



**AUTISM
CANADA
AUTISME**
See The Spectrum Differently
le spectre autrement



POST-SECONDARY DIGITAL TOOLKIT

A guide for faculty, peers, and autistic students
in post-secondary institutions.

Advocate • Educate • Support

Défendre • Éduquer • Appuyer

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Overview of the Digital Toolkit

The digital toolkit is intended to inform post-secondary institutions on how to support neurodivergent students, facilitate connections between peers and neurodivergents, and provide assistance, support, and resources to neurodivergent students. The toolkit includes four sections of information: Mental Health, Faculty, Peer, and Individual.

The Mental Health portion includes information on co-occurring conditions and mental health, suicidal ideation, masking and autistic break, and intersectionality. The toolkit also includes communities and resources for LGBTQIA2+, Indigenous, and BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and other people of colour) individuals.

The Faculty component includes information on understanding autism and the signs of an autistic student, resources on diagnoses for students, best communication practices, available accommodations, and stigma and discrimination prevention. These resources will allow the faculty members to better understand and accommodate neurodivergent students.

The Peer section has peer-based support, best communication practices, and stigma and discrimination prevention. This will allow neurodivergent students to connect with their peers in a meaningful way.

The Individual part includes a guide to accessing services, supports, peer programs, accommodations, and self-advocacy for neurodivergent students. This portion also covers the use of an Individual Education Plan (IEP) and its accommodations.

Mental Health

Mental health is composed of emotional, psychological, and social components. Taking care of our mental health is essential to our well-being. Individuals on the autism spectrum are more likely to experience difficulties with mental health, specifically anxiety and depression. By prioritizing and learning about mental health, it is possible to minimize hardships and improve overall mental wellbeing.

A note on language: Autism Canada recognizes that there are a variety of language preferences within the autism community. Out of respect for these preferences, Autism Canada utilizes both identity-first and person-first language interchangeably in our communications. Please refer to our [Words Matter Guide](#) to learn more about inclusive language.

If you or someone you know is at immediate risk, dial 911

Suicidal Ideation

Suicidal ideation refers to when an individual is thinking about suicide or planning to die by suicide. Research has suggested that suicidal ideation may be more common in individuals on the autism spectrum. Some signs to look out for when an individual is experiencing suicidal ideations include withdrawal from usual activities, decreasing social contact and using phrases such as “when I’m gone”. There is always help available for those experiencing suicidal ideations.

- Youth: Kids Help Phone 1-800-668-6868
- [Youth at Risk – Centre for Suicide Prevention](#)
- [Canada Suicide Prevention Service](#)
- [Centre for Suicide Prevention](#)

Co-occurring Conditions and Mental Health

These resources describe the co-occurring conditions that may be present with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

- [Mental Illness vs. Autism and Other Developmental Disorders](#) - Discusses the differences between mental illness and developmental disorders and how ASD and mental illness are related.
- [Co-occurring Conditions](#) - This link describes the co-occurring conditions that may be present with ASD.
- [Addressing Mental Health Issues](#) - Mental health disorders in youth and adults with ASD pose a significant clinical problem and often have a marked effect on their quality of life. Anxiety disorders and mood disorders occur at a higher rate in individuals with ASD compared to the general population.
- [Sleep Problems and Autism Spectrum Disorder](#) - Many studies have shown that a lack of sleep results in poor daytime behaviour in ASD, such as daytime sleepiness, depression, anxiety, lack of concentration, hyperactivity, increased distractibility, irritability, and poor learning abilities.
- [Understanding Sensory Processing Disorder | Understood - For learning and thinking differences](#) - Learn more about how sensory processing can impact a student's ability to learn and process information.

BIPOC Communities

There is a lack of research about the experience of people from Black, Indigenous and People of Colour (BIPOC) groups. Individuals who are part of the BIPOC community and on the autism spectrum may have a difficult time receiving support. It is essential to understand and learn about the experiences of BIPOC autistic people.

- [8 Black Mental Health Resources in Canada and Online](#)
- [Infographic: BIPOC and LGBTQ+ Mental Health](#)
- [Resources for Marginalized Communities and Allies](#)

Depression/Anxiety

It is normal to periodically experience feelings of sadness, but when you are feeling sad for an extended period, you may be experiencing depression. Anxiety is a common experience and can be helpful in certain situations, but when anxiety begins to interrupt your usual activities, you may wonder if you could have an anxiety disorder. Typically, symptoms of anxiety can be present in physical responses, thoughts, emotions, and behaviours.

If you or someone you know is at immediate risk, dial 911

We have provided resources to help you cope with feelings of anxiety and depression.

- [Psychiatry Advisor - Depression With Autism: Effective Diagnosis and Treatment](#)
- [Anxiety Canada - Anxiety in Adults](#)
- [Anxiety Canada - Anxiety in Youth](#)
- [Kids Help Phone - Am I experiencing depression?](#)
- [BounceBack by CMHA \(Program\) - a free, national evidence-based, self-help program for adolescents/adults, experiencing low mood, mild to moderate depression or anxiety, stress or worries.](#)
- [How can you support your teenager with autism spectrum disorder if they are depressed?](#)
- [Understanding and Managing Autism and Anxiety in Adults](#)

Masking/Autistic Break

Masking occurs when an individual tries to hide signs of their autism, such as stimming and fidgeting. Masking is more common among women and girls, which is why they are less likely to receive an autism diagnosis. Masking can be extremely stressful because it requires conscious effort to hide one's autism.

An autistic break or burnout occurs when an individual becomes exhausted from trying to fit into a 'neurotypical' society. Autistic burnout can occur at any age, but it typically occurs during major life transitions.

During an autistic burnout, an individual may experience physical, mental and/or emotional exhaustion, pain, confusion, irritability. Sometimes individuals may also experience a loss of skills or social withdrawal during the burnout period. We have provided some educational material on masking and autistic breaks/burnout.

- [Masking: The costs of camouflaging autism](#)
- [What is Autism Masking and Why Does it Affect Women More?](#)
- [Autistic Burnout, explained](#)
- [Autistic Burnout: An Often-Misunderstood Element of Autism](#)
- [Autistic Burnout: How to Recognize the Signs and Find Treatment](#)

Intersectionality

- [LGBTQ Supports for Bullying and Harassment](#)
- [What is Intersectionality?](#)
- [Figuring Out Your Sexual Orientation](#)

- [Resources for Autistic LGBTQIA+ people - Autism Spectrum](#)
- [LGBTQI Resource Page](#) - These resources were developed by a young autistic adult who is part of the LGBTQI community, in order to share information, resources and insights to self-advocates, parents and families.

Conclusion

Taking care of your mental health is just as important as taking care of your physical health. Paying attention to your mental health requires support, practice, and patience.

It is important to remember that our emotions fluctuate frequently, but constant mental health difficulties may indicate that you need some extra assistance.

For general mental health resources, you can visit:

- [Canadian Mental Health Association](#)
- [Youth Mental Health Canada: YMHC](#)
- [MindYourMind](#)
- [Webinar - Finding Your Way Through the Healthcare Maze with Yona Lunsky](#)

Autism Canada Resources:

[Autism Canada website](#)

[Autism Junction, Provincial & Territorial Funding, and other resources](#)

[Frequently Asked Questions](#)

Faculty

Many of the faculty and professors at post-secondary institutions lack the resources to better understand and accommodate students with disabilities, including invisible disabilities. Invisible disabilities may include neurological conditions, autism spectrum disorder, learning and processing differences, and mental health issues.

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Understanding Autism

- [What Does Autism Spectrum Disorder Look Like in Adults?](#)
- [Understanding Sensory Processing Disorder | Understood - For learning and thinking differences](#) - Learn more about how sensory processing can impact a student's ability to learn and process information.
- [Understanding Autism](#)
- [Understanding the Three Levels of Autism](#)
- [Transition to Postsecondary Pathways for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder \(ASD\)](#) - information about implementing useful practices to increase accessibility.

Communication, Accommodations, and Support

These resources will be beneficial for faculty members of post-secondary institutions to get a deeper understanding of autism and how to better communicate and support students on the autism spectrum.

- [How to Communicate Better with Neurotypical and Autistic Adults](#)
- [Best Communication Practices for Interacting with People with Autism](#)
- [What are typical challenges and accommodations for students with Autism Spectrum Disorder?](#)
- [Nine Domains of Accommodations](#)
- [Understanding and Supporting College Students with ASD](#)
- [Improving Communication & Behaviour - improving learning strategies and tackle challenges regarding communication involving students on the spectrum.](#)
- [Communication Challenges in College Students with ASD - addressing accessibility programs in post-secondary schools and challenges for students with autism](#)
- [Resources for building connectedness with adolescents with autism](#)

Educational Practices and Tips

- [The Transition to Post-Secondary studies](#)
- [Remote Learning for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder](#)
- [Transition to Postsecondary Pathways for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder \(ASD\): Translating Research into Practice](#)

Stigma and Discrimination

These resources will be beneficial for faculty members of post-secondary institutions to get a better understanding of the stigma and discrimination around autism.

- [Spectrum: Autistic and Disabled LGBT+ Young People Speak Out - young people who identify as SEND \(Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities\) and LGBT+ were interviewed about their experiences.](#)
- [What Women With Autism Want You to Know | Iris](#)

Additional Resources

[Neurodiversity Hub – Resources for Universities](#)

The #ActuallyAutistic Communities are all lead by neurodivergent people and self-advocates. They are the subject matter experts who can help with some of the difficult questions.

- YouTube: [actuallyautistic - Bing video](#)
- Facebook: [Actually Autistic](#)
- Twitter: [#ActuallyAutistic](#)
- Bloggers: [ActuallyAutistic bloggers | The Art of Autism](#)
- TikTok: [#actuallyautistic Hashtag Videos on TikTok](#)
- Instagram: [#actuallyautistics on Instagram](#)

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[Autism Junction, Provincial & Territorial Funding, and other resources](#)

[Frequently Asked Questions](#)

Peer

Through the Peer section, students can learn how to connect with their peers in meaningful ways. These resources will be beneficial for the student body at post-secondary institutions to get a fuller understanding of autism and how to better accommodate, communicate with and support fellow students on the spectrum and their peers.

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Communication

- [How to Communicate Better with Neurotypical and Autistic Adults](#)
- [Best Communication Practices for Interacting with People with Autism](#)

Stigma and Discrimination

- [Spectrum: Autistic and Disabled LGBT+ Young People Speak Out](#) - young people who identify as SEND (Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities) and LGBT+ were interviewed about their experiences.
- [What Women With Autism Want You to Know | Iris](#)

Peer Support

- [What are typical challenges and accommodations for students with Autism Spectrum Disorder?](#)
- [Understanding and Supporting College Students with ASD](#)
- [Peer-based Support for ASD](#)
- [Exploring meanings of development and peer support aimed at people on the autism spectrum](#)
- [Forge friendships with autistic students](#)
- [Understanding autism's effect on friendships and social interactions](#)

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Individual

The Individual section is a guide for autistic students to access important services, programs, and accommodations. These resources will be extremely helpful in the transition and adjustment to post-secondary school. It also emphasizes the importance of self-advocacy and proper accommodation, including Individual Education Plans (IEPs) for autistic students.

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Understanding Autism

These resources will be beneficial for students on the autism spectrum at post-secondary institutions to get a better understanding of autism:

- [What Does Autism Spectrum Disorder Look Like in Adults?](#)
- [Understanding the Three Levels of Autism](#)
- [What it's really like to have autism](#) - A TedTalk about what it's like to be on the autism spectrum from the perspective of an autistic.
- [What are typical challenges and accommodations for students with Autism Spectrum Disorder?](#)

Access to Services and Support

These resources will be beneficial for students on the spectrum to assist them in finding needed support as well as some helpful tools:

- [Canadian Post-Secondary Schools Education Support Programs](#)
- [Effective Use of Educational Software](#)
- [Accessing Inclusive Personal Training Programs for Young Adults with Autism](#)
- [Getting a Diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder \(ASD\) in Adolescence or Adulthood](#)

Resources for Life on Campus

- [Autistic Self Advocacy Network, Navigating College](#) - the Navigating College handbook is a first-of-its-kind resource written by autistic adults for autistic college students exploring the various aspects of the higher education experience.
- [Transition Resource Guide for Students with Disabilities – Transition to Post-Secondary Education](#)
- [Facing the Challenges of Post-Secondary Education](#)
- [The Transition to Post-Secondary studies - important information and tips for a better transition into post-secondary.](#)
- [Critical Success Factors for Adults with ASD](#)
- [Tips for staying organized in college/university.](#)
- [Tips to manage social anxiety.](#)
- [Social Matters - improving Social Skills Interventions for Individuals with ASD.](#)
- [Webinar - Women on the Spectrum](#)

- [Peer-based Support for ASD](#)
- [The Emotional Toolbox](#) - The Emotional Toolbox represents a collection of tools (strategies) designed to help people deal with negative emotions.

LGBTQIA2+ Resources

- [LGBTQI Resource Page](#)
- [Coming Out](#)
- [Figuring Out Your Sexual Orientation Homophobia](#)
- [LGBTQ Supports for Bullying and Harassment](#)
- [Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity](#)
- [Being LGBTQ+ and on the Autism Spectrum](#)
- [Resources for Autistic LGBTQIA+ people](#)
- [Queerly Autistic Resources](#) - contains links to books, websites and YouTube videos that might be helpful to explore the topics further, as well as information on how to get in touch with organizations that may be able to help you in a crisis.
- [Autistic Self Advocacy Network - Needs of Trans Autistic People](#)
- [Asperger/Autism Network - LGBTQ+](#)

Academic Resources and Tools

- [Developing Job Skills](#)
- [Assistive technology to help children with autism spectrum disorder \(ASD\) succeed academically](#)
- [Remote Learning for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder](#)

- Beeline Reader - Beeline displays text using colour gradients that support visual tracking and allows readers to focus more on other aspects of reading, improving the reading abilities of students of all ages and skill levels.
- Biology Simulations - Virtual lab simulations for students to explore. Topics include biology, evolution, ecology, and cells.
- ZoomText - Fully integrated magnification and reading program tailored for low-vision users. Magnifier/Reader enlarges and enhances everything on your computer screen, echoes your typing and essential program activity, and automatically reads documents, web pages, email.

Individual Education Plan and Accommodation

- What is an IEP?
- Effective educational practices for students with ASD
- Typical challenges and accommodations for students with ASD
- Nine domains of accommodation

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Autism Canada is a national organization with a grassroots perspective on the issues currently facing those with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Our mission is to advocate alongside and support individuals with autism, their families and caregivers living in Canada. We deliver on this mission by putting people first through education, advocacy, and support-based programming.