

SO...WHAT CAN WE DO?



A place to start

The following pages are designed to make you think. They also include activities to do with your paraprofessionals, classroom staff, or colleagues. Change is hard, but it starts with awareness.



What's so great about normal???

Everyone talks about things getting back to normal. But WHY? Pre-pandemic "normal" was not exactly autism-friendly. Autistic people have traditionally been expected to adjust or "mask" their behavior so they can blend in. Let's shake things up!



Consulting authentic voices

We encourage you to seek out information from neurodivergent individuals in order to learn how autistic people actually feel about the issues that concern them. And when you are making decisions about a workplace or classroom, try to involve autistic voices in the process!

Rethinking Expectations



We need to challenge assumptions by rethinking our own behaviors and expectations.

Read these with your colleagues or classroom staff and discuss. Then fill out the following activity page.

Assumption: Stimming interferes with learning and should be interrupted.

Reboot: *Stimming is a form of self-regulation and helps individuals learn.*

Assumption: Stimming needs to be redirected because it looks strange and people stare.

Reboot: *So what? Let's teach people that stimming is ok. And that staring is rude.*

Assumption: You need to be seated in order to listen and learn.

Reboot: *People listen and learn in different ways. That's ok.*

Assumption: Non-verbal/non-speaking individuals are "low-functioning."

Reboot: *Non-speaking individuals are often highly intelligent and can communicate in a variety of ways.*

Assumption: You must make eye contact in order to listen and pay attention.

Reboot: *Many autistic individuals are dysregulated by eye contact and can't see and hear at the same time.*

Assumption: "Attention-seeking" is the cause of many unwanted behaviors.

Reboot: *There's nothing wrong with seeking attention. Hello! Isn't that what we want kids to do?*

Assumption: As an educator, my job is to maintain control in my classroom.

Reboot: *As an educator, my job is to support students in learning to control their own behavior and to learn to self-regulate.*

Assumption: If a student constantly tries to jump on the trampoline, it can be used as a reinforcer or a privilege they can earn.

Reboot: *If a student constantly tries to jump on the trampoline, it's a sensory need, and they should be allowed to jump on the trampoline. Sensory activities are not a privilege; they are a necessity and a right.*

Rethinking Expectations Worksheet



We need to challenge assumptions by rethinking our own behaviors and expectations.

After reviewing the previous page with your team or staff, generate a list of assumptions educators, service providers, or employers may be making at your own site.

Assumption:

Reboot:

Assumption:

Reboot:

Assumption:

Reboot:

Assumption:

Reboot:

Assumption:

Reboot:

Sensory Awareness to Build Sensory Safety



We need to challenge our awareness of what is happening in our environment, and our understanding that everyone's sensory experience is different.

Review the descriptions of the eight senses listed below. Discuss them with your co-workers. How do these affect you? Do you notice how your students or employees are affected by these? Then complete the activities on the following page with your co-workers or staff.

Sight is your visual sense through your eyes. Other words used to describe your sense of sight are visual, vision, see, seeing, and looking.

Hearing is your sense of noise and sound through your ears. Other words used to describe your sense of hearing are auditory, hear, and listening.

Taste is sensed through your tongue and mouth. Another word used to describe your sense of taste is gustatory.

Touch is sensed through your skin. Other words to describe your sense of touch are tactile and feel.

Smell is sensed through your nose. Other words used to describe smells are scents.

Movement is sensed through sensory receptors in your joints and muscles and also your inner ear. Another word used to describe your sense of movement is proprioception. Proprioception tells you where your body, arms and legs are in space. More words you might see are moving, body movement or proprioceptive.

Balance is sensed through your inner ear. Another word used to describe balance is vestibular. Your vestibular sense tells you where your head is in space and helps keep you upright.

Interoception is an internal body sense. Another word used is interoceptive. It tells you if you are hungry, thirsty, if you have to go to the bathroom. And helps you sense your internal organs.

From: <https://www.sensoryfriendly.net/you-have-eight-senses-not-five/>

Sensory Safe Worksheet



Creating a sensory safe environment begins with awareness.

Choose a community site, such as a store, doctor's office, or library. Pay attention to all the stimulation going on and record on here. Next, fill another page out for your own site. Have all the members of your staff or team do this activity, all in different places. Then share. Remember that different people are bothered by different things.

Name:

Location:

Day/Time:

What do you see? Pay attention to things that are bright/dark, moving/stationary, complex/simple.

What do you hear? List every sound or noise you hear, no matter how loud/soft or brief/repetitive.

Close your eyes. Are there any smells you notice?

How many people bumped into you? Were the aisles narrow or wide? What were obstacles as you moved through the location?

Now think about how you feel? Are you hungry, tired, energetic?



Emotional Regulation Reflection

- Be more flexible—How flexible are you in your classroom or workspace?
- Make the classroom or workspace more predictable—What are the ways you currently make the classroom or workspace predictable? How could you improve?
- Build a relationship and become someone to trust—What are you doing to build good relationships with your students or employees?

Changing Perceptions Through Positive Language

List three "behaviors" occurring in your setting. Now rephrase, using positive language and building on individual's strengths.

Example—

Behavior: Alex is non-compliant.

Rephrase: Alex is learning to advocate for himself by expressing his preferences.

Behavior:

Rephrase:

Behavior:

Rephrase:

Behavior:

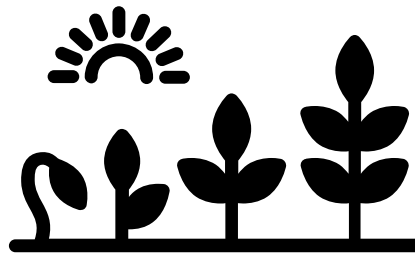
Rephrase:

Final Thoughts

As allies, we need to advocate and legislate for autistic individuals to have access to all of the opportunities that enable them to live independently and to attain meaningful lives.

While there need to be changes at a societal level, change must start with us. We each have the power to make changes that will support and enhance the lives of the autistic community!

What changes will YOU make based on the lessons from this weird year?



Thank you for attending our presentation!
For questions or comments, you can reach us at:
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For additional resources and information, find us at:
www.autismmovingforward.com



Follow us on social media!

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