

# We don't treat Autism

## Here's Why



### Pathology Model

Autism "refers to a group of complex neurodevelopment disorders characterized by repetitive & characteristic patterns of behavior & difficulties with social communication & interaction. The symptoms are present from early childhood & affect daily functioning."

NIH - <https://www.ninds.nih.gov/Disorders/Patient-Caregiver-Education/Fact-Sheets/Autism-Spectrum-Disorder-Fact-Sheet>

There is no cure for autism & therapists should not provide therapy with an intent to "cure" autism.

### Neurodiversity Model

ASAN (Autistic Self Advocacy Network): "Autism is a developmental disability that affects how we experience the world around us. Autistic people are an important part of the world. Autism is a normal part of life, & makes us who we are. ASAN (& we) believe that instead of trying to change disabled people, we should work to make sure people with disabilities can access what we need."

### Autistic People

- Think differently
- Process senses differently
- Move differently
- Communicate differently
- Socialize differently
- May need help with activities of daily living

Some Autistic people have intellectual disability, others do not.  
Some Autistic people can speak, others do not speak. Some Autistic people need a lot of support in their daily lives, others may need less.  
Some Autistic people have other disabilities in addition to autism, others do not.

Therapies should help Autistic people, not train them to appear "less autistic" or meet neurotypical standards or clinical outcomes.

### *Autism Intervention looks like*

ABA/Behavior Modification ('shaping behavior', rewards/punishment)  
Positive Reinforcement  
Training compliance for neurotypical social skills, & teaching masking & camouflaging to "hide" autism  
Insisting on spoken communication/Verbal Behavior®  
'Whole Body Listening, eye-contact  
Restricting access to AAC, using a PECS ® (ABA) approach  
Therapy goals for sensory tolerance or extinguishment  
Denying access to supports, accommodations & modifications, or using them as rewards  
Extinguishing echolalia, monotropism, monologuing, stimming or Autistic "quirks"

### *Empathetic & Respectful Therapy with Autistic people looks like this*

Understanding that behavior is often communication of a need or a problem (sensory, inability to communicate, physical or emotional need)  
Unrestricted AAC access with core language & modeling  
Improving communication abilities in the client's preferred mode  
Teaching self-advocacy, respecting personal agency  
Providing supports, accommodations & modifications at all times, in all situations  
Equitable inclusion  
Perspective-taking for ALL, problem-solving, empowerment  
Using a trauma-informed approach