

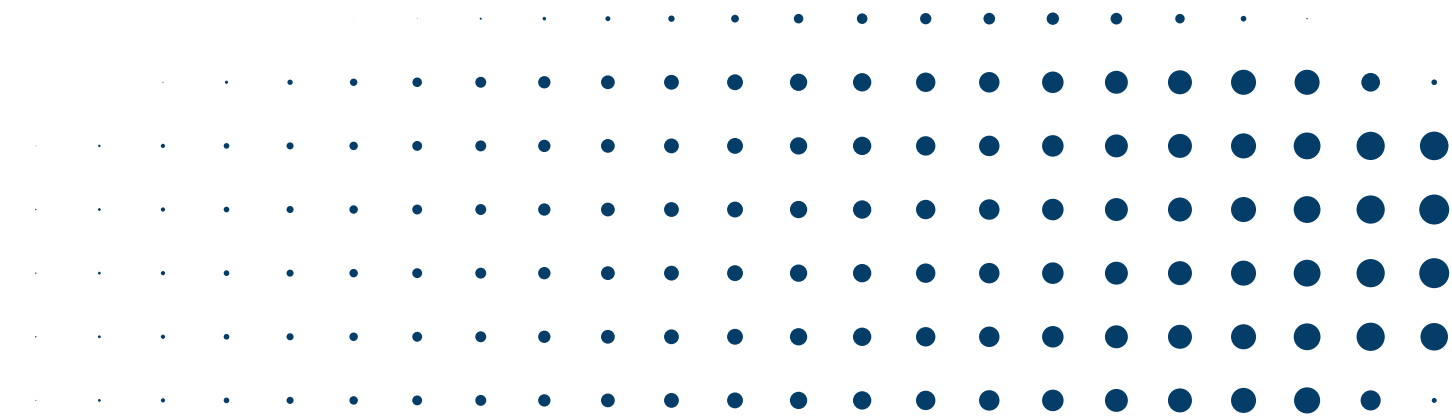


SUPPORTING AUTISTIC STUDENTS IN FRANCE

Matthew Lawrence
The #ActuallyAutistic Coach



The #ActuallyAutistic Coach
To Unmask is to Thrive





WHAT WILL WE COVER ?



- **Understanding Autism in the US vs France**
- **Challenges of Autistic Students Abroad**
- **Navigating Crises**
- **Understanding Autistic Burnout**
- **Crating a Supportive Eco-System**
- **Affirming Autistic Students**
- **Reflections, Experiences, Questions, Answers**

NEURODIVERGENT? AUTISTIC?

- **Our focus : Autistic people - this is what people most often mean by ND - though ND covers many things**
- **Most of the advice and accomodations we will discuss to all Neurodivergent people**
- **Beyond that, what is helpful to us are also fantastic for anybody**
- **Understanding the overlap between ND neurotypes and the lack of formal diagnosis is huge - you never know who you may be dealing with**

KEY NUMBERS

- **Up to 80% of autistics are ADHD**
- **Up to 50% of ADHDers are autistic**



INTRO : WHO AM I?

Matthew Lawrence, the actually autistic coach

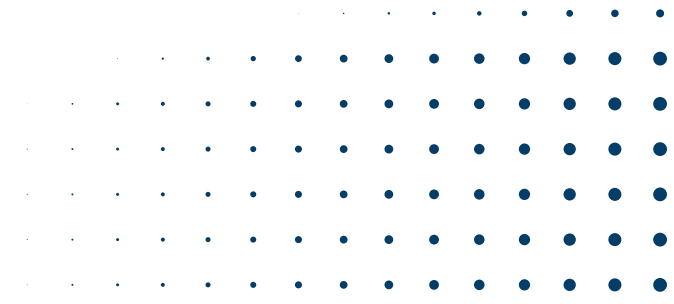
- Autistic ADHD, CPTSD, Dyspraxic, POTS >> I'm disabled in a number of different ways - even if I don't look like it to you
- Diagnosed autistic at 2.5 years old - I've seen first hand the way autistic students are treated across my lifetime in educational institutions and in society in general.
- Lived and worked in 5 countries, in France since 2021.
- I'm also a rabbinical student, am working on a travel guide to France for autistic travelers, and a former competitive roller blader
- Autistic teacher, coach, consultant
- Working with the autistic students since 2006, helping prepare students to go study abroad.
- I work with : autistic adults, families, companies, government organizations, and schools
- What form : 1-on-1 work, educational seminars, support groups, retreats all over the world.
- I'm a founder of the Autistic Peer Support Coach Collective and train other autistic peer-support coaches and consultants around the world



AUTISM IN GLOBAL CONTEXTS: UNDERSTANDING DIVERSE EXPERIENCES

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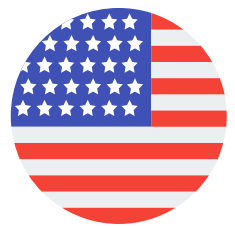
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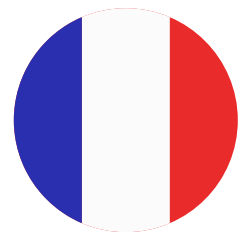


I. AUTISM IN GLOBAL CONTEXTS: UNDERSTANDING DIVERSE EXPERIENCES

Autism's cultural perceptions vary significantly—what's recognized and supported in one country might be misunderstood in another.



- **Today, the US tends toward the Neurodiversity paradigm, emphasizing autism as a difference (while still a disability) rather than a deficit. While still not fully accepted by all people, including autistic ones, this represents the worldview that the vast majority of autistic people hold.**



- **France, by comparison, continues to lean more towards a medical model of autism, even amongst autistic people, though this is gradually changing with increased advocacy and education.**



I. AUTISM IN GLOBAL CONTEXTS: UNDERSTANDING DIVERSE EXPERIENCES

- **In both countries, however, professionals working with autistic people, and the general public, remain grossly unaware of the nature of autism and rely on old stereotypes, research, and science that has been rejected.**
- **Embracing the neurodiversity paradigm supports positive identity formation and self-advocacy among autistic individuals.**
- **Autistic self-advocacy movements have been crucial in shaping policy, perception, and support systems, with varying degrees of presence and impact globally.**



I. AUTISM IN GLOBAL CONTEXTS: UNDERSTANDING DIVERSE EXPERIENCES

- **Cultural sensitivity is key in supporting autistic students abroad, requiring programs to adapt to the diverse needs and perspectives of autistic students.**
- **While of course France is different and we aren't looking to spread American hegemony, understanding the nature of ableism and autistiphobia is key.**
- **Successful support models consider cultural context, ensuring accommodations and advocacy efforts are appropriately tailored.**

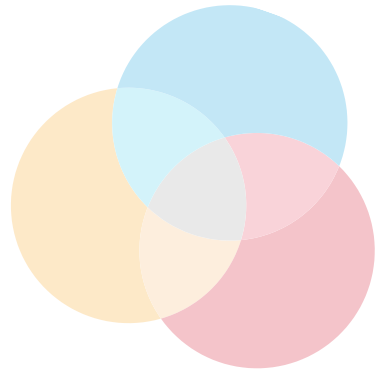


I. AUTISM IN GLOBAL CONTEXTS: UNDERSTANDING DIVERSE EXPERIENCES

- **Different countries' legal and educational frameworks impact the accessibility of support and accommodations for autistic individuals, necessitating a nuanced approach for international programs.**
- **While in France the majority of autistic people do not study in university, let alone in a different country, the case is quite different for American students, where educational opportunities are ensured by law. Thankfully this is changing in France.**
- **Global differences in diagnostic practices and the availability of support services can create disparities in the experiences of autistic students studying abroad.**



I. AUTISM IN GLOBAL CONTEXTS: UNDERSTANDING DIVERSE EXPERIENCES



- The intersection of autism with other cultural identities (e.g., race, ethnicity, gender) further complicates the experience of autistic students in foreign settings, highlighting the need for intersectional support approaches.
- Encouraging cross-cultural exchanges about autism and neurodiversity among students and staff can enhance mutual understanding and foster a more inclusive environment for everyone.
- Via understanding how autistic people see the world, compassion and grace can be extended on the part of organizations and universities

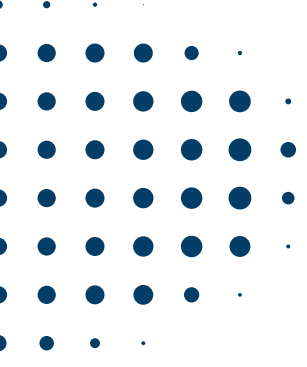


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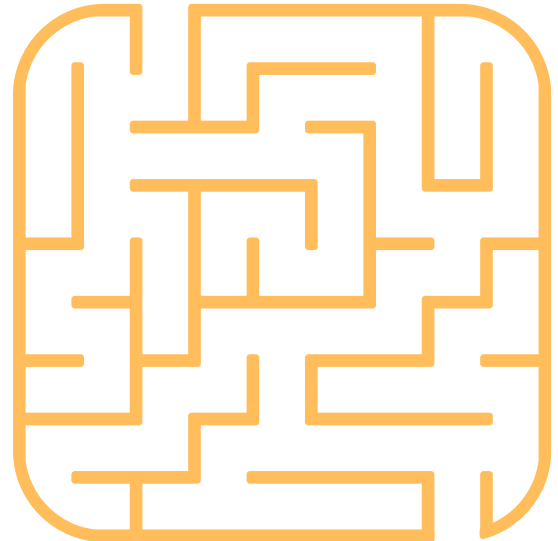
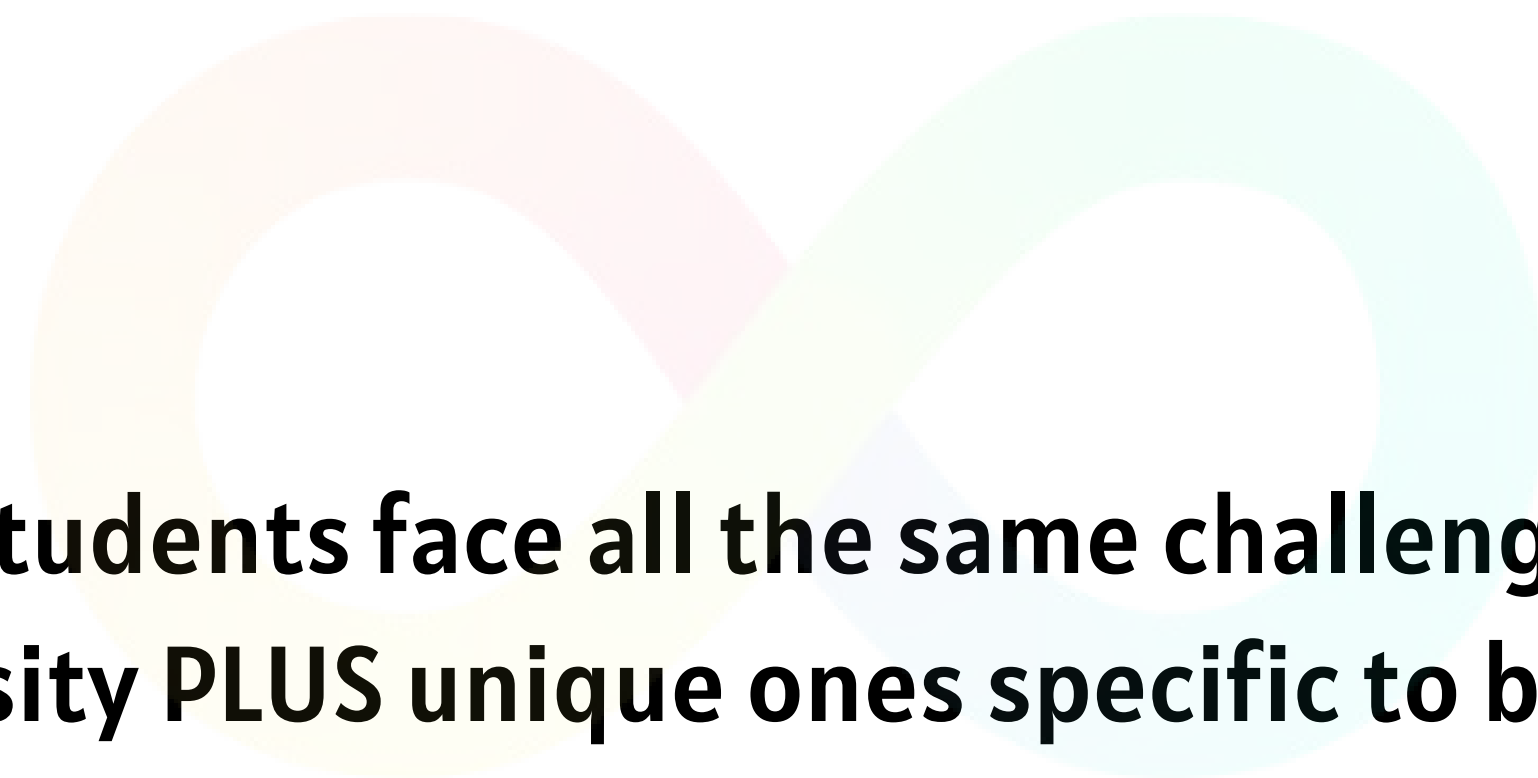
THE LANDSCAPE OF CHALLENGES FOR AUTISTIC STUDENTS

- ABROAD

- FRANCE SPECIFIC



2. THE LANDSCAPE OF CHALLENGES FOR AUTISTIC STUDENTS

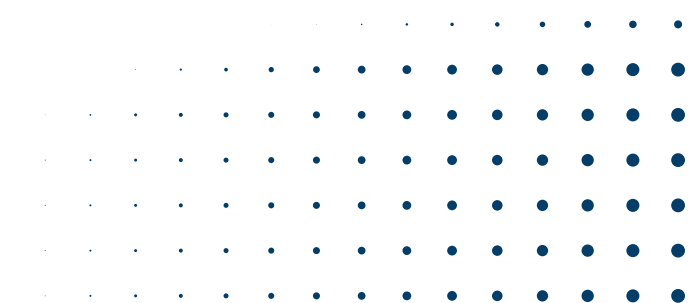


Autistic students face all the same challenges as any students in university PLUS unique ones specific to being autistic.

These exist wherever they are...

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2. THE LANDSCAPE OF CHALLENGES FOR AUTISTIC STUDENTS

- **Students need to manage and navigate the typical life of a university student and young person while ALSO navigating the balancing act of being an autistic person in a neurotypical world.**
- **Varied learning styles mean that traditional teaching methods are not always effective for autistic students.**
- **Educational settings frequently lack awareness and implementation of neurodiversity-affirmative approaches.**



2. THE LANDSCAPE OF CHALLENGES FOR AUTISTIC STUDENTS

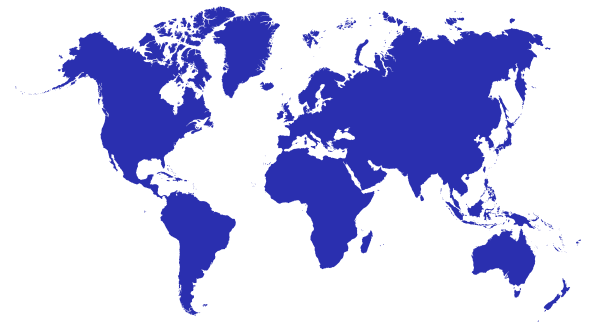
- Navigating social interactions with peers and educators often requires substantial mental and emotional effort.
- Sensory sensitivities can make typical classroom and campus environments overwhelming.
- Accessing accommodations can be a bureaucratic and stigmatizing process within educational institutions.
- Executive functioning challenges complicate time management, organization, and completing tasks.
- Frequent misunderstandings with non-autistic individuals due to differences in communication styles (Double-Empathy Problem)
- The necessity of camouflaging and masking (concealing autistic traits) to fit in, which is mentally exhausting and damaging to self-esteem.



2. THE LANDSCAPE OF CHALLENGES FOR AUTISTIC STUDENTS

- **Social pressure to conform not just as a young person, but as an outsider.**
- **Difficulty in finding a supportive community that understands and accepts autistic individuals as they are.**
- **Stigma and misconceptions about autism can lead to social exclusion and bullying.**
- **The risk of Autistic Burnout is heightened by the cumulative stress of daily coping strategies.**
- **Mental health disparities, including higher rates of anxiety, depression, victimhood due to violence, and suicide often exacerbated by social isolation.**
- **The challenge of advocating for oneself and one's needs in environments that may not recognize or validate those needs. This leads to further exhaustion**

2. THE LANDSCAPE OF CHALLENGES FOR AUTISTIC STUDENTS - ABROAD



- Going to study in a new country, an autistic student will need to manage and navigate everything we just discussed
- + PLUS the new challenges of a new culture
 - + PLUS the new challenges of said culture as an AUTISTIC person

It's taken a life to barely understand their home context - now it's being quadrupled.

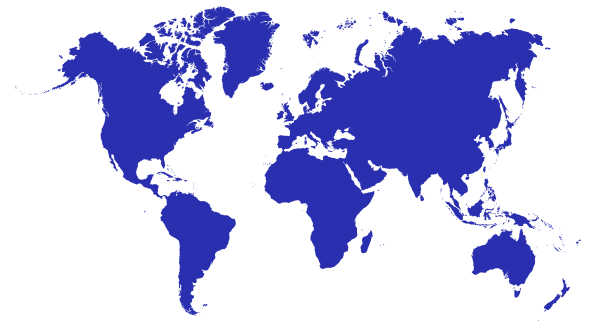
All while being judged for not being able to catch up or fit in.

2. THE LANDSCAPE OF CHALLENGES FOR AUTISTIC STUDENTS - ABROAD



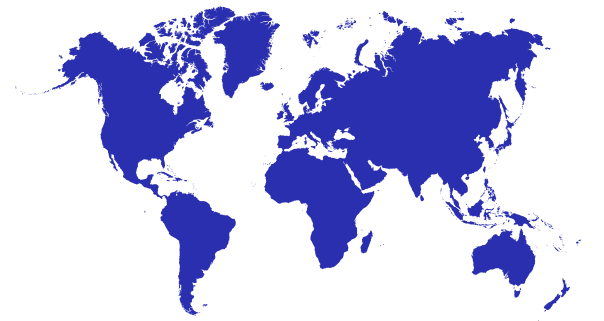
- The bureaucratic aspects of studying abroad, including visa requirements and accommodation arrangements, pose additional executive functioning challenges.
- Changes in routine and environment can significantly impact coping mechanisms and mental health.
- Adapting to a new country's educational system and style and social norms can be particularly disorienting for autistic students.
- Language barriers compound communication challenges, making misunderstandings more frequent.
- Unfamiliar foods and living arrangements can exacerbate sensory sensitivities.
- The absence of a familiar support network and settings increases feelings of isolation and stress.

2. THE LANDSCAPE OF CHALLENGES FOR AUTISTIC STUDENTS - ABROAD



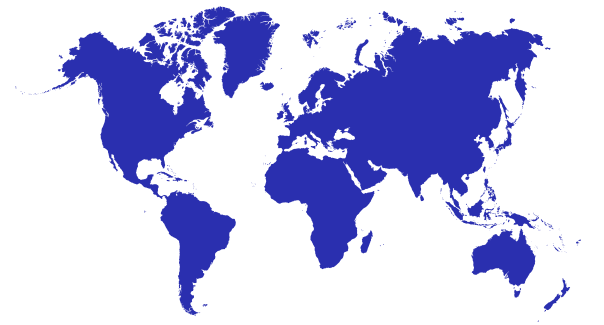
- The stress of managing academic responsibilities while adapting to a new culture can lead to quicker Autistic Burnout.
- Prejudices and lack of awareness about autism may be more pronounced in some cultures as we saw.
- Navigating foreign healthcare and mental health systems to find neuro-affirmative support can be daunting, if not impossible.
- Establishing new relationships in a foreign context is challenging, complicating the search for understanding peers. Whether or not they're both from the same country (going back to diff schools, etc)

2. THE LANDSCAPE OF CHALLENGES FOR AUTISTIC STUDENTS - ABROAD



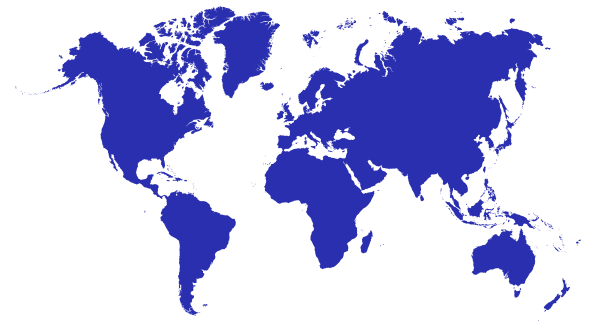
- Accessing specific accommodations may be more difficult due to differences in disability rights laws and educational policies.
- Adjusting to a new culture's norms, values, and daily life can be disorienting and stressful for many students.
- Cultural differences in the expression of empathy and understanding can lead to feelings of alienation.
- Cultural differences and lack of knowledge of them can lead to confrontations, stress, and alienation. They can even be dangerous.
- The need for masking may increase due to fear of standing out or being misunderstood in a new cultural setting.

2. THE LANDSCAPE OF CHALLENGES FOR AUTISTIC STUDENTS - ABROAD



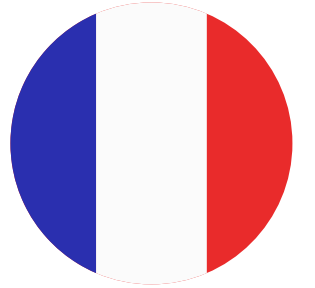
- **Potential conflicts between an individual's neurodiversity-affirming identity and cultures that predominantly view autism through a medicalized lens.**
- **Difficulty in participating in study-abroad-specific activities, like group travel or social events, that require extensive social interaction and flexibility.**
- **Concerns about safety and navigating unfamiliar public spaces, particularly for those with additional navigational or sensory processing challenges.**
- **Uncertainty about whom to trust or how to seek help in emergency situations, including during Autistic Meltdowns, Burnout, or mental health crises.**

2. THE LANDSCAPE OF CHALLENGES FOR AUTISTIC STUDENTS - ABROAD



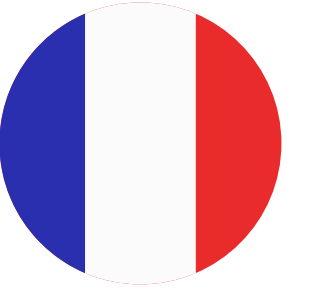
- **Balancing the demands of academic work with the desire to explore and experience the new country can lead to time management challenges.**
- **Managing finances abroad, including unexpected expenses, currency exchange rates, and living costs, can be challenging.**
- **Being far from familiar support networks, family, and friends can lead to feelings of loneliness and isolation.**
- **Finding suitable, safe, and affordable housing abroad can be difficult, particularly for those with specific living or sensory needs.**
- **Re-adapting to one's home culture after spending significant time abroad, often referred to as "reverse culture shock," can also pose challenges.**

2. THE LANDSCAPE OF CHALLENGES FOR AUTISTIC STUDENTS - FRANCE SPECIFIC



- Inaccurate service times and crowded conditions on the Metro
- Customer service concerns
- Dealing with bureaucracy
- Impatience towards non-French speakers
- Lack of understanding and patience towards disabled individuals
- Frequently incorrect posted times for businesses and services
- Limited availability due to closures on certain days
- Restaurants closing for extended periods during the day
- Difficulty finding specific stores for essential items like pharmacy products - most stores don't sell EVERYTHING like in the US
- Early closing times

2. THE LANDSCAPE OF CHALLENGES FOR AUTISTIC STUDENTS - FRANCE SPECIFIC



- Dealing with narrow stairs due to the absence of elevators, which can be challenging for individuals with dyspraxic and POTS issues.
- Facing criticism for being perceived as "loud".
- Misconceptions arise when someone who may not "appear autistic" is automatically seen as not disabled or deserving of basic patience.
- Cultural differences in social norms between America and France, where actions like asking people how they are or not greeting shop clerks may be interpreted differently and cause inter-personal issues.



3

NAVIGATING CRISES

- MELTDOWN

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3. NAVIGATING CRISES

- **Autistic students are prone to suffering from Autistic Meltdowns, Shutdowns, and Burnout**
- **All people should be aware of these - in particular, those responsible for student welfare and health**
- **Autistic people experiencing an acute meltdown or shutdown, or a chronic experience of Burnout need support and coping with them in a healthy and safe way without support is extremely difficult, if not impossible.**



3. NAVIGATING CRISES : WHAT IS AN AUTISTIC MELTDOWN?

- **Autistic meltdowns are intense responses to overwhelming situations, reflecting a state where basic needs are unmet, signaling a necessity for immediate support and understanding.**
- **Recognizing meltdowns as a natural self-protective response, not intentional or within the individual's control, helps in approaching the situation with empathy rather than judgment.**
- **Differentiating between tantrums and meltdowns is crucial; meltdowns are not manipulative but a result of sensory, emotional, and physiological overwhelm.**
- **An over-activated nervous system leads to meltdowns, signaling that the autistic person is in a state of distress and requires support to return to a state of regulation.**
- **External meltdowns may involve visible expressions of distress such as crying or shouting, while internal meltdowns may manifest as withdrawal, going silent or dissociation, both requiring sensitive support.**



3. NAVIGATING CRISES : WHAT IS AN AUTISTIC MELTDOWN?

- **Understanding triggers is essential for prevention and support; familiarize oneself with what may precipitate a meltdown for the individual and work to minimize these triggers in their environment.**
- **Support during a meltdown involves creating a safe, non-judgmental space, reducing sensory inputs, and allowing the individual the time they need to recover without pressing for communication.**
- **Post-meltdown support is just as important, ensuring the individual has access to water, comfort items, and a quiet space to fully recover without immediate analysis of the event.**
- **Educating peers and staff about meltdowns promotes a supportive community that recognizes the need for compassion and practical support strategies during these challenging times.**
- **Implementing a personalized "meltdown first-aid kit" can empower autistic individuals and their supporters to address distress effectively, including sensory tools, comforting items, and strategies known to help the individual regain calm.**



3. NAVIGATING CRISES : SUPPORTING AN AUTISTIC PERSON IN MELTDOWN

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3. NAVIGATING CRISES : EXAMPLES OF INTERNAL & EXTERNAL MELTDOWNS

Internal - <https://youtu.be/cTzUbe5hoI8> (4:50+)

Internal - <https://youtu.be/OtwOzIGVkdG> (2:55+)

External - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TxULxprO_I

External - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8l4qSSEB_oc

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3. NAVIGATING CRISES : RECOGNIZING AND MANAGING MELTDOWNS

Meltdowns can be difficult to stop once they begin, but it's possible to delay or prevent them by recognizing the warning signs.

- It's essential to learn the necessary skills to manage these situations, even though it can be challenging for autistic individuals dealing with interception and alexithymia issues.
- Examples of useful techniques include semi-controlled breathing and cold distraction.
- Some autistic people can handle meltdowns on their own, but most will need support. Support is not an option for most and without meaningful support, a meltdown can turn into a SHUTDOWN
- Identifying the triggers and developing strategies to manage them before a meltdown occurs is the best approach.

Remember, everyone's experience is different, so it's essential to find what works best for the autistic person that you're supporting.



3. NAVIGATING CRISES : WHAT TO DO IN A MELTDOWN?

- Take charge, but softly. If possible, exclude others from the area, except for you as the support person. Do not generally attempt to leave the scene this time, as it may be risky.
- Straw breathing to help calm down for the autistic person.
- Do not judge; meltdowns are not under the control of the autistic person. Give them time to calm down. It will take a few minutes.
- If possible, remove the triggering factor.
- Do not raise your voice or shout at an autistic person during a meltdown; this can exacerbate the situation or cause it to become violent.
- Don't ask questions or inquire "are you okay?" initially since it may be tough for us to answer. DO NOT SAY "it's OK" or "it's FINE" in a dismissive way. ALWAYS be reassuring and not patronizing
- Turn off any music, lights, or other possible sensory stimuli..
- Stay calm, composed, and supportive, but don't talk too much. DO NOT tell them that they are embarrassing or a burden.
- For those autistic people who are able and enjoy it, the use self-massage to help calm down.
- Don't touch an autistic person unless you're sure that touch can be beneficial from a particular person.



3. NAVIGATING CRISES : MELTDOWN RECOVERY

- Make sure the autistic person has water and drinks after calm is restored.
- Allow the autistic person to stim all they want.
- Do not try to analyze with them what caused the meltdown right after it. Allow time to recover.
- Breathing in while tensing muscles - letting go of them when breathing out
- 54321 Method - see, touch, hear, smell, taste
- Do not make the autistic person feel guilty for you helping them. Don't complain about time, embarrassment, etc.
- Allow the autistic person to move around freely and come back to grounding
- Engage with special interests, eat same-foods, and play with comfort items that regulate
- Get some sleep and rest the mind AND body the next day



3. NAVIGATING CRISES : PLEASE REMEMBER

- **It's important to remember that there's no need for autistic people to be self-critical for something beyond our control. Instead, offer them grace and compassion.**
- **It's counterproductive to berate autistic people in the aftermath of a meltdown. It's also violent and can lead to another meltdown.**
- **Autistic are not a burden, nor are we unintelligent, immature, weak, or malicious. We are deserving of understanding and compassion.**
- **We are, in fact, disabled individuals whose nervous systems have responded to unmet basic needs in a perfectly natural way given the circumstances we are facing.**

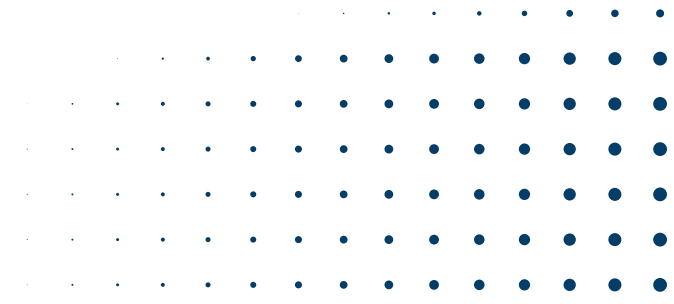


4

UNDERSTANDING AUTISTIC BURNOUT

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4. WHAT IS AUTISTIC BURNOUT?

- **Autistic Burnout arises from prolonged exposure to environments that don't accommodate autistic needs, leading to deep exhaustion and a loss of skills - resembling depression but not the same.**
- **It's characterized by increased physical tiredness, making daily academic tasks feel insurmountable.**
- **Students might experience intensified sensory sensitivities, finding usual classroom stimuli unbearable.**
- **There can be a noticeable withdrawal from social interactions, affecting relationships with peers and participation in group activities.**
- **Challenges with organization, planning, and completing assignments may become more apparent, impacting academic performance.**



4. WHAT IS AUTISTIC BURNOUT?

- Emotional regulation may become more difficult, with feelings of anxiety or sadness becoming more frequent or intense.
- A loss of interest in subjects that once were sources of passion or motivation can occur, with students feeling disconnected from their studies.
- Communication challenges may increase, with students finding it harder to express their needs or concerns effectively.
- Adhering to previously helpful routines may become challenging, affecting daily and academic life.
- Autistic students might find it more difficult to mask or manage social expectations, leading to stress in social settings.

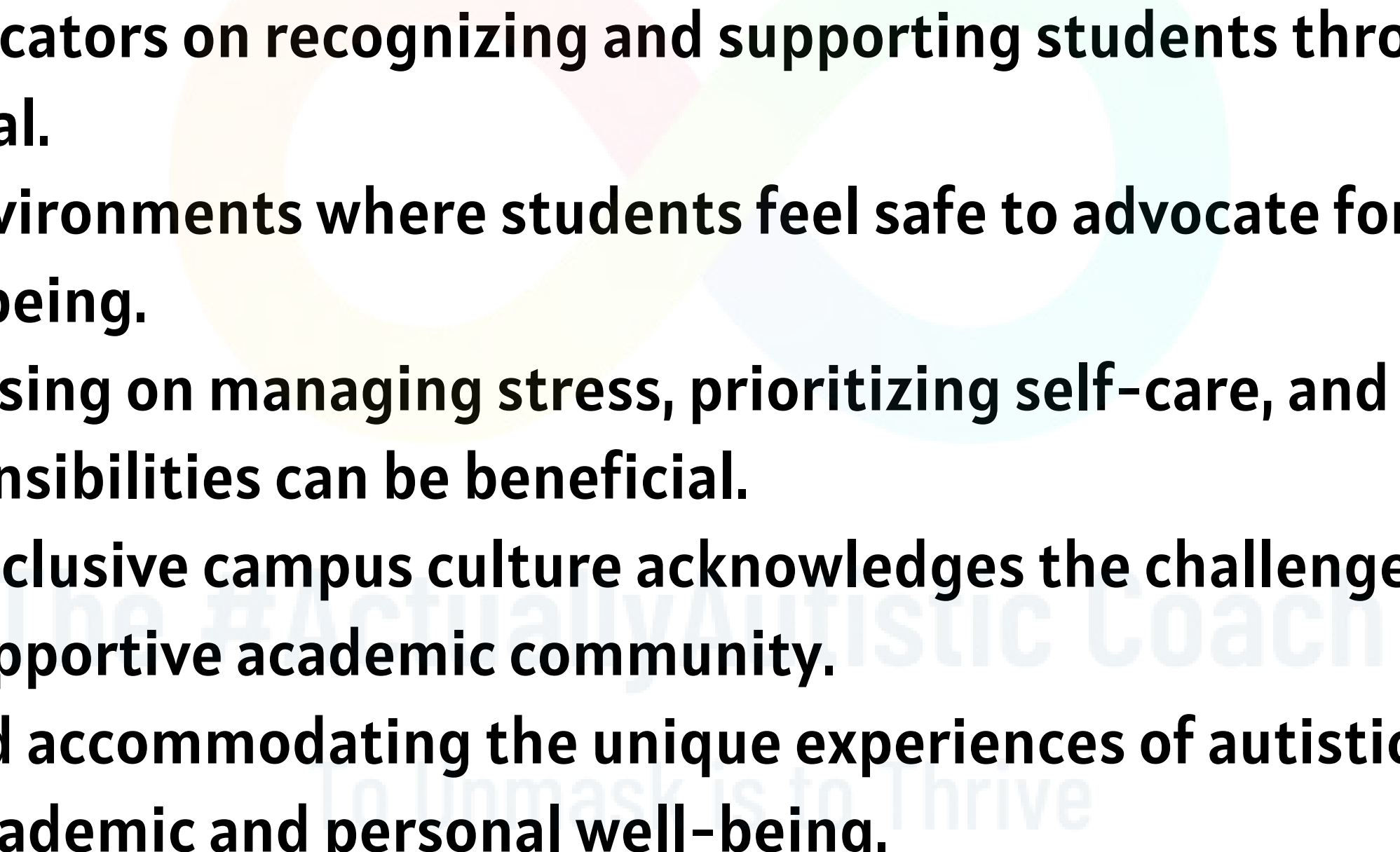


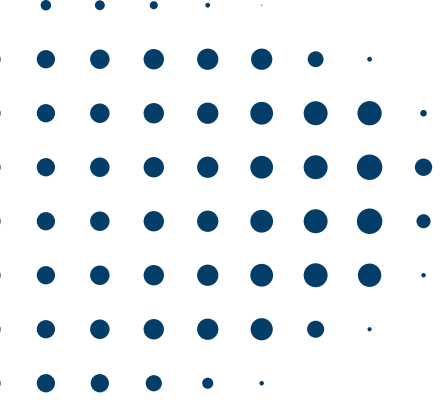
4. WHAT IS AUTISTIC BURNOUT?

- **Academic engagement may decrease, not due to lack of interest or effort, but as a direct impact of burnout.**
- **Flexible academic accommodations, like assignment extensions or modified schedules, are essential to support recovery.**
- **Quiet, sensory-friendly areas on campus can help manage sensory overload and provide a respite from stimuli.**
- **Support from understanding counselors or mentors can offer strategies for navigating this period.**
- **Developing a support network among peers can provide a sense of community and shared understanding.**



4. WHAT IS AUTISTIC BURNOUT?

- **Training for educators on recognizing and supporting students through autistic burnout is crucial.**
 - **Encouraging environments where students feel safe to advocate for their needs enhances well-being.**
 - **Workshops focusing on managing stress, prioritizing self-care, and navigating academic responsibilities can be beneficial.**
 - **Promoting an inclusive campus culture acknowledges the challenges of burnout and fosters a supportive academic community.**
 - **Recognizing and accommodating the unique experiences of autistic students is vital for their academic and personal well-being.**
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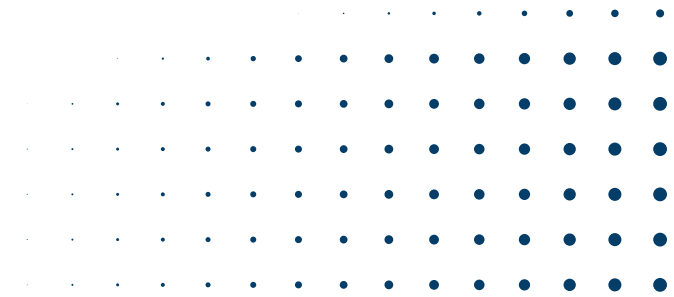


5

**CRAFTING NEURO-AFFIRMING
& SUPPORTIVE ECOSYSTEMS
ON CAMPUS**

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5. CRAFTING NEURO-AFFIRMING & SUPPORTIVE ECOSYSTEMS ON CAMPUS

Learn how to listen to autistic people's needs, concerns, and worries with empathy and compassion.

The best way to learn about autistic people and what we need is to simply ask and listen to our experiences with an open mind and without judgement

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5. ACADEMIC, CAMPUS & LIVING ACCOMMODATIONS

- **Provide clear, accessible pathways for requesting accommodations.**
- **Streamline bureaucratic processes for obtaining accommodations.**
- **Introduce flexible coursework deadlines for autistic students.**
- **Offer virtual class attendance options to accommodate different needs.**
- **Develop specialized housing that considers sensory & emotional sensitivities.**
- **Implement quiet zones on campus for sensory breaks.**
- **Create dietary accommodations in campus dining services and recommended restaurants and canteens throughout the city based on their needs.**
- **Train residential life staff / host families on neurodiversity and inclusivity.**
- **Establish a buddy system for navigating campus and local amenities.**
- **Ensure availability of neuro-affirming mental health professionals.**
- **Build a team of neuro-affirming support staff and professionals.**



5. PRACTICAL HOUSING ACCOMMODATIONS

Quiet Living Areas - Offer housing in parts of the campus or city known for being quieter, with less foot traffic and noise pollution, to help reduce sensory overload.

Single Rooms - Provide the option for single rooms to give students control over their living environment, making it easier to manage sensory sensitivities and have private space to recharge.

Sensory-Friendly Rooms - Equip rooms with sensory-friendly lighting (e.g., dimmable lights, blackout curtains) and minimalistic decor to avoid overstimulation.

Access to Kitchen Facilities - Having access to kitchen facilities allows for dietary control, which is important for students with specific food sensitivities or preferences.

Proximity to Essential Services - Situate housing close to campus facilities, grocery stores, and healthcare services to minimize the need for extensive navigation and travel.

Emergency Support Systems - Implement an accessible emergency support system within housing complexes, including clear instructions in multiple languages and formats, for students who may experience crises or need immediate assistance.

WHAT IS A NEURO-AFFIRMING MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONAL?

Understanding Autism Within the Neurodiversity Paradigm

Neuro-affirming mental health professionals view autism through the lens of the neurodiversity paradigm, acknowledging it as a natural variation of human neurology rather than a disorder to be fixed. This perspective is crucial for providing support that respects and values the autistic experience, emphasizing strengths while addressing challenges.

Creating a Safe and Affirmative Space

For autistic students, especially those navigating the complexities of studying abroad, having access to mental health professionals who affirm their identity can be transformative. These professionals create safe spaces where students feel understood and supported, which is essential for their mental and emotional well-being.

WHAT IS A NEURO-AFFIRMING MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONAL?

Tailored Support Strategies

Neuro-affirming professionals are adept at developing support strategies that are tailored to the unique needs of autistic individuals. This includes recognizing how sensory processing differences, social communication challenges, and executive functioning difficulties might impact a student's mental health and devising coping strategies that align with their neurology.

Combatting Mental Health Disparities

Autistic individuals often face higher rates of anxiety, depression, suicide ideation, and other mental health challenges. Neuro-affirming mental health support is critical in addressing these disparities, offering therapeutic approaches that understand the root causes of distress within the context of autism and providing effective interventions.

WHAT IS A NEURO-AFFIRMING MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONAL?

Empowering Self-Advocacy and Autonomy.

By aligning with the neurodiversity paradigm, neuro-affirming professionals empower autistic students to advocate for their needs and preferences. This empowerment is particularly important abroad, where students must navigate unfamiliar systems and advocate for accommodations.

Training and Awareness

For mental health professionals to effectively support autistic students, ongoing training and awareness-raising around the principles of neurodiversity, the challenges of studying abroad for autistic individuals, and the importance of culturally competent care are necessary. This ensures that support is not only affirming but also adaptive to the diverse contexts students will encounter.

WHAT IS A NEURO-AFFIRMING MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONAL?

Collaboration with Academic and Support Services

Neuro-affirming mental health professionals can play a pivotal role in collaborating with academic advisors, disability services, peer-support workers, and other support staff to ensure a cohesive support network. Their insights into the autistic experience can inform broader institutional practices, making campuses more inclusive and responsive to neurodivergent students.

Advocacy Within the Mental Health Field

Lastly, neuro-affirming professionals can serve as advocates within the broader mental health field, pushing for a shift towards more inclusive, affirming practices that recognize and celebrate neurodiversity. Their advocacy can help to challenge outdated models and promote a more holistic understanding of autism and mental health.

CREATE AN ENTIRE SUPPORT TEAM



It's not just about one professional, but about creating an entire support team

- **Mental health counselor/psychologist for psychological support**
- **Autistic faculty & staff for advice & modeling**
- **Autistic peer support worker for advice, support, affirmation and facilitating autistic support & social spaces**



BUREAUCRATIC SENSITIVITY AND ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT

- **Streamlining documentation processes reduces bureaucratic stress for autistic students, promoting smoother access to needed accommodations.**
- **Extending deadlines for submitting documentation acknowledges the unique challenges autistic students face, ensuring equitable access to programs.**
- **Training staff in cultural competence and neurodiversity enhances administrative sensitivity, fostering an inclusive and supportive environment.**
- **Assigning dedicated support personnel within study abroad offices offers autistic students a reliable point of contact for navigating administrative tasks.**
- **Ensuring all bureaucratic communication is clear and accessible helps autistic students understand and meet requirements without undue stress.**



BUREAUCRATIC SENSITIVITY AND ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT

- **Establishing a feedback mechanism for administrative processes allows for continuous improvement based on direct student experiences.**
- **Offering pre-arrival orientation sessions for autistic students addresses specific administrative questions and concerns, easing the transition abroad.**
- **Collaborating with local neuro-affirming autism organizations provides autistic students with additional support for understanding and navigating foreign bureaucracies.**
- **Developing an accessible emergency support plan for autistic students ensures they have guidance for dealing with bureaucratic challenges in difficult or crisis situations.**
- **Providing advocacy and liaison services helps autistic students interact with French bureaucracy as needed, including healthcare, legal, and academic systems.**



INSTITUTIONAL ASSISTANCE IN ACCOMMODATION NEGOTIATION

Autistic students can thrive with proper support - they aren't lazy or less capable.

Disability is part social based - because disabilities aren't accommodated by society.

Autistic student have enough to worry about - this is what makes being autistic a disability.

Not supporting an autistic student is tantamount to tripping someone who is walking by!

Autistic students will often be reluctant to ask for help - to be truly affirming, those in a position to support need to make it clear that they are there to help and support



INSTITUTIONAL ASSISTANCE IN ACCOMMODATION NEGOTIATION

- **Disability offices and academic advisors proactively facilitating accommodation discussions lift the burden of self-advocacy from autistic students, ensuring their energy is preserved for self-care, academic work, and cultural engagement.**
- **Regular training for disability offices in neurodiversity-affirming practices equips them to better understand and advocate for the specific needs of autistic students.**
- **Establishing protocols for proactive accommodation planning before students arrive on campus ensures that needs are met from day one, minimizing stress and adjustment periods.**
- **Encouraging regular check-ins with students to discuss and adjust accommodations as needed fosters a responsive support system that adapts to changing needs.**
- **Involving autistic students in policy-making and program development brings valuable insights into creating more effective and meaningful support structures.**



INSTITUTIONAL ASSISTANCE IN ACCOMMODATION NEGOTIATION

- **Launching campus-wide awareness campaigns about neurodiversity educates the broader community, promoting a more inclusive and understanding environment for all students.**
- **Hosting interdepartmental meetings to coordinate support for neurodivergent students ensures a unified approach across services, enhancing the overall support network.**
- **Advocating for the inclusion of autistic voices at every level of decision-making strengthens institutional commitment to neurodiversity and inclusivity.**
- **Implementing a centralized, accessible information hub for autistic students studying abroad centralizes resources and guidance, simplifying the navigation of institutional support.**
- **Committing to ongoing evaluation and adaptation of accommodation processes based on autistic student feedback prioritizes continuous improvement and student satisfaction.**

AFFIRMATION IN EDUCATION AND PERSONAL INTERACTIONS

Don't forget that while policies are great and necessary, the most important factor in an autistic person's well-being is the face-to-face interactions that they have every single day.

Most spaces are not affirming or even safe for autistic people.

The goal needs to be creating an environment where communication in an autistic-friendly way is the norm.

Educate everyone on campus on the autistic experience!



AFFIRMATION IN EDUCATION AND PERSONAL INTERACTIONS

- Promoting active listening in advisement sessions ensures autistic students feel heard and understood, validating their experiences and needs.
- Integrating student-led discussions on neurodiversity into the orientation for the program fosters an inclusive academic environment that celebrates diverse experiences and communication styles.
- Adapting classroom environments to respect all communication styles supports autistic students' participation and contribution, valuing their unique insights.
- Using inclusive teaching strategies that acknowledge and accommodate diverse autistic learning styles, enhancing educational accessibility and engagement - ie not everyone does things the same!
- Implementing peer mentoring programs with a focus on academic and social support empowers autistic students through shared experiences and guidance.



AFFIRMATION IN EDUCATION AND PERSONAL INTERACTIONS

- Providing workshops for staff and faculty expands campus-wide understanding and appreciation of neurodivergent identities and communication styles.
- Establishing safe, anonymous channels for autistic students to express their needs and feedback encourages open communication and continuous support adaptation.
- Recognizing and celebrating the achievements of neurodivergent students publicly affirms their value and contributions to the academic community.
- Facilitating regular training for faculty on adapting to and supporting neurodivergent students ensures a consistently affirming educational experience.
- Encouraging educators to create flexible assignment and participation options accommodates autistic students' varying needs, promoting equity in assessment.



THE ROLE OF PEER SUPPORT AND AUTISTIC PROFESSIONAL STAFF

- Recruiting autistic peer-support advisors and mentors provides students with role models and guides who share similar experiences and understandings of the world. This is separate from the mental-health counselors, as it is someone autistic and seen as a peer.
- Organizing regular, informal meet-ups and/or support groups for autistic students facilitates a sense of community and belonging, offering a space for shared experiences and support - this could be program specific or Paris-wide of all the universities.
- Facilitating peer-led workshops on navigating university life and studying abroad helps autistic students acquire practical insights and strategies from those who have firsthand experience.
- Introducing a mentorship program that pairs incoming autistic students with experienced autistic peers enhances the support network for new students, easing their transition into university and being in France.
- Establishing a dedicated sensory space on campus for autistic students to socialize and relax promotes mental well-being and peer connection in a comfortable environment.



THE ROLE OF PEER SUPPORT AND AUTISTIC PROFESSIONAL STAFF

- Offering training for peer support workers (staff and faculty who are autistic) on confidentiality, empathy, and effective support strategies ensures that peer interactions are beneficial and respectful.
- Encouraging the development of peer-led academic study groups creates supportive academic environments tailored to autistic students' learning styles.
- Creating a chat or social media group for autistic students studying abroad allows for the sharing of resources, advice, and experiences, fostering a virtual support network.
- Implementing a buddy system for autistic students to navigate administrative and social aspects of studying abroad reduces stress and promotes independence.
- Hosting events, trips, and activities specifically designed for autistic students encourages social engagement in a structured and understanding setting.



BUILD BRIDGES - NOT BARRIERS



There is an urgent need for or comprehensive, neuro-affirming support systems.

By fostering environments that celebrate autistic people, we pave the way for all students to thrive, not just survive, in their academic and personal explorations abroad.

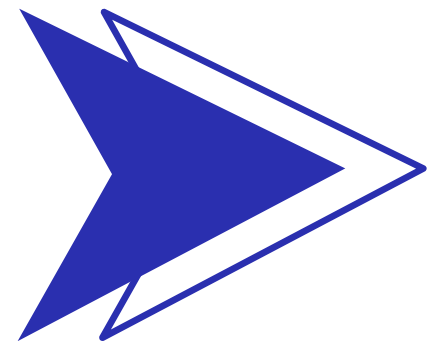
The #ActuallyAutistic Coach
To Unmask is to Thrive



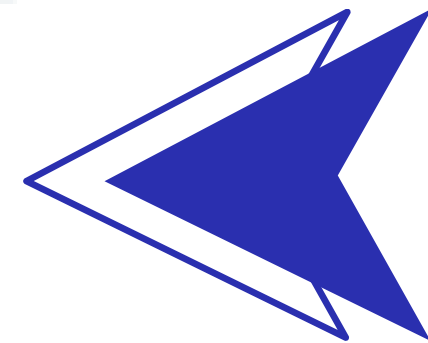
Remember, the strength of our community lies in its diversity.

By listening to and learning from the experiences of autistic students, we enrich our collective understanding and capacity for empathy.

Let us move forward with a commitment to inclusivity, ensuring that the adventure of studying abroad is accessible and rewarding for everyone.



**WHAT'S GOOD FOR AUTISTIC STUDENTS
IS GOOD FOR ALL STUDENTS
ND & NT!**



A PRACTICAL GAME PLAN FOR AN INCLUSIVE CAMPUS

Comprehensive Training Programs

- Neurodiversity Awareness Training - Implement mandatory training sessions for all staff and faculty on neurodiversity, emphasizing understanding autistic experiences and other ND conditions.
- Inclusive Teaching Methods Workshop - Offer workshops that provide educators with strategies for inclusive teaching, covering topics like flexible assignment deadlines, varied instructional methods, and accommodations for sensory sensitivities.
- Sensory Environment Awareness - Train staff to recognize and mitigate potential sensory challenges within the classroom and campus environment, such as adjusting lighting, minimizing noise, and offering sensory breaks.

A PRACTICAL GAME PLAN FOR AN INCLUSIVE CAMPUS

Supportive Policies and Communication

- **Clear Communication Channels** - Establish clear and accessible communication channels for ND students to request accommodations and express their needs, ensuring staff are responsive and understanding.
- **Policy on Flexibility and Accommodations** - Develop and disseminate a clear policy on academic flexibility and accommodations, detailing how staff can implement these measures in their teaching and interactions. Also enact policies that specifically address the sensory and emotional needs of ND students, including accommodation procedures and crisis management plans.

A PRACTICAL GAME PLAN FOR AN INCLUSIVE CAMPUS

Specific Support Initiatives

- Mentorship Programs - Create mentorship programs that pair ND students with faculty or senior staff members trained in neurodiversity, providing a direct support system for navigating academic and campus life.
- Peer Support Training - Offer training for ND staff and faculty on facilitating and supporting peer mentorship and support groups among ND students, emphasizing the importance of peer experiences and insights.



A PRACTICAL GAME PLAN FOR AN INCLUSIVE CAMPUS

Crisis Management and Emotional Support

- Crisis Response Training - Provide specific training on recognizing and responding to ND student crises, including meltdowns, shutdowns, and burnout, with strategies for offering immediate and sensitive support.
 - Mental Health First Aid - Include mental health first aid in staff training, focusing on recognizing signs of distress and the appropriate ways to offer support or direct students to professional help.
- The #ActuallyAutistic Coach
To Unmask is to Thrive



A PRACTICAL GAME PLAN FOR AN INCLUSIVE CAMPUS

Environmental Adjustments

Adaptive Learning Environments -

Modify learning environments with adaptive lighting, acoustics, and furniture to create sensory-friendly classrooms and study areas.

Event Planning Considerations -

Ensure campus events, including orientations and ceremonies, include considerations for ND students' sensory and emotional needs, such as quiet zones, opt-out options, and sensory-friendly activities.

A PRACTICAL GAME PLAN FOR AN INCLUSIVE CAMPUS

Inclusive Environment and Community Building

- Inclusivity Workshops - Host regular workshops that engage staff and faculty in discussions on creating an inclusive campus culture, encouraging ideas and initiatives that promote understanding and acceptance.
- Feedback and Continuous Improvement - Implement a system for collecting feedback from ND students on their experiences with staff and faculty support, using this feedback to continually improve training and policies.

A PRACTICAL GAME PLAN FOR AN INCLUSIVE CAMPUS

Specialized Resources and Collaboration

- Resource Development - Develop resources specifically for staff and faculty on supporting ND students, including guides, best practices, and case studies.
- Interdepartmental Collaboration - Foster collaboration between academic departments, disability services, and student affairs to ensure a cohesive approach to supporting ND students across all areas of campus life


A PRACTICAL GAME PLAN FOR AN INCLUSIVE CAMPUS

Emotional Support and Self-Care

- **Emotional Regulation Workshops** - Offer workshops specifically aimed at helping ND students develop emotional regulation skills, including mindfulness, stress management, and coping strategies.
- **Counseling & Peer-Support Services with ND Expertise** - Ensure counseling and peer-support services are staffed by professionals trained in neurodiversity, who can offer ND-affirming therapeutic and peer-support approaches.
- **Support Groups and Social Events** - Facilitate support groups and social events tailored to ND students, providing opportunities for connection and community building in environments that consider their sensory and emotional needs.

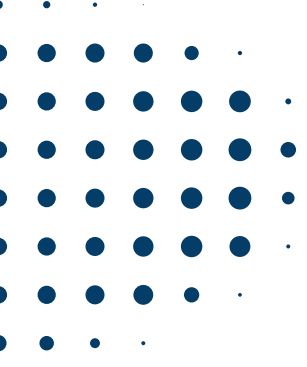


A PRACTICAL GAME PLAN FOR AN INCLUSIVE CAMPUS



Implementing these strategies and programs as part of a clear action plan will empower staff and faculty to provide effective, informed support to neurodivergent students, enhancing their academic success and overall well-being.

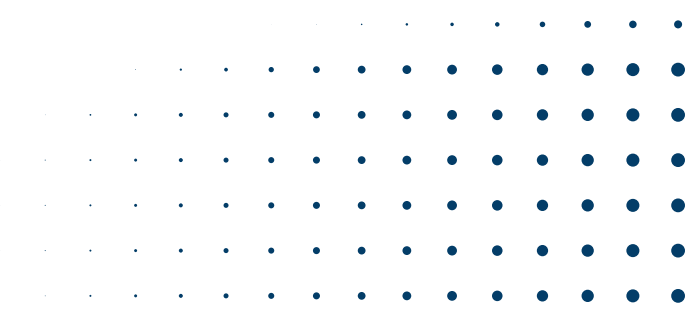
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REFLECTIONS, EXPERIENCES, AND QUESTIONS

The #ActuallyAutistic Coach

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I'm available as:

Merci

- **A consultant to your institution on creating a neuro-affirming environment**
- **A support worker to your students**
- **A facilitator for your student student groups**
- **A trainer for workshops & seminars on ableism, autism, and neurodiversity**

THEAUTISTICCOACH.COM