



Podcast

Autism Conversations

UNM Autism Programs

Normalizing Self-Care for Healing Podcast Transcript

Savannah Oster: Hello, I am Savannah Oster. I am an Education Associate at the CDD, as well as a team member of Autism Conversations. I am happy to be here as your facilitator for today's podcast titled, Normalizing Self-Care for Healing. Today, I will be talking with three of my amazing colleagues, I am so honored to work with.

Please help me welcome Jayme Swalby, raChelle Karman, and Mariah Montoya.

Thank you all for being here today.

We are going to start with introductions. Jayme, can you please start us off with your introduction?

Jayme Swalby: Of course, Savannah, thank you so much. My name is Jayme Swalby, and I am a Senior Program Therapist here at the CDD, and also the mom of somebody with autism. And I have worked with the CDD for a while in a lot of capacities, and self-care is just one of the really important things, so I'm really excited to be here today talking to you guys.

raChelle Karman: Hi, I'm raChelle Karman, I'm a health educator with the CDD, and I've been here a little over a year, and it's amazing to be here and working with these wonderful people.

Mariah Montoya: Hi there, I'm Mariah Montoya, I'm here with the CDD as well, and I believe I've been here about 8 years, and I have some family perspective, again, just in terms of when we're thinking about neurodivergence, both my sibling and I, different forms. But yeah, excited to be here.

Savannah Oster: Thank you so much, everyone, for introducing yourselves. I'm going to ask you all some questions today. The first question we are going to begin with is.

What is self-care, and why is it important?

raChelle Karman: Savannah Self-Care is about taking a proactive approach to managing your well-being.

It's making sure that you're staying physically active. You are eating healthy. Fixing nutritious meals that fuel your body. Making sure that you're taking care of yourself emotionally, mentally, spiritually, and getting enough rest and sleep.

All of these are important, because if you don't manage your well-being in all of these areas, then you're going to start feeling drained, and you're not going to be there for your job, or school, or your family, and you're going to be taking care of yourself, then. Let me back up a little bit, you're going to be forced to take care of yourself, rather than doing it proactively. And that's important.

Jayme Swalby: I think that you just touched on something in my world, I'm coming off of a little bit of a cold right now, and I think it's because I got run down, and I was not doing the things that you're talking about, the things that needed to be done to take care of myself. So, I think these things happen to all of us. I was thinking to myself this weekend, well, the world is telling me I need to take care of me. And so, you're right, it just does happen that way.

When I think of self-care and why it's important, and I think of autism or neurodivergence, I've spent time working, throughout my career with people with autism throughout the lifespan, and I think this is such an important topic that often gets missed in that when we're thinking about all of the things that we need to be doing, you know, whether it's therapies, or school, or lessons, or whatever the things are.

I think if we don't offset these things with the things that bring us joy, or the things that care for our body, then we will end up in burnout, and we often hear about autistic burnout, or whatnot.

Our bodies will maybe get ill or have burnout. We see that with people that we work with.

And so, I think it's just really important that we're talking about this today, especially in relation to autism.

Mariah Montoya: Yeah, it makes me think about the concept of masking, and how, it's interesting to me, the definition of neurodivergence kind of implying that the neurodivergence itself would be, like, a smaller group or a subset group of individuals, and I mean, I highly question if that would be actually the case or not, but this idea that, you know, the world and the society that we've kind of created requires individuals to form themselves to accommodate, and so just kind of getting up and going throughout your day with this neurodivergence, it

forces individuals, I think, often times to expend more energy than I think others might. And the energy of having to, kind of perform that every day just kind of lends itself, I think, to burnout more easily. And so, yeah, I think it is really important that we're talking about this.

Savannah Oster: Thank you all so much for your perspectives. They're all so true, we just gotta take care of ourselves, because, like Jayme was saying, we could get sick, we will be forced to take care of ourselves if we do not rest. I personally take a rest day, because I know how important it is for me.

That way I don't get sick, and I also do things to pamper myself to help keep me going for self-care, and I exercise, I do a bunch of walking outside almost every day, and so I agree with everything, because it's just so critical. I started thinking about mental health and its huge. Even with wellness to help me feel well and keep going.

The next question for today, is why you spend time to care for yourself when there are so many other things that take priority?

Mariah Montoya: Well, first, it makes me think of the word priority, because

you yourself must be a part of that circle. I would argue that that's not even something that you can question, because I think the moment you start to question that is when you're in that red zone and maybe needing to take that break.

But this is my, Southwest Airlines kid coming out a little bit here. My parents, or my father, worked for Southwest Airlines, and one of the quotes that I heard a lot in my childhood was.

you know, should the oxygen mask come down, you must apply it to yourself before you help someone next to you. And I feel like that really does apply outside of that one circumstance. And it's relevant with this, extremely so, because you really cannot continue to pour into others if you yourself are running empty. And I think a lot of the times, you know, there's there is both, I think, a societal training for a lot of people in, like, caregiver roles to fulfill that expectation of, like, well, it is noble, and it is so good of you to, like, just continue to caretake and be so present and there for everyone else, especially in your family.

I think there's cultural reasons for that as well. I mean, coming from a Hispanic family, that is something that is so very highly regarded, you know.

I remember getting a lot of, like, reinforcement of that when I was a child, which, you know, it's not a bad thing. But if you don't monitor that, and if you are not prioritizing yourself that will be a huge downfall for you. There's going to be that burnout. It's gonna come out in other ways.

So, you know, just like we keep saying, this idea of, you know, keep within your alignment, whatever that means for you, I think that's gonna mean different things for different people. And it'll probably look different day to day, but there must be at least some sort of, I think, anchor within yourself, otherwise you become pulled in all of the directions but the one that, you know, is stabilizing you. I think that's just a really rough place to be in.

raChelle Karman: I think to go along those lines, Mariah, I think that setting boundaries are important.

You know, if we're constantly taking care of others, and we're not setting boundaries to make or to set aside time for ourselves, then we are going to be a well that dries up. We're going to be constantly drained, and then we're gonna get sick and possibly, you know, manifest other chronic diseases. So, I think boundaries come to mind when you said all that stuff.

Mariah Montoya: And we know, like, scientifically, that stress, it's not just a mental concept. I think when we think of stress, we think of this, you know internal image of it living in your head, and it stays there, it stays trapped in your brain. That's where the stress lives. But we know, like, it doesn't, it goes into everything. It can go into your digestive system, it can go into your musculature, it can go into all of these different places, your nervous system, your poor nervous system.

Which leads into other things, and really does so heavily impact our bodies, and it's important to really keep that in mind and, use that to keep yourself aware.

Jayme Swalby: This question, just had me thinking, because it just feels like, something that we all kind of carry. How do I fit this in when there's so much going on? How do I do this? And I love how you said that, Mariah, that we have to be the priority. We have to do that. So, I think sometimes it takes that effort to kind of change your mindset a little bit to, you know, I have to take care of myself, or these other things happen.

When I think about individuals I've worked with who do have autism, and I think about self-care, I've seen it happen for people where it can help with someone's self-regulation. It can help with sensory overload sometimes, if you have an opportunity to just sit for a little bit and kind of do the thing that brings you joy, or do something that is calming for you in this world that is so busy.

And like you said, Mariah, so many autistic individuals are often sharing with us how much more of an effort it takes to navigate the world, and to be in the world doing the things that the world expects you to do. And so, self-care is a really empowering tool that we all have at our hands, but we often overlook.

And so, us being here today talking about the importance of that, I think, is so wonderful. Because regardless of where you fall on the autism spectrum, what kind of support needs you

have or whatnot, these things can get overlooked. But it's super important that we all, all of us as human beings, as you're saying, Mariah, coming in as a whole, that we have the opportunity to take care of ourselves in some way. And if we need support in that, if we need someone to help us do that, then we have that supportive person that can help us figure out what that is.

Savannah Oster: Thank you so much, Jayme, Mariah, and raChelle, for all of your response and your perspective. I completely agree, because when it comes to self-care and priority, you can't really pour your time into other people if you can't for yourself, or you can't love others until you take care of yourself, because if you take care of yourself, then you're more likely to be able to give the people what they need.

But especially, I'm learning that for myself, it takes a lot of practice, and sometimes we just need reminders that

we gotta just take care of ourselves, that way when we need to fulfill something for someone else, we're able to do that with love and caring, and that's something I have learned in my life.

And also with the priority, taking time for yourself is a priority, definitely.

Jayme Swalby: Thank you, Savannah, for sharing that. It takes practice, that it's not something that comes easy, because I think sometimes when I hear different people talking about self-care and all of that. It tends to seem like it would be easy. Maybe it should be easier than it is for me. Why is this so hard for me, or something? And you sharing that from your personal perspective is really important, and I just appreciate that, because it's not always going to be easy, but it always is important.

Savannah Oster: Thank you so much for that perspective, Jamie, because it's not easy. It's sometimes harder, so I definitely have to set boundaries for myself and my family. I tell them, I really need to rest, that way I feel well.

Sometimes you don't have to give yourself too many explanations just to the point they'll understand. Explaining it vaguely is good. And telling them what your health needs are to meet them, that way people understand, okay, she really needs to rest, that way she feels great for this event. So, I accommodate with my family's events, that way I can be there for them.

The next question I have for today is, do you have a favorite self-care activity? Can you please give some examples of self-care activities for neurodiverse individuals?

Jayme Swalby: Okay, so my favorite self-care activity, the thing for me is if I can take my dog on a really long walk. That is my favorite thing to do. And, who I am as a person, I really need to have some calmness for my mind in this busy, busy world that's always saying, do this, go here, don't forget that.

You always feel like you're running, running, running, so to be able to do something that absolutely clears my mind. You know, I have no technology on me, it's just me and my dog, and we're just walking and enjoying and kind of just seeing the world around us. My kids will tell me, I have adult children, and they'll say, Mom, you're going outside to touch grass. And I'm like, yes. Yes, I need to touch grass to be able to kind of be okay in this busy world. So, for me, that is something that gives me some exercise, it clears my mind, it kind of does a lot of things for me.

And the second part of that question, Savannah, examples of self-care for neurodiverse individuals. Again, I'd like to bring us back to where Mariah started us in, you know.

These things are good for all of us, all of these kinds of activities. But the important piece is that we find what works for us. We find the thing that brings us joy. We find, you know, the foods that are good for our body. We find the, activities to do that are good for our heart and our soul, and really help us in that. And so, I think if someone is neurodiverse, if someone has autism, there may be some modifications that need to be made. There may be some differences in, routines that need to be there, or incorporating it in different ways, or support from another person. Those types of things might need to be there, maybe. But I just really encourage us all to think that these are just things that are good for people.

So. some of the things I think about are, allowing yourself just to be alone. That, I find, for a lot of people, is really helpful for them, and especially in a world where we have people around us all the time. Journaling, I think music. Music for so many people, can be calming, and an example I have is

I learned really quickly when my kids were younger, how music feels differently to different people, and so I was putting on some music for my children that was kids' music, and it was actually Winnie the Pooh music, and they were like, Mom, this makes us sad, and what they wanted was ACDC. They were like, this makes us feel calm.

Mariah Montoya: Cathartic. Exactly!

Jayme Swalby: And I realized really quickly how music is not the same for all of us. My body likes a much more calmer thing to make me feel calm, and for them, it was not. And so, again, I think it comes back to looking inside yourself. What do you need?

And, I don't want us to forget about things like stimming. Often, for people that have autism, they go throughout their day, and it's often like, well, I have to control the stims that help regulate my system, but I have to control them because I'm in this environment, or I'm doing whatever. And it's that masking, right? So, allowing yourself time to stim, to do that, to have that opportunity can be so big. Also allowing yourself time for your special interests. Those are the things that I think are super important. They're there for a reason for us and we can't overlook, and so if those bring you joy, find time to do that.

Mariah Montoya: Yeah. I'm just sitting here, so excited, all of that.

I think, one of the things that I'd like to touch on with that question is it doesn't have to look like anything in particular. It doesn't have to be exactly like what you were saying with the music. It doesn't have to be like the, perhaps, more stereotypical idea of, like, sitting in a quiet room and meditating, it can, if that's what works for you, that's beautiful, but it can also be the most intense, unusual thing.

This one hits kind of home for me this year, because I found an activity that I never really considered before, which is a form of, like, acrobatic aerial work, dance that I had always kind of thought to myself, like, oh, well, that looks lovely, you know, but I could never do that. I could never do it. And then I decided, you know what? Well, why not just one... one class? One class, couldn't hurt.

And what I found as I continued going was there was really something incredible happening when I had my body suspended up in the air like that. I am having to use 100% of my brain to keep myself safe. I have to think about what every muscle in my body is doing. What my fingers are doing, my arms, my shoulders, my legs, everything is so engaged and working so hard. I cannot think about anything else. And I didn't realize exactly that that was happening. I thought, I was just struggle bussing the entire day. I was just like, wow, this is really, really hard. But after class, I was like I feel so calm. I have so many endorphins right now, I'm so happy.

And I've done a lot of different exercises before. I still run, I go to the gym, but I find that there's a lot of quiet moments within that, like running. If you're not blasting music pretty loud, you're very much with yourself, which I think is a good thing, too.

But there was something about this that forces me to be in the present moment. I can't think about what's for dinner, I can't think about this next email coming up that I need to figure out, I can't think about anything else, and I really can't stress about things that have happened in the past either. I have to be right here and now. And it was an unusual activity that because I think, you know, when you look at it, it looks is like, wow, that looks dangerous. It looks really hard, and I'm like, kind of, but it is the most meditative and soothing thing that I think I've ever done.

And so what you were kind of touching on, like, this idea of what brings you joy and that journey of self-analysis, I think, is so crucial.

because as you try things, as you learn yourself, as you kind of figure out those things that tend to work for you, I think you're putting yourself on this path of, one, prioritizing yourself and your needs. You're finding out what those are, which is so important, because I think, you know, with life, life happening as it does, it's very easy to kind of, like, let those moments go by and, you know, focus on, like, what feels so urgent.

But taking that time, and finding those things, and letting them just kind of be whatever it is. It can look like those very calm and soothing things, but it can also be something that's just a, like, way off the wall, but works for you.

raChelle Karman: You both, really shared some good information. Mariah, the focus part, if you're focusing on one thing, then you can't worry about everything else, and it kind of naturally calms you.

And in a past life, I used to be extremely on the go, and it wasn't just about running, it was finish line is there, and I have to get there first. And it was, like, hard if I didn't make it, you know. Hard on yourself, and eventually you learn to have compassion for yourself when that's taken away from you, and you can't do that anymore.

One of my joys is going out on my patio every morning and practicing Tai Chi. Not only is that calming, but my pond fountain is making its calming water effects, and I get to go out there and focus on my breathing. Every move, takes complete focus. You can't think about something else otherwise you're going to trip and fall, or, you know, do something.

So it's really important to find that sense of peace, to calm you down, and to bring you back. But that's my focus, and that's my go-to now, and it's good physical activity as well, so, kind of, plays on all parts of the body.

Jayme Swalby: I think it's so fun to hear what works for everybody, because it is all so different, right? And we all have these needs, and I think, as you all are talking, something that comes up for me, and raChelle, you touched on it a little bit, is that these things may change over time, as well. It's not necessarily going to be consistent for, like, the rest of your life. Maybe it will, but maybe things will change for you, and that is okay too, allowing that to happen, you know, as you grow and develop and change. Maybe what is coming for you, or helps you, might change as well.

Savannah Oster: Thank you all so much for your perspective on your favorite self-care activities. I love every single one of your perspectives on self-care activities and advice, how to

keep us soothing and calm. My personal favorite self-care activity is painting in my free time. And I love acrylic painting, so I make gifts for people with my cards and with painting.

I, as well, do hot yoga for exercise. One of my friends got me into hot yoga, and so hot yoga also keeps me present, and really, they encourage that in hot yoga class. For self-care, I love hot yoga class. And going to the gym, as well, personally, just keeps me going. Even through challenges, hot yoga and art keep me going.

I do whatever I can, and I used to be a person that wanted to keep going, too, and one day, my body told me, no, no. So, I'm like, I'm gonna create rest days from now on, just to help me. So, I also have a yoga ball I use at home, an exercise ball, to listen to music to keep me soothed. And I do that to help myself just re-collect my thoughts, keep me relaxed, so I know that really helps me. An OT told me, I need a yoga ball, so I got one, I always have them.

Jayme Swalby: Nice, it's excellent that you listened to yourself when your body was saying, no. No!

Savannah Oster: Yeah, exactly.

So, the next question I have for all of you is. How can self-care look different for autistic individuals?

Jayme Swalby: This one think we touched on just a little bit already, but, I really think just keeping in mind what strategies work for the individual. What strategies do you use everyday? I always think of visual supports. Visual supports are just great. They're great for all of us, but it may help you. For some people, I know some friends of mine, have to write activities down in their schedule in order to be able to get their activities in. They have to have a schedule, but that's another type of visual piece.

I also think of routines. Making it a routine. Every day at 6 o'clock, I get up and ride my exercise bike. Every day, whatever. So, these things are that we know that work, and support individuals with autism keep those in mind with self-care, too. It's not like it's separate. It's part of who you are. So what strategies work for you? Make sure that you're still utilizing those for your self-care routines.

raChelle Karman: I think along with that, I think everybody touched on this, but Savannah, you made a comment about practice. You know, it takes a long time to form a practice or a habit, so you need to practice and keep doing it. Even on the days you don't feel like it, you get up and you make sure that you plug in self-care into your daily routine because if you don't, then you

know, that habit isn't going to be formed, and I think that was a good thing that you, pointed out.

Jayme Swalby: I also, on that, Savannah, you touched on the fact that you had an OT share with you about, a yoga ball that would be helpful. I think sometimes having someone support you in that, to say, gosh, maybe do this, or try that. Or if it's not working for you, try having a supportive person or people in your life that can help you. I think that is excellent.

Mariah Montoya: Yeah, I think that's one of those things, too, with neurodivergence, you know, my sibling and I are really different in that, I very much, like, crave newness. Something new and interesting that's gonna capture my attention, and he's very much routine. Routine, structure, nothing new. Do not introduce me to the new thing, do not want that.

And so, we both kind of have these, strengths that come along with that, like, I will very gladly try, like, the weird new class and somehow fall into aerial work.

But at the same time, it is hard for me to maintain it, because I want to sometimes try the other new thing, and then I'll get distracted with that, and then I'll forget to go. And it's kind of one of the interesting things about ADHD, like, we're always moving, but, you know, sometimes creating that structure is difficult.

And then with him, he's got that structure on lock. It's wonderful, and he will do the routine, but if you try and introduce something in there, there's a big struggle or challenge.

It falls, once again, to just taking that time to really encourage yourself or find someone to help encourage you to start to create those neural pathways.

I think what really helped me to like, classes is I found a place that offers, like, twenty different types of classes. So, if I want to try something new, hey, I'm gonna go on Friday instead and do that weird thing there, whatever they were doing, that looked fun.

And then, you know, with my sibling, finding someone in his life that kind of helps encourage him to do that. Exactly as you were saying, Jayme.

Yeah, I think it can sometimes look a little bit different with neurodivergence, but I think it's all that much more important to then prioritize it.

Especially in this world, there's just so much going on all the time. Even, you know, in those rare moments where it could be calm, it isn't. It just isn't. We're living in circumstances where the world is always turning, and always changing, and there's always things happening, and finding your center, finding a grounding or stability within that, is a practice. It's something you have to intentionally choose which makes it difficult. But I think the more you keep choosing it, the more that becomes a structure, and perhaps just a little bit easier to do.

Jayme Swalby: Absolutely, as you were talking, Mariah, I think about, things I've learned from autistic adults, and the intensity of the sensory sensitivities that are in the world, and the social exhaustion that can occur.

And also the co-occurring anxiety for many autistic individuals, and how that impacts their daily life. And then I think about this self-care piece, and how if you can manage to find the thing that gives you that calm, like, for you, Mariah, hanging upside down, and your mind is just allowed to just be in that moment and present, I think it can offset some of those really big challenges that people share with us that get in the way of their daily experiences.

So, self-care is powerful if we can kind of get into those routines.

And sometimes we slip. And sometimes life happens and says, oh, you can't do this for a while because you've been injured, or because whatever, and those things will happen. And we need to be mindful of that. But just having people to support us to pick back up.

Mariah Montoya: That's, yeah, that's a really big piece. And it's something that, I mean, I personally think about all the time, just based on what it is, because I noticed I had started going. And then I started going more and more and more, and I was like, this is fantastic, this is doing everything for me.

And then I had a couple of days where I had, you know, a lot of acting work to do on the side which completely went the same time as the classes. And there was, I think, it wasn't a couple of days, it was like two months and it was the absolute opposite. It was go to work, drive to Santa Fe, and do that for a few hours. And then I had a forty-five-minute break where I could sleep in my car. And then go to the next rehearsal, because there's two projects going on at the same time.

And I was really going through it. And every time I was falling asleep in the car, I was thinking, like, I really want to go back to those classes, I really feel like I need that more than ever. But they were not available at the time I was getting home about midnight.

So, finding something, even if it's small, just a small little thing that you can do for yourself, it might not be the thing that is the most grounding, or the most you know, joy-giving activity. But if you can do like a little mindful eating exercise or you know, whatever time you've got. If you can just sit alone with yourself, listen to music, like you were saying, anything that you can do that just gives you just a little boost. A little check-in with yourself is so important.

Savannah Oster: Thank you so much, raChelle, Mariah, and Jayme, for sharing your advice and your wisdom on how self-care can look different for autistic individuals.

For me, I also like routine. I like to incorporate new activities. I am adventurous, and I've been trying to travel a little bit more gradually. And my mom believes one day, because right now,

I'm not a big traveler. I do like to travel, just not out of the country right now. But one day, my mom said, I bet you will be able to get out of the country, so I'm trying my best to get there.

And so, I like routine as well as a mix with adventure. And I also encourage, like Mariah was saying, try something new. So, I got back into art by a friend, and I also did a gym class and for a while a dance class.

Like, I really like this stuff, I really do. And I really need to get better about making more time for the things I love, besides yoga, and besides, all the other things I do right now like art. I really love art so much. I'm trying my best. It's really tricky sometimes. Just making time and energy.

Scheduling it is my thing. I'm a planner. And so the planning really helps me out with autism.

Are there strategies that can be helpful in maintaining these activities?

Mariah Montoya: I think it was a couple of things that we've, mentioned prior, but I think the two big ones that just need to be highlighted over and over are self-analysis, so just learning yourself, learning what works for you. And also what doesn't work for you, I think, is just as important.

And finding what really motivates you on a very individual level.

I was just talking to my mom the other day, because she was asking me, you're so active these days, you're always, like, physically doing something. And she was like, I wish I had that as well. And she was like, do you have anything that you would recommend for me?

And I thought about it, and I realized, you know, in order to answer that remotely, I had to go way farther in there than, oh, what physical activity would you like?

It goes into, you know, what do you find motivating? What would you be willing to wake up for it to do? Is there anything you have that you'd be like you want to do so badly that you would be willing to cancel something else, perhaps?

Like is so intrinsically important to you that you are willing to make that a staple in your life? Because for me, that is physical activity, but it doesn't have to be.

It can be something entirely different. It can be what's really motivating for me is being in a dark room alone for an hour. That sounds like heaven, Which to me is like absolute opposite. I like the light. I like brightness.

But that motivation is going to be the thing that keeps you tied and tethered to whatever it is that brings you that joy. And it took me, over thirty years to actually figure out that I'm a physical person. I actually really thought that I was much more, you know, introverted. And I think I am introverted, but very like, physically introverted.

So, you know, I've tried a lot of things. I've done those dance classes, which I really did like. I've done a lot of gym running, I've tried a lot of different, like, physical exercises, and found the most joy and things that I can do with one other person.

And that was, like, a weird thing for me to learn. I love being one-on-one with someone. If you ask me to be a part of a small group, I'm not as excited about that when it comes to exercise.

And I think that's because I get competitive. And then if I'm competitive, then I'm suddenly worried about the competition of it, and I don't like that as much. I want to not be comparing all the time. And that's something that I've also just had to work on, like, letting go of, because it isn't a competition.

I'm definitely trailing a lot with this question, I'm sorry. Going down a whole rabbit hole here, but I think there's two strategies. Knowing yourself and then knowing what motivates you.

Those two things kind of working in tandem.

Jayme Swalby: For me, you know, I go back to that piece of just thinking about the strategies that support you throughout the day.

Do you use visual support? Savannah, you mentioned routines. Are sounds too much for you, and so, you need to put in some Loopies in your ears or something like that. Use the strategies that work everyday. I don't think it's anything different. I don't think it's anything unique for self-care, but I think don't forget to use the things that are supportive to you.

And you have to know yourself, and I think along with that potentially could come some advocacy with others who say well, you might be better doing this. Advocate for those things that you yourself know about yourself, and that you want to try, or you want to do. You know, this is your journey and your path. And so just be true to yourself.

Like you're saying, you know, figure that out. You're talking, Mariah, about, your mom and how, as you thought about it, you went really deep into, gosh, there's this aspect and that aspect. So, talk with people. Talk with them and you might get to know yourself a little bit better when you have those conversations about things.

But it doesn't seem like it's a one-track thing. Just be true to yourself.

raChelle Karman: Be open to change. Be open to change, because change happens, and if you're used to being in a mindset of doing certain things. Something might happen where it navigates you in a different direction.

And so you have to be open-minded, and have self-compassion for yourself, because taking that direction might have a mental, emotional, physical struggle.

And if you don't realize that you need to be open to the change, then it's going to create more dissonance with yourself, and you're not going to be able to practice self-care. So, it's really, really important to look at that journey, and the path isn't always straight. It's curved at times, so that is my routine.

Jayme Swalby: That is a beautiful reminder.

raChelle Karman: It's like a willow tree, you just bend with and go with the flow.

Mariah Montoya: I was thinking that bamboo, too, like, I had run to the same metaphor.

Savannah Oster: Thank you so much, raChelle, Jayme, and Mariah, for your strategies that can be helpful in maintaining these activities. For me, I do counseling. I do that, because counseling helps me kind of put things into perspective. It's healing, so I recommend counseling to anybody that needs counseling. It's like therapy to me, because I could pour out all my feelings to a counselor. So, I've learned counseling is my healing.

And my strategy that can be helpful in maintaining my attributes, kind of refreshes me as well. Trainings help me a lot at work and in my personal life, as well, in learning from other people and volunteering on the weekends.

Also church helps me because volunteering refreshes the soul. Giving back really helps me be able to keep going. It reminds me that it feels really good when you give back to the community, so that's my own strategies that can be helpful in maintaining these activities.

This is Savannah Oster with the Autism Conversations team, and on behalf of our team, we want to thank our brilliant panel for joining us today. I also want to thank you, the listener, for tuning in to listen to this incredible, informative conversation.

Be sure to check out our other conversations about autism. Until next time, keep the conversation going.