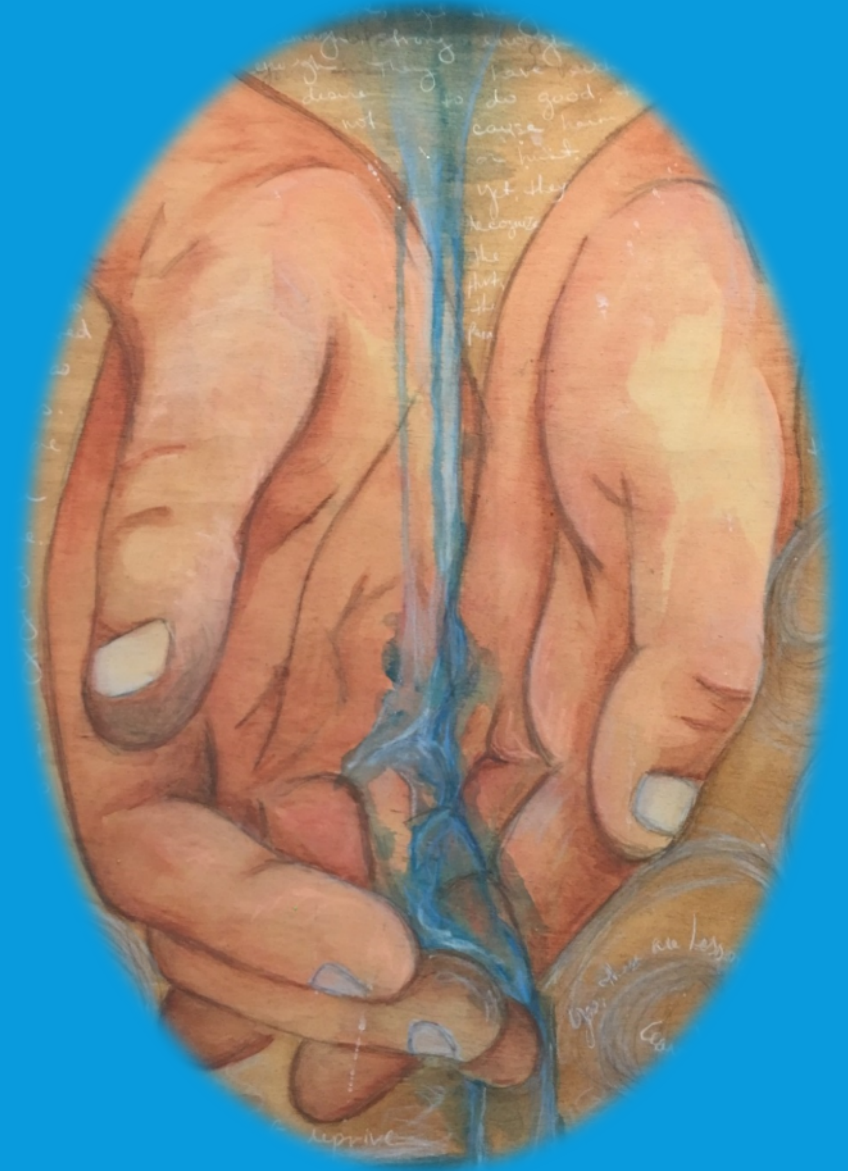


AUTISM AND AGING: *In Search of Community*

**The Fifth Annual Southeast Regional
Adult Autism Conference**
Chattanooga, Tennessee
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LEARNING OBJECTIVES



Participants will understand some strengths and limitations of community as it relates to adults on the autism spectrum.

Participants will gain an awareness of some challenges experienced by adults on the autism spectrum as it relates to engaging the community.

Participants will gain an understanding of some effective ways of finding community.

Participants will have an awareness of some personal resources available to adults on the autism spectrum as it relates to finding community.



COMMUNITY?



“...the term community refers to the obligations, gifts, or service that persons bring to one another...”

“ Community is similar to covenant, which suggest an overcoming of barriers between strangers .”

“...identifying of ways in which they can be resources for each other.”

(Dictionary of Pastoral Care and Counseling, Abington Press, 1990)

COMMUNITY, CONT.



A Collection of reciprocal relationships

**that heal,
educate,
equip,
and restore.**

COMMUNITY, CONT.



- **A safe place to explore**
- **Enjoy a common language**
- **A shared understanding of sacred things/places**



STRENGTHS OF COMMUNITY

RESOURCES



- **Spiritual**
- **Educational**
- **Psychological**
- **Economic**

HEALING



Physical

Spiritual

Psychological/Mental

Meaning

SOCIAL INTERACTION



Religious

Sports

Camping

Traveling



LIMITATIONS OF COMMUNITY



OUR SEARCH FOR MEANING



Meaning, refers to the interpretation of situations and events in terms of some broader frame of reference.” (McGuire, 1987)

Why is this happening to me?

Where is my place?

Who am I?

MEANING, CONT.



- Religion
- Sports
- Nature
- Science
- Art
- Music



- **Growth**
- **Be vulnerable**
- **To embrace moments of aloneness**



SPIRITUAL DISTRESS



Spiritual distress “...is the disruption in the life principle that pervades a person’s entire being and that integrates and transcends one’s biological and physical nature.”

(North American Nursing Diagnosis Association (NANDA))



- **A Personal Journey**
- **Planting “seeds of hope”**
- **Forgiveness as an approach to life**



COMMITMENT TO BOUNDARIES



Boundaries define us.

“They define what is me and what is not me.”

A Boundary shows me where I end and where someone else begins.”

“...leading me to a sense of ownership.”

(Cloud and Townsend, 1992, 2017)

BOUNDARIES, CONT.



- **Understanding personal space**
- **Seeking Awareness**
- **A pursuit of balance**
- **Taking communication risk**



AGING ON THE AUTISM SPECTRUM

A STRANGE LAND



- **When I was a child**
- **I was seen as a child**
- **I was nurtured as a child**

NOW THAT I AM AN ADULT.



- **Troubled Waters!**
- **Trusting my world view.**
- **Trusting my instincts.**

A TROUBLED NARRATIVE



- **A lifelong disorder/no cure**
- **Social difficulties**
- **Repetitive behavior**

WHAT ABOUT THERAPY?



- **What are the therapeutic goals?**
- **Is there a therapeutic relationship?**
- **I am not okay!**



**ABANDONMENT-DESPAIR-CONFUSION-
HOPELESSNESS-LONELINESS-LOST-YOU ARE
NOT OKAY-THERE IS NO HELP FOR YOU-**

AGING ON THE AUTISM SPECTRUM, CONT.



- **Stress**
- **Anguish**
- **Withdrawn**



**“WHERE DO WE GO
FROM HERE?”**



IN SEARCH OF **COMMUNITY**

THE PERSON IN THE MIRROR



- **“...Know thyself...”**
- **My deepest feelings**
- **My greatest fears**

THE PERSON IN THE MIRROR, CONT.



- **My pain**
- **My hopes**
- **My fears**
- **My desires**

THE PERSON IN THE MIRROR, CONT.



My shame

My grief

My Confusion/inner chaos

BOUNDARIES



- **Emotional**
- **Physical**
- **Social**

“I”



- **A person**
- **I reside in A physical structure called the body**
- **I am a part of nature**

HUMILITY



- **Forgiveness self and others**
- **Patience**
- **Healing as a process**



PERSONAL RESOURCES?



**POWERLESSNESS, DESPAIR, BROKENNESS,
CONFUSION, INNER CHAOS, ABANDONED,
MISUNDERSTOOD, UNFIXABLE, DISORDER,
HOPELESSNESS, UNACCEPTABLE, INVISIBLE,
UNSOCIABLE, INFLEXIBLE, UNEMPHATIC**



RESOURCES?



REALLY?



YES, REALLY?

PERSONAL/SPIRITUAL RESOURCES!



- **Abnormal social approach**
- **Failure in normal back and forth in conversation**
- **Reduced sharing of interests, emotions or affect**
- **Failure to initiate or respond to social interactions.**
- **Deficits in nonverbal communicative behaviors used for social interactions**
- **Poorly integrated verbal and nonverbal communication.**
- **Abnormalities in eye contact and body language or deficits in understanding the use of gestures.**
- **Deficits in developing, maintaining, and understanding relationships, ranging , for example, from difficulties adjusting behavior to suite various social contexts; to difficulties in sharing imaginative play or in making friends; to absence of interest in peers.**
- **Stereotyped or repetitive motor movements, use of objects or speech**
- **Insistence on sameness, inflexible adherence to routines, or ritualized patterns of verbal or nonverbal behavior.**
- **Highly restricted, fixed interests that are abnormal in intensity or focus.**
- **Hyper- or hypo- reactivity to sensory input or unusual interest in sensory aspects of the environment (e.g., apparent indifference to pain/temperature, adverse response to specific sound or texture, excessive smelling or touching of objects, visual fascination with lights or movement.**

(DSM 5)

RESILIENCE



Long Suffering

Hope

Commitment

Honesty

Generosity

Love

Inner Peace

Solitude

Meditative

Sensitivity

Sensitivity

Creativity

Inward Journey

Forgiveness

Silence

Consistency

Living in the moment

Integrity

Focused



BOUNDARIES!

“...DEFINE US.”

SPIRITUAL CARE



“...Occurs in a compassionate relationship. It responds to our search for meaning, self-worth, and our need to express ourselves to a sensitive listener...”

(Meaningful Aging , Australia, 2009)



DISCUSSION

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