

Autism, “Adulthood”, & Asking for Accommodations

By: Patrick Gale & Russel Houser

Russel's Story



- Passionate about supporting people of all abilities/backgrounds to reach their goals and dreams, and live a self-directed life.
- My passion started after I knew of my own autism diagnosis.
- Previously worked in Adult Home/Community Services for 9 years.
- Now working with autistic children ages 2 - 8 as a Lead Registered Behavior Technician in the field of Applied Behavior Analysis.
- Also passionate on discussing various topics of disability, to spread awareness and acceptance of people with individual differences.

Patrick's Story



- Diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) in 1999 at the age of 5
- Has worked in the telecommunications industry since 2017 designing fiber optic cable routes to feed businesses, homes, and cell towers
- Has a long-term goal of public speaking about mental health from the perspective of someone with ASD and helping people of all ages determine their career goals and how to achieve them

Why?



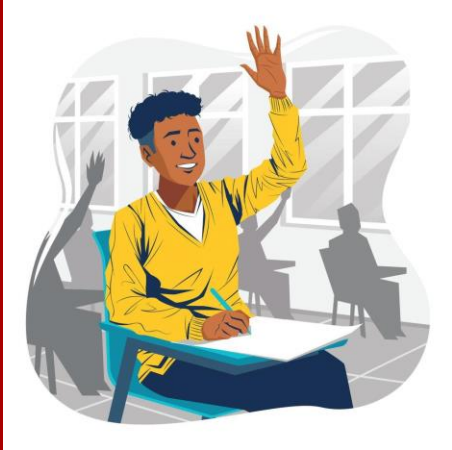
- We share a passion for speaking publicly on autism, based on our personal and professional experiences.
- While we received special education services in our childhood, we had to pave our paths in our adulthood.
- While there are many resources and supports available for autistic children and adolescents, there is a falloff of resources when they become adults.

Education



- What should we look for in an “accommodation”?
- Our personal experiences with school accommodations.
- Other factors/barriers we had to encounter.

Education



- We should approach “accommodations” with an open mind
 - Not just if they are for someone with or without a disability.
- Many of us use some type of tool in our lives to help us succeed!
- Technology has made some resources easier to use for everyone.
- It’s okay to ask for help when you need it.
 - Someone else in your classes may have needed help too!

Education

- Seeking accommodations is often the student's responsibility in college.
 - You can prepare for this transition now before finishing high school.
 - Consider participating more in your IEP meetings more actively.
- Fortunately, colleges still offer a variety of helpful resources!
 - Disability Services Offices
 - Tutoring Sessions



Education



- When choosing where to go to college, ask yourself a few questions:
 1. How close do I want to live from my caregivers or guardian(s)?
 2. What do I want to study?
 3. How much of a challenge am I willing to accept?
 4. Will the college have resources for my personal needs?

Employment



- Many autistic people face a disconnect between academic and job success.
 - Often, they are either unemployed or underemployed.
- Workplaces can involve social/life skills not often taught in classrooms.

Employment



- We can help bridge this gap by offering other opportunities.
 - Volunteer Work
 - Internships
 - Special Academic Projects
 - Freelance Work
 - Mock Resume/Interview Workshops

Employment



- Ask yourself, “What do I like to do?”
 - Consider what jobs interest you.
- Think about what would help you succeed in the workplace.
 - Don’t worry about if it is “normal” or not.
- We all use some sort of “accommodation” to help us succeed at work!
 - However, you may have to speak up first to express your needs.

Employment



- There are autistic employees in many different workplace environments.
 - “If you meet one autistic person, you met one autistic person.”
- Many autistic people share certain strengths which can help on the job.
 - Attention to Detail
 - Excellent Memory
 - Highly Observant

Employment



- Potential Barriers in the Workplace
 - Lack of understanding from management
 - Poor relations with coworkers
 - Lack of Supports/Resources
- How do we address such barriers?

Independent Living



- Many individuals with ASD struggle to cope with major change.
 - Moving to a new location is one such example in many cases.
- When planning a move, ask yourself four questions:
 1. Do I want to live near my caregiver(s) or guardian(s)?
 2. Do I want to live near where I work?
 3. Do I want to live near my favorite attraction?
 4. What type of environment and weather do I prefer?

Independent Living



- Many people start living on their own after high school.
 - This includes many changes to someone's personal routine.
- To help prepare, make a list of skills needed to live independently.
 - Cooking
 - Cleaning
 - Using Public and/or Private Transportation
 - Maintaining Finances and Supplies
 - Living with Other People

Independent Living



- Here are some ways to prepare for living away at college.
 - Academic or social/recreational school break programs.
 - College extended stay/orientation programs (if applicable).
 - Attending community college for 1-2 years (if applicable).

Independent Living



- Ways to prepare for residential living (CILA, ICILA, etc):
 - Connect with an Independent Service Coordinator (ISC)
 - The ISC can help you find services that you are looking for.
 - Meet with an agency's residential team and intake coordinator.
 - Remember to ask any questions you may have!
 - Take tours and visits of any homes you're interested in.
 - Feel free to set up any tours/trial visits at your pace.



Independent Living

- (Patrick): For me, starting a new life in a new location was extremely helpful.
 - I graduated from college in May of 2017
 - I interviewed for a position in Kansas City two months earlier and got the job.
 - I was looking forward to becoming independent and starting my new job.
 - In November of 2022, I relocated from Kansas City to Omaha.
 - My mental health improved dramatically within five months of this major change.
- (Russel): For me, I learned how to navigate rural, urban, and suburban life.
 - Before living on-campus at college, I lived in a small rural town.
 - I was able to meet with a faculty who helped students adjust to city life.
 - During my freshman year, I was still able to visit my parents on weekends.
 - As I spent more time in the city, I felt more comfortable with the change.
 - Feeling confident with my routine had also helped with my mental health.

Mental Health



- Anxiety and depression are very common among autistic people.
 - Often from navigating a world with unique challenges for them.
- We must include mental health in supports for autistic people.
 - Access to positive mental health is a right.



Mental Health

- How did we get through our mental health struggles?
- Q: What do you do when you feel helpless?
 - A: There are many options, depending on how the person copes with their feelings.
 - A: In the worst cases, it is smart to seek professional advice.
- Q: What symptoms of anxiety are often overlooked?
 - A: Feeling sick, tired or having headaches more often; sometimes being high-achieving.
 - A: Avoidance of specific activities or scenarios; all-or-nothing thinking.
- Q: What symptoms of depression are often overlooked?
 - A: Low appetite; short-term memory problems; lack of self-confidence

Mental Health



- Fortunately, there are many resources on mental health services.
 - Counseling centers for college students.
 - Employment Assistance Programs (EAP) in workplaces.
 - Private Counseling Centers (both in-person and virtual).
 - Disability Services Agencies may offer services to their participants.
 - Counseling, Psychiatry, Applied Behavior Analysis

Mental Health



- It is okay to seek help, and we should not feel stigmatized in doing so.
 - It can certainly feel difficult to admit the need to seek help.
- There are some actions you can take now to support your mental health.
 - Consider talking to a trusted friend, neighbor, or loved one.
 - Journal your thoughts/feelings on a regular basis.
 - Reach out to online or in-person support groups.
 - Get some exercise and go out in the community more!



Final Thoughts

- (Russel): “You can do anything that you set your mind to. I know you can”.
- (Patrick): “I feel like a stranger from another world, but at least I’m living again”.
- Adulthood may seem daunting, but it doesn't have to be!
 - You can prepare for this exciting stage of your life now.
- Being independent can feel great, but also practice inter-dependence!
 - No one is an island, so feel free to reach out for help as needed.



Acknowledgements/Dedication

- (Russel): I am grateful for the ever-lasting support of my wife and our families.
 - I also thank my friends for being there along the way.
- (Patrick): My mother was (and still is) my greatest hero.
 - I never got to tell her that while she was alive, but I'm saying it now.

Thank you!





Questions?

