

Defining | US

PODCAST LEARNING COMPANION

Our podcast companions expand learning beyond the walls of schools and organizations by bringing crucial conversations to the leaders, educators and organizations that matter. Use this guide to promote critical reflection, deeper discussion and meaningful connections among adults and youth around the topics that are Defining US.

VOICES OF CHANGE

A Podcast with Stacey DeWitt

INSIDE EPISODE 3:

"Creating a Better World for Everyone"

Join the conversation as Stacey DeWitt and Terra Tadlock-Smith discuss societal assumptions about autism and people with autism, Tadlock-Smith's personal experiences as a parent of a child who has been diagnosed with autism, and the active role that individuals can take to ensure a better, more inclusive world for all, including those who are "Normal with Autism".



TERRA TADLOCK-SMITH

We are thrilled to be joined by Terra Tadlock-Smith, creator and host of the podcast [Normal with Autism](#). Terra works with children, adolescents, and adults presenting a range of emotional and behavioral problems. Terra's areas of counseling and treatment include but are not limited to anxiety, depression, relational issues, communication, and ADHD. Terra is also a special needs mom and understands the unique challenges faced by special needs families. Terra gives a very personal, in-depth look into children with autism and how we, as a society, can be the driving force behind the necessary change our world must undergo to ensure everyone is accepted and understood. With over 15 years of professional experience and a lifetime of personal experience, Terra knows what needs to be done and how we can create a better world for everyone.



LISTENING AND REFLECTING

Use this learning companion to dive deeper into the episode topic, with suggestions for asynchronous listening, engagement and experiences that offer opportunities for reflection, connection and commitment.

WAYS TO LISTEN

Use the podcast transcript to increase engagement by following along and highlighting words, phrases, or concepts that stand out in the conversation. Take notes in the margin of reflections, connections and questions and consider these three methods for listening:

1. Open Listening - Listen to the podcast to simply notice and note the words, phrases and moments in the conversation that spark emotion and connections
2. Focused Listening - Listen to the podcast with a focus on the Moments that Matter using the time stamp and topics from the "Podcast Notes"
3. Reflective Listening - Listen to the podcast with a focus on critical self-reflection, using any or all the reflection questions below

CRITICAL REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What experiences have you had that connect to this topic?
2. What do you hope to learn from listening to this episode?

AS YOU LISTEN:

1. Record the most compelling moments or insights you gain from listening to Terra Tadlock-Smith on this podcast episode. Why do these moments resonate with you?
2. How does listening to Terra's experiences and perspectives on autism shift your understanding or perception of autism?
3. Terra discusses the concept of "normal" and challenges societal norms. How do you think these impact individuals with autism, and what can you learn from it?
4. In this podcast, Terra shares personal anecdotes and stories. Which story or moment left the strongest impression on you, and why?
5. What steps can you take to become more inclusive and understanding of individuals with autism?

AFTERWARDS:

1. What about this discussion resonated with you?
2. What questions or ideas would you like to explore further?
3. What conversations will you have or immediate actions will you take to create change in our own sphere of influence?

EXPERIENCES THAT ELEVATE THE LEARNING

The following experiences are intended for use with leaders, educators, parents and those working in educational organizations. The purpose is to promote critical reflection, connection and commitment toward action. They should be used and adapted based on the individuals, group dynamics and organizational context of the learning.

EXPERIENCES TO PROMOTE CRITICAL SELF-REFLECTION

Reflect on Important Moments in the Conversation

Use the timestamps within our [podcast notes](#) to find and re-listen to the most powerful moments in this episode, then write about your own perspective, experience, and insights.

- 5:01 – "Oh so, he's like normal with autism"
- 10:31 – Sharing a different narrative about autism
- 16:28 – "More children of color...if disabled, they're suffering the most in schools"
- 18:54 – The barriers to families of color in finding support for children with disabilities
- 22:42 – The need for people outside the community of the disabled to speak out
- 32:53 – Learning to communicate emotions differently
- 36:16 – Needs from a policy perspective

Understanding Neurodivergence

When a person's brain learns or behaves in a different way than what might be considered "normal" it is referred to as neurodivergent. Neurodivergence is not abnormal. However, it reflects a difference in how the brain functions. Respond to each question in a journal and then engage in a conversation with someone about how neurodivergence showed up (or did not show up) in your experience as a student in Pre-k -12th grade, higher education or in your experiences at work.

Consider the following questions:

- How do your identity, experiences, and knowledge influence your understanding of this topic?
- How does the topic of inclusion and autism relate to experiences in your current context?
- What are the implications of the information presented in this podcast for your practice?
- How will you continue the conversations presented in this podcast in your school/community/organizations?

MIND MAPPING

Listen to this episode and respond by answering the following prompts:

1. Create a mind map or visual representation of the key themes, ideas, and experiences discussed in the episode.
2. Share your mind map with a friend or family member and discuss the insights you gained from Terra's perspective on autism.

EMPATHY AND REFELCTIVE JOURNALING

After listening to the podcast, spend some time journaling about your thoughts, emotions, and any personal connections you made with Terra's story, or the topic discussed. Put yourself in Terra's shoes by imagining how you might feel or react in similar situations. Share your journal entry with a friend or family member, or even online within a community interested in autism awareness and advocacy.

EXPERIENCES TO PROMOTE BUILDING DEEPER CONNECTIONS BETWEEN INDIVIDUALS AND THE LEARNING

INCLUSIVE CLASSROOM DESIGN

Imagine you are redesigning a classroom to make it more inclusive for students with autism. Consider factors like lighting, seating arrangements, sensory tools, and communication aids. Create a blueprint or description of your inclusive classroom design and discuss how it accommodates diverse learning styles and needs

PERSONAL AUTISM ADVOCACY

Research and identify an aspect of autism advocacy that you are passionate about. Create a short presentation or social media post explaining why this issue is important and what steps you can take to advocate for it.

Share your presentations or posts within your community to raise awareness and inspire others to act.

EXPERIENCES TO PROMOTE TAKING ACTION

INCLUSIVE COMMUNITY EVENT

Organize an event or workshop focused on autism awareness and inclusivity.

Invite guest speakers from the autism community to share their experiences and insights.

Include interactive activities, such as sensory-friendly spaces and communication aids, to ensure all attendees can participate comfortably.

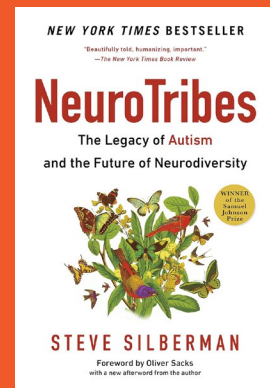
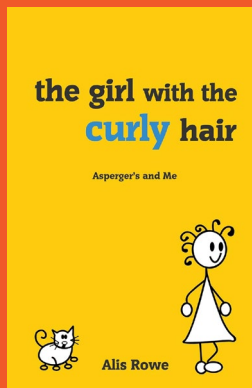
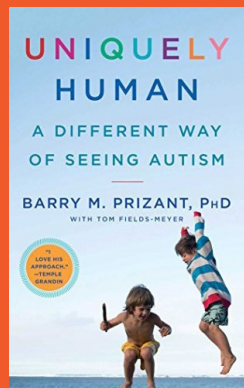
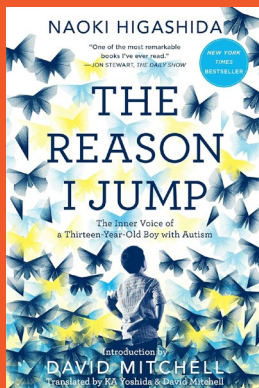
INCLUSIVE GAME DESIGN

Design a game that can be enjoyed by individuals of all abilities, including those with autism.

Consider accessible rules, sensory-friendly components, and communication options.

Playtest the game and solicit feedback on how you can improve the game for inclusivity. See a few examples at [UNICEF.org](https://www.unicef.org) for inspiration.

INDEPENDENT READING AND BOOK CLUB RECOMMENDATIONS



RELEVANT RESOURCES:

- [Normal with Autism](#) hosted by Terra Smith
- [TED Talk: What it's Really Like to Have Autism](#) by Ethan Lisi

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