00;00;00;00 - 00;00;32;01
Cale
Welcome to Grin + Bare It. A show that uncovers the remarkable stories from one of the most demanding industries in the world — Healthcare. From inventors and trailblazers to frontline workers and scientific experts, we explore the biggest challenges faced in healthcare and how these brilliant people have solved them. On today's episode, we're delving into autism. Did you know that approximately 1 in 70 Australians is on the autism spectrum, with likely many more undiagnosed?

00;00;32;03 - 00;00;54;18
Cale
For many of us, when we think about autism, we're actually thinking about what's known as profound autism. The reality is it's not a single condition, but a spectrum that includes a wide range of interrelated factors, including how we think, feel, interact with others, and experience our environment. Joining me today are two brilliant minds who have significantly shaped the field.

00;00;54;20 - 00;01;28;26
Cale
Professor Tony Attwood and Doctor Michelle Garnett. Professor Attwood is one of the world's foremost experts on autism, and is renowned for his extensive research and seminal book on Asperger syndrome, which has been translated in over 25 languages. His pioneering work has earned him a place as one of the leading authorities on autism. Doctor Garnett is a revered clinical psychologist and founder of Minds and Hearts, a premier autism clinic that offers state of the art support and interventions for individuals with autism and their families.

00;01;28;28 - 00;01;54;10
Cale
She's co co-authored six books on the topic, and most importantly, Doctor Garnett herself is autistic and has ADHD, which she was diagnosed with later in life. These two powerhouses joined forces in 2019 to form Atwood and Garnett Events, an organization that aims to enhance autism awareness and understanding. In this episode, we'll dive into the rise of autism in modern society.

00;01;54;12 - 00;02;16;26
Cale
The coping mechanisms people with autism use that often lead to significant mental health impacts downstream. Tips for raising kids with autism and living with it as an adult, and the superpowers and unique ways of thinking that your autistic colleagues bring to a healthcare setting. Get ready for an enlightening and endearing conversation with two of the foremost experts in the field.

00;02;16;29 - 00;02;20;26
Cale

Let's get into it.

00;02;20;28 - 00;02;40;22
Cale
So, Michelle, Tony, thank you so much for joining me on the show.

Tony
Well, thank you, Cale. We're glad that we've finally got together.

Michelle
Yes. Thank you Cale, it's a pleasure to be here.

Cale
So today we're going to talk about autism. And I've actually had a burning question for some time on the topic. So I'm so glad you're on the show that I can ask.

00;02;40;27 - 00;03;04;03
Cale
To me, it does seem like more people are being diagnosed as neurodivergent. And one theory that I had is that there's just way more stimulation in today's world. Do you think that's the reason more people are identifying as autistic than previously? Is there any truth to that? I would love to test my theory that we're just in an overstimulated world nowadays.

00;03;04;10 - 00;03;36;13
Michelle
It's such a fascinating upfront question, Cale. You know, the answer is that there's just so many pathways to having the presentation of autism, and we know that the people that do eventually get discovered as being autistic or ADHD, for that matter, tend to be more sensitive in many ways. And that kind of high sensitivity across many areas. Social sensitivities, sensory sensitive around chaos, and the overstimulation of the current world is a stress factor.

00;03;36;15 - 00;04;03;09
Michelle
But obviously there's many layers to this, many pathways, I guess, to autism. And it's a very heritable condition. So 80 to 90% heritability. Genetics definitely play a part. And we know with epigenetics. And are those genes going to be switched on? What's the presentation going to be like? We do live in a stressful world. If you're sensitive, if you've got the genetic predisposition, then you're much more likely to actually have that autistic presentation.

00;04;03;09 - 00;04;31;01
Michelle
Absolutely. And ADHD, the same neuro divergence essentially. Tony, what do you think?

Tony
Same thoughts. Modern society is becoming increasingly autism unfriendly. At school you're having to work in groups. The sensory sensitivity is, should we say, sensory experiences are horrendous. So there are many environmental factors that will lower the threshold at which autism is likely to be noticed. But if we're looking at modern society, there's one that we tend to forget.

00;04;31;01 - 00;04;55;06
Tony
But it's very important. Autism is more likely with older parents, and what's happening in modern society, where we used to start having children in our 20s, we now start in our 30s, and we've known since the 1970s that autism is associated with older pets, both mum and dad, so that the chances are statistically greater because people are delaying having children.

00;04;55;10 - 00;05;15;03
Cale
That's it's actually created about a thousand more questions for me on the back of just those two answers. And there are a lot of pathways there for sure, between the epigenetic piece, which is a very topic of interest for me particularly, and this correlation causation component of all the parenting nowadays. I'm going to dig into both of those a little bit later.

00;05;15;10 - 00;05;39;00
Cale
Before I do, I would love to hear both of your individual personal stories because you've got unique views on autism as practitioners, as parents, as people who are working in healthcare. And so I would love to get both of your stories of why you're committed to this specialism.

Michelle
So I was really lucky in my master's in clinical psychology training at Queensland University here in Brisbane.

00;05;39;04 - 00;06;05;02
Michelle
I was able to listen to Tony as a presenter, a guest presenter within that program, and I was just blown away. You know, it's really, as we say, bitten by the autism bug. It just caught me. I was like, this is fascinating. I could not get enough. So my first line was directly to Tony's door to get a placement in disability services, which is where he was then the leader there at the time, the clinical lead.

00;06;05;04 - 00;06;36;17
Michelle
The more information I had, the more I needed. I really did a deep dive. It was my master's thesis that became the main focus for all my placements, and then my PhD afterwards and my life afterwards. And I really thought at the beginning of that journey it was an intellectual pursuit

and that was it. I was kind of directly in the face of all the social learning theory and CBT that we were getting at the time, and I was just fascinated that, oh, you could just have this brain that that worked so differently and gave you such a different experience of the world.

00;06;36;17 - 00;07;02;28
Michelle
And I wanted to know more about that. But it wasn't until many years in, I don't want to say how many, because it's embarrassing. I kind of started to realize that this particular presentation, autism, described many members of my family, many partners I had been with and in love with in the past. And eventually, you know, embarrassingly, that is later I realized it described me wasn't quite 30 years.

00;07;02;28 - 00;07;26;22
Michelle
That sounds really bad. I had an, I had an external validation of the diagnosis in September last year, but I kind of suspected before then, but probably realistically only, you know, seven years or so earlier I was starting to think maybe me. So it was a long journey almost, you know, starting in a place of self recognition as I want to be a psychologist and then ending up full circle back at myself of self recognition.

00;07;26;22 - 00;07;50;06
Michelle
And I'm autistic and ADHD, so fascinating journey. And as you can hear, a lot of that journey has been with Tony because I've been in just over 30 years and it started with him. So that's my little story, Cale.

Cale
Amazing. And what about you, Tony?

Tony
It seems that I, I infected Michelle.

Michelle
Yeah, that's it. Contagious.

Tony
And it's a condition you don't want to recover from. Yeah. For me, it historically, it goes back to being a first year psychology student, working in a special school as a volunteer and making two autistic children. At the time, all we knew about autism was the silent, aloof, autistic child. High support needs quite considerable behavioral concerns and so on. And so I then decided that's it. That's going to be my career.

00;08;15;15 - 00;08;43;12

Tony
So it was meeting two very young autistic children that challenged me in so many ways. And I think that it, it affected me, yes, intellectually, but also compassionately and emotionally that these children were suffering in ways that other kids don't suffer. They enjoyed socializing, but socializing they didn't like. For example, they enjoy boring sensory activities like playing with water for hours.

00;08;43;13 - 00;09;07;21
Tony
Other kids would find that boring. They were totally entranced by it. So there were many components. But I was there at the beginning when that was all, 1 in 2500 children, now 1 in 36 and exploring the autism continuum. But just like Michele starting, the pennies were dropping. This is my family now. It was my previous generations and subsequent generations.

00;09;07;21 - 00;09;31;13
Tony
I have an autistic son and two autistic grandchildren. So for me, it then became a personal explanation of many aspects of my childhood. But now, as a parent.

Cale
Well, a couple of different stories there. They I think it's probably important for people before we dig into some of the specific topics around parenting, around sort of working in healthcare to get generalized context. And so I would love someone to explain, how do people with autism think? How do they think differently to someone without autism?

Michelle
I just think it's really important, first of all, to acknowledge the diversity in neurodiversity. So in some ways, I feel even though I've met thousands of people now, kids, adolescents, adults who are autistic and being autistic myself, I'm just struck by how much diversity there is.

00;09;56;05 - 00;10;19;21
Michelle
So I feel strange talking for autistic people because it's such a different experience for each person. But certainly there are themes, there's patterns, and these have been researched and we can see these in our clinical practice. And so probably one of the biggest ones that really wasn't talked about for decades is that the biggest in impact for many is sensory.

00;10;19;22 - 00;10;45;19
Michelle
So when you say think differently, I know what you mean. And that's cognitive, but your thinking is very much affected by a sensory world as well. And sensory world meaning internal sensations, not just the five senses that we think of. And we know that for autistic people, that sensory processing system is working differently. And so I know for myself and for many of my

clients, some of the biggest memories I have growing up were sensory, the sensory experience of the world.

00;10;45;19 - 00;11;02;17
Michelle
And that that was overwhelming, that my system works differently and didn't make sense of that very easily for me for a long time. And so for a while, you know, long time, I think I was kind of in a fog. I call it an autistic fog. I didn't really feel that I had a good handle on what was going on out there.

00;11;02;20 - 00;11;26;20
Michelle
When people were talking to me, what their expectations were, what I needed to do, and also internally because I wasn't in tune with my own bodily sensations. So my interception wasn't very good at all. And semi emotions, my own thoughts were all, all a mystery to me as well. And so I kind of start with that because when I speak with other autistic people, they are similarly very affected by this sensory system.

00;11;26;24 - 00;11;50;28
Michelle
But one of the dominant paradigms for understanding autism has come from Simon Baron-Cohen, a professor in England at Cambridge University. And he really talks about theory of mind. He didn't coin that term. It was understood from education to be, being able to have a theory about someone else's mind and how that works. So perspective taking and so we know there's so much research now to show that.

00;11;51;04 - 00;12;14;20
Michelle
And this is in brain morphology studies as well as cognitive tests and observational work that certainly an autistic person doesn't think socially. So we're not necessarily thinking of the social meaning of a context cues reading other people. Well, non-verbal communication and then being able to, on the fly quickly incorporate that into what we may do or say next.

00;12;14;28 - 00;12;36;26
Michelle
So if your first line isn't social, you are going to have a different priority in the social setting. And that isn't always understood, that particular priority. So one example is you go to work, to work. You're not there to socialize. You're not there to sit in the tearoom for a long time or exchange stories, gossip, ideas with others unless they are related to work.

00;12;37;03 - 00;12;56;07
Michelle
And that can be kind of odd for others. Why don't you sit with us in the lunchroom? And the answer is probably, well, I don't like the conversation, isn't very interesting and also don't like for

me it was the smell, the olfactory sense of just extreme nausea to the, to the sensation of smell. So there's probably lots of things that people are looking at autistic people, even if, I mean for summer, it's very clear that the person is autistic, but for others it's not. And so they can just look odd and mysterious because they are, as you say, thinking differently. And the main lines I think is sensory and social.

Tony
I would add another dimension to that, and that is that autistic individuals, for reasons we're not quite sure, maybe neurology, it could be circumstance, probably a combination of the two are prone to very strong emotions, especially anxiety.

00;13;23;26 - 00;13;43;26
Tony
But there can also be despair and anger and so on. So for many autistic individuals, yes, they have problems with the social and the sensory side of life, but also the emotional side, the ability to perceive and regulate their emotions and that can lead to all sorts of issues too. So when we say autism, as Michelle was saying, it's incredibly complex.

00;13;43;26 - 00;14;04;16
Tony
And as has been said before, if you've met one autistic person, you've met one autistic person. And that's so true. What has fascinated me through all these decades is the diversity and exceptions, ou have a pattern, then you think that's the autistic pattern. And then, lo and behold, you might think someone who's doing the exact opposite of that.

00;14;04;21 - 00;14;31;12
Tony
So the diversity is intriguing, but also confusing for the general public.

Cale
It's interesting that, I can imagine there's a connection between the social component, which you describe. Michelle, the emotional component, Tony, and the reaction emotionally. Like really it's it can compound upon the social setting almost, which makes it sort of exacerbated in many aspects as a follow up to that, because it is so diverse. There's a two part question, which is how many people in the general population of Australia do you think have some form of autism? And then how many are currently undiagnosed that are in the population?

Tony
That's a tricky one. Our concept of autism is changing because we're identifying how an autistic person camouflages or compensates for their autistic characteristics. They may create a social mask, a social script. It stops them being bullied and teased, and it allows you to be included in social situations. But that also means that you are not likely to be picked up as suffering as you often are, until the will fall off and you're depressed or anxious and so on, and eventually, or

you're identified. So one of the things that's happening now is that we are finding that there are certain peaks in development when autism can be identified.

00;15;22;27 - 00;15;50;17
Tony
It can be in preschool years for someone who's not speaking, who has horrendous meltdowns, and parents say, how on earth do we manage them? But it also may be the teenager who finds I can't act any more. This is causing too much stress or the adult saying this has been all my life and what's happening with Michelle and I is we've recently had a deluge of women saying, I think I'm autistic, and that has been a new trend.

00;15;50;17 - 00;16;29;19
Tony
So we think that the ratio of males to females is actually two males to one female. It may actually be parity but we've yet to see.

Michelle
Yeah. Thank you Tony I agree it's a really interesting question Cale. I really would love to know the answer. Of course, if you're not counting the people, you don't know the answer. And both Tony and I are researching enough that we hate to hazard a guess, but like, I think so that statistic that Tony said earlier, about one inch 36 people in our population are autistic, that comes from the latest research in the US, the CDC data on eight year old boys.

00;16;29;26 - 00;16;56;07
Michelle
So that's really conservative as a start. And in all of the time that I've been in, I've just met so many parents where at least one is autistic but not necessarily formally diagnosed. They're not being counted in, in that. And we know it's wildly genetic. So let's say 50%. But also there's research showing that autistic women choose neurodivergent partners, including mainly autistic partners but also ADHD partners.

00;16;56;07 - 00;17;19;14
Michelle
So there's a lot of parents of those eight year old boys. So I think it's at least, you know, double what, what the current statistics are. But it doesn't. I think governments get very frightened about those kind of stats when they start to go into, you know, ADHD is 10% of the population overall. And then if you add in autism, you know, you're probably looking at 15% autistic, ADHD.

00;17;19;17 - 00;17;38;28
Michelle
And then there's all the other kind of ways you can be neurodivergent on top of that. So you're looking a lot at a lot of neurodiversity without even looking at the undiagnosed people in the community. And I'm really glad that you raised the group that it's probably at least as many are diagnosed or not, probably more that are not diagnosed.

00;17;38;28 - 00;18;05;22
Michelle
They're just out there as I was for 55 years, getting on with life and trying to make the most of it and understanding yourself the best way you can. And I think that it's important to mention it because we don't have research on those people. So when, for example, we're doing a talk soon on employment and autism and the statistics are horrible for unemployment for autistic people, like really high, it's shockingly high.

00;18;05;22 - 00;18;34;13
Michelle
Underemployment and unemployment ranges. You know, it's around 70%. But if we were to be able to include all of the autistic people in our community who are undiagnosed, it would be nowhere near that. It certainly paints the wrong kind of picture for many who are autistic. Having said that, I am all for recognizing autism in the workplace in a non stigmatizing way and making sure it's inclusive.

00;18;34;20 - 00;18;58;04
Michelle
So so very important because many people do suffer at work when they're autistic because of the lack of understanding. So we do need awareness. But I also think we need awareness of the diversity, that there's a lot of difference in terms of what can happen for people in a lovely blend of, yes, autism can be absolutely a disability and we need to look at that.

00;18;58;04 - 00;19;24;14
Michelle
And what accommodations are there? There's a new term coming out profound autism and and how do we support that. And then there's autism really undiscovered undiagnosed and performing in whatever profession that person has chosen or occupation that person's chosen. So massive diversity and embracing all of it is my, I guess, bright and shiny vision of the future. Being able to handle that idea as a community, the complexity of it.

00;19;24;18 - 00;19;52;03
Michelle
I think one way that helps, for example, is knowing that if it's profound autism, you're very likely to have what we call Autism Plus, which means that the person may well also have a lack of language, a very profound expressive language, language disorder, which may be about movement problems and maybe has the thoughts that can't articulate them. And also often sometimes that comes along with, in this category, intellectual impairment and intellectual disability as well.

00;19;52;03 - 00;20;11;27
Michelle

So of course, if you have those two conditions and you're autistic it’s going to look very, very different than if you don't.

Tony
I was just going to say that there is a theme that you can have the characteristics, but not the disability and the diagnosis. All is crucial. And I think discovery is not necessary to access psychological support or psychiatric support.

00;20;12;01 - 00;20;38;03
Tony
It's for self understanding and to make appropriate and wise decisions based on your strengths, not your weaknesses. So there are individuals who have that particular profile resonate with it and say, that's me, but I may not need or seek professional or clinical support.

Cale
It's a really good point, because my, my follow-up question was going to be in this concept of masking, which, you know, I think that would be really challenging for people. There's kind of a there must be a balance somewhere along the line, which is if some of those traits or tools that you're using are helping you to function, then maybe that's okay. I'm not saying it is, but my question probably for, for you Tony is where do you see the balance being drawn in this sense of masking to basically fit versus potentially identifying everybody and then sort of working backwards from there? Do you have any point of view on that?

Tony
Well, I can understand why masking occurs. It's a survival mechanism. You have to suppress your autism. And that means suppressing many of the things that help you cope with life. But it also means that you've got to be a false self. You're not the authentic self, which is absolutely exhausting and leads to depression.

00;21;26;17 - 00;21;47;17
Tony
However, there are some times when anyone will mask phrases when in Rome, do as Romans do. So it's a human characteristic. I don't know what's required here. I will take on this role or this script to be successful. So yes, in a sense it's like alcohol. A little bit of it is relaxing and okay, too much is a problem.

00;21;47;21 - 00;22;08;20
Michelle
So to do it well, it's all things in moderation, right? You know, that's kind of what you get. Let's not be too extreme that I think that the trouble with it, the difficulty is when someone has been masking their entire life and then suddenly realizes that they have, and that actually they identify with the autistic characteristics. How do you stop masking?

00;22;08;21 - 00;22;24;22
Michelle
Because it is so integral to how you survived. And as one woman said to me, it's like asking me to stop breathing. I don't even know I'm doing it. It's just automatic. It's what I do. I know that it's not my true self, but I don't know what else to do. What else do I put in its place?

00;22;24;25 - 00;22;46;15
Michelle
And then is it safe to unmask? It becomes another issue. Just to add to what Tony was saying as well. Just wanted to say that sadly, the research backs up that you do run the risk of mental health conditions if you use masking. So it is associated with higher levels of the experience of anxiety disorders and depression. It is a psychiatric risk to do it.

00;22;46;23 - 00;23;11;07
Michelle
So I know a lot of mums of young kids now, you know, they're noticing their kids are masking and camouflaging to survive at school, and they're very concerned for their kids. They want their kids to be accepted for who they are and to be able to unmask early. But it's hard to know how to support them to do that when there is still such a lot of negative stigma around being autistic in the community.

00;23;11;09 - 00;23;37;24
Tony
And that leads into another point that Michelle and I are using at the moment is to explain, not correct autism. You don't need to camouflage if you can explain and people will understand you. The difficulty is who do you explain it to and how do you explain it. So it's very important in the psychological support that we give is how can you explain yourself and be understood by others.

00;23;37;28 - 00;24;06;10
Tony
So you don't need camouflage and that you're accepted and accommodated in the family or work environment? That's our goal for the future.

Michelle
Sorry Tony, I just need to also add that it's really difficult to like. I just think about myself as an example. When I was a little kid, there's no way I could self-advocate in that way. So I think that like as Tony says, we use that strategy a lot and we want kids to learn how to use it for sure, but it's just not available for some kids.

00;24;06;10 - 00;24;31;25
Michelle
I think we've got to intervene on both sides. You know, it's not just, oh, give the kids social skills training, teach them to mask more effectively, teach them to navigate the social world because

the dominant culture is neurotypical. It's also saying, well, how do we help neurotypicals understand neurodivergent and that it's okay to be different and that there's a whole range of wonderful aspects to autism, ADHD, neurodivergent.

00;24;31;25 - 00;24;55;10
Michelle
And I think that's a massive mission and much harder to do than the one we do clinically, which is help people explain themselves. You know, you've only got so much power as an autistic person. That's the difficulty. And some autistic people, myself included, would have had far too much anxiety to be able to use that methodology, even though it's really smart and, and it makes a lot of sense.

00;24;55;13 - 00;25;18;01
Cale
Yeah. I mean, actually there's a lot of analogs with what way to appear. And I think business building more broadly, which is creating, in your case, brand awareness of how do we totally base stigmatize autism full stop. So it allows for what you've just described, which is I can advocate for myself and for others without fear that people will be judging that this is a by default, a negative trait.

00;25;18;04 - 00;25;41;27
Cale
You know, that's actually a really big and long process as part of that process. And we work through here. Tony, a specific question for you. I would love to understand maybe the history of our understanding of autism. And so if we take, say, a 50 year view, you've already touched on a few points amongst older parenting and, you know, maybe the way it's been stigmatized historically.

00;25;42;00 - 00;26;10;24
Cale
Can you give us a whistle stop tour on the last 50 years of, of autism?

Tony
Okay. Now, autism has always been here. It's a part of human nature. It depends on how we look at it and describe it. And it was originally described as an expression of schizophrenia or psychosis by a psychiatrist who was exploring schizophrenia and thought, well, what would schizophrenia be like in a child, someone who is socially withdrawn in a world of their own, etc.?

00;26;10;29 - 00;26;42;05
Tony
So really, from the 1940s up till the middle 1970s, it was a description of psychosis or schizophrenia, then realized, well, actually the brain is wired differently and there's developmental delay. And autistic individuals don't grow up to become schizophrenic and vice versa. So it was viewed then as what we call a neurodevelopmental disorder. And that meant

that the approach was very much therapy to improve communication, self-care skills, behavior management and so on.

00;26;42;09 - 00;27;12;29
Tony
And as time went on, we recognized that autism is everywhere in a variety of ways. And what's happened recently, which I think is great, is the input of autistic people themselves in terms of research and mutual support. I think the phrase is no research about us without us. Excellent, because we need to find out what autistic people want to know about so that there is now a much stronger.

00;27;13;01 - 00;27;36;22
Tony
Because when I began, autistic individuals literally, often did not have a voice. Now they do, and they're advocating in a variety of ways. And I think that's excellent.

Cale
The one thing that I think even coming onto the show and speaking with you both for me, was I'm not even sure I'm using the correct terminology at times. And the last thing I wanted to be is offensive in any way.

00;27;36;27 - 00;27;54;28
Cale
And so and I think actually it's it again is similar in death, which is people who actually don't even know how to approach the conversation without fear of, am I doing this wrong? I'd love to hear advice from you both on if you think it's an issue. If you think it's something we should be talking about, how do you approach it?

00;27;55;01 - 00;28;34;27
Cale
Both. Maybe with people that might be struggling or you suspect could have autism or, you know, have loved ones who are. And within that, is there anything that becomes inherently political or stuff that we should definitely not talk about? I would love to hear both of your thoughts on that.

Michelle
Absolutely. When we're talking about autism and you start to describe it, the internal presentation as well as external, there are so many light bulb moments, people start going, wow, that's so describes my brother or husband or wife or best friend or etc. and as you say, it's such a difficult conversation to begin because of the negative stigma around it.

00;28;34;27 - 00;28;55;20
Michelle

For example, I have two teenage kids at the moment and it's really much the case. Unfortunately, even with me as their mum, the, at their school, the autistic kid is a pejorative term. It's a criticism. Oh, are you autistic or something? It's kind of an implication that there's something wrong with you. So. Whoa, have we got a long way to go?

00;28;55;20 - 00;29;37;18
Michelle
And these are young people who are embracing gender diversity and, you know, different all sorts of forms of being diverse. But we're just not there yet with neurodivergent, which is so, so sad. So anyway, my answer is, I think it really would depend on the relationship that you have with that person. And that means that, for example, if you're a parent and you have a teenager, I would be very, very cautious unless the person is already asking you questions or you know from their feed that they are actually looking up autism, I would not want to go there because there are already feeling less than and incredibly mortified about who they are and wanting to be desperately different from who they are. And like everyone else. And that conversation is really hard. If I was a teenager, I wouldn't use the word at all. I would just be talking to them about, you know, how are you going? What's what's going on for you? I can see that you're distressed and that I feel that, well, I wonder if we could have a talk about that.

00;29;56;22 - 00;30;22;05
Michelle
What is making you feel distressed? What's happening? And having a relationship that completely embraces that person. And then over time, there's going to be a window to talk about neurodivergent, but that's probably going to take a long time. And they're probably going to be in their 20s by the time you do for, similarly, if it's if we're talking now about someone who's older, so you're listening to this and you're thinking about a partner again, really, really sensitive.

00;30;22;08 - 00;30;45;07
Michelle
If you have a really good relationship with them and you've had conversations about autism, ADHD, neurodiversity, a nice opening can be, I think that describes some of my traits. That's a bit like me. I'm like, I'm ADHD in these ways, and I think my autism shows up in this, in these ways, and that can be an invitation to, to share about those issues.

00;30;45;07 - 00;31;16;02
Michelle
But essentially, I guess to sum up, I would just say because of the nature of autism at the moment, and we know from research, ADHD is not as similarly negatively stigmatized. Although there is still some negative stigma on ADHD, the ADHD conversation could be an easier one. Autism can be very difficult, so I would just be starting with how are things going for the person and be really, really person centered and just see, I know with some mums I've suggested they leave out books about this topic, but that was ages ago.

00;31;16;02 - 00;31;39;22

Michelle
I don't have teenagers pick up books anymore, you know you can just leave that they're not necessarily reading.

Cale
Leave out a handful of TikToks to go on their feet.

Michelle
Yeah, exactly.

Tony
Okay. But I think that brings up another dimension is that there are now autism heroes in a variety of ways, and that's what the young generation want is their own autistic heroes, not what their parents suggest and who you should become.

00;31;39;26 - 00;32;05;12
Tony
And this can be in the music industry. Artistic industry is also in modern technology, so they need their own heroes who have used autism to the benefit of themselves and of society. So that's not positive identity is what we're looking for.

Cale
And do you have any comments, Tony, on the terminology side, on the like, you know, when and how would be the right approach, if at all?

00;32;05;14 - 00;32;34;15
Tony
Unfortunately, a lot of autistic individuals achieve their concept of autism from their peer group, and if that peer group has a negative approach, then they will have a negative approach. They don't want to be seen as different. I think a major area for the future is in terms of school, providing appropriate descriptions and support for autistic individuals for the whole class to realise the diversity that's in that class and how they can help in that person wanting to make friends cope with sensory sensitivity. Different way of learning and so on. And it's tolerance of difference. And that's what we want teenagers to do. But unfortunately, many non-autistic teenagers are incredibly intolerant of anyone who's different. By definition, an autistic person is different. So one of the issues that we face is bullying and teasing, which is incredibly destructive, leads to all sorts of problems. So the attitude of others, especially teenage peers, is very important.

Cale
Yeah, it's really interesting actually, the the concept even of classroom setting, if you can kind of show the breadth of the diversity in enough detail for people to go, oh, actually, yeah, we're

much more aligned than we are different, particularly in certain areas, it seems like it could be helpful, albeit really large undertaking.

00;33;28;28 - 00;33;53;20
Cale
Overall, I wanted to switch gears here a little bit. And Tony, you referenced a really interesting point about the relationship of older parents and autism. Can you speak a little bit more about your findings there?

Tony
Okay. The findings about older parents comes from both research and clinical experience. The research was done oh, actually quite a number of years ago in many different countries.

00;33;53;20 - 00;34;13;26
Tony
And it's fairly confirmed now. And it's an aspect that society needs to be aware of for our own clinical experience. We recognize this too. And it does also mean that one of the things that we're looking at that is a sort of a link to this is if you have an autistic child, you got a 30% chance of having another.

00;34;14;00 - 00;34;35;19
Tony
So there are families that have more than one autistic child, and these are some of the things that we need to be aware of. Because then the parents need more support, because those two autistic children may be very different in that support needs. So these are some of the things that we're having to explore clinically and in terms of research.

Cale
And structurally. Like what do you think the implication is of that? Because obviously people are having their families older. What do you think of the sort of long term implications here?

Tony
I think the long term implication is we're going to get more autistic kids.

Cale
Succinct, succinct, Tony. They're a good way to put it. And probably a good segue, actually, it's a good segue into being a parent of a child with autism. If you're up for it, I would love to hear your experience in that. And probably for people who are listening out there, any, any lessons learned, any things that you have that you can pass on to people who may be, you know, challenged.

Tony
That is such an open question. It is very difficult to know where to start with parents. I think one of the first things is very simple: love your child, accept who they are. Many of the challenges

that they have, it's not their choice. Sometimes it's a coping mechanism. They certainly didn't choose to have sensory sensitivity or the confusion in social situations. So love and compassion and acceptance is going to be crucial from parents.

00;35;34;03 - 00;35;58;13
Tony
Another thing is to try and bring in expertise from a variety of areas, and a number of therapists may be able to help, but also exploring the personality of the autistic person so they have a sense of achievement in what they do, and it's very much appreciated by the parents. It's also looking at how the dynamics will affect the family, siblings and things like that, what's going on.

00;35;58;17 - 00;36;21;05
Tony
So it's something that is a difference that it takes a while for parents to accommodate. And what may occur is there's different rates of acceptance between a mum and dad also trying to cope with the attitude of grandparents, neighbours and so on. After months, other ones, you realise I've got to come to terms with this. It's not a matter of discipline.

00;36;21;05 - 00;36;43;02
Tony
I'm going to have to deal with it effectively. I'm going to have to use different strategies. I have issues of separation anxiety, meltdowns in the supermarket. I've got to discover my own way of helping my autistic son or daughter cope with those situations. And that's the issue not only of having an autistic child, but also an autistic partner. That's a new story.

00;36;43;05 - 00;37;06;09
Cale
It's actually an incredibly good segue to my next question, which is about sort of adulthood and having autism in adulthood. Michelle, you've already referenced it to a degree. I would love to hear more of that story of how you identified and how you went for so long without identifying or being diagnosed. I find that really interesting that it took a lot of your life and you work in this. You work in this every day.

00;37;06;09 - 00;37;33;13
Michelle
I know, I know, I agree, I think it's amazing. So I just want to say my experience as an autistic adult is so influenced by the fact that I am Caucasian. I have incredibly supportive parents who gave me what Tony just described as optimal in terms of support and accepting me as I am, and I have had amazing opportunities in my life.

00;37;33;17 - 00;37;55;13
Michelle
So I feel that I'm speaking from a very privileged position, and that does not at all mean that I haven't had suffering. We all, of course, life also has suffering in it and autism, the way that's

played out for me in terms of suffering has been clinical depression, cyclical depression. So I'm very prone to depression and I've got a long history of social anxiety.

00;37;55;13 - 00;38;24;27
Michelle
The typical shy kid very much on the out, in the playground, clueless, don't know how to make friends. Then I have a conversation and overwhelmed by the sensory environment. So there's even with the best understanding and support, I think autism can still represent a psychiatric risk for adults. And that's certainly been my experience. And the experience, of course, I'm a clinical psychologist, so I'm going to see a, a bit of a skewed sample of people in my practice.

00;38;24;27 - 00;38;57;10
Michelle
They're coming to me because of mental health issues like anxiety disorders and depression, but it's just a risk being autistic, unfortunately, is a risk for these conditions, and not just because of the genes. For those coming in, mood disorders, including anxiety disorders, tend to cluster with the genes for autism. So you're more likely than, therefore, just because of your genes to have social anxiety, obsessive compulsive disorder, and generalised anxiety disorder.

00;38;57;13 - 00;39;36;12
Michelle
Specific phobias. All of the anxiety disorders happen more and I think that really relates to that sensitivity. And the other aspect of it, of course, for many autistic adults, is that if you come into the world and you're not programed to do the social things you're expected to do to know how to play with others, not just one on one, but in a group, to know how to have conversations and to read people well and and respond appropriately in terms of the social norms, which are different from school to school that you go to, you're supposed to be able to process the world in terms of a sensory experience in a an even way that helps you be alert for learning, and you're just not wired that way. It means that you're going to potentially come across, as Tony said, more adverse social experiences like bullying and teasing and not being able to make friends. I remember going through times at school where I just didn't have any friends. I made a friend, usually one, and then if they left, I didn't have another friend until I could somehow make another one, but I didn't really know how I was making them, I was very unaware. When I read now about all of those women who are talking. There's some really good autobiographies out there and podcasts out there too, from neurodivergent women, and they talk about how they watched other students and copied and imitated and oh, how smart is that? I wish I had thought of it. I wasn't smart enough.

00;40;23;04 - 00;40;43;09
Michelle
I did not do that. That would have been a very helpful thing to do. I started masking much later. I started camouflaging much later. Before that, I was just a quiet wallflower. But just in terms of the experience of, of this for adults, I think the main thing is that it's, you know, you're different from an early age.

00;40;43;09 - 00;41;03;18
Michelle
I think it would have been helpful for me to know that I was autistic earlier, but that wasn't available. And that's okay. So one of my big, I guess, bandwagons that I'm, I'm really on and wanting to promote is early identification of the internal presentation of autism because I, which many females have, but also males and all genders.

00;41;03;18 - 00;41;26;04
Michelle
So and you actually it's more likely to have an internalised presentation of autism if you do identify with being the other gender or binary or any other genders. So I think we need to understand this and listen to people, be aware and on the lookout, and have our ears wide open for what the experience of that person is.

00;41;26;04 - 00;41;57;03
Michelle
It's just very hard for us to tell you because it's difficult to put the internalised experience into words. But it is possible when you're safe and supported, and be able to do that within a relationship. I had many, many really good conversations with trusted adults growing up that were helpful in terms of me understanding myself without anyone ever using the word just understanding the difficulties of having a conversation, understanding other people and showing up for yourself, understanding yourself.

00;41;57;03 - 00;42;18;17
Michelle
Those were very useful conversations to have, and that's why I think it's important to have these conversations, regardless of whether we know that autism is actually part of the picture. The, knowing it is super helpful. You know, I was just on a high for the first 4 to 6 months of knowing. It was just so helpful to know how did I miss it for so long.

00;42;18;22 - 00;42;44;02
Michelle
I think one of the reasons is because when I came in, we were this, is in 1993, the description for being autistic, but having fluent language and not having an intellectual impairment was still very much, is it high functioning autism or is it Asperger's syndrome? And it was that particular profile which, which was very male. So there's four males for every one female.

00;42;44;04 - 00;43;10;13
Michelle
And it's a little professor who's very awkward socially and says embarrassing things and is quite gumby, you know, not not great at sport. Well, that was me, but all the rest was not me. I remember I had so much social anxiety. I remember thinking, oh my God, I wish I was autistic

because if you couldn't imagine what someone else was thinking of you, you wouldn't have the fears that I had socially of being judged and criticised and thought as less that.

00;43;10;18 - 00;43;32;08
Michelle
But that was a very naive view. However, it was one of many people had that we didn't know social anxiety was possible. I remember the first research study, it was conducted by Professor Ron Rapee at University of Sydney, and he found that actually, boys with Asperger's syndrome can have social anxiety. So that, you know, that's interesting. There's there's misconceptions that fortunately have been corrected.

00;43;32;11 - 00;44;05;06
Michelle
But this idea that you have a lack of theory of mind is completely wrong. In other words, you can conceptualise what other people are thinking of you. It's just that you're slower at processing that, and it's harder to do when you're in sensory overwhelm or social overwhelm. So I was not really looking at myself as being autistic until we started doing a deep dive into the girls, because all of a sudden, that was 2011, where Tony and I wrote the first screening questionnaire for girls to determine from age five whether this is autism.

00;44;05;09 - 00;44;33;00
Michelle
And then there was so many autobiographies. And what really helped, so I'm just looking at my bookshelf at the moment to find it, a fantastic book by Rachael Harris, and she wrote My Autistic Awakening. Now this, this is a woman who has known she's been autistic for many, many years and had a very kind of classically autistic presentation to start with, and really didn't get on socially, but learned to by her intelligence.

00;44;33;00 - 00;44;50;27
Michelle
And when I read her book, I just said, that's me. I just get it. That I absolutely. And luckily I was kind of beginning a friendship with Rachael. So it was so easy to just deepen that friendship just to say, let's go for coffee. There's a lot to talk about. And then that was so helpful to speak with Rachael about her experiences and resonate with them.

00;44;50;27 - 00;45;13;03
Michelle
And then I was really lucky to be able to meet Barb Cook and work with her on a fantastic volume. I can sit now on my bookshelf called Spectrum Women Walking to the Beat of Autism, and this was well, at the time we said 15 autistic women and Michelle brought in because of my clinical experience with autism, and I was a commentator, I would read and then draw it into clinical experience and research.

00;45;13;07 - 00;45;34;12

Michelle
But of course, it was really 16 autistic women with autism talking about autism. And when I read the autobiographical chapters by each woman, I was just again struck by the similarities in their experience and my own. So I was just so lucky. And then I came to the point of thinking, well, you know, I think I'm autistic, but it's okay.

00;45;34;16 - 00;45;54;08
Michelle
Really happy in my own skin. I've moved through a lot of my earlier issues. So for me, social anxiety and depression had been part of my history for quite a while by then, and I was ready to just be happy as an autistic woman, kind of in private. And then I and then the neurodiversity affirming.

Tony
Yeah. I'd like to add a few comments on that. Michelle has always been my hero. She's a very determined and brave person. For example, she has social anxiety, especially standing up in front of people and giving a presentation. This was horrendously anxiety provoking for her. Now she's overcome that and she presents fluently and in a relaxed way. And the more I discover about her early development and all those sort of aspects, I go, wow, you are amazing.

00;46;23;17 - 00;46;44;01
Tony
It's how far you've travelled in what you achieved. People would not know that. They would think, oh, that's been easy. They haven't realised the amount of effort that's going to her second thing is, often in autistic adults, you have the issue of, to a great extent, stress and burnout because they're trying to cope in an autism unfriendly environment.

00;46;44;02 - 00;47;06;24
Tony
They can try to do it, but eventually they collapse. But finally, there is new research, and I've been partly involved in that in determining ageing and autism. And it's not as bad as we first thought. What tends to occur is the autistic person 60 plus will start to say, yeah, I'm I'm not. I'm actually pretty good. They give themselves some slack that is far less self-critical.

00;47;06;29 - 00;47;32;25
Tony
They really don't care what other people think of them. And they say all the things that help me. I discovered myself. Gardening, for example. And one of the big things that is an indicator of a positive outcome is a sense of humour. And they're able to laugh at themselves. So for many, I strongly remember my stepfather, who was an engineer, very autistic, when I was six years old.

00;47;32;26 - 00;48;08;24
Tony

And then in his later years, how he matured and engaged. I was delighted with how the ageing process seemed to help him considerably, and I'm very grateful for that. So people need to realise that there can be a time in that person's life of self-acceptance, but also a degree of engagement that is really awesome.

Cale
It's a fantastic point on this concept of self-acceptance, and that, you know, maturing internal relationship that you have with yourself, which I think happens with age generally. But it's yeah, obviously much more profound in a world where that's been disconnected, you know, when you are younger, there's many things that you touch on there, Michelle, which I would, I would love to chat about. I would love to hear how being autistic has actually benefited you in your profession.

Michelle
My experience has been that it's benefited enormously for various reasons. And one of the biggest, I think, is tenacity. Just just being so single minded. It's now called often monotropism. And it's really the ability to just whenever you think something is really important, you can zone in hyper focus and really, really work on that. So it's really possible then to be value led and less led by perhaps the difficulties, like my anxiety and my depression and the stress stuff, you know, the sensory stuff.

00;48;57;28 - 00;49;22;19
Michelle
So certainly there's been adversity, but that single mindedness, so good. I'm so grateful to autism for that one. And one of the fascinations in my life has been autism. As you can tell, I'm still so, so very interested in this area and it's 30 years plus. The other huge one that used to be called special interests, but that ability to just be so lit up inside by a topic and ideas and I'm so lucky.

00;49;22;19 - 00;49;39;18
Michelle
I feel so lucky. I've got that in my life. My work isn't my work, you know, it's my passion. It's something I really enjoy and I have to really try and limit it like I've got to work hard on life balance. It's very easy to tip over into working too hard because it's not work. It's, it's both, it's passion and work.

00;49;39;23 - 00;50;03;13
Michelle
So those two tenacity and monotropism hyper focus also. But the other ones I've noticed in myself, the friends that I have who are autistic as well as my clients, is the personality characteristics that tend to come along with autism. And one of those is being very open hearted, being led by the heart, very compassionate, amazing people. I've just met the most amazing autistic people.

00;50;03;14 - 00;50;25;07
Michelle
They're really, really caring. People make amazing partners, family members, sisters, brothers, community members and another one is their honesty. You know, I really love, I was reflecting on it the other day, most of my closest friends now are autistic, and I thought, what is one of the things that I just love about them? And it is their honesty. There's trust.

00;50;25;07 - 00;50;45;23
Michelle
And for me, trust is the basis of relationship. If you can trust, you can feel safe. And so that I just feel very safe with my autistic friends, their fair mindedness and their honesty, their straightforwardness, you know where you are. There's no hidden agendas or games. I love that about people. There's probably lots of other ones I could go on with.

00;50;45;26 - 00;51;11;01
Tony
Okay, I'm going to add a couple to that. One is an autistic characteristic of emotional empathy, and that is that you have the ability to perceive the most subtle signals of the emotional state of the person that you're supporting. Also, I would say the autistic ability with patterns and systems. So I will be sitting next to you when we're doing a diagnostic assessment, and you'll be leading in, in the conversation, so on.

00;51;11;06 - 00;51;33;19
Tony
And I'm amazed at the patterns and components that you identify, and then bring them all together into a conceptualisation. It's great. I could watch you do that, very much nonjudgmental. And I think that is superb because the person feels that they can open up because you're not going to go, oh dear, oh, you're disappointing me. It's basically nonjudgmental.

00;51;33;19 - 00;51;59;13
TOny
Acceptance, I think is is another part of your success.

Michelle
Thank you Tony. Yeah, I resonate with all of those as well. Thank you. And I have noted these in my friends who are also autistic and clients. I think two are very hard working, it’s a real strength of character. They're that work ethic to lean in and show up and be reliable, very real, led and very held.

00;51;59;14 - 00;52;23;11
Michelle
I have a diagnosis of ADHD, but I believe that my autistic strengths have assisted me a lot to manage the problems that I've had because of ADHD. My difficulties starting on things,

procrastination, and my inability sometimes to prioritise. It's just overwhelming. There's too much, where do you start? But I've learned really good strategies, and I really think that's the autism to help.

00;52;23;11 - 00;52;44;15
Michelle
Because again, of that tenacity, persistence, keep going. Find a system and looking at patterns, finding ways of doing things that work for me. Once I find the ways too, I just use them repetitively so it doesn't get boring. It's just really, really super helpful to use these ways. It was actually an author who pointed this out to me,

00;52;44;15 - 00;53;12;26
Michelle
She wrote a wonderful book called The Wonderful Thing About Phoebe Rose, and she was describing the sensory enjoyments in life. And I think as much as I've described today about the sensory challenges, autism brings sensory joy as well. I think I get very, very powerful joy, a sense of relaxation out of certain senses through you, like olfactory, certain smells, certain textures, certain ways the light shines visually.

00;53;12;26 - 00;53;34;05
Michelle
It is just so very, very beautiful to me. It's just a wonder to be alive in that moment. And I'm sure that's accessible to many humans. I'm describing human experience, but speaking with other autistic people, I think there's just this polarity that happens in the sensory processing system that it's not just all negative. There's extremes of negativity, extremes of pleasure as well.

00;53;34;11 - 00;53;58;24
Cale
Yeah, it does sound like some of the positive traits or the positive experiences are almost like superpowers in many ways. It's obvious, as you've both described it, that autism comes with some amazing strengths which should be recognized in the workforce. The separate question is within healthcare, there's obvious benefits because people have experienced a condition which maybe their patients are also experiencing.

00;53;58;26 - 00;54;24;23
Cale
And so what are maybe the benefits and challenges of people gaining employment in healthcare who have autism?

Tony
Okay, I think one of the problems or a major challenge is ignorance in the health services. This is a very popular employer for autistic individuals. There is an interesting research study that looked at the parents of autistic children, and the assumption is that the parents will be in engineering and accountancy and so on.

00;54;24;27 - 00;54;54;03
Tony
But the one career with the highest level of autistic children was medicine. And if you think about it, in medicine, you have to have a phenomenal memory for facts and information. You got to be very good at patterns and systems patterns in terms of a radiologist. You've got to be able to be fine detailed. As a surgeon in microsurgery, you're going to be able to solve a particular problem and go off with all the various tests and find out what the solution, the diagnosis and treatment is going to be.

00;54;54;06 - 00;55;33;25
Tony
But it's also caring and being incredibly caring. And in our clinical list, we have psychologists and psychiatrists who are autistic, and they bring a particular nonjudgmental, highly supportive approach. Paediatricians as well. So there are aspects of medicine that can be attractive in terms of employment, but not attractive in terms of sensory sensitivity. And that can be a problem either for the person to accommodate or as I've known recently, somebody came into accident and emergency, said that they were autistic and it caused all sorts of what do we do?

00;55;33;25 - 00;55;52;25
Tony
What's so different? So they immediately went to one of the nursing staff who was the mother of an autistic child, and she was able to explain everything to them in a way that's all right now. So it's gaining the knowledge of that. I'll give you another quick illustration. My sister is an anaesthetist and she deals with obstetrics and so on.

00;55;52;25 - 00;56;14;13
Tony
And the nursing staff were incredibly critical of this autistic mum throughout the childbirth process. And when my sister found out that she was autistic, she went right. She really lectured the nursing staff, no, she is in pain. She doesn't like this. You will need all the accommodations. And she went in to support and she got that from me in many ways. I'm glad that I passed that on to her to help that and going through that process of of childbirth. But the biggest problem was not the childbirth. It was the attitude and the dismissal and rejection of the nursing staff.

Cale
It does sound relatively challenging in some ways. It in many cases the solution is easy, which is educate people more broadly, have them like lead with more empathy and compassion and just understanding like but it's simultaneously it's very complex, that relationship as you describe, which is particularly good at a lot of the characteristics of a role and professionally excellent.

00;56;50;06 - 00;57;18;26
Cale

But that sensory sensitivity, so much the environment in which they do that role can be challenging at times. It's yeah, it's a, it's a really interesting point that you've made there. I do want to switch gears a little bit on both of your views on medication and its role in neurodivergence. And the reason this question is prompted is that I'm finding increasingly, I speak to a lot of parents who their child has been quick to be diagnosed with ADHD and quick to be medicated.

00;57;18;26 - 00;57;44;29
Cale
And that process actually seems very swift, very abrupt. And so I'd love both of your thoughts on medication more broadly, but also this seems like the rise of medicating as a first line of defence.

Michelle
I can speak to that first, if you're like Cale, just to say that the current ADHD best practice guidelines are to medicate. And that's probably why you're seeing that so much so quickly.

00;57;45;02 - 00;58;12;21
Michelle
The research is very strong. I've got some amazingly huge studies now on the benefits of medication for both children and adults who have ADHD, so I'm really not surprised. It is a first line, although it's not for everyone. And one of the things I do need to point out for medicos is that if you do have someone who's ADHD and autistic, the ADHD medication is less likely to be effective.

00;58;12;21 - 00;58;35;13
Michelle
So we have a, effectiveness rate of about 80% if it's pure ADHD, but only about 50% if the person is also autistic. So even though it's the first line, it's definitely not a guarantee that you're going to get a beneficial effect. And also, when we talk about a beneficial effect, I want to be really clear. There's no medication for autism and neither should there be.

00;58;35;18 - 00;59;00;17
Michelle
But a lot of autistic people have got conditions that may benefit from using a medication. Like let's talk about anxiety, depression as well as ADHD. So we do need to consider medication for autistic people. Absolutely. For the other conditions. But the advice always guided by the literature is that when medication is considered, obviously that's a very informed approach.

00;59;00;18 - 00;59;25;06
Michelle
We know that the way medication is introduced and maintained by the health professional has a massive impact on its helpfulness. So there are very, very careful, way sensitive ways that

medication can be introduced and then managed with the person. But we do need to consider low doses and as you titrate up, go very slowly. I talked earlier about sensitive people here.

00;59;25;06 - 00;59;52;04
Michelle
That's personality and body. Mind body no different. The body is sensitive. It seems to metabolise these medications in a different way. And we need to be very sensitive to that. And so there's more side effects. Now when I first started in this area and I'm seeing more and more women, I just was struck by why is it that all the women I'm seeing, it felt like probably wasn't 100%, but it was a high, high rate or got the uncommon side effects of the medication.

00;59;52;07 - 01;00;15;03
Michelle
These were common for my autistic women. And now there's research that bears that out. So absolutely, we have what we call a toolkit for assisting people in their management of stress and management of challenge, social sensory challenge in a world not designed for autistic people. And one of the tools in the toolkit, the toolkit is medication, but that's very individual and not necessarily always helpful.

01;00;15;07 - 01;00;46;02
Cale
I think the challenge is not, is less about the role of medication, and probably more parents struggle with the speed at which medication is recommended, and that could be a function of we, we are so efficient now at diagnosing that this is the issue. That's scary for some people that it can be decided that quickly, but there's, some of the doubt or the critique is that, hey, we've only had one interaction or we've done one test and I would love to be sure before we start down the path of medication.

01;00;46;06 - 01;01;19;25
Cale
And so that was, that was probably where the question was coming from, is the speed at which we go to medicate, not the drug efficacy of the medication itself.

Michelle
Yeah, I get it. The diagnostic assessment process for ADHD, I don't think that's ideally managed within a one that you know, that that first interaction personally, the best practice guidelines are, for example, that we would definitely sample the behaviour across different settings, speak to multiple informants and have screener questionnaires, as well as more lengthy questionnaires to discern that.

01;01;19;25 - 01;01;40;23
Michelle
So obviously, it depends how long that consultation lasts. But there's a lot of things that trauma can look like ADHD. So you don't want to miss that. You know, I think we, I agree with you. We

can't be hasty. And it's interesting hearing that because I'm, I'm, I hear the other complain. It takes so long to get the diagnosis and so many appointments and it's so expensive.

01;01;40;25 - 01;01;59;18
Michelle
So this is interesting. I hadn't even thought of that as an issue, but I can say that it's that to experience that is an issue. Definitely.

Cale
So the final question to you both, the reason for the podcast is called Grin + Bare It is that it's often the advice, you know, when you're experiencing a challenging situation. It's kind of like grin and bare it, get on with it, and it almost references your masking concept to it.

01;01;59;18 - 01;02;24;04
Cale
I want to peel it a level back for both of you, which is. Do you have a single piece of advice to people who are currently facing real adversity?

Michelle
Yes, I would really, really suggest practice compassion, self compassion. It's always going to be to yourself first or you get burnout, compassion burnout. And from there comes compassion.

01;02;24;07 - 01;02;57;29
Michelle
Because autism is just being human, you know, it's a different way of being human. We talked about different ways of thinking, perceiving, sensing, relating in the world, but essentially none of it is outside human experience. So we access compassion, that would might be my lead, lead comment.

Tony
Yeah, not to be so self-critical. Unfortunately, autistic individuals are the worst critics of themselves, and it's basically saying be more positive to yourself because what you've had to endure, nobody else really will understand only you, however, not to let it destroy you.

01;02;58;04 - 01;03;24;07
Cale
Amazing. We have a lot of people who work in healthcare listen to the show, and I would love just very simple bits of advice to the following type of people. The first is you're the colleague of someone who is neurodivergent. What would be a piece of advice to that person?

Tony
To the non autistic person, listen to them and find out that there's a reason why, that they may be a bit unusual. They may not be easily describing why they're like that, but find out and then make accommodations.

Michelle
Yeah. Me too. I think if you're just thinking, wow, this person is not acting like the others in the team, there's differences here. My immediate inclination would be to just become curious, lean in, find out what it's like, what their values are, what they're enjoying about work, what, what brings them there, and then, you know, what are the challenges? Just getting really curious, but obviously in that respectful way because it's personal to feel different to others. So really wanting to respect that as well.

Tony
I think that's a very important point. Respect. Yes.

Cale
The second category of person I would love a small piece of advice for is someone who is neurodivergent, either identifying as you know, or have been diagnosed as working in that healthcare environment.

01;04;15;22 - 01;04;42;09
Cale
What can they do for themselves to make that environment more productive, a happier place to work

Michelle
The biggest start, I think, is self-awareness. So coming in. So we wrote a book called Autism Working. And that whole piece is about know yourself, if you know your strengths, what you're bringing in, but also be aware of what may be challenges so you can be on the lookout for those aspects.

01;04;42;14 - 01;05;06;00
Michelle
And once you have self-awareness, the next thing and this is not available easily, but I would really encourage working on it either individually or with a coach or a loved one, Self-Advocacy. How do I show up for myself and know that I'm worth it? I've got something to offer, but I've got to work so much better. The, the productivity, the, the wellbeing, my own wellbeing, that of my bosses, my team will be so much better if these accommodations were there. So it's self-awareness and self-advocacy. And this is where I really think Tony's advice earlier bears, is that ability to explain oneself to someone else. That's, I think, in the workplace that can really, really have a good effect and also find a mentor. But I know I'm only allowed one answer.

01;05;25;24 - 01;05;53;16
Tony
Oh, no. No. Yeah, that was the answer I was going to give. Yeah, it's someone who can explain the politics, the procedures, the egos, the topics you can and you can't say able to repair the situation and so on. So they need not only as an advocate for themselves, but they need

someone in the workforce, maybe appointed, maybe someone who's naturally chosen to do that, who recognizes their challenges and then spends the time reassuring, explaining and supporting.

01;05;53;20 - 01;06;15;10
Tony
So that's what I would look for a mentor in the workplace. But also at home who can debrief and support.

Cale
Michelle, Tony, you've been so generous with your time. I can't thank you enough for joining and sort of being open about neurodivergence generally and autism specifically within the show, I wish you well on all of the work that you're doing and looking forward to speaking with you soon. Thanks for joining.

Tony
Okay. Thank you.

Michelle
Thank you so much, Cale. Really enjoyed the conversation. Take care.

01;06;25;25 - 01;06;55;26
Cale
Thank you so much for listening to this week's episode. Hope you enjoyed it. As always, I would love your feedback, questions, or any suggestions that you have to someone that I should be speaking to next as our guest. You can find me on LinkedIn, or you can find the Grin + Bare It podcast on TikTok and Instagram. Now the best way to support this show, if you did like it, is leave your feedback, subscribe wherever you get your podcasts, or simply share it with your friends and colleagues.

01;06;55;29 - 01;07;05;22
Cale
Thank you so much again. See you next time on Grin + Bare It.