Self-Advocacy In Your Community

An Autistic's Guide To Speaking Up And Speaking Out

And you are…?

- I'm Steph Diorio, and I work here!

- Diagnosed as autistic (then Asperger's syndrome) in 2009

- I'm the local history librarian/archivist at Hoboken Public Library

- Working in a public library is a great opportunity for me to self-advocate!

What's self-advocacy, anyway?

- Standing up for yourself and your rights
- Special meaning to the traditionally disenfranchised disabled community
- Issues we face include:
  - Accessibility
  - Being infantilized/talked down to
  - Being taken seriously
  - Being talked over by parents/"experts"

My Personal Self-Advocacy Work

- Blogging (since 2010)

- Autistic Gaming Initiative

- Speaking at conferences, including Targeting Autism

- Supporting other autistic people and amplifying their voices

- Discussing being autistic with the people around me

How do you get started?

- In my case, I started blogging first, but anything that gets your voice out there goes!
- Autistic-led organizations:
  - The Autism Self-Advocacy Network
  - Autistic Women and Nonbinary Network
- Making autistic friends helps a lot
- Reach out to autistics from minority groups

What are some good ways to help achieve acceptance?

- Blog away or start a YouTube channel!
  - Your unique autistic voice is valuable to the discussion.
- Share other autistic people's content!
- Join autistic groups on social media!
- Don't be so hard on yourself!
- Allowing yourself to be autistic can go a long way.

What are some good ways to help achieve acceptance?

- Speak up to change the culture around you

- Since taking my job here I've added a valuable autistic voice

- I've explained things like:

  - Preferred symbolism

  - Preferred language

- If you speak up, make sure you're safe

If I'm not autistic, how can I help autistic people I know?

- First and foremost, LISTEN TO THEM.

- If an autistic person is telling you that these things are harmful, believe them:
  - a type of therapy
  - an organization
  - a societal expectation is harmful to autistic people

- Preferred language: "autistic people," not "people with autism"

- We don't "have" autism, we "are" autism

An important note on functioning labels…

- Autistic people also widely reject functioning labels, as they're often used to deny agency and support.

- A well-known statement in the autistic community is that "high-functioning is used to deny support and low-functioning is used to deny agency."

- Functioning labels also don't effectively describe the challenges we face.

- If something has caused us trauma, it's important to believe us.

And now back to that non-autistic support....

- Share our voices (not just in April!)

- Call out ableism in your life

- If a disabled person is with you, center their voice

Intersectionality

- Some people's experiences will be different due to overlaps in identity

- This is referred to as intersectionality

- Prejudices people face vary and intersect at different points

- It's harder for women and non-white people to receive a diagnosis

  - Racism and sexism play a role

My child is autistic. What can I do?

- I suggest being totally awesome, like my parents!

- Allow your child to be autistic

  - They won't grow out of it!

  - Let them stim!

- Teaching social skills = good; teaching compliance = bad

- Don't try dangerous "cures"

- Don't overshare on social media (this goes for all parents)

- Don't make your child's autism about you

Andrew Wakefield Is A Fraud

- VACCINATE YOUR CHILDREN. IT DOES NOT CAUSE AUTISM.

- Wakefield's study in *The Lancet* has been disproven numerous times

- Herd immunity is important

Questions? Comments? Stand-up Comedy Gigs?

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