



# **ASAN**

**AUTISTIC SELF ADVOCACY NETWORK**

# **10 Things Colleges can do to Help Autistic Students Do Well**

## **Focus group editors:**

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Nicole Villemaire

Taylor Terry

Tesha Thibodeau

Randy Lizotte

William Finkelstein

Dori Tempio

# Introduction

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**College** is a school that you can choose to go to after high school, where you can pick what to learn about. Not everyone goes to college, but recently, more and more autistic students are going to college. Colleges want autistic students to do well, so some colleges have programs just for autistic students. When colleges have these programs, more autistic students go to those colleges. But these programs are all different from each other. They all do different things to try and help autistic students. We don't know which programs actually help autistic students. Some of these programs might not help autistic students do well, while others might even make things worse for autistic students.

"Doing well" in college means different things to different people. There are lots of people who study college, and want to know what it means to "do well" in college. Some people who study college say that "doing well" means getting good grades. Other people say "doing well" means graduating college, or they say that "doing well" means that college helps you grow as a person.

Colleges talk with people who study college, and then decide how they want to try and help autistic students. But most people who study college don't ask autistic students what they think. They don't ask autistic students what "doing well" means to them. That means colleges might not make programs that actually help autistic students.

ASAN wanted to know what autistic students think about college. So ASAN talked with a group of autistic college students. We also talked to autistic people who work with college students, like teachers, coaches, and people who study college. We talked about what "doing well" in college means for them. We talked about what problems autistic students had in college, and what colleges can do to help autistic students do well.

Autistic people told us what "doing well" in college meant to them. They said it meant a lot of different things, like:

- Feeling happy at college
- Feeling like they belong in college
- Getting to be with non-disabled people in college

- Getting to make their own choices in college
- Getting a good job after college

They said getting good grades is important, and graduating is also important. But they said that doesn't always show that a student is doing well. They thought being happy in college was more important than getting good grades.

There were 4 big problems students talked about.

1. College is very different from high school, so going from high school to college is hard.
2. Sometimes colleges made it hard for students to get accommodations. Accommodations are changes that make things easier for people with disabilities. They help us get the same things as non-disabled people. College students can get accommodations for lots of different things. Many students with disabilities get accommodations in class. For example, they might get extra time to take a test. It is the law for colleges to give students with disabilities accommodations, but some colleges still make accommodations hard to get.
3. Other people at college had bad ideas about disability, and didn't want to include people with disabilities. Other students or teachers were unfair to students with disabilities, so students with disabilities got left out.
4. Having a disability made it harder to do things at college. Some things cost more money for students with disabilities. For example, some students had to pay to get help, like a support person. Some things take more energy for students with disabilities. For example, going to class can take more energy for students with disabilities.

All these problems made it harder for autistic students to do well. The students we talked to came up with ways colleges could make things better, like:

- Making programs to help new students get used to college, and teaching students about the ways college is different from high school.
- Making it easier for students to get accommodations for their disabilities.
- Making spaces at colleges for autistic students to meet.
- Teaching non-disabled people at colleges about disability.

ASAN also asked people about college autism programs. We asked autistic students about these programs, as well as autistic people who work at colleges. Some autistic students had a good time in an autism program, while other autistic students thought their program didn't help them at all. They said that autism programs need to help autistic people meet their own goals. They also said these programs can't keep autistic students away from everyone else.

ASAN looked at what autistic people had to say about college, and made a list of ten things colleges can do to help autistic students do well. ASAN hopes this list can help colleges make good changes, and that colleges will help their autistic students do better in college.

# 10 Things Colleges can do to Help Autistic Students Do Well

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## **1. Show that you think disability is important!**

Put more money towards helping students with disabilities. Give money to make better programs for autistic students, and to students with disabilities to get help we need.

Also, start a group of students and people who work at the college to think about how the college should help students with disabilities. Give this group power to make changes.

## **2. Make spaces in college that autistic people can use and feel welcome.**

Think about more than just classrooms. What about places like clubs, football games, or the cafeteria?

## **3. Give autistic students accommodations for their disabilities.**

Make sure you help them reach their goals.

## **4. Give autistic students chances to make friends.**

Give autistic students chances to meet each other, and make friends with non-autistic students.

## **5. Make a place for people to learn about getting accommodations.**

This can be online, or a place at college, but everyone needs to be able to get there.

## **6. Make sure autistic students can get what they need to be at college.**

Make sure help doesn't cost them extra money. For example, a tutor shouldn't cost a student extra money.

## **7. Make sure different college groups work together.**

Groups for autistic students should work with other groups. They can work with groups for students of color, LGBTQ students, or students with other disabilities.

## **8. Make more services at college to help autistic students.**

Make more mental health services, and make sure the people in charge of mental health services understand autism and disability. Make more services to help autistic students live on their own while they are at college.

## **9. Make sure all autistic people feel welcome on campus.**

It doesn't matter what an autistic person needs to do well at college. They should still feel welcome at college. Work harder to welcome autistic people who belong to other groups that get left out, like non-speaking students and autistic students of color.

## **10. Make sure to talk to autistic students.**

They can help make your college a better place for them!

# Words to Know

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## Accommodations

Changes that make things easier for people with disabilities. They help us get the same things as non-disabled people.

## College

A school that you can choose to go to after high school, where you can pick what to learn about.