



UCLA  
ALL BRAINS

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## NEURODIVERSITY

Providing an Inclusive  
Space for Autistic, ADHD  
Students and Other  
Neurodivergent Students.

# Introductions

- Your name
- Your pronouns
- Your role (student, staff, faculty, other)
- Why did you come to the event today?



# What is Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)?

- What do you know about ASD?
- Where did you learn this from?
- What do you think you should know?

# Student's Perspective

- Video: Don's Descriptions of Common Autistic Traits (5:16)



# Discussion Questions

1. What about Don stood out to you?
2. Do you think your peers and UCLA staff have an accurate understanding of ASD?
3. Put yourself in the shoes of students with ASD: how might these students face challenges in a college setting because of their ASD status?



# What Is Autism?

Eye contact

Social response

Social initiations

**Social Communication**

Reciprocity

Gestures

Joint attention

Directed affect

Restricted interests

Rigid routines or rituals

**Restrictive/  
Repetitive  
or  
Stereotyped  
Behaviors**

Body mannerisms

Repetitive speech

# Why Is This Important?

- Rising prevalence rates, estimated 0.7 – 1.9% of autistic college students.
  - more prevalent in boys than girls, diagnosed later in minorities
- **Autistic college students experience high rates of dropout for multiple reasons (i.e., social, academic, etc.)**
- 70% of autistic adults have at least one additional disorder
  - social anxiety, ADHD, oppositional disorder, obsessive compulsive disorder, Tourette's syndrome, insomnia, depression



# What is ADHD?

- Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder
  - Symptoms: hyperactivity, disorganization, impulsivity
- 1. ADHD – Inattention
  - Principally sustained inattention or task persistence
- 2. ADHD – Hyperactivity
  - Principally poor inhibitory control
    - Lack of impulse control, moving/fidgeting/talking excessively, restless





# ADHD in College

- Not common for college students to recognize that they are ADHD
- Have difficulties with:
  - sustaining attention (e.g. paying attention in lecture)
  - following through on instructions (e.g. not completing homework on time)
  - engaging in tasks that require sustained mental effort
  - listening when spoken to directly
- Need help with:
  - organization & focusing
  - breaking down tasks into smaller parts

# Relevant Legal Mandates

- Pre-College: Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)
- Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act (ADAAA)
- Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act or the Workforce Investment Act (504)
- Higher Education Opportunity Act (HEOA)

**These mandates require us to provide protections/accommodations and prevent discrimination for students with ASD**





***SUPPORTING***

***STUDENTS'***

***NEEDS***

Supporting the needs  
of neurodiverse  
students on the hill

# Challenges

- What do you see as your responsibilities as a RA?
- What are the barriers you face as an RA in helping ASD/ADHD students?
- What are some challenges these students face?

# Other Challenges

What are the challenges for students with autism on campus?

- Lack of staff and faculty awareness of ASD
- roommate conflicts
- Navigating campus systems
- Planning ahead of time
- Managing stress
- Controlling behavior/impulses
- Daily living skills, personal hygiene, and independence
- Making and maintaining peer networks
- Communicating with professors
- Working collaboratively in groups
- Self-advocacy and disclosure

# Challenge - Engagement

- M is a first-year student who was randomly assigned to live with two other girls
- M spends most of her free time in her room reading anime and does not attend floor events or meetings
- Other students often say M is “weird,” “off,” or “socially awkward”
- M’s roommates often say she is “really picky,” “anti-social,” or “lonely”

# How to Support Engagement

- **Before assuming she wants to engage, ask!**
  - Hi, I just wanted to check-in with some of the people on the floor to see how everything at school is going. What are some of the things you enjoy or dislike about school?
- **Create activities based on their interests and ways of interacting**
  - What are some things you like to do? Have you met people who like those things too?
- **Connect M to student orgs based on her interests, strengths, and talents**
- **Normalize this experiences of other students**
  - Do NOT use autism to describe M, unless she self-identifies or consents
  - “Everyone spends their time differently. Everyone enjoys different things.”
  - Highlight M’s strengths and interests



# Challenge - Friendships and Boundaries

- J is a first-year transfer student sharing a dorm with two students
- J tags along with his roommates the cafeteria and in the common room.
- However, J's roommates give nonverbal cues they do not like when J tags along with them.
- J does not seem to hang out with other students and has difficulty making friends
- No one on your floor attempts to hang out with J or seem to want to hang out with J



# How to Support Making Friendships

- **Ask J about his friendships and social interactions**
  - What do you wish you could talk about with other people or friends?
- **Identify J's strengths, interests, and talents**
  - Connect J to student groups based on his interests
- **Help J identify signs of acceptance and rejection**
  - Acceptance: spend 1-on-1 time, respond and initiate conversation in person and online, invitations to do things, accept on social media
  - Rejection: does not seek your attention, avoids conversation, ignores social media invites
  - Friendship is a choice
  - Normalize the experience of rejection and acceptance
- **Social Coaching & Role Play**
  - Good conversations - how to initiate, trade info, common interests
  - Boundary setting - be clear, explicit, and concise



# Challenge - Conflict Resolution and Boundary Setting

- L was randomly assigned a roommate, K
- K would invite their family to their apartment without giving L notice
- K would cook all meals without cleaning after herself and their kitchen had no window which would contain the smell
- L found this challenging due to her sensitivity to stimuli
- L coped with this stress by completely avoiding her apartment and roommate
- L was also matched with an advisor who addresses inappropriate topics within their meetings
- L experienced stress due to her difficulty creating boundaries

# Conflict Resolution with Roommate

How would you support a student with similar challenges regarding roommate conflict?



# Conflict resolution with advisor/faculty

How would you support a student with similar challenges (conversations with professors)?



# Challenge - Daily Living Skills

- S was in her 2nd year of college and was living with several roommates
- S experienced social and academic challenges
- S's parents supported her through scheduling classes but her roommates found their involvement "odd"
- S had difficulties with self care and would avoid bathing, brushing her teeth, and eating
- S's roommate's took on the role of "parents" as they began to worry about her
- S was constantly worried about offending people



# Resolution

How would you support a student with similar challenges?



# Supporting Students with ASD

- Be clear, concrete, and explicit (e.g. roommate contracts, event details)
- Allow delivery of communication in different formats, such as electronically
- Have sensory materials available for residents (e.g. stress ball, play doh, noise cancelling headphones)
- List of clubs and student organizations



# Supporting Students with ADHD/ADD

- Schedule planning, To-Do lists, breaking down tasks, timing, quiet study rooms
- Directly connect them to resources/accommodations
  - CAE
  - **AAP/PLF, Tutoring**



# All Brains

- Socials!
  - Game Nights, Powerpoint party, Movie Nights
- Peer Mentoring Program
  - 1:1 mentoring with peer trained volunteers
- Workshops
  - How to go to Office Hours
- Trainings
  - training UCLA staff/faculty
  - increasing awareness for neurodiversity



# UCLA Resources

- **CAE:** facilitates academic accommodations and provides access to educational opportunities for students with disabilities (<http://www.cae.ucla.edu/>).
- **CAPS:** provides counseling and psychological services to UCLA students (<http://www.counseling.ucla.edu/>).
- **Ashe**

# UCLA Resources

- **UCLA All Brains:** encompasses different orgs committed to improving the college experience for neurodiverse individuals. Peer mentor programs, game nights, and other social activities. (<https://www.uclaallbrains.org/>)
- **UC-LEND Clinic:** provide training with primary care providers offering ADHD, autism, and other neurodevelopmental evaluations in addition to linking patients with a care team that helps families. 2x a month, Wednesdays 9-12pm  
(<http://www.uc-lend.org/lend-clinic/>)



# ***THANK YOU!***

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