

Neurodiversity and Preparing for Inclusion

Shawn Sullivan, MPA

Training and Development Specialist 1

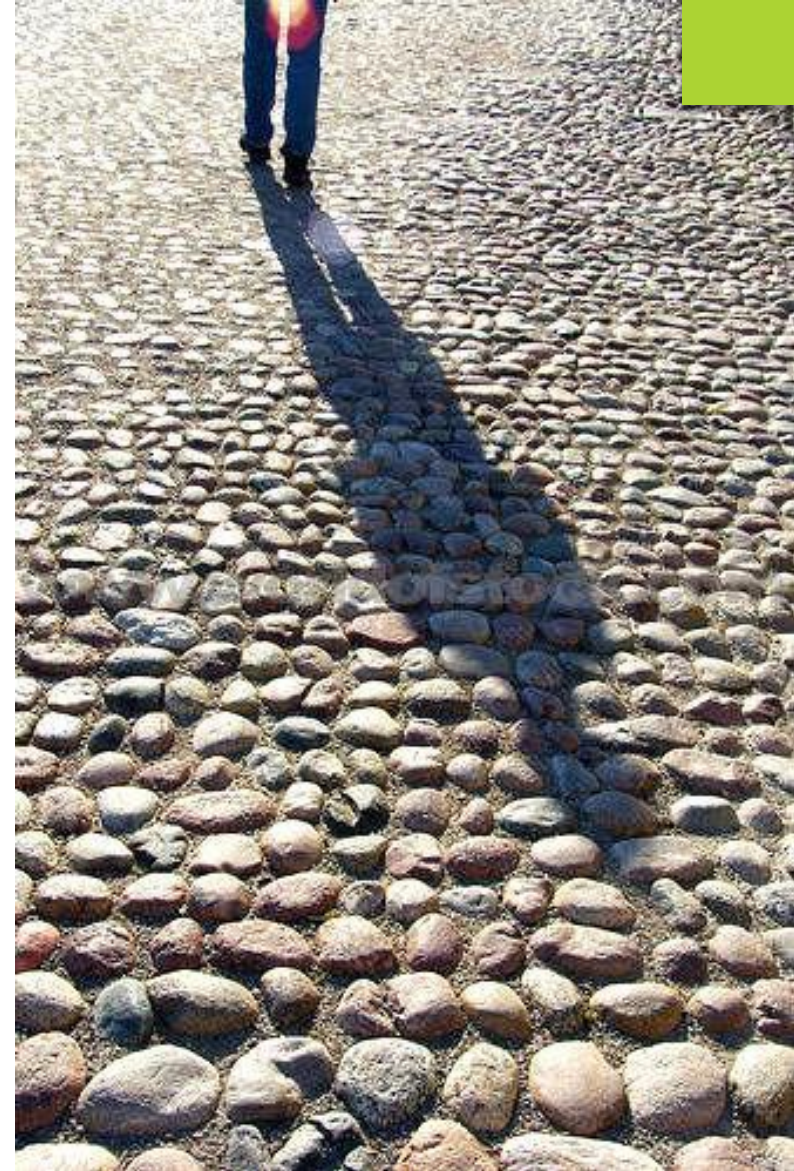
Oregon Eligibility Partnership, Oregon Department of Human Services



When autistics say this world isn't made for them, here's what they mean

Autistic people often have profound deficits in executive functioning, which means that they do so much work, internally, to prepare for any new situation before they even arrive.

Autistic children and adults need enough information to be able to go into an event mentally and emotionally prepared.



Proactive Planning

“When I got there, I did what I always do and sat in the parking lot, imagining myself walking in and observing how other people entered the building. I have to imagine doing things before I can do them because my task initiation switch is broken. My child was wordlessly doing the same.”

Proactive Planning

“Kids like mine and adults like me need accomplices who can predict our needs and meet us where we are. They can’t do that without listening and paying attention.”

“Parents of autistic kids cannot rely on other people to know how to make sure a fun activity is actually fun for their kids— or even prevent it from being traumatic.”

This applies to your co-workers on the spectrum too.

Disability is Normal

Disability is normal in our world.

“But all the children at this event learned about seniors and disabled people is that it’s appropriate to give them a box full of hygiene products for their birthdays. They learned nothing about their lives or circumstances that humanized them.”

Disability is Normal

What is the implication?

“Without non-disabled people, we won’t have what we need to brush our teeth and take a shower? That disabled people’s ‘worlds are changed’ by getting a box of bath products that may not even be useable to them?”

“Definitely, there was a tragic lack of awareness and empathy for disabled and elder people. That same distance from the reality of being disabled impacts my child.”

Proactive Planning

“Everyone makes mistakes, but not everyone is likely to make so many mistakes that they seem to others to be willfully sabotaging things or are at risk of social exclusion because humans are self-selecting and many avoid or actively harm those they perceive to be the weakest link.”

Proactive Planning

Autistic people need to be mentally rehearsed because we often cannot spontaneously process new things at the same speed as others. Being blindsided by unexpected circumstances will consume so much executive functioning that we won't have enough left to **stay regulated, focused, and communicative** in busy spaces.

Impacts

“No one could even see all the subtle communicating we were doing without the luxury of words. They didn’t even think about our need to communicate and wouldn’t have to know our language.”

“It was **not** appropriate for most autistic or otherwise neurodivergent children. Had this been designed for autistic people, it would have looked different.”

Autistic people are not wired to do a totally different activity every fifteen minutes.

“And every activity should not be a test of motor planning skills. I realize these are easy activities for most kids, but almost every kid’s event we ever attend is a series of motor skills activities. My child has lots of strengths that she never gets to exercise because other kids would struggle in those areas.”

How you can help!

Ask! Have someone with neurodiversity at the table when planning events.

Where is the “quiet room” at work? If we don’t have one, we need one.

Ask the coworker who is always by themselves if they want to come to lunch or get coffee.

Reach out to your local Employee Resource Group (DHS employees)