

4.24.25 Roundtable Focus Engaging in Autistic Culture: A Practice Rooted in Ethics

In our first ABS NAP Alliance Roundtable Discussion, we explored why ABA providers need to engage in autistic culture, and how we can engage with autistic culture.

Roundtable Takeaways

- **Engaging in autistic culture:**
 - Leads to more socially significant outcomes
 - Increases epistemic justice & reduces iatrogenic harm
- **How we engage in autistic culture matters:**
 - Recognize & affirm autistic cultural elements and intersectionality
 - Engage with autistic-created content, build personal connections, & center clients as knowledge-holders.
 - Entering autistic spaces in a respectful, open-minded manner
 - Understand how your identity informs passive vs active engagement
- **Insights from autistic culture to integrate into practice:**
 - Compassion over compliance
 - Facilitating unmasking in safe spaces
 - Autistic play is valid play
 - Fostering belonging
 - “The goal is not independence, it is autonomy.”
- **BACB Ethics Codes Alignment**
 - 1.07; 2.09; 3.04

Roundtable Insights

Notable Member Contributions

How to Embrace Autistic Culture:

- Ask questions and listen to autistic voices
- Acknowledge diverse & intersecting autistic expressions and values

Facilitating Autistic Authenticity:

- Use creative, flexible engagement
- Validate all forms of autistic play, communication, expression, etc.

Next Steps:

Integrate autistic culture into practice by hiring and supporting neurodivergent staff and embedding neuro-affirming values throughout your organization.

Autistic Culture Content

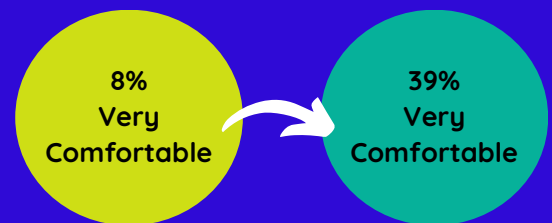
Organizations: Mindful Behavior, National Autistic Society, AUsome Moms

Social Media: @neurowild, @fidget.and.fries, @Kaelynnup, @iamsitting, @blackspectrumscholar, @notanautismmom, @Neurodivergentschoolpsych, @theblackautist, @beardedbehaviorist, @Nigh.functioning.autism

Books, Websites, Etc.: “Life on the Bridge: Linking My World to Yours” (book by Kaelynn Partlow), autisticadvocacy.com, The Autism Advocate

Pre- & Post-Discussion Poll Results

How comfortable do you feel in accessing information about autistic culture from autistic people?



2025 NCABA Annual Conference

An Ethical Imperative: Bridging the Empathy Gap Between ABA Service Providers and Autistic Individuals

At the 2025 NCABA Annual Conference this past February, ABSNAP Core Members Selene Johnson and Cindy Andree-Bowen delivered a powerful Invited Address to behavior analytic professionals from across the state. Their presentation called for a much-needed shift in mindset within the field of Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA). Drawing on concepts such as epistemic justice, iatrogenic effects, the double-empathy problem, and testimonies from autistic individuals, Selene and Cindy challenged attendees to broaden their understanding of autistic culture. They advocated for centering the perspectives and lived experiences of autistic people, recognizing them as the true experts in their own lives.

NCABA Presentation Key Resources

Cassidy, S. A., Gould, K., Townsend, E., et al. (2020). Is camouflaging autistic traits associated with suicidal thoughts and behaviours? Expanding the interpersonal psychological theory of suicide in an undergraduate student sample. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 50, 3638–3648. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-019-04323-3>

Catala, A. (2023, April 11). Understanding neurodiversity, unlearning neuronormativity. *APA Blog*. <https://blog.apaonline.org/2023/04/11/understanding-neurodiversity-unlearning-neuronormativity/>

Evans, J. A., Krumrei-Mancuso, E. J., & Rouse, S. V. (2024). What you are hiding could be hurting you: Autistic masking in relation to mental health, interpersonal trauma, authenticity, and self-esteem. *Autism in Adulthood*, 6(2), 229-240.

Fisher, J. (2023). Epistemic injustice: The silenced voices. *International Journal of Mental Health Nursing*.

Haegele, J. A., & Hodge, S. (2016). Disability discourse: Overview and critiques of the medical and social models. *Quest*, 68(2), 193–206. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00336297.2016.1143849>

Kupferstein, H. (2018). Evidence of increased PTSD symptoms in autistics exposed to applied behavior analysis. *Advances in Autism*, 4(1), 19-29.

Milton, D. E. M. (2012). On the ontological status of autism: The 'double empathy problem.' *Disability & Society*, 27(6), 883–887. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09687599.2012.710008>

Naylor, C. (2023). "Much better set up to do my best work": What does "neurodiversity-affirming practice" mean to the autistic community? [Doctoral dissertation, University of Nottingham]. *University of Nottingham*.

Okoroji, C., Mackay, T., Robotham, D., Beckford, D., & Pinfold, V. (2023). Epistemic injustice and mental health research: a pragmatic approach to working with lived experience expertise. *Frontiers in Psychiatry*, 14, 1114725.

Retzlaff, B. J., Fisher, W. W., Akers, J. S., & Greer, B. D. (2020). A translational evaluation of potential iatrogenic effects of single and combined contingencies during functional analysis. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, 53(1), 67–81. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jaba.595>

