

Notes from Audra Sisak (on 15th Dec 2022)  
relating to the CSF 2023 workshop on "Storytelling and Autism"

## **Autism and Storytelling**

### **Planning for the Workshop**

1. Who is attending the workshop
  - a. Caregivers of autistic people
  - b. Professionals
  - c. Educators
  - d. Autistic individuals
2. What might be some successful ways for storytelling with the autism community?
3. How can non-autistic people support those with autism in storytelling?
4. How can this workshop help the autistic storyteller?
5. Language and Communication

### **Background Information**

1. Autism
  - a. Neurological and developmental disorder
  - b. Most traits seen before the age of two BUT can be diagnosed at any age
  - c. Communicate, learn, and behave differently than neurotypical
  - d. Spectrum disorder under the umbrella of "Neurodivergents"
    - i. Level 1 (Aspergers)
    - ii. Level 2 (Autism)
    - iii. Level 3 (PPD)
  - e. Autistic Disorder, Aspergers, Nonverbal Learning Disorder, Retts Syndrome, Childhood Disintegrative Disorder (Umbrella) (National Institute of Mental Health, 2022)
2. Storytelling
  - a. Fiction
  - b. Nonfiction
  - c. The activity of writing or telling stories! (Dictionary, 2022)
  - d. Evokes emotions, feelings, engages the listener
  - e. Other forms
    - i. AAC devices
    - ii. Communication device
    - iii. Prerecorded versions
    - iv. Performance art/theatre
    - v. Dance/Movement
    - vi. Different languages (including ASL/BSL)

- vii. Video games
- viii. Film/TV
- f. Purpose of storytelling
  - i. Pass on traditions
  - ii. Tell a perspective/POV
  - iii. Entertainment
- g. Storytelling structure
  - i. Hook/Introduction
  - ii. Incident
  - iii. Key Events (arch rising)
  - iv. Half way point (arch)
  - v. Cross roads or plot twist (arch)
  - vi. Climax
  - vii. Resolution

### **Autistic Storyteller**

1. Environment
  - a. Sensory friendly
  - b. Accommodations
  - c. Support services if needed
  - d. Carly Fleischman is a great example of what happens when this isn't taken into consideration (confetti during the interview)
2. Executive Function
  - a. Organization
  - b. Time Management
  - c. Getting the ideas out on "paper" or "real time"
3. Communication
  - a. Form of communication
  - b. Prepared

### **Audience Listening to an Autistic Storyteller**

1. Cues
  - a. We will miss them! (shaking hands, greetings, cues on stage, "the light")
  - b. Treat us like you would any decent human being
  - c. Don't miss our cues! Our reactions to parts of our stories or certain parts for us may have more meaning than to someone neurotypical (example: plushies, lyrics to a song)
2. Patience
  - a. Wait for teller to finish
  - b. Pauses will happen when we are processing the information in our brains – there is a delay and you can physically see it happen sometimes
3. Behaviors

- a. Stimming will occur on and off stage – unless we are endanger of hurting ourselves or someone else, leave us alone
- b. Emotions won't always match how we actually feel – trust our words in the story (I have lots of trauma around my parents, yet when I tell that story I smile and shake my head like a neurotypical)
- c. Notebooks are allowed – we need them due to memory issues, comfort, and audio processing issues

### **Supporting the Autistic Teller**

1. Think outside the box
  - a. Structure of a story doesn't always count
  - b. Flexible thinking with ideas that are important (what's important to me may be non-important to you)
2. Perspective
  - a. Honor our voices by respecting our method
  - b. Criticize with honest feedback that is clear, concise, and delivered with good intentions
  - c. Autistic people have deep empathy – we can read energies of people (maybe not emotions or feelings the same but most of us can read energy), so make sure intentions are pure, good
  - d. Understand this is one perspective that is valid, no matter the method of delivery, the message, or style. The person deserves to have their time to tell their perspective in storytelling
3. Flattery (ways we might show excitement or emotions)
  - a. Echolalia
  - b. Eye contact
  - c. Repeated movements
  - d. Adding more information from our related experiences
  - e. Wanting to talk more about interests
  - f. Mutual respect
4. Sensory
  - a. Touching equipment
  - b. Practicing before the show in exactly the same environment
  - c. Volume controls
  - d. Microphone (hold it, feel it, play with it to see how it holds and works with your body in space)
  - e. Walk around the stage if able-bodied – get to know places, markings for cues where to stand
  - f. Lighting around the stage
  - g. Getting onto a stage (are venues accessible?)

**References**

Dictionary. (2022). "Storytelling." Retrieved from

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