



Acceptance in Action

- Family ▪ Classroom
- Workplace ▪ Public Spaces

Bridging the Gap Between Today's Reality and Tomorrow's Promise For Autism Acceptance

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Who This Talk is For?

- Any one whose life has been touched by autism.
- Parents.
- Autistic children, teenagers and adults.
- Caregivers and Family members.
- Teachers, therapists, healthcare professionals and Community leaders.
- Faith leaders, policy makers, employers and advocates.



FAMILY & HOME

- Where acceptance begins; inside the walls of your home
- Strongest findings in autism research, shows that acceptance at home leads to: lower rates of anxiety, depression, emotional dysregulation/maladaptive behaviors and less masking.



Common Struggles

- Family members blame the mother
- Relatives suggest 'Spiritual' causes or divine misalignment
- Siblings feel ignored or ashamed
- Parents carry their grief alone in silence
- Child hides/withdraws because they feels like a burden



What Acceptance Must Look Like

- Parents/Caregivers communicating : “You are Enough”, “Your brain works differently and that is okay” versus “Stop doing that”, “Why can’t you be normal”.
- Learning about Autism together as a family and include siblings in the journey.
- Celebrating small wins loudly.



Practical Insights for Parents

- “A Child who is accepted at home can face any world.” Your home is their first school of hope and acceptance.
- “Your child did not choose Autism. But you can choose to see their gifts.” Frustration is normal but giving up is not your story nor your portion.
- “Talk to other parents. Shame grows in silence.” Community is medicine for isolation.
- “You are not a bad parent. You are a brave one.” Bravery means asking for help.



EDUCATION & SCHOOLS

“Every child deserves to learn; in their own way”.



Where are Autistic children in the Classroom?

36%

in mainstream school

64%

In special education or no school at all

Source: clinical study of autistic children, Calabar, Nigeria



How can we bridge this gap?

- Teachers need training, not fear. Autism is not contagious.
- Inclusion means the child learns alongside others, with support.
- Special schools are not prisons. They are launchpads.
- Non-speaking children can still learn through pictures, signs and technology.



What Acceptance Should Look Like in Your School

- You are allowed to learn in your own way.
- You are allowed to ask for quiet time when the noise is too much.
- You are allowed sensory time to meet your sensory needs for optimal attendance to other tasks thereafter.
- Your Autism is not a punishment. It is part of who you are.
- UN explicitly recognizes Education as a fundamental human right.



“ No child should be turned away from a school gate because of how their brain works.”



HEALTHCARE

The Autistic individual should get dignified care; without stigma and without shortcuts.



NAVIGATING HEALTHCARE WITH AUTISM

The Problem

Most hospitals have no Autism- specific trained staff. Doctors may dismiss parents or the autistic adult's sxs, or label children as 'stubborn' or 'possessed'.

For Parents

Bring a written profile of your child to every appointment. List their triggers, communication style, and what helps them calm down.

What Doctors Must Know

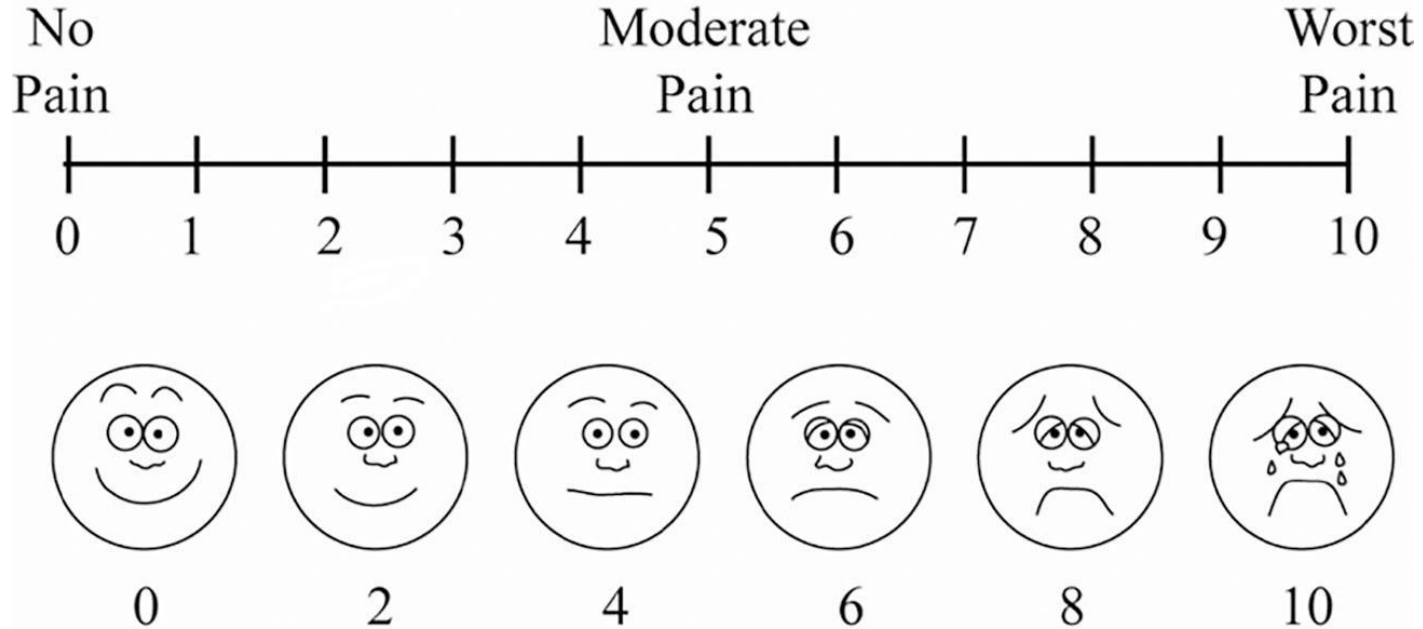
Autistic patients feel pain differently. They may not speak at/during the doctor's visit/exam. Exercise patience, not force.

What Change Looks Like

Sensory-friendly corners. Autism Rapid Response trained staff. Doctors who not only listen but hear. No Nigerian child should suffer in a hospital because they are Autistic.



Pain Scale





Community & Culture

“It takes a village to raise a child, and to accept one”



COMMUNITY MYTHS vs. TRUTH

MYTHS

- “The child is under spiritual influence.”
- “The mother did something wrong.”
- “They should be hidden from the public.”
- “They cannot contribute to society.”

TRUTH

- Autism is a collection of related neurological difference, present from birth.
- No one individual causes Autism.
- Autistic people deserve to be seen in our markets, churches, mosques, and community events.
- Many Autistic people are artists, engineers, teachers, research scientists, doctors and leaders.



WHAT CAN THE COMMUNITY DO?

- Don't mock. Greet and include Autistic children in neighborhood activities.
- **Religious leaders:** should preach acceptance.
- **Market Traders:** be patient with Autistic adults shopping. Give them time.
- **Youth & Peers:** Befriend and not bully, as being different is not a weakness but a strength to be revered.
- **Traditional Rulers:** Champion awareness and acceptance. You are our most powerful town criers. Your voice carries farther than the African talking drum.



EMPLOYMENT & ADULTHOOD

Most autistic adults in Nigeria continue to go unseen, unheard and unsupported.



What Employers Can Do

- **Rethink the hiring process:** offer alternate interview options. Hire for capability, not charisma.
- **Provide structured onboarding:** checklists, visual guides, assigned mentors or buddies. A good first 90 days often predicts long-term retention.
- **Normalize workplace accommodations** such as noise-cancelling headphones, flexible lighting, hybrid or remote options.
- **Train Managers:** sensory needs, Executive function challenges, different communication styles.
- Create workplaces where differences are expected and respected.



TO THE AUTISTIC ADULT:

- You survived a world that was not built for you. That is extraordinary strength.
- Your way of seeing the world is not wrong. It is just different.
- You deserve a fulfilling career no matter what it is.
- Nigeria needs your gifts. You are not a burden. You are a meaningful and instrumental addition/contribution.



Faith Communities & Autism Acceptance

“No condition disqualifies a human being from the house of God.”

Stop harmful practices that end up
causing trauma to the individual.

Welcome the whole family

Preach inclusion explicitly; name it
from the pulpit.

Create safe spaces for autistic children,
sensory friendly services, trained
ushers.



WHAT NIGERIA'S SYSTEMS CAN DO

- **Government:** can fund Autism diagnosis and Early Intervention programs by developing a National Autism Plan which can be piloted in states and then scaled thereafter.
- **Schools:** Teachers need training on inclusive education and how to properly interpret and implement an IEP
- **Hospitals:** Create an Autism-trained team or unit in all teaching hospitals
- **Workplaces:** require inclusion policies. Autism is a recognized disability under Nigerian Law.
- **Media:** Show Autistic Nigerians with dignity, versus burdens or objects of pity.



A Letter to Nigeria

Dear Nigeria,

We are raising a vast number of Autistic children right now; in our homes, our schools, our streets, and our villages.

Some of them are sitting in this room today.

Watching and listening to how we speak about them.

What will we choose to show them?

Shame or dignity? Silence or solidarity? Fear or Acceptance?



We are a people who say “It is well”; O ga di imma, A dara, Komai zai yi kyau”. Let us mean it.



Acceptance starts today. It starts with you.



ACCEPTANCE PLEDGE

- I will see the child before the diagnosis
- I will learn to understand before I judge
- I Will not mock, and I will not shame.
- I will celebrate differences in my home, my school, my workplace and place of worship.
- I will speak up for the child who cannot yet speak for themselves and listen harder to the one who can
- I believe every Autistic person in Nigeria deserves a full life.
- I choose acceptance, today and every day.



What can I do as of today?

- **As a Parent:** Show and tell your child you love them just the way they are.
- **As an Autistic Person:** You have a strength/talent the world needs. Identify it, name and develop it.
- **As a Student:** Speak up next time you hear someone mocking or bullying an Autistic person.
- **As an Educator:** Read one article on inclusive education this week.
- **As a Clinical Practitioner:** Stay up-to-date with emerging research, neuroaffirming evidence-based practices, and the voices of those with lived experiences because our patients deserve clinicians who continue to learn long after they earned their degrees.



Tomorrow's Promise for Autism Acceptance



Acceptance is more than words we say.

It is INTENTIONALLY choosing kindness every day. INTENTIONALLY opening doors once closed by fear and stigma.
INTENTIONALLY making every voice feel seen and heard.

From the Sandy plains of Sokoto, to the Atlantic Ocean Coastline of Akwa Ibom. From the Coconut groves and lagoons of Lagos, to the Mountainous scenery of Taraba. Let compassion replace silent pity. Let schools, workplaces, homes, and hearts become the place where belonging starts.

Nigeria shines when every child can grow, and their unique differences are honored, not hidden. For every unique mind holds gifts untold, more precious and valuable than any mineral.

Together we can build a nation where ACCEPTANCE becomes an INTENTIONALLY lived participation. Because acceptance is not a destination to reach, but a journey that calls each of us to listen more deeply, learn more INTENTIONALLY, and create spaces where every autistic person can belong, thrive, and be celebrated exactly as they are.







