

Entering Into Adulthood with Autism:

What We Know and What We Still Need to Learn

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February 14th, 2024



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Center for Adult Autism Services

“A Letter To My Younger Self”





Overview

- ❖ Autism in Adulthood 101
- ❖ Future Planning
- ❖ Interdependence vs. Independence
- ❖ The Meaning of Life: Growth and Learning
- ❖ Questions

What Do You Want Your
Child/Client to Be
When They Grow Up?

❖ Doctor

❖ Lawyer

❖ Teacher

❖ Happy

What Does Being an Autistic Adult Look Like?

- ❖ Dominant image of autism as childhood condition



1 in 36
children
in the U.S.
has autism

Autistic Adults in the Media

- ❖ The few images we do have of adults on the spectrum...



What Does Being an Autistic Adult Look Like? (Cont.)

- ❖ 35% of autistic adults go to college
- ❖ 15% of these adults are employed
- ❖ *85% unemployment rate for autistic adults*



Challenges of Autistic Adulthood

- ❖ Services and supports related to autism are still overwhelmingly geared toward children or parents of children on the autism spectrum
- ❖ Autism-centric spaces are sometimes not accessible to autistic adults
- ❖ Research is still focused on children with autism

Autistic Adult

≠

Autistic Child

Future Planning

- ❖ How can individuals on the autism spectrum think about the future if no one believes they can have one?
- ❖ IEP meetings
 - ❖ The world outside
 - ❖ What the “experts” said

What the Experts Said...

- ❖ “Amy is a very rigid, unimaginative youngster, who is unable to understand the intricacies of interpersonal relationships.”
- ❖ “Most of Amy's statements were quite factual and she displayed no understanding of humor.”
- ❖ “Amy displayed no understanding of empathy.”

Moving Beyond the Day to Day

- ❖ Individuals on the autism spectrum don't always have the opportunity to discover who we are
- ❖ ...Which then makes it more difficult to think about who we will become
- ❖ Surviving vs. thriving

What Can You Do?

15

- ❖ Autistic people can have our lives planned from beginning to end
- ❖ ...But is it really our life or the one you chose for us?
- ❖ Let go and let grow



❖ Amy's Thoughts on the Future (Age 10)



❖ Autistic resilience

What is
Something You
Need Help With?

What is Something You Need Help With?



Interdependence

Knowing who you are



Knowing what to ask for help with



Knowing whom to ask for help

Interdependence vs. Codependency

- ❖ Interdependence and Codependency are **not** the same thing
 - ❖ “*Codependency is characterized by a [...] dysfunctional, one-sided relationship where one person relies on the other for meeting nearly all of their emotional and self-esteem needs.*”
- ❖ Interdependence = Mutual dependence

Interdependence

❖ Amy's Thoughts on Independence (Age 10)

❖ My own harshest critic



What is something you
couldn't do when you
were younger, but now
can do?

Growth & Learning

23



Growth & Learning (Cont.)

- ❖ Autistic people can grow and change!



What Happens Next?

- ❖ Challenges and problems don't go away when we get older. They change, too.
- ❖ Address these challenges by treating us like the adults we are, not the children we were
- ❖ Experts aren't always right

What Happens Next? (Cont.)

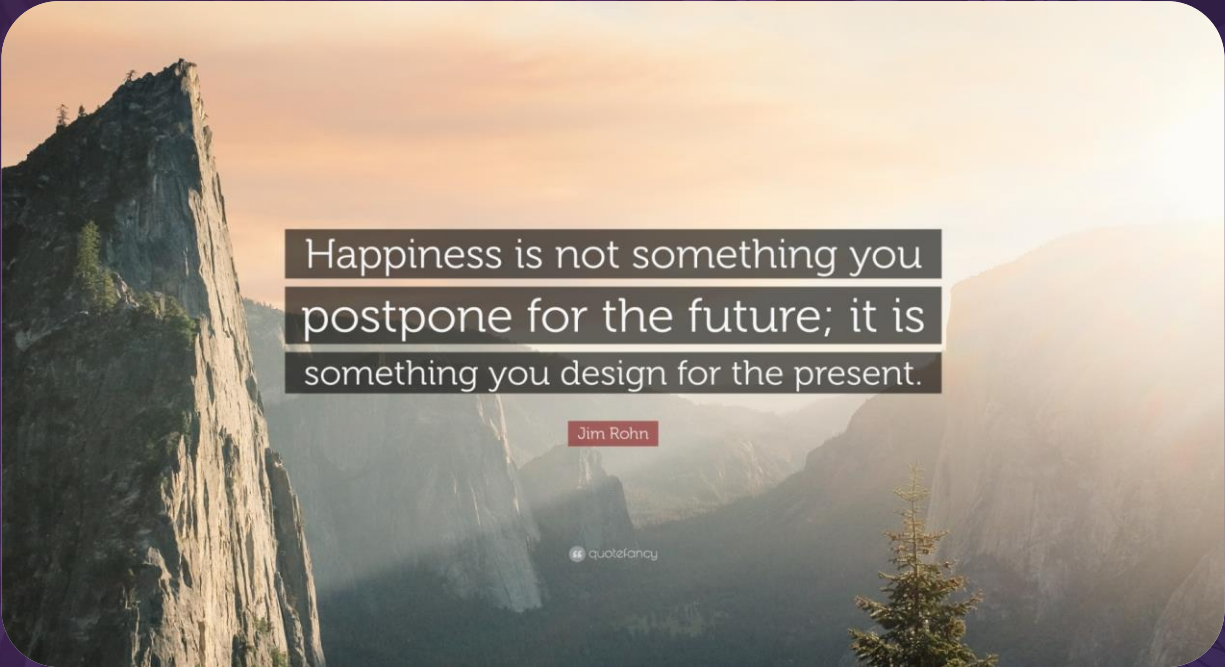
- ❖ Second Adulthood
- ❖ Autistic parents of autistic children need support, too



Taking It Home...

- ❖ Include autistic people in discussions about the future
- ❖ Interdependence instead of independence
- ❖ Yesterday doesn't define tomorrow

Remember...



Happiness is not something you
postpone for the future; it is
something you design for the present.

Jim Rohn

quote fancy

Contact Information

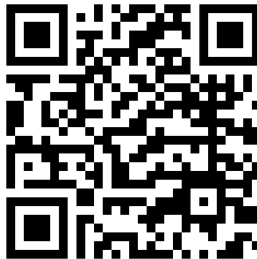


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Questions

A chalkboard with the text "ANY QUESTIONS?" written on it in white chalk. The text is arranged in three lines: "ANY" on the top line, "QUESTIONS" on the middle line, and a question mark "?" on the bottom line. The chalkboard is set against a dark background and is framed by a white border.

ANY
QUESTIONS
?