

“Let’s Talk About…” is a column in our monthly newsletter where we will learn one thing at a time about how we can love others the way they want to be loved. We will learn something each month that helps us understand and respect people who are different from us a little more deeply.

Let’s Talk About (My Time Management…jk actually Autism)

According to the most recent CDC data, about 1 in 36 children born in the U.S. has been diagnosed with autism. Given that girls and people of color are known to be underdiagnosed, autism is likely even more common than that. And since April is Autism Acceptance Month, let’s talk about autism. And because we’re talking about brains, let me remind you of a couple words I introduced several months ago when we talked about neurodivergence. Neurotypical just means the kind of brain that processes the world the way society assumes people will process things. Neurodivergent describes all sorts of other brains, like ADHD ones and autistic ones.

You might’ve heard about Autism Awareness Month at some point before now; that’s because the name was only officially changed in 2021. Autistic advocates have been asking for the name change for quite some time, as “awareness” implies autism is a problem, while “acceptance” encourages us to embrace the diversity of humanity. Historically, autism awareness has centered non-autistic voices and silenced what actual autistic people have to say about their own experience of life.



So, if we choose to listen to autistic folks, what would they like us to know? First, autistic life can be just as joyful and meaningful as neurotypical life. Autistic people in general are not at all interested in a “cure,” because they would not be themselves if their brains were different.

Second, while each individual is different, autistic folks by and large may actually be more empathetic than the average neurotypical person. There is a misconception around this because autistic communication styles often differ from neurotypical ways of communicating.

Finally, you may already be picking up on this, but if you’ve met one autistic person, you’ve met one autistic person. Autism shows up in lots of different ways in different people. Boys and girls tend to manifest different autistic traits, as do children and adults, and again, every individual is different. Believe people if they tell you that they’re autistic, and if they name a way that you as a friend

or we as a church can create a more welcoming environment for their brain, trust them, and let’s make it happen!

In case you missed it, here’s your action step for this month: Listen to people, especially autistic people, and trust that they know their own experience. Happy April!

Our “Let’s Talk About…” column is one place where we can help one another learn how to be better allies for all our neighbors. If you have a question you’d like answered, or if there are things you wish others in our congregation better understood about your own marginalized identities or those for whom you are already a strong ally, please submit suggestions to <https://forms.gle/E9eRqZJGLgVagbDZ9> or email me directly at virginiag@smokyhillumc.org.