

The Bridges to Adelphi Program: A Comprehensive College Support Program for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder

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While there are no clear answers to the enigma of Asperger Syndrome, there are unexpected treasures

Jesse Saperstein, *Atypical Life With Asperger's in 20 1/3 Chapters*



Bridges to Adelphi Program

- The Bridges to Adelphi Program is designed to support Adelphi University students who self identify with diagnoses of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), or other non-verbal learning disorders.
- The Bridges Program is offered through the Division of Student Affairs
- Began as a granted pilot project in 2007, funded by Jewish Child Care Association



Bridges to Adelphi Program

- Academic criteria for acceptance to the university must be met first
- No separate application or admittance process
- Fee for service program
- 75 Students
- 23 Staff



Autism Spectrum Disorder

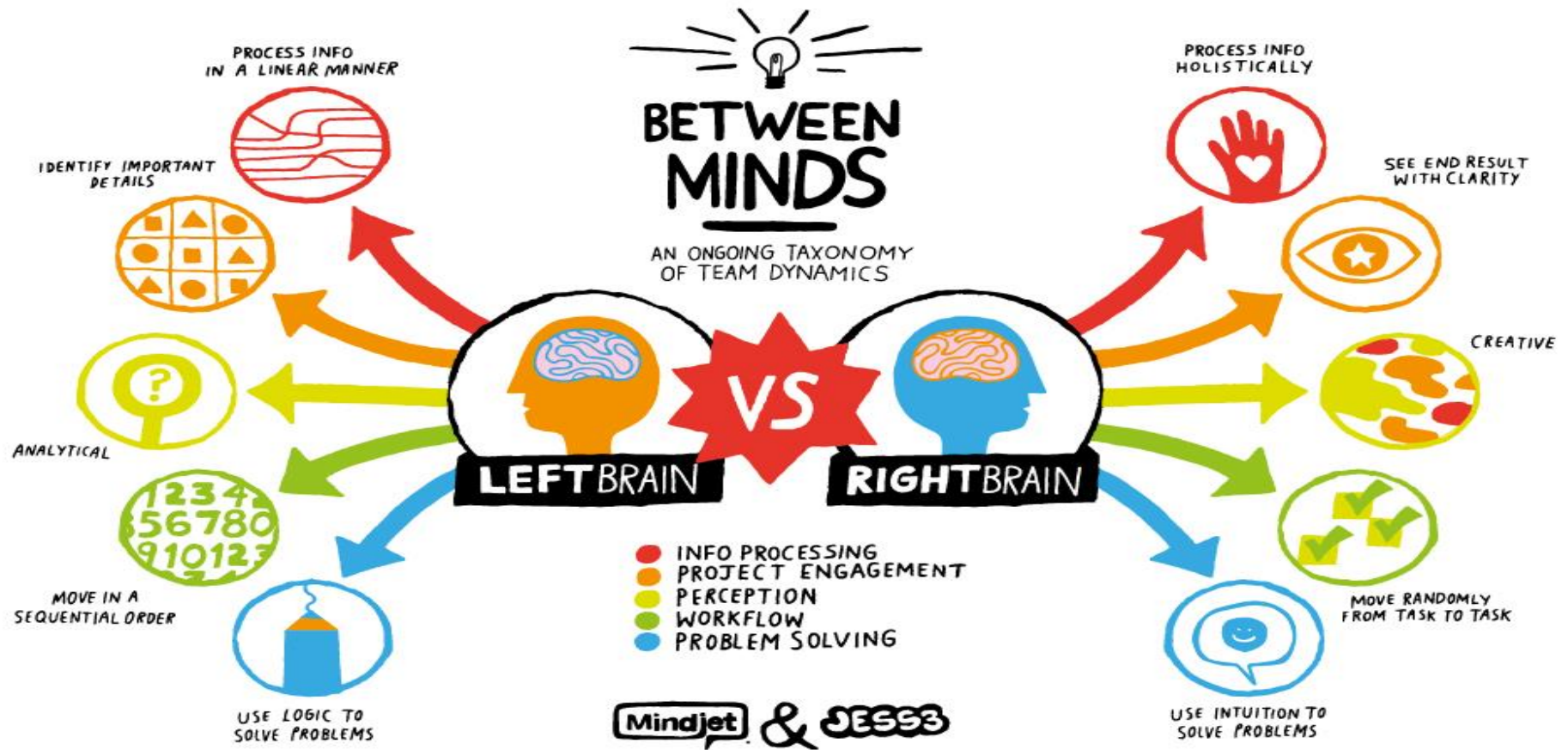
- ASD is a complex pervasive developmental disorder resulting from a neuro-developmental malfunction that affects normal functioning of the brain.
- Because ASD is a pervasive developmental disorder, it is different from a learning disability in that it affects all areas of functioning including academic performance, social interactions, interpersonal communication, and executive functioning skills.
- Therefore, a college support program for students with ASD must take a pervasive approach
- ASD is a non-verbal learning disorder
 - 70% of communication is non-verbal



Autism Spectrum Disorder

- DSM- V
- 1 in 88
- There are never two people with ASD who are exactly the same.
- ASD is not mental illness
- The majority of people with ASD also struggle with anxiety and depression
- ASD is a life long problem
- ASD is often a “right brain” disability





High School vs College

- IDEA vs ADA
- IEP vs Accommodations
- Mandated vs Offered
- Self Advocacy
- Parental Involvement
- Faculty Expectations
- First time away from home



College Students on the Autism Spectrum

- Executive Functioning
- Fear of Failure
- Illogical/Distorted/Concrete Thinking
- Theory of Mind
- Impulse Control
- Affect Regulation
- Working Memory
- Processing Speed
- Communication Skills
- Social Skills
- Family Dynamics
- Independent Living Skills
- Comorbid Diagnoses
- Denial
- Past History/PTSD
- Transitions



College Students on the Autism Spectrum

Creative/Visual Thinkers

- May think in photographic images
- Excel in arts
- Struggle with math, languages
- Careers in fine arts, drafting, photography, graphic design, jewelry design
- As children they enjoy playing with building toys like LEGO's



College Students on the Autism Spectrum

Verbal Thinkers

- Think in word details.
- Excel in amassing large amounts of information and facts about specific subjects such as history, geography, foreign language, weather, stock market reports, and sports statistics.
- Struggle with drawing, math, abstract thinking
- Careers in language translation, journalism, accounting, speech therapy, economics, library work, or financial analysis
- As children, may remember and recite long strings of information



College Students on the Autism Spectrum

Pattern Thinkers

- Think in patterns
- Excel at music, math, foreign languages, and computer programming.
- Often see patterns and relationships between patterns and numbers instead of thinking in pictures
- Struggle with written language, and verbal expression
- Careers in computer programming, engineering, music, and physics
- As children they may play music by ear, and be interested in chess or video games



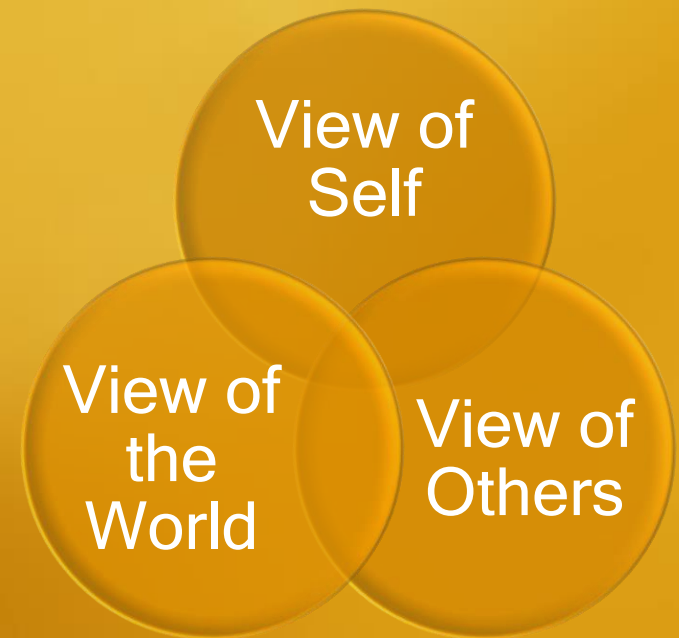
Automatic Negative Thinking

These three circles are the core information processing issues that are central to automatic negative thinking

Circle 1 - "I'm no good"

Circle 2 - "I don't understand others, and they don't understand me"

Circle 3 - "I have failed before. I don't want to fail again. Therefore, I am not going to do it"....This leads to failure, which then acts as a self fulfilling prophecy....which leads back to Circle 1



Helpful Techniques

- Identify what type of thinker this student is
- Create an accepting, calm, predictable environment
- 4C's - clear, concise, concrete and consistent
- Avoid sarcasm, irony, double entendres
- Limit your questions and thoughts
- Natural consequences
- Never take it personally



Student # 1

- Male - Freshman
- Full scholarship, 800 on Math SATs
- Physics/math major = Pattern learner
- Concrete thinker needs a "logical" explanation behind everything
- Poor EFDs
- Poor impulse control, Poor frustration tolerance, Poor affect regulation
- Does not read social cues.....ToM
- Impulsivity leads to poor classroom behaviors.....ToM
- Dysgraphia
- Poor transitioning skills
- OCD

- » Lived on campus, now commutes
- » Mentor" in each class
- » Concrete and consistent rules and boundaries
- » "3 strikes and you are out"
- » Internal vs. External thoughts
- » Student Counseling Center
- » Natural consequences



Student #2

- Female - Senior
 - Honors student
 - Originally political science major, now fine arts... she is an “Artist”
 - Creative thinker, writer
 - Poor ToM
 - Struggles with anxiety, depression, and ANT’s
 - Emotionally labile
 - Procrastination and avoidance
 - Processing speed
 - Went to a small private school from K - 12 where her mother worked
 - Lives on campus, dorms with a fellow female Bridges student
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- » Identify triggers: Accepting others opinions, ANTs, and procrastination , med management, diet, sleep
 - » Student Counseling Center
 - » Sketchbook
 - » Vocational planning



Student #3

- Male - Freshman
- Verbal thinker
- 720 Math SAT's 660 Verbal SAT's
- 95 HS Average
- Mainstream NYC HS School
- Bio Major
- Dorming in single
- Medications
- HS vs College
- Put out of several classes due to provocative behaviors
 - Psychiatric/Psychologist consults
 - Faculty involved
 - Parents involved
 - Natural consequences
 - Consistency



Bridges to Adelphi Program

- Based on psychological principles of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, Social Learning Theory, Person Centered Therapy / Unconditional Positive Regard, Temple Grandin
- Bridges strives to create an environment supportive of the intellectual, emotional, and spiritual needs of students
- Maximize areas of student strengths, encouraging creativity and self esteem
- Foster each student's unique view of the world
 - "See the world through their eyes"
 - "Hear their music"
 - Try to be the first "To get them"
 - Build trust



Bridges to Adelphi Program

- All services are provided by current Adelphi graduate students studying:
 - Psychology
 - School Psychology
 - Education
 - Social Work
 - Speech and Communication Theory



Bridges to Adelphi Program

- Academic Services
- Social Services
- Vocational Services

- Reports and documentation



Bridges to Adelphi Program

Academic Coach

- Focus on executive functioning
 - Following syllabi
 - Planning work and assignments
 - Time management
 - Self care
 - Accessing academic accommodations
- Academic Coaches are interested in how students think about things



Bridges to Adelphi Program

Learning Strategist

- Focus on assignment completion
 - Research
 - Editing assignments
 - Test preparation & studying
- Learning Strategists are interested in how students learn, and work
- Academic Coaches and Learning Strategists collaborate



Bridges to Adelphi Program

Other Academic Supports & Benefits

- Priority registration
- Director is academic adviser
- With consent, contact with DSS
- With consent, contact with faculty
- With consent, contact with family
- Computer/Math Coach



Bridges to Adelphi Program

Social Services

- Bridges office is open:
 - 8am - 8pm Monday - Friday
 - 9am - 4pm on Saturday
- Twice weekly open groups
- Weekly Women's group
- Weekly Men's group
- Monthly outings
- Peer mentoring



Bridges to Adelphi Program

Vocational Services

- Vocational testing
- Individual and group vocational counseling
- ACCES-VR
- On campus internships
- Off campus partnerships
- Post graduate vocational program partnerships



Bridges to Adelphi Program

Benefits to the University

- University is responding to growing awareness and need
- Positive community regard
- Students are an asset to the campus
- Non-tuition income
- Retention
- Diversity
- Unique training opportunity for staff
- Research



Bridges to Adelphi Program

Program Challenges

- Growth
- Support from upper administration
- Space
- Support from faculty and staff
- Staffing
 - Professional vs. Grad students
 - Training
- Post graduation



Bridges to Adelphi Program

Partnering with:

- Academic Provost
- Faculty
- Administrative Staff
- Student Counseling Center
- Disability Support Services
- Learning/Writing Center
- Admissions
- Residential Life
- Registrar
- Student Conduct
- Public Safety
- Conference Services



Bridges to Adelphi Program

Research

Longitudinal study on the intercorrelations between, and differences over time

- Self-Esteem
- GPA
- Attendance
- Retention

Intercorrelations and differences between

- Alexithymia
- Emotion Regulation Difficulties
- Anxiety



Suggested Readings

Developing College Skills in Students with Autism and Asperger Syndrome

Freedman

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Adult Asperger Syndrome

Gaus

Thinking in Pictures: My Life with Autism

Grandin

Succeeding in College with Asperger Syndrome

Harpur, Lawlor, and Fitzgerald

ATYPICAL Life With Asperger's in 20 1/3 Chapters

Saperstein

Students with Asperger Syndrome: A Guide for College Personnel

Wolf, Brown, Bork

