

# Ask a Therapist

ACT

Dori Zener, MSW RSW

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## Question Themes

Autistic Adults - Acceptance of difference

Talking about Dx

Early Identification in girls

Meltdowns/Dysregulation

Mental Health & Schools

Friendship

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## Keep up in social situations supportive friends

Talk to friend in advance - topics, catch up

Situated self in good spot

Recognize might miss things, and that's okay

It's okay to cut people off every now and then, just say "Oh sorry, go ahead"

Don't feel responsible to carry the conversation - this is a shared responsibility

Catch up with friend after - what did I miss?

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## Keeping up with everyday life

Scale back

Use systems, habits and routines

Adjust your expectations

Call in supports

Executive Functioning coach

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## Tips for calculating capacity

“Sometimes worn out, distracted, executive function difficulties

Spoon theory

Think of energy as a finite resource

What recharges your energy? ie. exercise, walk in forest, meditation

What people/environments drain your energy?

Consider health/life stages ie. menopause, virus

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## Differentiating Autism & ADHD

Social communication - ADHD may know what to say, but may come out the wrong way due to impulsivity

Behaviour: “Special interests” more Autism

Autism - Welcome structure and routine, reduces unpredictability.

ADHD - Do well with structure but struggle to implement and seek out novelty

Both may have the ability to sustain intense focus for areas of interest

Both have rich inner world

Both can be introverted and extroverted

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## Masking & Unmasking

Difference between social masking and autistic masking

Cost of masking: Stress and anxiety, Depression, Exhaustion, Loss of identity, autistic burnout, increased risk of suicidal thoughts.

Start at home

- When you are feeling pleasure - how do you want to express this? A stim? A vocalization?
- When you are upset - what are you gravitating towards to self-soothe?

Is it advisable to open up behaviours and tendencies? Yes, in places and relationships where you feel safe being vulnerable.

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## Daughter afraid of blood - menstruation

Start early - reduce surprises

Explore what pads and period proof underwear best for her

Explain normal, natural

Read books about it

Ask her how she wants to learn about it

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## Talking about diagnosis

What age?

Gauge what they already know about autism

Strengths-based, tie it to aspects about themselves

Famous people who are autistic that they might know and look up to

Talk about the misconceptions of autism in the world

Teachers talking to parents when daughter has questions - encourage/mediate conversation with family

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## Talking about diagnosis - when things go awry

Internalized stigma - proof something defective about her

Betrayal - purpose of testing

Don't push it

Move away from the label - focus on strategies and support

Respect desire not to share

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## How to advocate for diagnosis

Use the DSM-5 criteria

- Social Communication
- Restricted repetitive behaviour
- Sensory

Give examples

Or Autism Profile for more in depth

Discuss the nature of the interests

Differences between behaviour across settings

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## Early identification

Girls are encouraged to be more social

Difficulties with changes, transitions

Obsessive interest in people

Selective mutism, separation anxiety, school refusal

Sensory sensitivities - clothing

Avoidant/restrictive food intake disorder (ARFID)

Difficulties explaining thoughts feelings and perspective taking

Not picking up on cues

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## Early identification

Non-speaking - assume competence

Use visuals

Give choices

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## How to deal with meltdowns/emotional regulation

Meltdowns are a product of feeling overwhelmed

Identify what leads up to a meltdown so you can learn to anticipate and

reduce them:

Environments

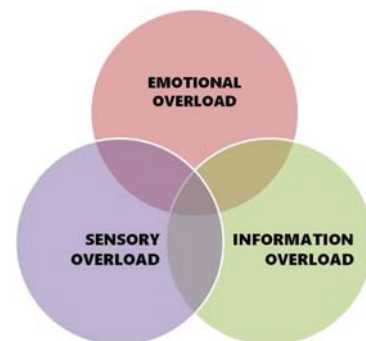
Thoughts

Feelings

Body sensations

Actions

Give time and space to recover



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## Supporting emotionally dysregulated kids

Make proactive plan - normalize emotions/reactions

Tipping point - not taking in verbal information

Stay close but give space

Tag team where possible

Impact of meltdowns on friendship and school - not in her control

Identify and reduce triggers

Instead of "I'm sorry" - I wish that

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## Friendship - one person

Validate how important it is to her

Sharing a friend- person has enough to give for multiple people

Friendship stronger when people take breaks

Get to know other people too

If you try to control who she plays with you might lose her as a friend

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## Self-advocacy

Teach different forms of bullying - exclusion, name calling, put down etc.

Teach what a supportive friend looks like

“I’m going to go play with someone else”