

AUTISTIC'S SELF-IMPROVEMENT/ADVOCACY PACKET

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The purpose of this Worksheet is 2-fold:

- 1) It was modeled after the “1st step packet” that the Christian general purpose 12 Step support group, New Wine, that helped me overcome my codependency. The intent of the author of the original worksheet was to help the addict/codependent to see the impact that their additive/dysfunctional behavior was having on their personal life.

Likewise, this Worksheet is designed to educate Autistics about their own Autism and the effects that it has on their lives. So, it doesn’t just ask the questions, it explains why the question is being asked. Just as with the 12 Step packets; the Autistic would greatly benefit by going over what they wrote in this worksheet with a mentor, confidant, counselor, support group, etc.

- 2) Help Autistics with self-advocacy by providing them with a “cheat sheet” that can aid them in explaining their autism to others.

For ease of reading, please type in your answers to all questions in the spaces below each question. These spaces have been intended in order to distinguish the answers from the questions.

WHO ARE You?

This first section is intended to give you some basic insights about yourself that can help you explain yourself to others. It especially focuses as much as possible with the positives that are often drowned out by the struggles that have come to define Autism in the eyes of many. It also focuses as much as possible on possible solutions in order to encourage Autistics & their loved ones.

- 1) **How would you describe what you perceive to be the differences in how your brain operates to how the majority of those whom you associate with?** Many Autistics are incapable of explaining the differences between themselves and non-Autistics beyond, “We’re wired differently.” I tried using this model after I first got diagnosed at the age of 40. It resulted in longtime friends getting frustrated with me because it not only didn’t give any insight in to who I was and why, but it also didn’t lay a foundation for finding solutions.

Many have the mindset of whatever men are, women are the exact opposite, and vise-versa. After I started attending the monthly meetings, I started noticing that this same basic mindset of whatever non-Autistics were, Autistics are the exact opposite, and vise-versa. Furthermore, I noticed that the stereotypes about Autistics was very similar to those of men, and the stereotypes about Neurotypicals was very similar to those of women.

Please refrain from using any textbook terminology, except for those that you truly believe describe you, and describe how you view your brain works in ways that you believe others just don’t understand:

- 2) **What are your autistic gifts?** It is both very frustrating and misleading for autistics to be viewed solely by the things that they struggle at.

Please provide a list of special gifts that you believe that you have as a direct result of your autism. Make sure to include specific examples of how these gifts have benefited you:

3) What personal attributes of yours can be an asset in certain setting, but a detriment in others? An individual with a strong personality can be a driving force to get stuff when supported by those who buy in to their vision; but can also provoke an adversarial response when they try to interact with individuals who they're not as well acquainted with. Not only most personality attributes perfect for one situation, but detrimental to others, there're a number of attributes of Autism/Asperger's that can also be a mixed blessing.

Please describe attributes that you have, Autistic/Aspie or otherwise, that help you to succeed in one endeavor, but struggle in another:

4) Which of your autistic struggles have self-corrected? Science shows that the unique struggles autistics have are the result of some parts of their brain developing differently than a neurotypical brain does. As a result, these parts of the autistic's brain are less active than the same parts of the brain of a neurotypical. In addition, science also shows that the human brain is "plastic," meaning that our brain is constantly changing, enabling it to adapt in both positive and negative ways. This provides us with scientific evidence that some areas which autistics struggle with may be modifiable.

Therefore, please list your autistic struggles from the early years of your life that you believe may have self-corrected. Include any sensory processing issues that do not affect to the same extent as they may have in the past:

5) Which of your autistic struggles have you learned to manage? We autistics should never assume that we are hapless victims of our autism. Although autistics may object to everyone trying to change us, the fact is that there are things that we really would want to improve about ourselves because doing so would make life so much easier on us. Just because many of our struggles are neurological in origin does not necessarily mean that we are powerless to do anything about them. Many of our struggles can be managed through the use with proper strategies and coping skills by those who are willing to mentor us. Securing the cooperation of those that we interact with on a regular basis will make things a lot easier for us, but all self-improvement hinges on the choices of the person seeking to improve themselves.

Therefore, please make a list of areas that you still struggle with that you have learned effective strategies for dealing with. This does not necessarily mean that you consistently implement these strategies in an effective manner, but that you do possess the knowledge to do so:

6) Which of your autistic struggles have you not yet learned how to manage? I can provide no guarantee every area that Autistic/Aspies struggle with will self-correct or be managed. There is also the possibility that some of the autistics who are doing this worksheet simply have not yet gained sufficient neurological development. Others may not have learned effective self-management techniques due to a lack of age and/or experience.

Please list the areas that you still struggle with:

7) What dysfunctional behaviors of others aggravate your autistic struggles? There have been many times when I've talked to my personal advisors about the problems that other people's behaviors cause me, especially those that make it impossible to manage my autistic struggles. I am often told that such behaviors cause problems for everybody. There have been tens of thousands of books written about parenting, teaching, childcare, marriage, conflict resolution, leadership, business management, etc. Although there may be a degree of variance in what should and should not be done, there are also number of principles that are as close to universal that they could be considered absolutes. Some of these things are considered common sense principles that you should not need to buy a book to tell you. So why do so many people do things when they should know better, but neglecting to the things that they should know they need to do?

Please List those things that would make your life easier if other would start or stop doing:

8) What judgements that non-neurotypicals have made about you do you feel to be erroneous?

Please list those things that would make your life easier if others would start or stop doing them:

COMMON AUTISTIC/ASPIE ISSUES THAT YOU MAY OR MAY NOT DEAL WITH

Although many of these issues may have been brought up in the previous section; sensory processing issues affect such a large portion of the Autistic community that they do need to be singled out here to make sure that they are addressed. The atypical neurology that autistics have can result in their brain having difficulties processing sensory input. This can make autistics hyper or hypo sensitive to sensory stimuli; as well as well as confusion in the brain's ability to interpret the information.

As I said earlier, science shows that the human brain is "plastic," meaning that our brain is constantly changing. Because of this, it is possible for these sensory processing issues to self-correct in part or in whole. Unfortunately, the process reverses as our brain starts to deteriorate as we get older. This can result in not only Autistics/Aspies developing these issues later in life, but neurotypicals developing some of these same issues.

9) What sensory processing issue(s) have you struggled with?

- a.** Please describe what sensory processing issues that you may have had, but has since completely self-corrected to the point that it is no longer a problem:

- b.** Please describe what sensory processing issues that have impacted you at some point in your life, but no longer impact you to the extent that they once did:

- c.** Please describe what sensory processing issues you still struggle with and what you do to better manage them:

10) Have you ever had problems with being touched? It is an erroneous assumption that Autistics who do not want to be touched lack a desire for affection. In actuality, this is a sensory processing issue. Some Autistics have a negative physical reaction to touch due to the brain having difficulties processing sensory stimuli through the sense of touch.

If you have ever had problems in this area, please explain the physical reaction that you had to people touching you:

11) Have you ever had problems with “aggressive” behavior (hitting, biting, etc.)? It is understandable to assume that hitting, biting, etc. would be classified as “aggressive behavior.” However, if the intent of Autistic is to prevent another person from doing something that would trigger a sensory processing issue with in them, then should the behavior not be classified as self-defense?

I am not attempting to use these sensory processing issues as an Autistic’s “get out of jail free card.” Nor do I support the notion that Autistics never engage in inappropriate and/or malicious behavior and therefore should never be disciplined. After all, Autistics are just as human as everyone else and is therefore capable of engaging in inappropriate and/or malicious behavior as anyone else. Furthermore, Autistics are just as capable of being taught right from wrong as anyone else. Nevertheless, Autistics should be shown an appropriate amount of consideration when their sensory processing issues are a factor in their behavior.

Please describe any aggressive behavior(s) that you may have had at some point in your life that you believe was/were tied to specific sensory processing issue(s). Do you still have problems with this/these behavior(s) and sensory processing issue(s)?

12) How do you respond to emotional situations? Some Autistics struggle with managing stress and anxiety to such an extent that they may be prone to emotional outbursts. On the other hand, the misnomer that bothers many Autistics the most is that we lack empathy. This issue is being brought up in the sensory processing section because that is the true origin of this issue for some Autistics, who will at times get so overwhelmed by the intensity of the emotions of a situation that they might lose their capacity for self-expression.

13) Have you ever had bowel control issues? The fact that many Autistics have problems controlling their bowel movements is a well-known fact. However, what is not widely known is what the Autistic is experiencing moments, minutes and even hours leading up to their accidents. It is understandable that most would assume that bowel control issues originate in the gastrointestinal track, but it is erroneous for anyone to not consider the role that the brain plays in the defecation process and the problems that atypical neurological connectivity can cause.

Please describe the difficulties that you may have experienced with bowel control:

- a. **Please describe how you manage your stress and anxiety, or how you respond to such situations if you don't currently have effective means of self-management of these issues:**

b. If you believe you've every been accused of lacking compassion, being cold hearted, etc., please describe the situation:

14)What teaching techniques do you believe work best for you? Those who have already graduated from high school can only theorize about what techniques might have worked better for us during our K-12 years. Nevertheless, teachers today can try some of these theories to see if they might benefit some of the autistic children in their classes today. If you are thinking about going back to school, but are apprehensive because of your struggles in K-12, they might help you gain confidence that you can have a plan that might enable you to fare better.

a. Please provide some ideas of what kind of teaching techniques work better for you:

b. What kind of teaching techniques work do not for you:

15)What have your employment experiences been like? A lot of Autistics struggle to maintain employment for reasons that are directly connected to their Autism.

Please describe what, if any, problems you have had maintaining employment:

16)How do you respond to different social environments? Although it is a fact that Autistics do struggle in many social environments, it is a misnomer that they struggle in all social environments. It is also erroneous to assume that just because Autistics struggle in, and are often reluctant to join, social environments that they have no desire to socialize.

Therefore, please describe the following:

a. The kind of people that you find it easiest to socialize with:

b. The kind of people that you find it the hardest to socialize with:

c. What social environments are easiest for you:

d. What social environments are most difficult for you:

WHAT EMOTIONAL/PSYCHOLOGICAL ISSUES HAVE You STRUGGLED WITH?

With all of the focus that is placed on the neurological aspect of Autism; the emotional and psychological aspect of Autistics is almost completely neglected. The fact that the way you treat a neurotypical child greatly effects their social development is irrefutable, but the idea that the asocial and/or anti-social tendencies amongst the teen and adult Autistic could be connected to how their treated is considered a radical concept by many. Nevertheless, no matter what therapies, treatments and/or cures that an Autistic may or may not receive, they

will not develop effective social skills until their emotional and/or psychological issues are dealt with.

17)What needs of yours do you believe have gone unmet? Our needs may go unmet due to neglect, abandonment, our inability and/or unwillingness to express our needs, etc.

Please describe your unmet needs:

18)What physical, emotional and sexual abuse have you endured? The atypical social behaviors of autistics often times lead to destructive responses from those who do not understand us. The asocial tendencies of autistics can result in the kind of isolation that makes them prime targets for bullies and others who engage in predatory practices.

These are issues that we autistics must open up and talk about if we are ever going to overcome their consequences. Please indicate whether or not you have endured such experiences. If so, please indicate which types you have endured, the frequency you received such abuse and how old you were at the time.

a. Physical:

b. Emotional:

c. Sexual:

d. Unwanted Sexual Contact (This is listed separately from sexual abuse because some people, including many victims, perceive that there is a difference between the two. Nevertheless, one of the important issues that this question is attempting to address is the sexual vulnerability of autistics.):

19)Suicide thoughts and attempts.

- a.** Have you contemplated and/or attempted suicide?
- b.** If so, how old were you when you first started contemplating?
- c.** How old were you at the time of each of your attempts?
- d.** What was going through your mind as you contemplated such an irreversible solution?

20)What types of addictive/dysfunctional behaviors and character flaws have you struggled with? We autistics also need to recognize that not all of our struggles have anything to do with our autism. After all, we autistics are fallible human beings, just like the neurotypicals. All people, including Autistics, need to do their best to improve in any area that would help us live more fulfilling lives; especially if it becomes clear that we may have character flaws.

Taking responsibility for our choices is mandatory if we are going to succeed in changing the aspects of our lives that have become a detriment to us and those we interact with. Furthermore, using autism like a "get out of jail free card" will cause us to lose the respect and cooperation of many of those who might otherwise be sympathetic towards us.

Please acknowledge what issues of this nature you need to overcome:

GETTING HELP

21) Name all of the diagnosis you can remember being given. Those of us who graduated from school prior to the 1990s went through our school years before most of our educators and counselors even heard of "high functioning" Autism/Asperger's. They attempted to explain our atypical behaviors and development by diagnosing us with the only conditions that they were aware of at the time, are simply made judgements about what some of them perceived to be our motivations and/or lack of effort. There are also other conditions that bear resemblance to Autism/Asperger's. Some are now being considered as possibly being an aspect or variation of Autism/Asperger's.

Please provide as thrall of a list as you can recall of everything you have ever been diagnosed with, as well as judgements about you that you believe to be erroneous:

22) What types of treatments and/or therapies have been attempted with you and what were the results? Please list as many of the different treatments and/or therapies the experts recommended for you. Explain to the best of your ability the reasons that were given for why they believed these treatments and/or therapies might help you. What is your assessment of the effectiveness of these treatments and/or therapies?

23) What questions about yourself were answered when you were diagnosed with autism? Those of us who were diagnosed with Autism/Asperger's later in life spent our lives asking, why do we struggle with some of the simplest things? Why can we not do things that everyone is expected to have mastered when they were much younger than we are? Why do people not believe us when we say we are trying our best? Why are we treated so differently than others? What do we need to do so we can simply fit in with those who are around us?

- a.** What specific questions that you had when you first learned about your autism that you had to answers to.

- b.** What questions do you still have that you have yet to have answered?

WHAT IS YOUR OPTION ABOUT THE FOLLOWING?

The opinions that Autistics/Aspies have about Autism/Asperger's does matter, even if some interact with us in a manner that shows no real regard for what we have to say about ourselves and what we want for ourselves. It is not only the right, but also the responsibility, of every Autistic/Aspie to express their views in order that others can understand their needs, wants, desires, etc.

24)Neurodiversity:

25)The Person 1st view of Autism:

26)Research into a cure for Autism:

27)Biomedical treatments for Autistics:

28)“Normalization” of Autistics:

29)Vaccines causing Autism:

30)What do you believe is the best mindset to approach the subject of Autism with?

OTHER INFORMATION THAT YOU WOULD LIKE OTHERS TO KNOW ABOUT YOU AND YOURSELF