Learning to Embrace Autism

This tool provides a framework for interacting with neurodiverse individuals in the workplace in ways that are respectful, inclusive and welcoming.

Research about autism has been underway for years and continues to provide new evidence and information about this type of human diversity. Simultaneous with current research is the emergence of the neurodiversity movement and the culture of autism. Over the past twenty years, more people with autism have been speaking up and speaking out about how they experience the world. This, along with other calls for a more inclusive society, has resulted in a deepening respect for people with autism and greater acceptance of diversity among humans. The movement raises ethical, theoretical and ideological issues about how research is conducted. Being aware of these issues is important for those who live and/or work with people with autism and for the culture of autism itself.

PREVIOUS THINKING	NEWER THINKING	WAYS TO RESPOND
Disability is a deficit.	• Disability arises as a result of interaction with an unaccommodating environment. • A diagnosed disability provides access to needed and beneficial services.	• "Let me know if this space is comfortable for you." • "You have a unique way of thinking that I really appreciate."
Autism is a disability.	• Humans are diverse. • Cognitive variations are natural and valuable. • Autism is a reflection of neurodiversity.	• "Your deep interest in XX is important for others to hear about. Would you share what you've learned?" • Encourage multiple solutions to problems and different ways of doing things.
People with autism need to be "fixed."	• Autism is a unique and valid way of being. • Learner variability is a part of all of us.	• Recognize diversity as valuable. • "I like the way you're thinking about that. I never thought of that before."
People with autism need to be interpreted by the neurotypical.	• People with autism have a voice that needs to be heard. • People with autism need as much autonomy as possible.	• "Tell us what you think about that idea." • "Tell me what you need to be comfortable." • Develop an understanding of Universal Design for Learning.

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