



ERICSA 63RD ANNUAL TRAINING CONFERENCE & EXPOSITION

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Milwaukee

WISCONSIN

Different, Not Less – Enhancing Perspectives on Autism and Neurodiversity Communities for Future Child Support Workers

Speakers

James Gallagher, First Judicial District of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia Family Court,
Director

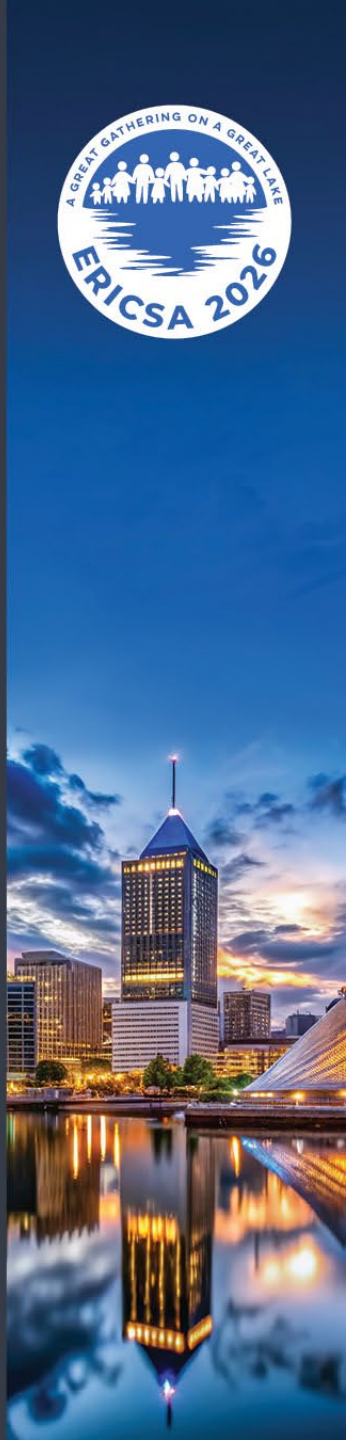
Paul Gehm, MI State Court Administrative Office, Friend of the Court Bureau,
Management Analyst

Melissa Hayes, Schuylkill County Domestic Relations, Director

Kate Hooven, PA ASERT Collaborative, Justice System Project Coordinator

Moderator

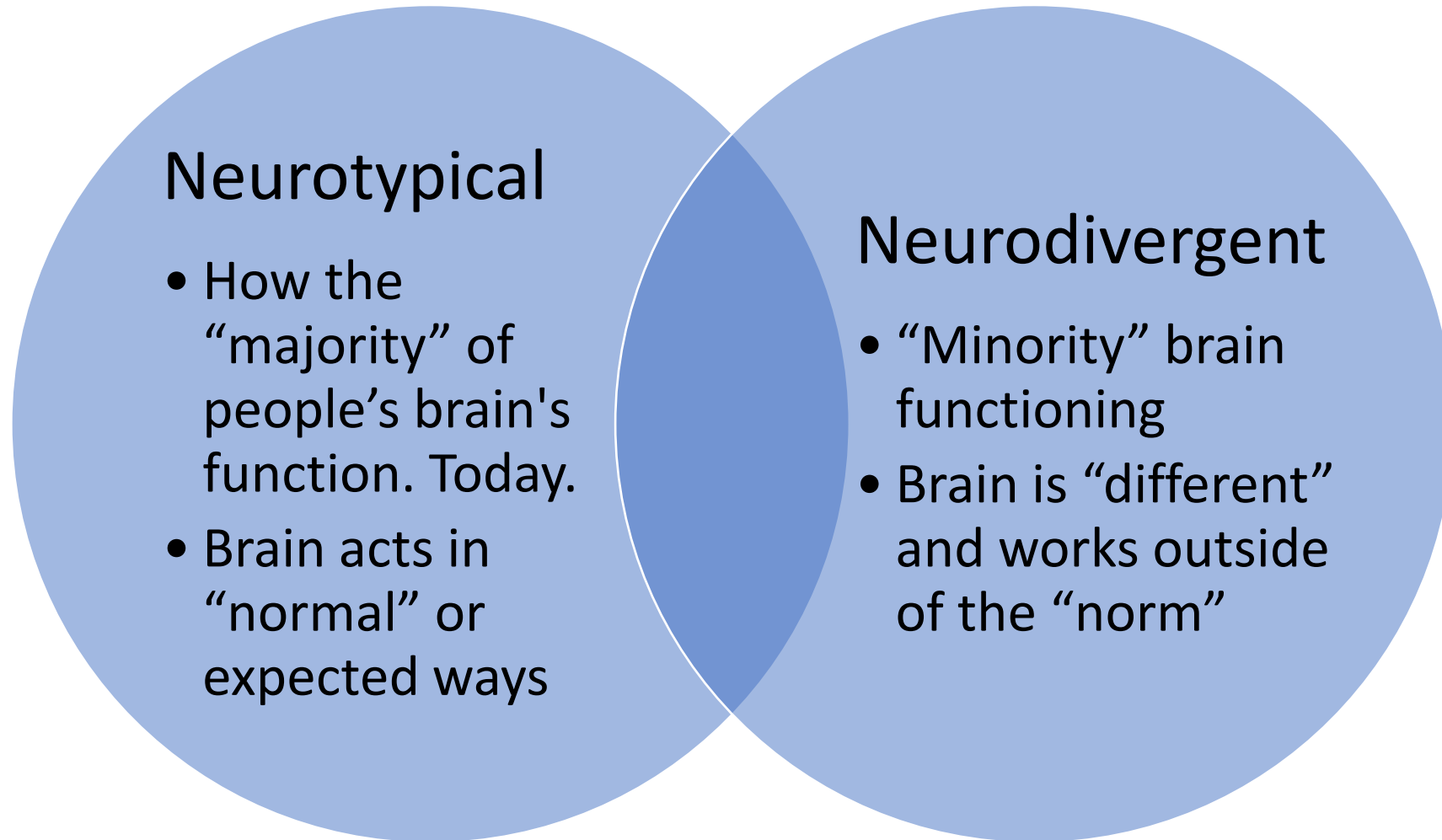
Dana Grimm, Deloitte, Sr. Solution Specialist



Neurodiversity, including autism and other neurological differences, is being diagnosed at increasing rates. According to the latest CDC data, 1 in 31 eight-year-old children and 1 in 45 adults have been diagnosed with autism. Over the next decade, an estimated 700,000 to over 1 million teens with autism will enter adulthood. More than two-thirds of neurodiverse adults, including those with autism, remain unemployed; in Pennsylvania, 80% of autistic adults with a college degree are unemployed. Some of these individuals may become clients or litigants in our child support programs, or even potential employees. This session will review common characteristics and traits within the autism and neurodiverse populations and explain how these can be misunderstood in courtroom or employment settings. We will discuss hiring barriers faced by neurodiverse individuals, as well as strategies, best practices, and training tools to better serve autistic/neurodiverse clients and employees. The session will also highlight the unique strengths neurodiverse individuals bring to the workplace and share successful examples of related initiatives from Pennsylvania courts.



What is Neurodiversity



What is Neurodiversity



All brains work differently – the level to which they work differently impacts “diagnoses”

- Neurotypical and neurodivergent

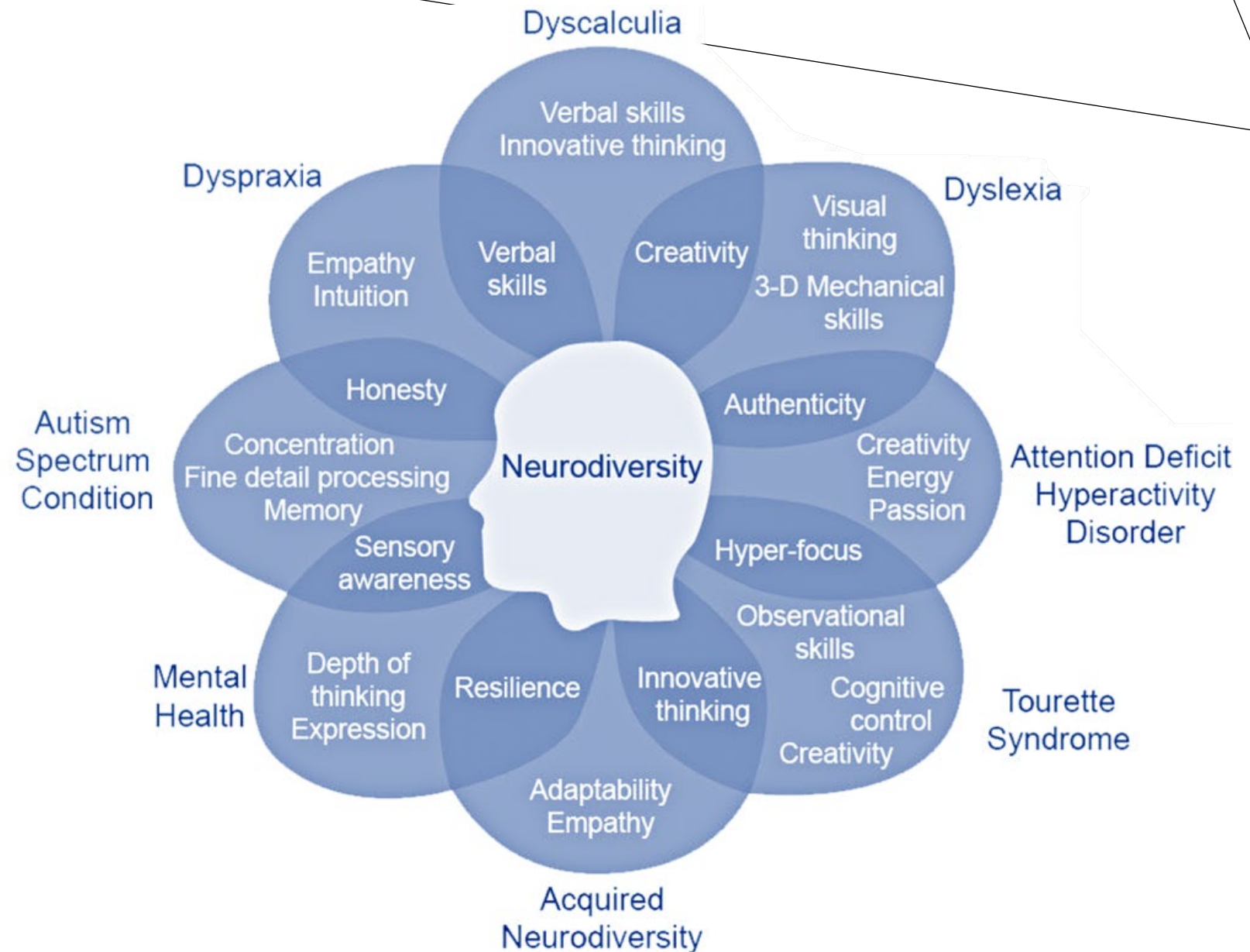


Dr. Singer – about individual strengths and differences



“Normal Sucks” – Jonathan Mooney

Neurodiversity mapped

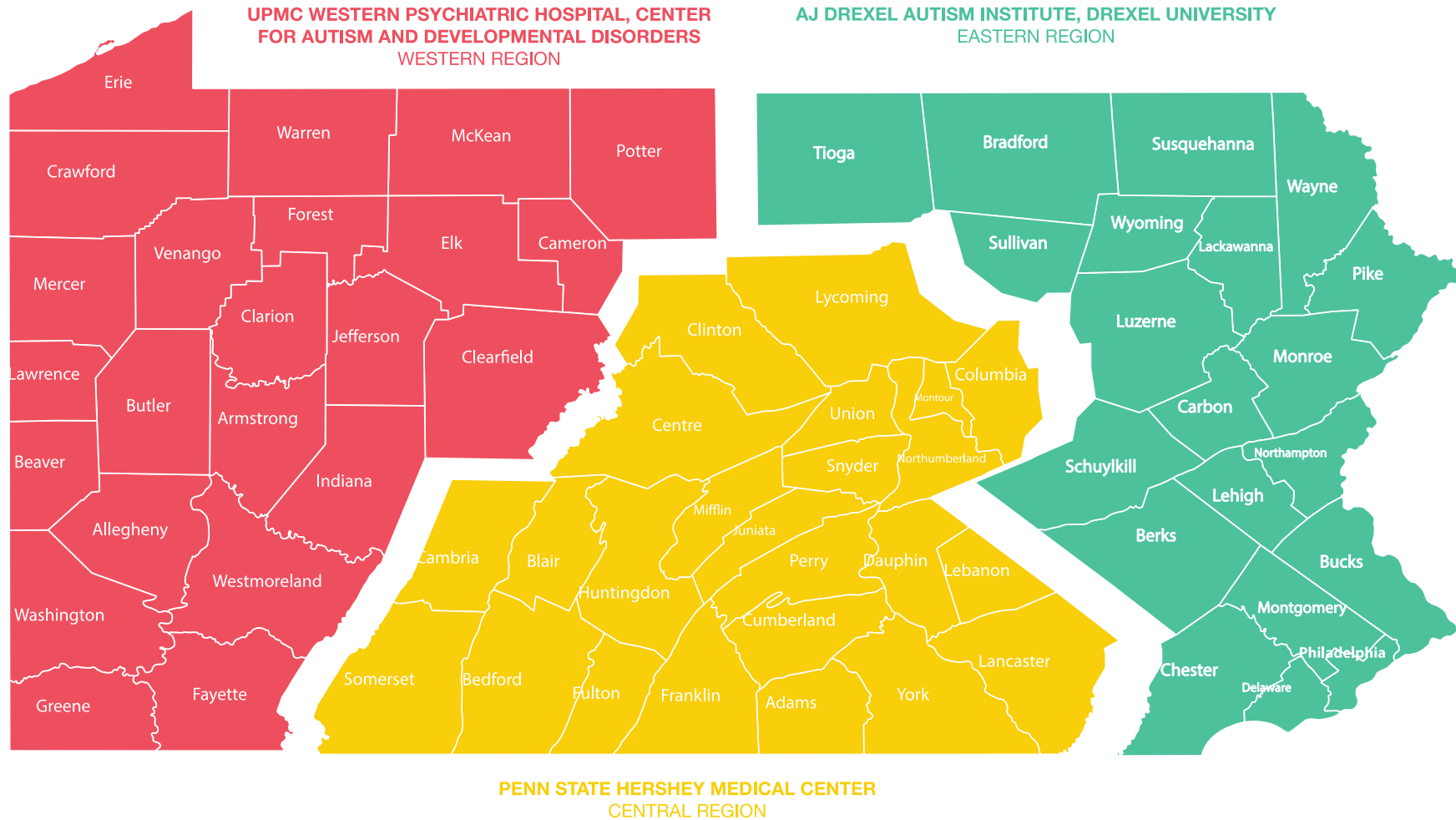


Source: *The Overlapping Skills and Strengths of Neurodiversity* by Nancy Doyle, based on work by Mary Colley.
[Neurodivergence at a Glance – Imagine | Johns Hopkins University \(jhu.edu\)](https://www.jhu.edu/neurodivergence-at-a-glance/)



Autism 101

Who We Are

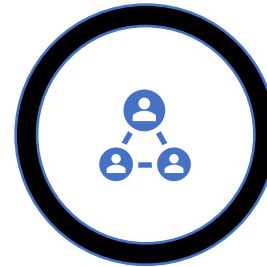


What does ASERT do?



EDUCATE

Individuals with autism and their families, professionals, and community members



BUILD

Resources, programs, and innovative projects



SUPPORT & CONNECT

The autism community throughout Pennsylvania to local, regional, and statewide resources



MEASURE

Data, needs, and change

A moment to talk about language...

- Person first vs Identify first
 - Inclusive language
- Ableist language
- What not to say or assume



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Inclusive Language: Considerations for Use

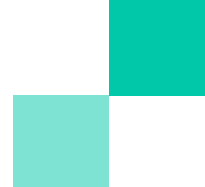
Created with support and reviewed by individuals on the spectrum

INSTEAD OF...	TRY THIS...
autism symptoms	autistic characteristics/traits/features
person with autism	autistic person
deficit	difference
treatment	supports/services/strategies/accommodations
person with a disability	disabled person
suffers from autism	impact/effect of autism
normal	neurotypical/non-autistic/person without autism
typical person/typical peer	non-autistic person/typically developing peer

What is Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)?

- A **complex** neurodevelopmental condition
- Life-long: autism is something an individual is born with; it is not acquired and individuals **do not “outgrow”** Autism Spectrum Disorder.
- Involves challenges in **social, communication, and behavioral** development
- It is **not** a mental illness and not an intellectual disability; however those diagnoses can co-exist.





Social Interaction Characteristics

Lack of Attention to Faces

Difficulty in Receiving and
Expressing Emotions

Reduced Eye Contact

Difficult in Developing Peer
Relationships

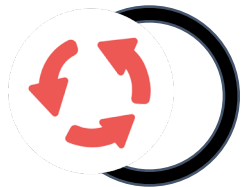
Lack of Social Reciprocity

Difficulty in Using
Nonverbal Social
Communication

Communication Differences



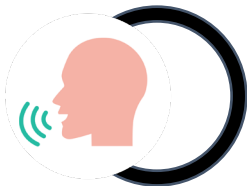
Absence or Delay
in Language



Stereotyped or Repetitive Use of
Language



Difficulties **Initiating**
Maintaining
Conversation



Deficits in Voice
Tone



Lack of **Social Play**

Language

☐ Speak clearly
and concisely

☐ Speak in a
calm, quiet
voice

☐ One
command at a
time

☐ Ask if they
understand

☐ No slang or
abstract
language

☐ Give them
time to
respond

☐ Repeat or
rephrase

☐ One person
talks at a
time



Restricted or Repetitive Behavior

1 Stereotyped, Repetitive Motor Mannerisms

2 Restricted Interests

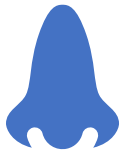
3 Inflexible Adherence to Routines or Rituals

4 Preoccupation with Parts of Objects

Strategy Quiet

Sensory Sensitivities

- Difficulty tolerating sounds
- Strong dislike of crowds
- Difficulty tolerating certain temperatures, lights or smells
- Difficulty managing changes in environment
- Food sensitivities, especially to texture
- Strong sensitivity to the feel of clothing or shoes
- Extreme dislike of being touched or hugged
- Extreme dislike of touching certain things or getting hands dirty
- Engage in repetitive movements
- High tolerance for pain



Overstimulation

Signs of Possible Overstimulation

- Flapping
- Pacing
- Rocking
- Scripting
- Loud Verbalizations

Which Can Lead To

- Meltdowns (e.g. yelling, flapping)
- Eloping (running away)
- Self Injurious Behavior (biting self, hitting head)
- Aggression

Tips and Tricks



Use visual
schedules



Have a quiet
room/space



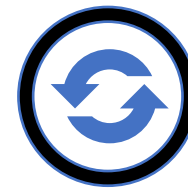
Use a motivational
system



Have
communication
strategy in place



Be mindful of
triggers and
escalating
behaviors



Give alternative,
replacement
activities

Importance of Sharing Their Diagnosis



People may not recognize symptoms of ASD and may misinterpret them



People may assume individual is under the influence of drugs or alcohol



People may believe individual has a mental health diagnosis



People may assume individual is being uncooperative



People may be concerned of deception with little to no eye contact

Appearing in Court

- Increased Stress
- Metal Detector
- Sensory Overload
- Courtroom Attire
- Extra Processing Time
- Language Issues



Interviewing and Court Testimony



Determine how the individual communicates verbal/gestures /device



Use the individual's words (especially if they use a communication device)



Build trust and rapport/caring attitude



Use visuals



Take breaks

Interviewing and Court Testimony



Timing of the interview is important



Ensure the physical space is conducive to sensory needs



Avoid Infantilization

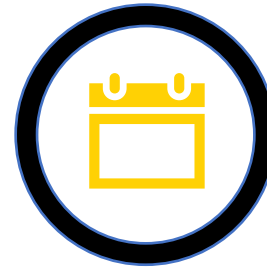


Use same interviewer every time

Tools/Strategies for Supporting Individual in Court



Provide visual schedule in advance



Continually remind individual about court date



Prompting if questions are vague

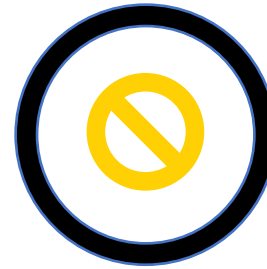


Prepare court staff about autism diagnosis

Courtroom Decorum Expectations



Stand when the judge enters the room



Keep disruptive behaviors to a minimum

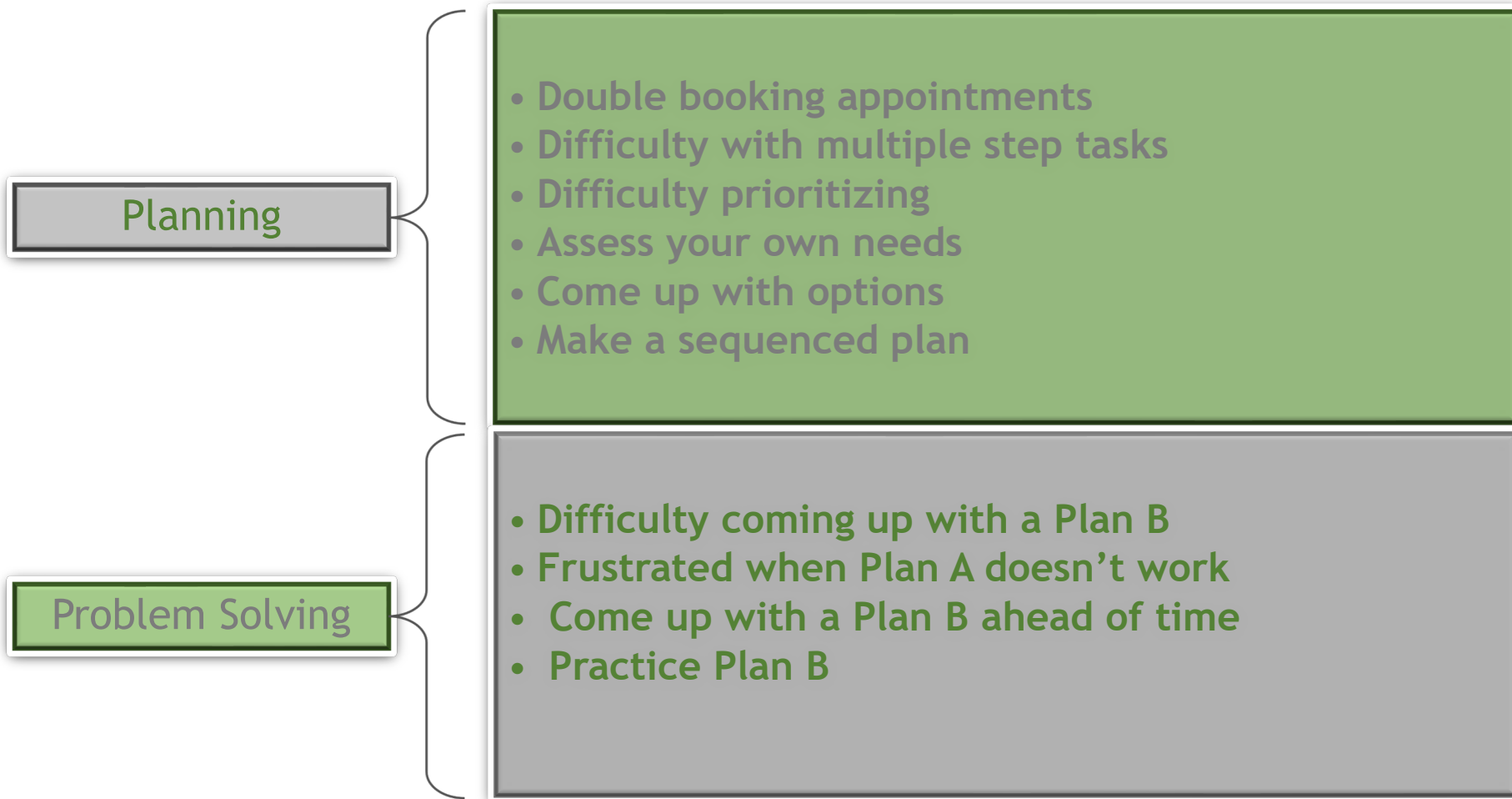


Dress appropriately



Be on time

Executive Functioning: Organizing Functions



Executive Functioning: Organizing Functions Continued

Shifting / Flexibility

- Difficulty switching to task that needs completed immediately
- Difficulty getting to work because bus or route is delayed
- Can change based on responses to environment
- Keep sensory needs in mind

Attention

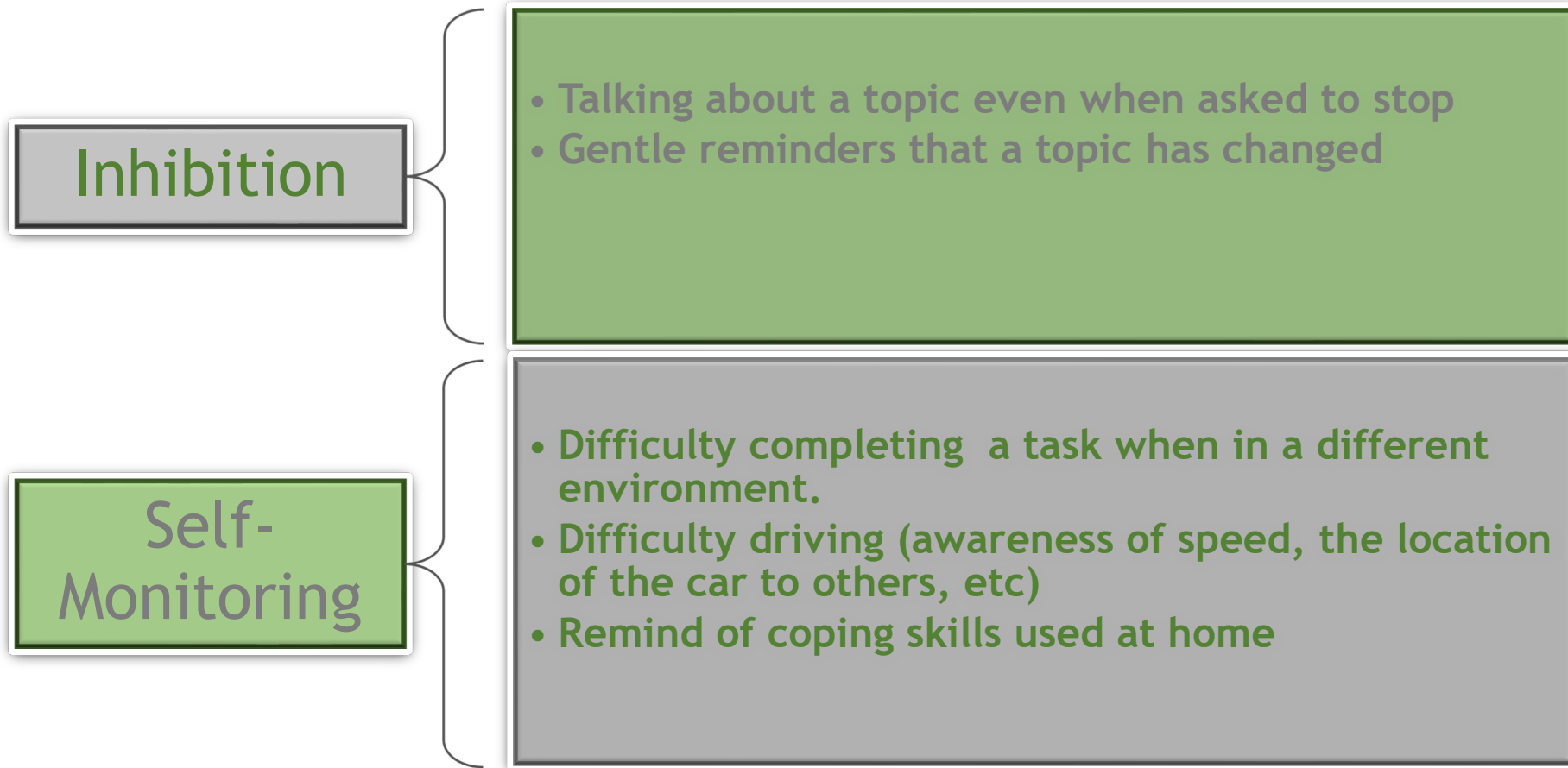
- Difficulty completing a task due to interruptions or distractions
- Difficulty being on time due to inability to estimate the time it takes
- Come up with Plan B ahead of time
- Practice Plan B

Executive Functioning: Organizing Functions Continued

Working Memory

- Difficulty dialing phone number as someone reads it
- Difficulty following multiple-step directions
- One task at a time
- Using visuals when possible

Executive Functioning: Regulation Functions



Executive Functioning: Regulation Functions Continued

Initiation

- Procrastination of non-preferred task
- May be unaware of how to break down a project into steps or not knowing how to begin
- Break tasks down into steps
- Provide visuals if possible

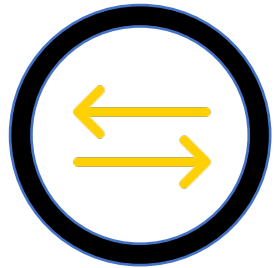
Employment Challenges



Missing Social Cues



Communication



Executive Functioning
Deficits



Social Awareness

PA Autism Needs Assessment: Job Search



Strategies for Workplace Success

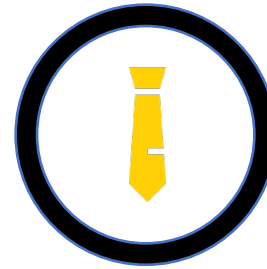
- Prepare both the employer and the employee
- Provide on the job support if necessary
- Visual supports
- Clearly defined work tasks and duties
- Well suited job placement
- Modifications and accommodations to the workplace



Strategies for Job Interviews



Practice and Role Play



Dress for Success



Suggest Other Ways to Prepare



If they are comfortable doing so, practice eye contact and a handshake

Treat Everyone With Respect



Know the people
you support
beyond their
resume



Take into account
communication
style



Discuss preferred
language re autism



Always honor an
individual's right to
privacy



Provide
opportunities for
independent
decision making



PAautism.org



Website: www.PAautism.org



Email: info@PAautism.org

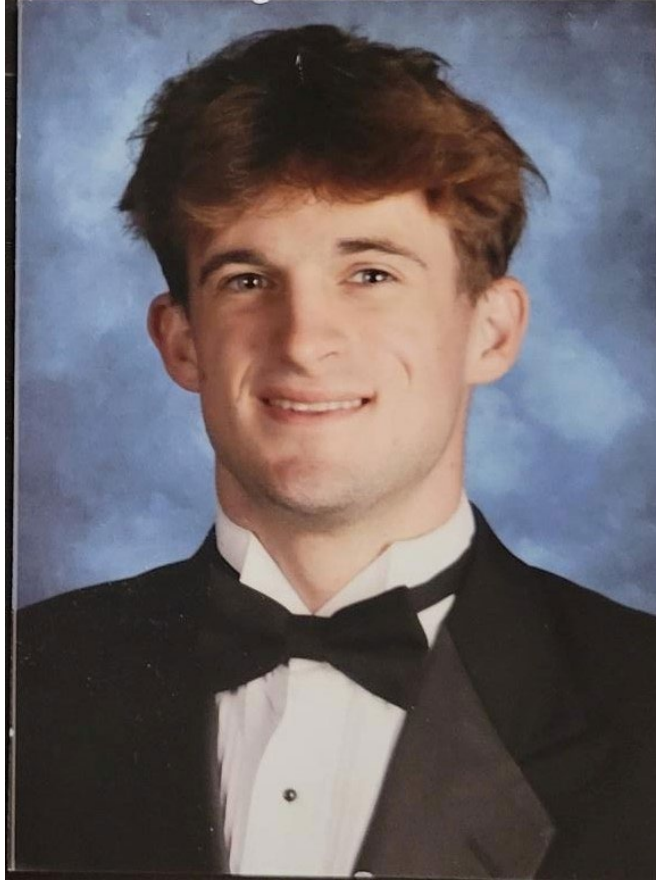
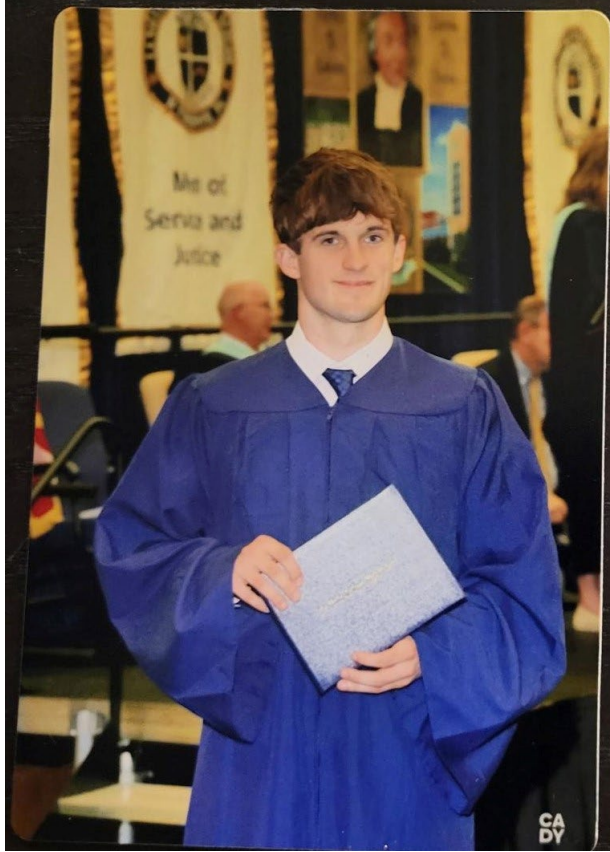


Phone: 877-231-4244

ASERT is funded by the Bureau of Supports for Autism and Special Populations, Office of Developmental Programs, PA Department of Human Services







3 of the 7 “Top Findings” in the Report concern staffing

1. Courts face significant staffing shortages and operational inefficiencies, with many court professionals working long hours, yet struggling to manage their workloads.
2. Staffing shortages are widespread and expected to continue over the next year, particularly in court clerk and clerk staff roles. State courts have been more heavily impacted than County/ Municipal courts, and judicial operations are more likely to expect shortages in the coming year than court operations.
3. While judges and court staff tend to work long hours, working extra hours doesn't necessarily lead to feeling that they have enough time to meet the respective needs of their roles.

Three of the most common types of Interview Questions

According to the Society for Human Resources Management (SHRM), the most common types of interview questions are:

- **Behavioral** - the purpose is to review the candidate's experience, personal attributes and job-related skills (e.g., Describe a time when you set a goal and were able to achieve it.)
- **Competency-based** - focuses specifically on skills needed for the position (e.g., Tell me about a time when you had to use your communication skills to deescalate a situation with an upset customer. How did the customer react?)
- **Situational** (e.g., - You learn that a former co-worker at your last job (a New Jersey Court) is applying for a judicial clerkship. You know that this person was terminated from their previous clerkship for sharing confidential information. You are not in HR. What, if anything, would you do?)

Leadership Approaches

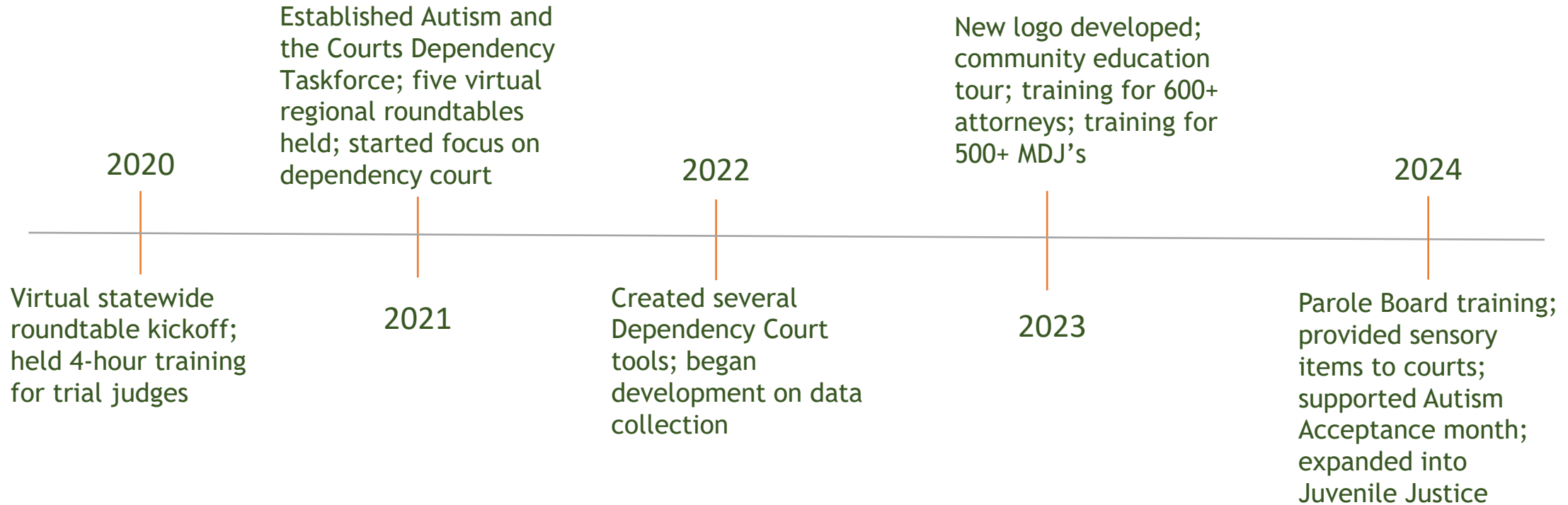
- Inclusive leadership starts with psychological safety, allowing individuals to express themselves without fear of judgment.
- Leaders should emphasize open communication, flexibility, and empathy in their interactions.
- Active listening is essential for understanding and supporting all employees.
- It's important for leaders to ensure that autistic and neurodiverse employees are not judged negatively.
- Leaders and staff should educate themselves about autism and neurodiversity to avoid stereotypes and misconceptions.
- Engaging employees in conversations about their support needs enhances organizational strength and workplace culture.



What is the Autism and the Courts Initiative?

Pennsylvania's Autism and the Court Initiative is focused on reducing trauma and supporting individuals in the court system with an autism spectrum disorder (ASD) by recognizing, accepting and responding to the needs of all court users and their families

Timeline of the Autism and the Courts Initiative



Results of the Autism and the Courts Initiative

Highlights:

- Over **1,000** PA judges received training on autism.
- Over **1,200** individuals across the state attended public dialogue forums.
- Over **2,000** court and child welfare professionals trained across the state.
- **564** people served with autism since data collection began.
- Autism Benchcard created for Dependency Court judges.

Results of the Autism and the Courts Initiative

Autism in Courts Progress

56 counties participating

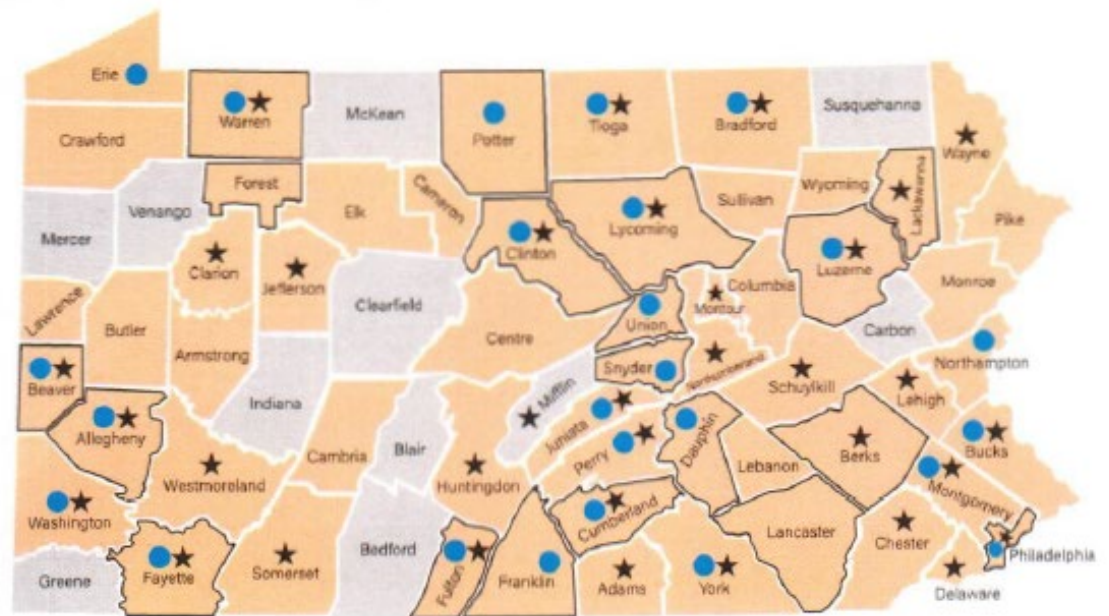
34 counties collecting autism data through CPCMS

19 counties created social stories

25 counties have prioritized the autism initiative

12 counties have created courthouse calming/
sensory rooms

30 counties use Sensory Bags in their courtrooms



Examples of Calming/ Sensory Rooms

SENSORY ROOM

SECOND FLOOR - ROOM NUMBER 278,
PHILADELPHIA FAMILY COURT

WHAT IS A SENSORY ROOM?

A calm, quiet space for those with sensory sensitivities. The room will provide a short respite for anyone (children, teens, adults) who are in the courthouse for a hearing.

WHAT IS AVAILABLE?

- Books
- Sensory Toys/Activities
- Bean bags
- Tablets
- Lap Blankets

WHO CAN ACCESS THE SENSORY ROOM?

Anyone! Remember, children must have an adult present.

***SENSORY TOYS ARE ALSO AVAILABLE IN ALL COURTROOMS, JUST ASK!**



How it Fits Within Child Support

Parents and Caregivers

- Earning level/potential in support calculations
- Communication options and styles
- Physical Environment

Children

- Likely increased medical and education expenses
- Parenting time

Employees

- Personnel/team building
- Employment and ADA Law

Parents and Other Caregivers

Support Considerations

- Impacts to earning level/potential
- 30-40% unemployment rate for neurodivergent individuals in the US.
- Enforcement Impacts

Communication and Engagement

- Processing of information
- Best communication method – calls, notifications, etc.
- Setting clear expectations
- Cold calling may not be successful

Physical Environment

- May need reduced stimulation
 - Music, noises, lights, temperature
- Fidgets or other opportunities to release sensory processing
- Limit transitions

Children

Increased Demands on Parent(s)

- Therapies, doctor visits, school needs, etc.
- Flexible scheduling may be critical

Parenting Time

- Ability of parents to share parental responsibilities
- Considerations when recommending custody and parenting time provisions; see [Michigan Parenting Time Guideline](#), pp. 21-22
- Understand, and plan for, impact of transitions
- Staggered parenting time?

Increased Needs for the Child

- Medical and therapeutic services
- Education
- Childcare

Resource and Contact

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 - JamesGallagher@pacses.com
- Melissa Hayes
 - MelissaHayes@pacses.com
- Paul Gehm
 - gehmp@courts.mi.gov
- Dana Grimm
 - dgrimm@deloitte.com
- SPECIAL THANKS to ASERT and Kate Hooven
- [Sensory Simulation Video](#)
 - UK National Autistic Society

