



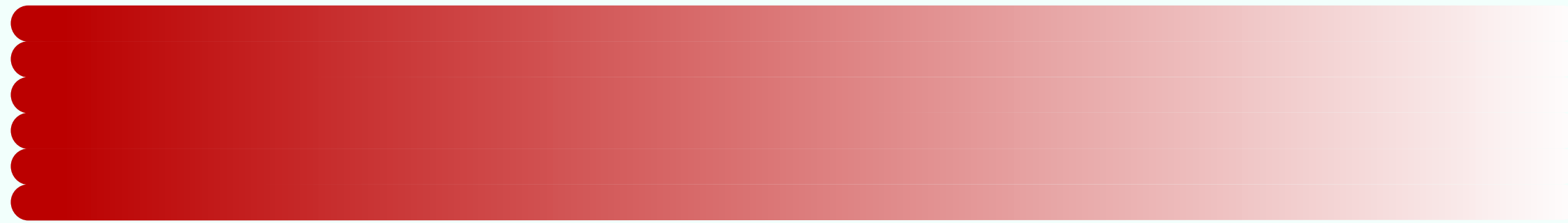
WHAT IS AUTISM?

The spectrum doesn't mean what you think it
means

YOU PROBABLY THINK OF THE SPECTRUM LIKE THIS

SEVERE AUTISM

MILD AUTISM



LOW FUNCTIONING

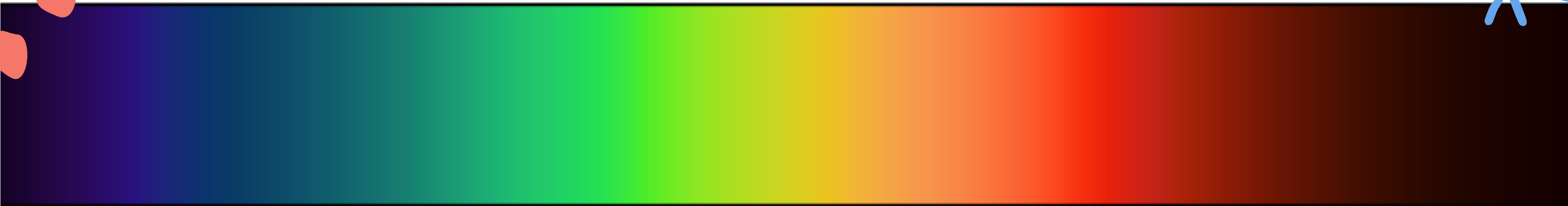
HIGH FUNCTIONING

OMG end of business

Affectionately quirky



BUT IT'S MORE LIKE THIS



Pragmatic Language	Social Awareness	Monotropic Mindset	Information Processing	Sensory Processing	Repetitive Behaviors	Neuro-Motor Differences
Social communication including body language, eye contact, small talk, and turn-taking in conversation.	Ability to pick up on etiquette, social norms, taboos. Ability to form and maintain relationships.	Narrow but intense ability to focus, resulting in "obsessive" interests and difficulty task-switching.	Ability to assimilate and apply new information quickly or to adapt to new environments or situations.	Challenges interpreting sensory information, hypersensitivity or hyposensitivity to stimuli.	Tendency to "stim" in response to varying emotions. Can be beneficial or harmful in nature.	Ability to control body movements. Ranges from clumsiness to complete loss of ability to move with intention.

PRAGMATIC LANGUAGE & ASSOCIATED PROCESSING STYLES

TERRA

- Extremely blunt and direct
- Does not ever do greetings or small talk
- Does not ever use hints
- Uses lots of jargon/ academic words
- Lots of tone and expression
- Dry humor/ deadpan
- Better in text than speech
- Situationally mute
- Quotes text verbatim

ERIC

- Rarely speaks
- Rarely gets beyond greetings/ small talk
- Mumbles, low volume
- Monologues on one topic
- Inappropriate humor
- Monotone
- Poor auditory processing
- Selective mutism
- Slight lisp, stammers and stutters when nervous

LEO

- Speaks when energetic
- Highly charismatic
- Catatonia/ no speech when low or exhausted; may go weeks without speaking
- Dominates conversation
- High vocabulary
- Loud voice and laugh
- Communication different from day to day
- Big words & creative swears

MAYA

- Considered nonspeaking
- Speaks but words do not match thoughts
- Understands what he hears
- Coprolalia & Echolalia
- Speaks in rhymes & metaphors
- Sing-song cadence
- Dark humor; slapstick; roasts
- Poor motor & impulse control

SOCIAL AWARENESS & ASSOCIATED PROCESSING STYLES

TERRA

- Feels other people's emotions before they do & more intensely
- Notices all subtle cues
- Understands language is implied but not what they mean
- Hermit, people avoidant
- Doesn't reach out to friends
- No small talk
- Hates indirect speech

ERIC

- Gets and remembers the roles of small talk
- Very polite
- Aware of pop culture trends
- Has conversations with people in his head
- Agreeable to a fault
- Cannot perceive tone or read hints
- Does not know how to keep conversation going

LEO

- Can read and respond to crowds but struggles one-on-one
- Life of the party
- Very charming, masks insecurities & autism
- Pushes boundaries to connect
- Very funny, witty
- Goes catatonic after big push
- Knows but rejects social norms

MAYA

- Understands social cues
- Highly attuned to emotions
- Remembers unique language of every individual
- Cannot do spontaneous speech so not able to converse typically
- Poor motor control and coprolalia make all social engagement difficult
- Loves being around friends

SENSORY AWARENESS & ASSOCIATED PROCESSING STYLES

TERRA

- Notices everything, very quickly overwhelmed
- No vestibular response, vision & hearing compensate
- Severe visual & auditory processing deficits
- Sensory avoidant, needs to lie in dark silence after social interaction
- Hates noise and moving or cluttered visuals

ERIC

- Very high body awareness, sensitive to pain/ discomfort
- Notices nothing in environment
- Very slow processing
- Rarely overwhelmed because low input of external stimuli
- Appears deaf at times
- Eats anything
- Doesn't notice smell
- Poor working memory

LEO

- Uneven sensory processing
- High seeker when happy; adrenaline junkie
- High avoider when down
- Needs intense flavors, music, and crowds when well
- Needs solitude when unwell
- Produces beautiful art, music, & writing when well
- Cannot do basic self care when unwell

MAYA

- High intensity sensory seeker
- High flavor foods & hot sauce
- Loves full body movement
- Hard rock or hip hop with deep bass blasting
- Drums and wants to move a lot
- Stims constantly by rocking, tapping chest and shoulders
- Seeks to laugh hard
- Has explosive emotions



WHY ARE AUTISTIC PEOPLE SO DIFFERENT?

**AUTISTIC PEOPLE ARE DIFFERENT FROM EACH
OTHER AND FROM NON-AUTISTICS.**

Autistics are all different because they're wired that way.
Here's your easiest neuroscience lesson ever.



ALLISTIC BRAINS

Most brains are like a series of well-connected highways between points of interest, with clear exit ramps and relatively even traffic distribution.

Traffic jams are rare.




AUTISTIC BRAINS

Autistic brains are like a series of 14-lane superhighways, detours, foot paths, scenic routes, boat streams, and winding West Virginia back roads. And everything stops for a train crossing.

Traffic jams are the norm.



AUTISTIC BRAINS ARE SPECIALIST BRAINS



In other words, some areas of autistic brains are hyper-connected and can intake or process hundreds or thousands of times more than an average person's; however, some are hypo-connected and may be totally non-functioning.

There is also much less communication between the left and right side of the brain for autistics (lateralization).

Sometimes, information is not even processed in the same part of the brain as it is for most people.





IMAGINE AN INFECTIOUS DISEASE EXPERT

WHOSE SPECIALIZATION WAS TO MANAGE PANDEMICS

Until 2020, this person was not in high demand. Others probably saw their career as a waste of time and talent. They were probably the source of complaints about government waste and "pork barrel" spending.

This is an appropriate metaphor for autistic neurology in a world of multi-taskers.

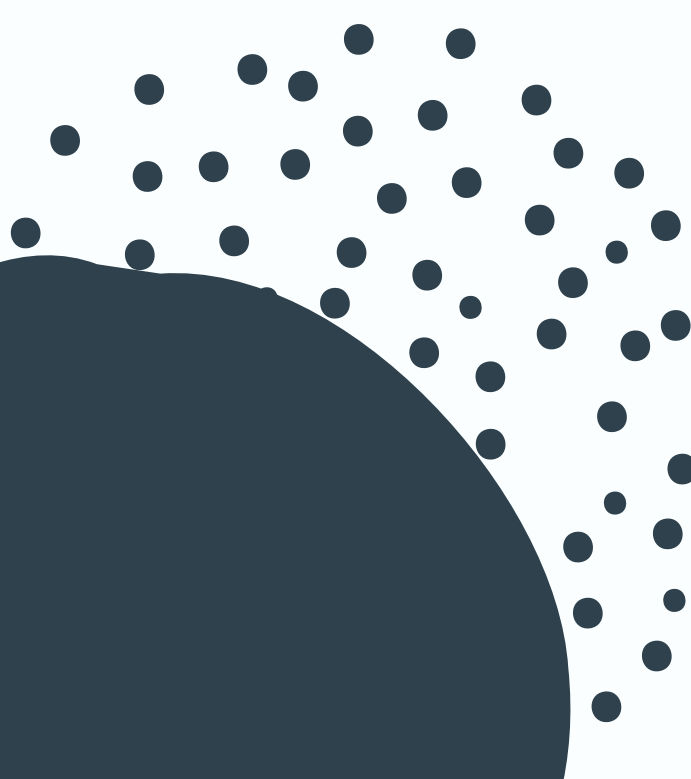


AN ANALOGY FROM AN AUTISTIC FIREMAN



I'm autistic and a firefighter. A friend of mine asked me if I thought her son could be autistic and what exactly does it mean to be autistic. Put on the spot, I defaulted to talking about my favorite topics-- firefighting and trains.

I told her that most people are very similar. Their differences are like the difference between a minivan, a sedan, a sports car, and an SUV. Their differences are relevant, they excel in various areas, and they are essentially able to perform the same basic functions. Some need more gas, some can tow more, some are faster, some have bigger trunks, but they are functionally similar.



But, I'm a fire truck. I have terrible suspension. If I run over a quarter, I can tell if it was on heads or tails. I can't turn corners easily or gracefully. It takes me a long time to get up to speed. I don't do well for errands. I am not convenient in parking lots.

Everyone is sad that I'm not a sedan, but that's only because they haven't been caught in a burning building recently.



My sister is a steam engine. It takes her a very long time to get going. She gets on a track and stays on it. She can carry more for longer than anyone I've ever known, but she cannot just stop. Nobody is as powerful as her, or as long-suffering. She can't adjust her trajectory.

People are frustrated with her because she isn't spontaneous enough, but that is like being frustrated with a steam engine for not running to the post office and picking up a few things from the convenience store.

Trains and fire rigs are not sedans. If someone wanted a sedan, they might not realize the value of a train or a rig.