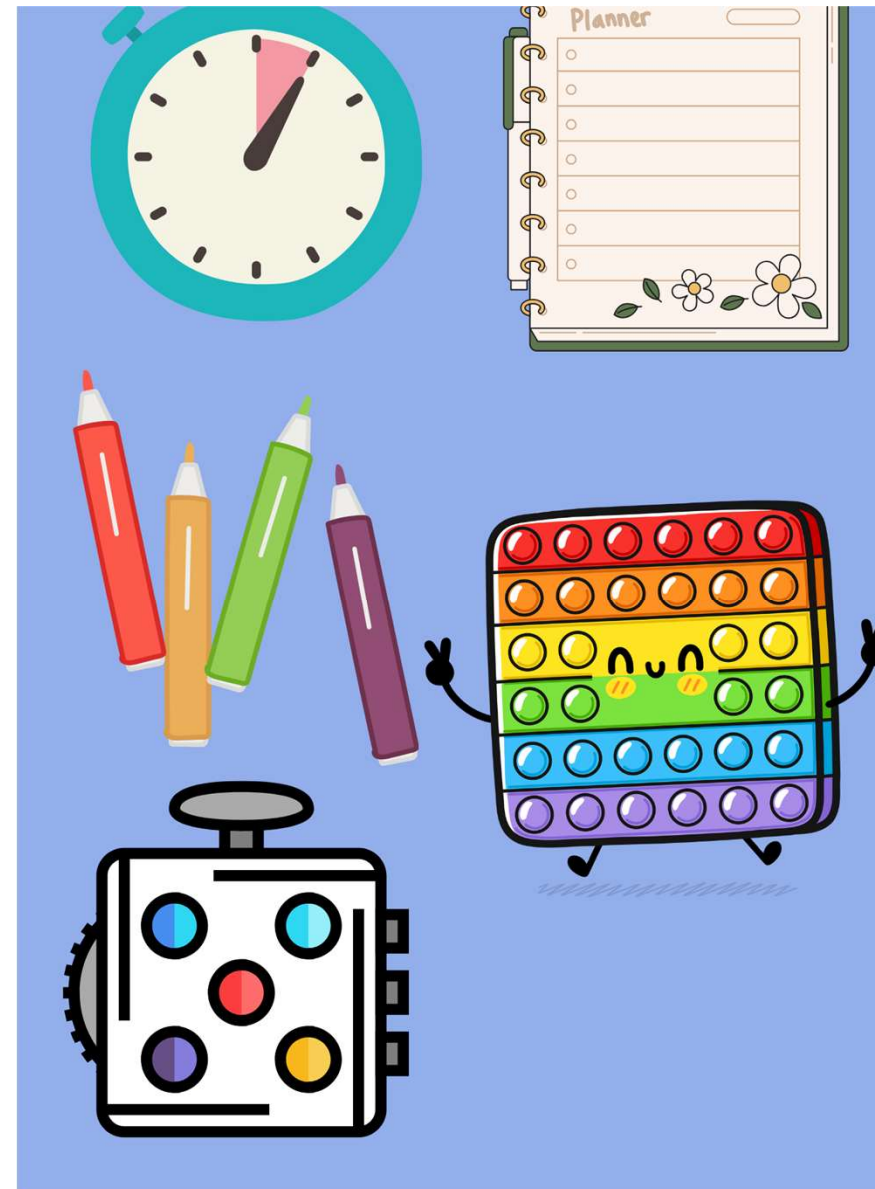
- 21% of students with a learning disorder like dyslexia also have an anxiety disorder.
- up to 84% of young autistic people experience clinically elevated anxiety
- 40% to 60% of adults with ADHD also have an Anxiety disorder.

Practical Strategies & Tools



Tools to Support Executive Function

- Visual timers
- Calendars and planners
- Coloring/doodling while listening
- Colored overlays or printing on cream or light-pastel colored paper
- Fidget Toys
 - Ono Roller
 - Stimagz
 - Speks
 - Fidget cube
 - Fidget jewelry (Conquering)



Strategies to Support Neurodivergent People



- SMART Goals
- Breakdown large tasks into smaller manageable steps
- Visual Aids
- Standing desk and walking/movement breaks
- Body doubling
- Keep everything needed for the job at point of performance

Building Supportive Pharmacy Environments



Building Supportive Pharmacy Environments

- Psychological safety, empathy, and trust are foundational
- Build relationships with employees before focusing on performance
- Provide personalized feedback
- Provide structure and routine
- Foster open constructive discourse and communication
- Be open to feedback



Empathy and Active Listening

- Be fully present in conversations
- Recognize that communication styles may vary
- Ask open-ended questions
- Paraphrase and repeat back what you heard
- Listen to understand not to respond
- Clarify what is being said
- Withhold judgement, try not to jump to giving advice unless asked for it
- Lean into your own curiosity
- Communicate clearly and directly



Case Studies



Case Study: ADHD in Pharmacy Practice

Scenario:

Sam is a pharmacy technician who is great with patients and thrives during busy rushes. However, she often forgets to complete follow-up tasks like restocking, logging communications, or finishing partially completed prescriptions. Coworkers have started to view her as “unreliable.”



Case Study: ADHD in Pharmacy Practice

Potential Support Strategies:

- Use checklists for task completion
- Provide visual workflow cues
- Allow movement or task variation



Case Study: Autism in Pharmacy Practice

Scenario:

Jordan is a pharmacist known for accuracy and attention to detail. However, patients have described him as “cold,” and coworkers feel he is difficult to approach. Jordan prefers direct communication, avoids small talk, and becomes frustrated when workflows change unexpectedly.



Case Study: Autism in Pharmacy Practice

Potential Support Strategies:

- Set clear, direct communication expectations
- Provide advance notice of workflow changes
- Normalize different communication styles
- Leverage strengths like accuracy and consistency



Case Study: Dyslexia in Pharmacy Practice

Scenario:

Alex is a pharmacy technician who connects well with patients and communicates clearly. However, she struggles with typing accuracy, spelling medication names, and processing written instructions quickly. This sometimes slows down workflow and leads to frustration from coworkers.



Case Study: Dyslexia in Pharmacy Practice

Potential Support Strategies:

- Use spell-check or text-to-speech tools
- Allow extra time for data entry tasks
- Use color-coding or visual aids
- Emphasize strengths like patient interaction





Key Takeaways

- Neurodivergent people bring creativity, focus, and resilience
- Every brain is different, support starts with understanding
- Empathy and flexibility build inclusive pharmacies
- Small accommodations make a big impact

Resources

ADDitude website/magazine:

<https://www.additudemag.com/>

Jessica McCabe: How to ADHD: <https://howtoADHD.com/>

CAST Universal Design for Learning:

<https://udlguidelines.cast.org/>

Genius Within: <https://geniuswithin.org/what-is-neurodiversity/>

International Dyslexia Association:

<https://dyslexiaida.org/>

Embrace Autism: <https://embrace-autism.com/>



Need More Information?

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