

April Autism Awareness Month

As per the definition provided by the [American Psychological Association \(APA\)](#), ASD encompasses a spectrum of developmental disorders that manifest primarily during the early years of a child's life. These disorders are characterized by challenges in social communication and interaction, as well as by repetitive behaviors, restricted interests, and activities.

Within [SIP](#), there exists a vast network of psychologists, therapists, educators, and researchers who specialize in ASD. Their collective expertise and commitment play a crucial role in enhancing the quality of life for individuals with ASD and their families. Through comprehensive assessments, evidence-based interventions, and ongoing support, SIP members strive to empower individuals with ASD to reach their full potential and lead fulfilling lives.

Take a look at the questions answered by SIP President [B.J. Boyd, Ph.D. \(Cherokee\)](#):

- What is a myth of ASD that you'd like to rebuke?

That you can self-diagnose from information you find on social media or the internet. These tools have been great for raising awareness of autism and have helped a lot of people recognize signs of ASD in themselves or their loved ones and look for help. However, there is also a lot of misinformation out there and you have to be very careful about the sources of information you use. ASD is a very complex condition with symptoms that can occur in several other disorders and you really need a thorough assessment by a medical or mental health professional with the appropriate training to make sure you receive an accurate diagnosis. An inaccurate diagnosis only leads to treatment interventions that will not help because they are based on an inaccurate assumption of what the problem is.

- How can we be more understanding or inclusive of the ASD community?

It helps to understand that ASD had a lot to do with how a person's brain is wired. If they struggle with social skills, it's not by choice and not because their family has not raised them well. We have to ask ourselves if whatever rule or social structure someone with ASD is struggling with is that important, or can it be changed. If someone with ASD are not actually harming anyone, can we adjust our way of doing things to make room for them, to help them feel comfortable and accepted. We seem to understand the need for accommodations for people with physical challenges, but we often do not consider how people who are neurodivergent also deserve accommodations. If we see them as relations (as Indigenous people often are supposed to do), who deserve our respect, compassion, and love, it becomes a lot easier to be inclusive.

- How have you incorporated culture to better serve the ASD community?

I think being aware of cultural differences is very important when assessing ASD in Indigenous people. Many of the signs or symptoms we are trained to look for as psychologists, such as degree of eye contact or styles of conversation and speech, must be

viewed in relation to cultural norms. Particularly when we know an Indigenous person may be working with non-Native educators, healthcare providers, or employers, we can help to highlight these distinctions and advocate for the people we serve. I think encouraging Indigenous people who have an ASD to consider engaging with their culture as a source of strength and support is also important. As Indigenous people, we often make room for people who may be a little different because they are our relations and they belong to the community, no matter what. People with ASD who struggle to feel accepted may find that their Indigenous community has a place for them.

April marks Autism Awareness Month, a time dedicated to raising awareness and promoting understanding of ASD within communities worldwide. SIP invites everyone to join them in their efforts to advocate for the ASD community during this month and beyond. By fostering greater acceptance, inclusion, and support, we can create a more compassionate and inclusive society where individuals with ASD are valued for their unique strengths and contributions.

Together, let's spread awareness, foster acceptance, and extend support to individuals with ASD and their families. Join SIP this April in championing the rights and well-being of the ASD community, and let's work towards creating a world where everyone, regardless of neurodiversity, can thrive!

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