

Why Pursue an Autism Diagnosis as an Adult?

By Emily Newton, PsyD, BCBA
VP: Diagnostics, AXIS for Autism

Recently, I was asked a question that has stayed with me: "I'm 42. I have a career, I'm married. Why do I need to know if I have autism?"

As adults, we often seek evaluations, attend appointments, or look for answers when something feels "wrong" or when we aren't accomplishing the goals we've set for ourselves. So often, we feel that something needs to be broken before we seek answers from a medical or mental health professional. But what if seeking a diagnosis isn't about fixing something? What if it's about better understanding yourself, making sense of your experiences, and finding opportunities to enhance your quality of life?

For some adults, learning they are autistic can provide a new perspective on their lives, bringing understanding and even comfort to experiences they had as children or challenges they faced growing up. For others, it may offer valuable insight into relationships, communication styles, or everyday needs. And for some, discovering they are autistic creates an opportunity to embrace a more authentic version of themselves.

Autism Isn't Just a Childhood Diagnosis

Although autism is a lifelong neurodevelopmental condition, it has historically been associated

with childhood. As awareness and understanding of autism have expanded, increasing numbers of adults are being identified later in life.

A 2024 study published in *JAMA Network Open* examined autism diagnosis trends across the U.S. between 2011 and 2022. Researchers found that autism diagnosis rates increased by approximately 450% among adults ages 26 to 34. These increases reflect changes in identification and diagnosis, not evidence that autism suddenly developed in adulthood. A 2020 study published in the *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders* estimated that 1 in 45 adults in the United States (approximately 2.2%) are autistic, (Dietz et al., 2020). These findings highlight an important reality: many autistic adults have navigated decades of life without fully understanding their neurodevelopmental differences.



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Understanding yourself, strengthening relationships, and finding community at any age.

How Does Autism Go Unrecognized for Decades?

Many autistic adults have spent years learning how to navigate a world that wasn't designed with their needs in mind. They may have studied social interactions, rehearsed conversations, or forced eye contact. These strategies are examples of masking, also called camouflaging, which involves consciously or unconsciously hiding or compensating for autistic characteristics to meet social expectations.

For some autistic adults, social interactions can feel less like being themselves and more like playing a role or performing for an audience. Over time, the distinction between who they truly are and who they feel expected to be can become increasingly difficult to navigate or lead to feelings of burnout (Hull et al., 2017).

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Twenty-Five Years Later: Our Veterans Deserve More Than Gratitude

By Durel "Dee" Williams

Watching my nephew graduate from Marine Corps boot camp was far more than a proud family experience. It was an opportunity to reflect on the responsibility we have to the next generation of American service members.

Twenty-five years after September 11, 2001, I watched a young man enter the profession of arms. What was so special about this inaugural event? It was my nephew. Having viewed this celebration from a unique lens: that of a retired Air Force veteran, a student of psychology, and someone who has spent years working to understand the relationship between human performance, trauma, resilience, and recovery, I took a very vested interest in his enlistment.

As Kinnick begins his military career, I find myself asking a question that deserves more attention than it receives:

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Durel "Dee" Williams

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Publisher's Note

By Barbara Nicholson-Brown

To Be Grateful

Thanksgiving is almost here and I'm reminded this time of year is not about food and gatherings with friends and family — it's about recognizing, and honoring the blessings in life.

That made me ask: how grateful am I the other 364 days of the year? The answer is simple, it always comes down where I place my focus. When I lose sight of gratitude, I lose grace.

Through years of working a powerful program, guidance and wisdom always arrives when I ask for help. We all have heard, "Life is as it should be," even when accepting *what is* in the present moment feels difficult.

Sometimes I need a moment of quiet to get centered, but what really works is getting into service, taking my chair in a meeting, listening without comparing, and believing my Higher Power has it all worked out....then letting go. Everything I am today comes from the gift of recovery. For that, I am truly thankful, blessed, and honored.

This month, we're excited to feature **Axis for Autism** as part of our expanding effort to bring more resources to the community. We are always honored to share the wisdom of our behavioral health and recovery experts on topics that matter most, helping individuals and families as we 'Inspire Success on the Road to Recovery.' A heartfelt thank you to our contributors!

In honor of Veterans Day, a huge thank you to my friend and colleague Durel "Dee" Williams for his powerful article, '*Our Veterans Deserve More Than Gratitude*'—a message straight from the heart.

We are also pleased to highlight the **Homes for Heroes** initiative through a grant awarded to Scottsdale Recovery Center, dedicated to 'Empowering Veterans to Rebuild Their Lives' (page 11)."

Here's to staying grateful!



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For more than 65 years, Arizona Women's Recovery Center has empowered women on their journey to recovery, creating places of safety, support, and connection. We are deeply grateful for the legacy they have created and the difference these programs have made in the lives of countless women and families across our community.

As we move forward together, Terros Health is committed to honoring that legacy while building on it— continuing to provide compassionate, comprehensive, evidence-based care and support to the women and families we serve.

This is more than a transition— it's a continuation of a legacy and the beginning of a new chapter filled with hope, health, and healing.

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The Gap Between Service and Care

For decades, the Department of Defense and Department of Veterans Affairs have invested considerable resources in healthcare, suicide prevention, transition assistance, and behavioral health services.

Yet access to services does not always translate into continuity of care. Those that have worked in this field long enough understand the continuum of care model, sometimes arduous and redundant. Nevertheless, work in progress

Military service members move between installations, assignments, medical systems, and eventually civilian communities. Often with little to no support. Each transition introduces the possibility of interrupted treatment, delayed referrals, incomplete communication, or uncertainty about available resources.

For someone managing chronic pain, post-traumatic stress, depression, substance use, or another health concern, these disruptions can carry significant consequences.

The problem is not simply whether services exist. It is whether individuals can navigate them consistently, without having to repeatedly establish their needs or advocate for basic coordination.

Resilience Cannot Replace Healthcare

Throughout my military career, resilience was central to operational readiness. We trained individuals to perform under pressure, adapt to adversity, and maintain mission effectiveness.

These skills matter, but are not always transferable, learnable, or adaptable.

However, resilience training must never become a substitute for accessible healthcare or organizational accountability.

Service members can demonstrate exceptional physical conditioning, psychological adaptability, and professional competence while simultaneously experiencing significant emotional or physiological distress.

Human performance and human vulnerability are not mutually exclusive. Furthermore, I always say; Service before self does not equal service before family.

We must also recognize that the effects of prolonged operational stress can extend beyond an individual's period of active service, but well into their civilian experience.

Sleep disruption, chronic stress exposure, traumatic experiences, family separation, and occupational demands may influence health long after the uniform comes off.

A comprehensive approach to veteran wellness must account for these cumulative experiences rather than waiting for a crisis to justify intervention.

Transition Is a Process, Not an Event

Military separation is frequently discussed as an administrative milestone. It is a major life transition involving changes in identity, healthcare access, employment, family dynamics, and social support.

For some, that transition is relatively smooth. For others, it introduces substantial uncertainty. In fact, during Kinnick's graduation, a moment of uncontrollable emotion came over me as I watched his family provide significant support from the day he shipped off to basic training until the day he was welcomed home. What if many more veterans and service members received the same level of support?



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Effective transition planning should begin well before separation and continue afterward.

That means strengthening coordination between military treatment facilities, VA providers, community healthcare organizations, family advocacy systems and qualified peer-support networks.

It also means treating preventive healthcare, behavioral health screenings, and timely follow-up as essential components of readiness and reintegration. Kinnick's reintegration after 13-weeks is surely indicative of what his reintegration will look like after every deployment and separation phase...and that is enough to sustain a military member throughout their career.

A Responsibility to the Next Generation

Watching Kinnick graduate reminded me that military service is both an individual commitment and a national responsibility.

We ask young Americans to accept extraordinary obligations. In return, our institutions must demonstrate an equally serious commitment to their long-term health and well-being.

That commitment requires measurable improvements in access, communication, accountability, and continuity of care.

It requires listening to veterans and families when systems fail, incorporating their experiences into policy decisions, and evaluating whether programs improve outcomes.

Most importantly, it requires recognizing that veteran care begins while individuals are still serving.

As we observe Veterans Day, gratitude remains important. Ceremonies, recognition, and public appreciation have their place. But appreciation alone cannot coordinate a medical referral, prevent an interruption in treatment, or help a newly separated veteran navigate an unfamiliar healthcare system.

Those responsibilities require deliberate action.

Twenty-five years after 9/11, we have accumulated substantial knowledge about trauma, psychological health, resilience, and human performance.

The challenge now is translating that knowledge into dependable care systems.

When I look at Kinnick and the next generation entering military service, my hope is straightforward:

May they inherit not only the traditions of those who served before them, but also a healthcare system strengthened by everything we have learned.

That would be a meaningful way to honor America's veterans, not only on Veterans Day, but throughout their lives.

About Dee

Durel "Dee" Williams is a retired U.S. Air Force veteran with 25 years of Active Duty and Civil service, a psychology researcher, and a mental health advocate. He serves as Vice President of Mental Health America of Arizona, Senior Crisis Interventionist with the City of Chandler, and Founder and President of Beautiful Wounds Inc., a nonprofit supporting veterans, first responders, and youth. He holds a master's degree in Industrial-Organizational Psychology and is pursuing a PhD in General Psychology at Liberty University. His work focuses on human performance, psychological resilience, trauma-informed education, and improving access to mental health resources.

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Holiday Expectations, Obligations & Full Calendars

Don't Sacrifice Your Mental Health!

By Amy Tilley, PsyD

November is here. And so are all the holiday events for the next several weeks. Work parties, school events for your children, Friendsgiving, cookie exchanges, white elephant parties, and family events. How do you fit so much into your calendar? Where is there enough time to “do all the things,” attend all the events, and still have time to decorate your home, prepare for your own gathering, and leave time for yourself in all this hustle and bustle?

Amid the busyness of the holiday season, we can get so preoccupied that we tend to put things on the back burner, like our mental health and the need to rest and recharge. Holidays can bring up additional feelings and symptoms that make it more difficult to go about our days. Sometimes, there may be added pressure to “show up” and be happy at every family gathering. This can lead to increased stress and anxiety. You may notice that you have a more difficult time sleeping or focusing during the holiday season. Recognizing these symptoms early on can be a protective factor and allow you time to make a plan for yourself that benefits your mental well-being.

When you plan out your calendar (most of you probably have the calendar full already), schedule in time for yourself. Take an hour or two to unwind. Turn off your phone, put away the laptop, and say ‘no’ to other obligations. If we don’t prioritize our mental health every day, then we are no good to ourselves or anyone else.

There are benefits to setting clear boundaries and making rest and taking an ‘adult time out’ on a regular basis. The holiday season is stressful enough; we do not need to add to it! When you are preparing for a family gathering, an office event, hosting your own party, or a Christmas program at your child’s school, take these tips into consideration. They will help you balance the chaotic holiday season and those people in our lives that may make the next few weeks a little more challenging.

- **Focus on gratitude:** this helps create a sense of connection with others in your support circle. It can build emotional strength, reduce symptoms of anxiety, and allow them to navigate daily stress and difficult challenges together.



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- **Spend time with loved ones** who are truly supportive and care about you. This provides a sense of comfort and safety.
- **Set limits:** you can decide how long you stay at a gathering and who you choose to socialize with at the event. It can be helpful to communicate to the host when you need to leave, making the exit less abrupt.
- **Ask the host how you can help:** maybe you can set the table, chop some veggies, or clean up after the meal. This gives you some control while you are at the event and can help lower feelings of anxiety or overwhelm.
- **Take breaks:** if you feel that you are getting overwhelmed at an event, step outside or find a quiet space for a few minutes to regroup. I am a big fan of adult time outs, as they allow us time for ourselves and to use coping skills that may be helpful to ground us.

"Amid the busyness of the holiday season, we can get so preoccupied that we tend to put things on the back burner, like our mental health."

- **Adjust your expectations:** you don’t need to create the “perfect” holiday, and your home does not need to look like Martha Stewart designed it.
- **Manage finances early:** set a budget for each event you are hosting or going to and try not to falter from it. Expenses include travel, gas, hostess gifts, and your own time.
- **Keep a gratitude journal:** take time each day to write down three things you are grateful for. This helps foster a more positive mindset, reminds you of the good in your life, even during those challenging days. I have done this for over five years, right at the end of my day, and I can say that I sleep better and it ends my day on a positive note, remembering the simple things that made that day better.

These last two months of the year can be stressful, but they can also be memorable at the same time. Planning ahead to meet your and your family’s needs can be an important step to maintaining mental well-being and enjoying all the hustle and bustle of a full calendar, time with extended family and friends, and the joy of the holiday season.

Amy Tilley, PsyD. has 20 years in the mental health and addiction recovery field. Her clinical interests include working with young adults and adults diagnosed with co-occurring conditions. Visit desertstarARC.com or call 520-638-6000.





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How Does Addiction Affect a Person’s Life?

The Meadows Behavioral Health

Addiction rarely stays contained to one area of life. What may begin as occasional substance use can gradually start affecting mental health, relationships, daily routines, and overall well-being.

For many people, these changes happen slowly: Mood shifts become more noticeable, responsibilities feel harder to manage, and relationships may become strained or distant. Over time, substance use can begin shaping how a person thinks, feels, and interacts with the people around them.

Understanding these effects can help people recognize when substance use has moved beyond casual use and begun affecting important parts of life. In this guide, we’ll look at the full spectrum of the effects of addiction: physical and mental health, behavior, relationships, and everyday functioning.



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the substance to function normally, which can lead to withdrawal symptoms when the person tries to stop.

These physical effects can build over time and start making daily life harder to manage. In many cases, they also make it more difficult for someone to feel well enough to break the cycle on their own.

Common physical effects of addiction include:

- **Disrupted sleep or ongoing fatigue**
- **Headaches, nausea, or stomach problems**
- **Changes in appetite or weight**
- **A weakened immune system and getting sick more often**
- **Tremors, sweating, or other withdrawal symptoms**
- **Changes in heart rate or blood pressure**
- **Reduced coordination or slower reaction time**

How Addiction Affects Mental Health

Substance use directly affects the brain systems that regulate mood, stress, and emotional balance. While alcohol or drugs may temporarily reduce emotional discomfort, long-term use often creates new mental health challenges or worsens existing ones.

Many people struggling with addiction notice changes in their emotional state before they fully recognize how much substances are affecting their lives. Over time, these shifts can become harder to manage without support.

Increased Anxiety and Depression

Substances can change how the brain regulates mood and stress. At first, alcohol or drugs may create a temporary sense of relief or relaxation. That relief often fades quickly, and the brain may become less able to manage emotions naturally. Over time, many people experience stronger feelings of anxiety, sadness, or emotional numbness. Some may feel constantly on edge or lose interest in activities that once felt enjoyable. These symptoms can become more intense as substance use continues.

Difficulty Regulating Emotions

Addiction can make emotional reactions feel stronger and harder to control. Small frustrations may trigger intense anger, or everyday stress may feel overwhelming.

This happens in part because substances affect the brain areas responsible for impulse control and emotional regulation. As those systems become disrupted, mood swings and irritability may become more common.

Changes in Sleep and Energy

Substance use often disrupts healthy sleep patterns. Alcohol and drugs can interfere with the body’s natural sleep cycle, even if they initially make someone feel tired.

The Physical Effects of Addiction

Addiction can also have a serious effect on the body. Alcohol and drugs can disrupt sleep, energy levels, appetite, and overall health. As substance use continues, the body may start depending on



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Over time, people may struggle with insomnia, restless sleep, or feeling exhausted during the day. Poor sleep can make anxiety, depression, and irritability worse, which can deepen the cycle of substance use and emotional distress.

How Addiction Changes Behavior and Personality

Addiction can gradually influence how a person behaves, reacts to stress, and interacts with others. These changes often happen slowly, which is why they can be difficult to notice at first. Friends and family may begin to sense that something feels different, even if they cannot immediately identify the cause. As substance use becomes more central in a person’s life, it can start shaping daily choices, priorities, and emotional responses.

Increased Secrecy and Isolation

Many people begin to hide their substance use as it becomes more frequent. They may avoid conversations about drinking or drug use, spend more time alone, or withdraw from activities they once enjoyed.

Isolation can grow over time. Someone who used to be socially active may begin canceling plans, staying home more often, or distancing themselves from their loved ones. *Beyond Theory — S3 E10: Invia Betjoseph on Addiction & Isolation*

Shifts in Priorities

As addiction develops, substances can slowly take priority over other responsibilities. Work, school, family obligations, and hobbies may begin to feel less important than using or recovering from use.

People may find themselves spending more time thinking about when they will drink or use again. Activities that once brought meaning or satisfaction may start to fade into the background.

Irritability and Mood Changes

Addiction can also lead to noticeable changes in mood and temperament. Someone who was once patient and calm may become more easily frustrated or defensive.

Mood swings may become more frequent, especially when the body is experiencing cravings or withdrawal symptoms. These emotional shifts can lead to conflict with loved ones and create tension in everyday interactions.

How Addiction Affects Relationships and Home Life

Substance use often strains close relationships. As addiction progresses, communication can become more difficult, and trust may begin to erode.

Family members and partners may struggle to understand what is happening. They may feel worried, frustrated, or unsure how to help. At the

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Grateful for Enough

By Abby Rallo, BSN, RN

With Thanksgiving just around the corner, we are reminded to be thankful for what we have. But this year, I invite you to consider another perspective: *What if what you have is already enough?*

We live in a world of constant, fast-moving abundance. We have instant access to entertainment, same-day delivery, and immediate and endless content to scroll through. Many of us are just one call away from connecting with a loved one. Whether through hard work, fortunate privilege, or a mixture of both, we have so much to be thankful for this holiday season because we have it all... and we have it now. But in a world that constantly offers us more, when do we allow ourselves to say, “This is enough”?

Constant stimulation can leave little room for stillness. Constant connection to the outside world can make our inner world feel lonely. Never-ending content can leave us always wanting more. Frequent exposure to the highlight reels of another’s life can cause comparison and feelings of inadequacy. At the end of the day, if you turned off that podcast you were listening to, stopped scrolling, and deleted your online shopping apps, what would be left? How comfortable would you be with what was left?

Sometimes we are so surrounded by noise, information, possessions, and messages about who we should become that it becomes difficult to notice what is already here... **You. And you are enough!**

Gratitude is more than simply being grateful for what we have: It’s about being present in the here and now, and noticing that perhaps what we have (and who we are) has always been enough. The concept of gratitude is trending, at least ironically, in my Instagram feed. Jay Shetty reminds us, “When you’re present in gratitude, you can’t be anywhere else.” In many cultures, silence is sacred. Solitude has value. And disconnecting from everything so that we can connect with ourselves is not a luxury, but a necessity.

There is also something powerful about having the ability to accumulate more and yet still choosing to recognize when enough is enough. There is reward in realizing that we do not always need to gain something more to be whole.

Because isn’t that what Thanksgiving is all about?

This holiday season, I invite you to consider a different perspective. In addition to being thankful for what we hold in abundance, may we also practice being grateful for what we already have. The body that carried you through another year. The obligation you said “no” to because you finally put yourself first. The notifications you silenced because you remembered that the world could wait. The purchase you realized you didn’t actually need. The influencer you unfollowed because comparison was making you question your own worth. The stillness and silence that remind us that we do not always have to be consuming, achieving, improving, or becoming. Sometimes, simply being is enough.

And if this holiday season feels heavy for you for whatever reason, I invite you to be thankful for that, too. Because gratitude does not require everything in our lives to be good. Allow yourself to sit in that discomfort, be still in that space, and if you can, try searching for how you can shine some light on an area of darkness in your life. For example, “I am grateful for what this experience may teach me.”

Lastly, self-care means being able to recognize when the noise, expectations, or emotions get too loud and too heavy. Sometimes recognizing that we are enough also means recognizing that we were never meant to carry everything alone.



Original artwork submitted

Practicing gratitude can become easier when we have support from loved ones or mental health professionals. It’s okay to ask for help.

Thanksgiving is a time to be thankful for what we have. This year, perhaps we can also be thankful for the moment we stop searching for the next thing and recognize what has been in front of us all along. **You are enough. And that is something worth being grateful for.**



About the Author:

As a purpose-driven optimist, Abby Rallo pairs her experience as an educator with her duty to serve as a registered nurse to provide hope to humans. She is a firm believer that ‘giving makes you richer’ and even on her worst day, she aims to spread joy and kindness to others. Learn more about how Abby combines her values with innovative, evidence-based therapeutic programming at vialindabehavioral.com

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A Season of Strength:

Finding Gratitude, Healing Relationships, and Protecting Recovery Through the Holidays

By Ramsen Kasha, MS, MBA, LPC
Chief Clinical Officer Sahara Wellness Center

The holidays are meant to be joyful. For families affected by addiction or mental health challenges, this season can bring painful memories and pressure to pretend everything is fine. A family dinner can reopen old wounds and trigger difficult emotions. For someone working hard to maintain recovery, the expectation to be happy can feel overwhelming.

Healing does not take a holiday. Neither does grief, anxiety, or the work of rebuilding a life. Sometimes, the greatest gift we can give ourselves is permission to acknowledge our struggles while remaining hopeful about the future.

Love Your Family, Protect Your Peace

Family relationships are rarely as simple as holiday movies suggest. Some relatives have stood beside us through every setback. Others may still be healing from years of uncertainty. Trust takes time, and the holidays cannot erase the past.

In recovery, we may wonder whether family members will recognize us today or only our mistakes. Loved ones may want to trust again while fearing another disappointment. Both deserve compassion. Healthy boundaries can help. Attend a gathering for an hour instead of an entire evening. Avoid situations that threaten your recovery. Identify someone you can call and give yourself permission to leave when necessary. Sometimes, the healthiest decision is saying no.

Boundaries are not punishments. They protect the progress we have worked to achieve. We do not have to sacrifice our well-being to prove our love.

Recognize Stress Before It Takes Over

Holiday stress disguises itself as being busy. We fill every hour, accept invitations we dread, and convince ourselves exhaustion is part of the season. In recovery, stress can make maintaining healthy habits more difficult. Poor sleep, isolation, and unresolved conflict can undermine emotional well-being.

So we return to the basics: get enough sleep, eat regularly, attend recovery meetings or therapy, take medications as prescribed, and stay connected to



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supportive people. Make a plan before entering a difficult situation rather than waiting until emotions become overwhelming.

Families can help, too. Instead of asking, “Can you handle this?” try asking, “What would help you feel supported today?” That small change can replace suspicion with partnership. Healing grows stronger when people feel supported rather than judged.

Gratitude Without Pretending Everything Is Fine

During the holidays, gratitude can feel like an obligation. We are encouraged to count our blessings and focus on the positive. But gratitude loses meaning when it becomes another reason to feel guilty. A person can be grateful for sobriety and still grieve years lost to addiction. A parent can celebrate progress while remembering the fear the family endured. Someone rebuilding their life can appreciate a second chance while struggling with uncertainty. In therapy, we discuss how two things can be true at once.

Real gratitude does not require us to deny pain. It asks us to recognize what remains good, even when life is imperfect. It might mean appreciating a supportive conversation or the courage to get through a difficult day without returning to old habits. Sometimes gratitude means recognizing people who never stopped answering the phone. Sometimes it means acknowledging our willingness to keep trying. Sometimes, gratitude is simply being here.

Families Need Healing, Too

Addiction affects entire families, often leaving loved ones navigating fear, uncertainty, and strained relationships. Even when recovery begins, rebuilding trust takes time, and families need support of their own. At Sahara Wellness Center, we believe lasting wellness starts with caring for the whole person. As a full integrated care facility, we recognize the importance of addressing the challenges individuals face alongside the relationships and family dynamics that influence recovery. With the right support, individuals and families can begin rebuilding trust, strengthening connections, and moving forward with hope.

Give Yourself Permission to Begin Again

Perhaps this year's celebration will be smaller. Perhaps a familiar tradition will change, or a difficult relationship will need more time. Maybe the greatest accomplishment of the season will be protecting progress. Let that be enough.

We do not have to repair every relationship or solve every problem around the dinner table. We can choose healthier conversations, apologize when we have caused harm, and forgive ourselves for what we are still learning. Every holiday offers another opportunity to practice living differently. For families, it is a chance to discover that love and boundaries can coexist and support is more powerful than judgment.

We cannot control everything the holidays bring, but we decide what we carry forward. Carry patience. Carry the courage to ask for help. Carry gratitude. Carry hope.

You do not have to be completely healed to deserve peace. You do not have to have everything figured out to move forward. Sometimes the greatest holiday gift is not a perfect family gathering. It is the realization that, despite everything, you are still here, still growing, and still willing to begin again.

Ramsen Kasha, MBA, MS, LPC, has been in the field of addiction treatment and mental health since 2000. He is Chief Clinical Officer at Sahara Wellness Center.

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Another reason autism may go unrecognized in adulthood is diagnostic overshadowing. This occurs when an existing diagnosis becomes the explanation for all of an individual's behaviors, traits, and challenges, without considering whether another diagnosis may also be present.

For example, an adult diagnosed with anxiety may have their social difficulties, need for predictability, or avoidance of crowded environments attributed entirely to anxiety. While anxiety may certainly contribute to these experiences, it may not explain the full picture.

This is particularly important because mental health conditions frequently co-occur with autism. A 2019 meta-analysis estimated that approximately 42% of autistic adults experience an anxiety disorder at some point in their lives, and approximately 37% experience a depressive disorder (Hollocks et al., 2019).

These diagnoses aren't necessarily incorrect but rather the concern arises when one diagnosis is used to explain every experience. That's why evaluating autism in adulthood requires looking beyond existing diagnoses and understanding the lifelong patterns, experiences, and adaptations that have shaped an individual.

"For individuals who have spent years feeling different or misunderstood, connecting with other autistic adults can provide validation, shared understanding, and a sense of belonging."

So, What Are the Benefits of Knowing?

For some adults, receiving an autism diagnosis brings a sense of relief. Experiences that once felt confusing may begin to make more sense. Perhaps childhood friendships were difficult to navigate, social gatherings have always been exhausting, or unexpected changes in routine have consistently caused distress. A diagnosis does not erase those experiences, but it may change how someone understands them. Instead of interpreting lifelong differences as personal shortcomings, individuals may begin to understand their past through a different lens.

Strengthening Relationships

Autism can influence communication styles, sensory preferences, emotional expression, and approaches to conflict. These differences can sometimes lead to misunderstandings, particularly in romantic relationships. For example, when Partner A returns home from work, they need 30 minutes completely by themselves following an overstimulating day. However, Partner B interprets this as emotional withdrawal as Partner A does not greet them and ask about their day when they return home. Understanding autism can help couples move away from assumptions about one another's intentions and toward clearer communication and mutual understanding.

Finding Supports That Actually Fit

A diagnosis can also help adults identify supports and accommodations that better align with their needs. Differences in communication styles, sensory preferences, or executive functioning needs can sometimes create challenges in the workplace or lead to misunderstandings with coworkers. An autism diagnosis can help individuals better understand these differences and identify workplace accommodations, such as quieter workspaces, written instructions, or flexible scheduling, that support their success. Beyond the workplace, understanding one's diagnosis may also help guide mental health treatment, identify helpful strategies for daily living, supporting self-advocacy, and helping you to live a more authentic life.

Finding Your Community

One benefit of discovering you're autistic in adulthood may be realizing that you're not alone.

For individuals who have spent years feeling different or misunderstood, connecting with other autistic adults can provide validation, shared understanding, and a sense of belonging. Some adults find connection through autistic-led organizations, peer support groups, or online neurodivergent communities. Others build friendships around shared interests, hobbies, or activities where conversation and connection develop naturally.

But understanding yourself isn't only valuable when something needs to change. Whether you're 25, 45, or 65, it's never too late to discover something new about yourself. An autism diagnosis will not change who you are, but it can open the door to greater self-understanding, meaningful connections, and a life that feels more authentically yours. Learn more at axisforautism.com

"Axis for Autism recently celebrated the opening of their Glendale clinic."



Glendale ribbon cutting: from left, Christie Dunkelberger, Glendale Mayor Jerry Weiers, Axis CEO & Founder Christine Ehrich, Axis COO Katie Marti, and Axis VP of ABA Megan Tadvick, M.Ed, BCBA

About the Author

Dr. Emily Newton, PsyD, BCBA, serves as Vice President of Diagnostic Services at Axis for Autism, bringing more than 15 years of experience in the autism field. As a licensed clinical psychologist and Board Certified Behavior Analyst, she specializes in providing comprehensive, individualized autism evaluations grounded in neuro-affirming, family-centered care. Dr. Newton is passionate about recognizing each individual's unique strengths while ensuring families feel supported, informed, and empowered throughout the diagnostic process. Her work focuses on improving access to timely, high-quality diagnostic services and helping individuals and families better understand their needs.



- *Article references listed on page 13*

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Homes for Heroes: Helping Veterans Build a Foundation for Recovery

By Amanda Ostrow, Homes for Heroes
Designated Grant Contact, Scottsdale Recovery Center

Getting help for substance use or mental health concerns can involve much more than finding a treatment program. Where will you live? How will you get back to work? Who will care for your pet while you receive treatment?

Thanks to **Homes for Heroes**, Scottsdale Recovery Center has been able to answer these questions for over 40 veterans.

Arizona's **Homes for Heroes** initiative, announced by Governor Katie Hobbs and the Arizona Department of Veterans' Services in November 2025, has allowed Scottsdale Recovery Center to connect veterans to more than trauma-informed care; we can provide support and financial assistance that address the social determinants of health, including barriers and obstacles that prevent veterans from being able to focus on their recovery.

A treatment opportunity is important, but practical concerns can still stand in the way. Having somewhere to stay or knowing a pet will be cared for can affect whether someone feels able to enter treatment.

Homes for Heroes gives us resources to address those everyday barriers. Assistance available through the program has included housing-related expenses, employment needs, and pet boarding. This is the kind of support that helps veterans access care without leaving other urgent needs unaddressed.

For some veterans, finding employment is a priority. For others, it's being able to access safe and supportive housing as they continue to heal.

Since receiving the grant, we have seen veterans make meaningful progress toward stability and independence. Some have completed treatment, earned their peer support certification, and started careers in behavioral health. Others have used housing assistance to secure and maintain a lease of their own.

We have also helped veterans prepare to return to work by providing gas cards, interview clothing, assistance with car repairs and employment certification costs, and job-related tools and equipment. It has been powerful to see veterans feel more prepared and confident as they take that next step.

Just as meaningful is the relief on veterans' faces when they learn that Homes for Heroes can provide a safe, supportive place to call home while they focus on recovery.

Through Homes for Heroes, Scottsdale Recovery Center brings together housing support, case management, recovery services, pet boarding resources, and workforce-development opportunities. This allows us to help veterans address several needs while they work toward greater independence and stability.

We also work with community partners to help veterans connect with the services they need. Through our partnership with the Arizona Coalition for Military Families' Be Connected program, we help veterans access resources that support their recovery, stability, and long-term goals. These relationships matter because no single program can meet every need. Knowing which resources are available and helping someone connect with them is a substantial part of the work.

As the designated grant contact, I want the process to feel less overwhelming. That means keeping the focus on the individual, being clear about available options, and following through on the next steps while continuing to remove barriers that prevent veterans from accessing the care they need and deserve.

Homes for Heroes provides resources to do that work. Its purpose is not simply to offer the superior care Scottsdale Recovery Center is known for, but to help make that care accessible and useful to the veteran receiving it.



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Practicing Gratitude by Giving Back

By I Am Teen Strong

Gratitude is more than simply saying "thank you." It is the feeling of being thankful and recognizing the kindness, support, and goodness in our lives. It invites us to pause, appreciate what we have, and acknowledge the people and experiences that have helped shape our lives.



iStock credit: kieferpix

One beautiful and powerful way to practice gratitude is by giving back.

Giving back allows us to turn thankfulness into action. When we share our time, talents, kindness, or resources with others, we create a ripple effect that can reach far beyond a single moment. A helping hand can make someone's day easier. A kind word can provide encouragement. Volunteering can strengthen an organization that serves those in need. Even a small act of generosity can remind someone that they matter.

Giving back also changes the way we see our own communities. When we volunteer, serve, or support a cause, we become more aware of the needs around us, and of the many people working every day to make a difference. It reminds us that we all have something valuable to contribute.

There are countless ways to give back. Volunteer with a local nonprofit, mentor someone, help a neighbor, donate items you no longer need, support a community organization, or simply take time to thank someone who has made a difference in your life. Giving back doesn't have to cost money or require a significant amount of time. What matters most is the intention behind the action.

Don't let gratitude stop with "thank you." Put it into action. Choose one person, organization, or cause that has made a difference in your life and find a way to give back. Volunteer. Encourage. Donate. Serve. Share your talents. Start small but start somewhere.

When each of us turns gratitude into generosity, we have the opportunity to create a stronger, more connected, and more caring community.

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From the Mat



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Spiritually Fit: The Practice of Gratitude, Even When Life Is Complicated

By Alexandra Daffner

November has a way of bringing gratitude to the forefront. We see it in the language of the season, around dinner tables, in conversations with friends and family, and in reminders to pause and appreciate what we have. **But gratitude isn't always simple.**



For some, the holidays are a time of connection and celebration. For others, they can bring grief, loneliness, difficult relationships, memories of the past, or reminders of how much life has changed.

For those in recovery, this time of year can carry its own unique challenges.

That's why this November, we're thinking about gratitude a little differently at Spiritually Fit Co-Op. Gratitude doesn't require us to pretend everything is okay. It simply asks us to notice what is still good, still meaningful, and still worth holding onto—even in the middle of something difficult. Mindfulness teaches us to pay attention to what is happening right now. Gratitude takes that practice one step further by asking us to recognize what we appreciate within that moment.



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In recovery, learning to recognize the small things can be especially powerful. Healing isn't always marked by huge milestones. Sometimes progress looks like making it through the day, asking for help, choosing a healthier response, reconnecting with someone you love, or simply waking up and beginning again. There is gratitude in that.

One of the most important parts of practicing gratitude is understanding what it isn't. Gratitude isn't toxic positivity. We don't have to be grateful for pain in order to grow from it. We don't have to find a silver lining in every difficult experience. And we don't have to minimize grief, anger, disappointment, or uncertainty just because it's November.

We can hold two truths at once:

This is hard. And there is still something here worth appreciating.

Yoga offers us a physical experience of that same idea. A pose can feel challenging while we remain grounded in the breath. We can acknowledge discomfort without immediately running from it. We can soften where we're holding tension and recognize the places where we feel supported. The practice isn't about making every sensation disappear. It's about learning how to stay present with ourselves through all of it.

This month, instead of asking yourself only, What am I grateful for?

Try asking:

Who am I grateful for?

What has helped me get here?

What parts of my life do I want to nurture?

What am I ready to stop taking for granted?

Because gratitude isn't about having a perfect life. It's about developing the awareness to recognize the meaningful moments within the life we actually have.

As Thanksgiving approaches, remember that there is no single way to experience the holidays. Celebrate if you feel like celebrating. Rest if you need to rest. Reach out if you're feeling alone. Set boundaries where you need them. And give yourself permission to experience whatever comes up without judging it.

And if you find yourself spending more time alone this holiday season, know that solitude doesn't have to mean disconnection.

See you on the mat!

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Health-Care Hero

Congratulations to Scottsdale Recovery Center, CEO, Lee Yaiva, on being recognized as one of Phoenix Magazine’s 2026 Health-Care Heroes! This well-deserved honor recognizes Lee’s leadership, dedication, and commitment to making a meaningful difference in the lives of individuals and families throughout our community.

Scottsdale Recovery Center is incredibly proud to celebrate this achievement and grateful for the passion and vision he brings to clients and the community.

Lee Yaiva is a proud Hopi from the Village of Soongopavi in Northeastern Arizona and a member of the Water Clan (Patkiwungwa). He is the CEO of Scottsdale Recovery Center, the owner of HNIC, LLC, the founder of Reztoration Health and Healing 501(c)(3), and serves on local and national boards that ensure equitable access to high quality care. With 20 years of expertise in behavioral health and addiction treatment, Yaiva is known for blending clinical acumen with business insight, driving innovative solutions to address evolving trends in therapeutic interventions and service delivery.

Named one of Arizona’s Most Influential Minority Business Leaders by *AZ Big Media* and featured in *AZ Business Leaders Magazine*, Yaiva is a sought-after national speaker who focuses on empowering minority and underserved communities. He is a frequent contributor to *Together AZ*.

Learn more about Scottsdale Recovery Center scottsdalerecovery.com



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same time, the person struggling with addiction may feel misunderstood or ashamed, which can make honest conversations harder.

Strained Family Relationships

Addiction can create ongoing tension within families. Arguments may become more common, especially if loved ones express concern about substance use. Over time, emotional distance may grow. Family members may feel unsure how to approach the topic, while the person struggling with addiction may withdraw to avoid uncomfortable conversations.

Loss of Trust

Trust can be affected when substance use leads to secrecy, broken commitments, or unpredictable behavior. Loved ones may begin to question whether promises will be kept or whether certain behaviors will continue.

This loss of trust can take time to repair, especially if addiction has affected the relationship for a long period.

Impact on Children and Household Stability

Addiction can also affect the overall atmosphere in the home. When substance use disrupts routines or creates tension between family members, children may sense that something is wrong even if it is not openly discussed.

Household routines may become less predictable, and family members may feel increased stress or uncertainty. These changes can affect the emotional stability of the entire household.

How Addiction Affects Work, Finances, and Daily Life

Addiction can slowly begin interfering with everyday responsibilities. Tasks that once felt routine may become harder to manage as substance use takes up more time, energy, and attention.

Many people try to maintain their normal routines while struggling with addiction. Over time, though, the effects of substance use often start showing up in work performance, financial stability, and basic daily habits.

Declining Work Performance

Substance use can make it harder to stay focused, organized, and reliable at work. Some people begin missing deadlines, calling out sick more often, or struggling to keep up with responsibilities.

Concentration may become more difficult, especially if sleep is disrupted or the body is experiencing withdrawal symptoms. These challenges can eventually affect job performance and workplace relationships.

Financial Stress

Addiction can also lead to financial strain. Money may be spent on alcohol or drugs instead of regular expenses, which can create pressure around bills and long-term financial planning.

If work performance begins to suffer, income stability may also become a concern. Over time, financial stress can add another layer of anxiety to an already difficult situation.

Disrupted Daily Routines

Substance use often disrupts the routines that help people stay balanced and healthy. Sleep schedules may become irregular, meals may be skipped, and personal responsibilities may begin to fall behind.

Activities that once helped someone feel grounded, such as exercise, hobbies, or time with loved ones, may become less frequent. As these routines disappear, life can start to feel more chaotic and harder to manage.

Why Addiction Often Affects Multiple Areas of Life

Addiction affects more than behavior. It changes how the brain responds to stress, rewards, and decision-making. These changes can influence many parts of a person’s life at the same time. Over time, the brain begins to place a stronger focus on substances than on other needs. Activities that once felt meaningful may no longer create the same sense of satisfaction, while cravings and urges become more persistent.

This shift can make it harder to manage stress, regulate emotions, and make decisions that support long-term well-being. As a result, the effects of addiction often appear in mental health, relationships, work, and daily functioning all at once.

These changes are connected to how the brain adapts to repeated substance use. They are not a sign of weakness or lack of effort. With the right treatment and support, the brain can begin to recover and healthier patterns can be rebuilt.

When It May Be Time to Seek Help

Many people try to manage substance use on their own for a long time. They may cut back for a while, promise themselves it will stay under control, or believe the problem will resolve once stress improves.

When addiction begins affecting mental health, relationships, work, or daily routines, it may be a sign that extra support could help. Reaching out for help does not mean someone has failed. It often means they recognize that something deeper needs attention.

Some signs it may be time to consider professional support include:

- Substance use causing problems in relationships or at home
- Difficulty cutting back or stopping despite wanting to
- Increased anxiety, depression, or emotional distress
- Trouble managing responsibilities at work or school
- Feeling stuck in a cycle of using, regretting it, and trying to stop again

Addiction can feel overwhelming, but it is also treatable. Many people find that recovery becomes more manageable when they have guidance, structure, and support.

Find Support for Addiction Recovery

Addiction can affect many areas of life, but recovery can help restore stability and balance. With the right support, people can rebuild their mental health, repair relationships, and develop healthier ways to manage stress.

At The Meadows, treatment focuses on addressing both substance use and the underlying factors that contribute to it. Through holistic care and evidence-based therapies, individuals receive support that helps them understand their experiences and move toward lasting recovery. www.themeadows.com

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https://www.themeadows.com/blog/why-addiction-is-hard-to-overcome-how-the-brain-changes/?utm_source=together_az&utm_medium=referral&utm_campaign=content_syndication&utm_content=brain_changes_addiction



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Axis for Autism	602-888-8882	axisforautism.com
Calvary Healing Center	602-362-8589	calvarycenter.com
CBI, Inc.	877-931-9142	communitybridgesinc.org
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The Meadows	800-632-3697	themeadows.com
Mens Teen Challenge	520-792-1790	tcaz.org
Mental Health America of Arizona		mhaarizona.org
Mercy Care 800-631-1314	602-222-9444	mercycaarez.org
NorthSight Recovery	833-787-9718	northsightrecovery.com
Psychological Counseling Services (PCS)	480-947-5739	pcsintensive.com
Sanctuary Recovery Centers	1-844-978-TRUE	sanctuaryrecoverycenters.com
Sahara Wellness Center	623-400-9333	saharawc.com
Scottsdale Providence	480-210-1734	scottsdaleprovidence.com
Scottsdale Recovery Center	888-663-7847	scottsdalerecovery.com
Sierra Tucson	800-842-4487	sierratucson.com
Spiritually Fit- Co-op	602-809-0854	spirituallyfitco-op.com
Brough Stewart, MC, LPC, NCC	602-316-3197	
Steps to Recovery/Konnect	928-649-0077	konnnectwellness.org
Valley Hospital	602-952-3939	valleyhospital-phoenix.com
Via Linda Behavioral Hospital	480-476-7210	vialindabehavioral.com
Teen Challenge AZ	602-708-9475	tcaz.org

Additional Resources

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AZ. Dept. of Health	602-364-2086	
AZ Holistic Approach Counseling	602-529-1967	
Arizona Opioid Assistance Helpline	888-688-4222	
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Crisis Intervention	520-323-9373
Narcotics Anonymous	520-881-8381
Nicotine Anonymous	520-299-7057
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Recovery in Motion	520-975-2141
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EDA Meetings

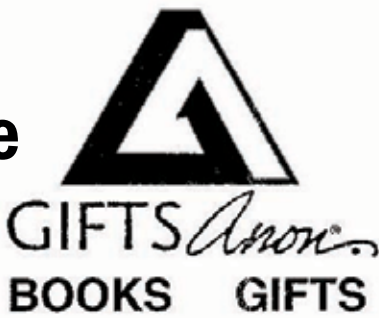
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Tucson Al-Anon Information	520-323-2229
Adult Children of Alcoholics (ACA)	aca-arizona.org
Bipolar Wellness	602-274-0068
Child Abuse Hotline – Support & Information	800-422-4453
Cocaine Anonymous	602-279-3838
Co-Anon	602-697-9550
CoDA	602-277-7991
COSA	480-385-8454
Crisis Help Line – For Any Kind of Crisis	800-233-4357
Crisis Text Line	Text HOME to 741741
Crystal Meth Anonymous	602-235-0955
Debtors Anonymous	800-421-2383
Domestic Violence	800-799-SAFE
Families Anonymous	602-647-5800
Fentanyl Anonymous	520-338-9307
Food Addicts food addicts.org	435-764-1461
Gamblers Anonymous	602-266-9784
Gam-Anon 602-303-7876	National Hotline 844-475-4213
Grief Recovery	800-334-7606
Heroin Anonymous	602-870-3665
Marijuana Anonymous	800-766-6779
NDMDA Depression Hotline – Support Group	800-826-3632
Narcotics Anonymous/Phoenix	480-897-4636
Narcotics Anonymous/Casa Grande	520-426-0121
Narcotics Anonymous/Flagstaff	928-255-4655
Narcotics Anonymous/Prescott	928-458-7488
Narcotics Anonymous/Tucson	520-881-8381
Nar-Anon Family Groups	(800) 477-6291
National Youth Crisis Hotline	800-448-4663
Overeaters Anonymous	602-234-1195
PAL (Parents of Addicted Loved Ones)	480-300-4712
Parents Anonymous	602-248-0428
Phoenix Metro SAA	602-735-1681
RAINN (Rape, Abuse, Incest National Network)	RAINN.ORG
Rape Hotline (CASA)	602-241-9010
Sexaholics Anonymous	602-439-3000
Sexual Assault Hotline 24/7 English & Spanish	800-223-5001
Sex/Love Addicts	602-337-7117
Sex/Love Addicts Tucson	520-792-6450
Sex Addicts Anonymous	602-735-1681
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