

Minute of Support for Autistic and Neurodivergent People

As Quakers, we believe all people are equal and deserving of the same rights. We strongly condemn the inaccurate, dangerous statements made by the US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., as well as the plan to put autistic people on a national list. A national list would serve little if any therapeutic purpose, but the potential for privacy and human rights violations is substantial. Lists such as this, of those perceived as disabled or mentally ill, have been used with horrific results, including harmful “treatments,” sterilization, and putting people in concentration camps. White supremacy, colonialism, and capitalism would have us believe human value is based on perceived superiority and perfection—an unattainable perfection. All people, neurodivergent and neurotypical people, have that of God within us. We believe it is essential to center the voices and experiences of autistic and neurodivergent people in the ways they receive therapeutic and other support.

Still today, harmful ABA (Applied Behavior Analysis) therapy is given to autistic people in schools and other places. ABA therapy is recognized by many autistic people as torture. It attempts to force autistic children to stop acting autistic, mainly for the comfort of neurotypical people. Autistic people have reported harms of traditional ABA therapy including the following: fostering learned helplessness and prompt dependency, suppressing natural autistic behaviors like stimming, leading to the development of masking to conform to neurotypical standards, decreased intrinsic motivation, low self-esteem, and an increased risk of psychological harm or even physical/sexual abuse if therapists use punishment-based methods or ignore the child's right to autonomy. Additionally, ABA founder Ivar Lovaas was substantially involved in gay conversion therapy. It is estimated autistic people are three to six times more likely to be LGBTQ+ than non-autistic people.

As Friends (Quakers), we recognize we have been complicit in similar harms, where our communities have attempted to force conformity to our own social norms, rather than recognizing the inherent value of each person and culture. For example, Friends contributed to “re-education” of Indigenous children and “mental health” reforms that did not center the experiences and needs of those we were supposedly caring for. We recognize the impact of our actions are sometimes harmful even when we have the intent to care. In writing this minute, we acknowledge our need for further education and awareness to more fully support autistic and neurodivergent people.

Sierra-Cascades Yearly Meeting of Friends upholds the humanity, equality, and rights of autistic people and people with other types of neurodiversity.

Supporting Materials and Resources:

- ["Prevalence and Early Identification of Autism Spectrum Disorder Among Children Aged 4 and 8 Years," CDC report](#), April 17, 2025
- [ASAN's \(The Autistic Self Advocacy Network's\) response to the CDC report](#)
- [National Institutes of Health Council of Councils meeting](#), April 21, 2025

- *Punished by Rewards*, Alfie Kohn
- [“Evidence of increased PTSD symptoms in autistics exposed to applied behavior analysis,”](#) Henny Kupferstein, *Advances in Autism*
- [“LGBTQ+ conversion therapy and applied behavior analysis: A call to action,”](#) 2022
- [“Disturbing Behaviors: Ole Ivar Lovaas and the Queer History of Autism Science,”](#) Margaret F. Gibson
- [“Hidden Nazi past: Ole Ivar Lovaas during the German occupation of Norway,”](#) Åsmund Borgen Gjerde, *History of the Human Sciences*, 2025
- [“When I learned my child was autistic, I was devastated. But reading about autism from autistic adults changed my whole perspective,”](#) *Business Insider*, Laura Ojeda Melchor
- [“The Controversy Around ABA: Why some autism parents and advocates find fault with the therapy,”](#) Juliann Garey, *Child Mind Institute*
- [“ABAI Finally Opposes the Use of Electric Shocks at the JRC,”](#) *Autistic Self Advocacy Network*,” 2022
- [“Why ABA Therapy is Harmful to Autistic People,”](#) Autistic Science Person

Videos from an autistic YouTuber on the CDC study:

- [RFK Jr., Autism, and Us](#)
- [NIH Director’s Update on RFK Jr.’s Autism Study](#)
- [HHS Press Release, Gender Dysphoria Report, and Pritzker’s Executive Order](#)

Action you can do to support autistic people:

- Speak up when you notice ableism and misinformation about autistic and neurodivergent people
- Speak to your local, state, and federal officials in favor of funding for affordable housing for neurodivergent people (see info in this [PBS article](#), [Urban Wire article](#))
- Advocate for an end to discriminatory policies such as the marriage penalty by supporting [S.73, Eliminating the Marriage Penalty in SSI Act](#) (learn more: [Center for Disability Rights article on Marriage Equality](#), [NPR story on the marriage penalty](#))

Good nonprofits you can donate to:

- Disability Rights Oregon: <https://www.droregon.org/>
- Autistic Self Advocacy Network (ASAN): <https://autisticadvocacy.org/>
- Oregon Self Advocacy Coalition: <https://www.askosac.org/>
- Kind Tree: Autism Rocks: <https://www.kindtree.org/donate>