

# Organization and Planning: Practical Strategies for Independent Living

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# A Brief Introduction

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- Undergraduate student at East Tennessee State University
  - Sociology major, Special Education minor
  - Founder and current President of Neurodiversity Club
  - Involved in disability advocacy on campus
- Former Teen and Adult Social Scene Coordinator for the Autism Society of East TN
  - Facilitated programs for the Johnson City community center
  - Counseled families on various topics (IEPs, self-determination, etc)
- An autistic adult – not a professional.



# Independent Living

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- What exactly defines independent living?
    - Financial freedom
    - Having your “own” place
    - Employment
    - Driving
  - Why do we strive for independent living?
    - Freedom
    - Self-determination
    - Autonomy



“No man is an island entire of itself. Every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main.”

John Donne





# Interdependence

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- While striving for independence is great, remember the phrase “No man is an island.”
- Everyone needs help and depends on someone else. Even the most able-bodied neurotypical person you know needs help sometimes.
- Understanding this is the first step to real independence – knowing that there is no shame in needing additional supports and help. Interdependence is a necessary part of human life.



# Executive Functioning

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- Executive Functioning is the mental processing involved in making decisions, multi-tasking, organization, and getting started on tasks.
- For a lot of us autistics, executive functioning is incredibly difficult.
- Other examples of conditions that cause executive functioning issues:
  - ADD and ADHD
  - Neurocognitive disorders
  - Depression and anxiety disorders





# Having difficulty with Executive Functioning is not laziness

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It's a legitimate problem for a lot of people.

# Types of Executive Functioning

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- There are several, and often overlap together:
  - Inhibition
  - Shift
  - Emotional Control
  - Initiation
  - Working Memory
  - Planning/Organization
  - Organization of Materials
  - Self-Monitoring



# Planning and Organization

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How does it fit in with independent living?



# “Adulthood” is complicated.

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- The art of “adulthood” is a lot more than what you can cover in a day.
- There’s a lot to keep track of:
  - Appointments
  - Medications
  - Meals
  - Budgets
  - Spending time with friends and family



# Physical Resources

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- Your local Arc organization
- Home and Community-Based Services
- National Council on Independent Living
  - Independent Living Centers are located throughout the country
    - *Chattanooga: Tri-State Resource and Advocacy Corp. (TRAC)*
    - *You can find your local center at <http://www.ilru.org>*
- Local organizations and clubs
  - GCA Centre for Adult Autism



# Online Resources

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- The Autistic Self Advocacy Network has several toolkits and articles regarding self-determination and making your own choices.
  - [Roadmap to Transition](#)
  - [Accessing Home and Community-Based Services](#)
- Some autistic advocates have great websites with information that can help:
  - RealSocialSkills.org
  - Judy Endow

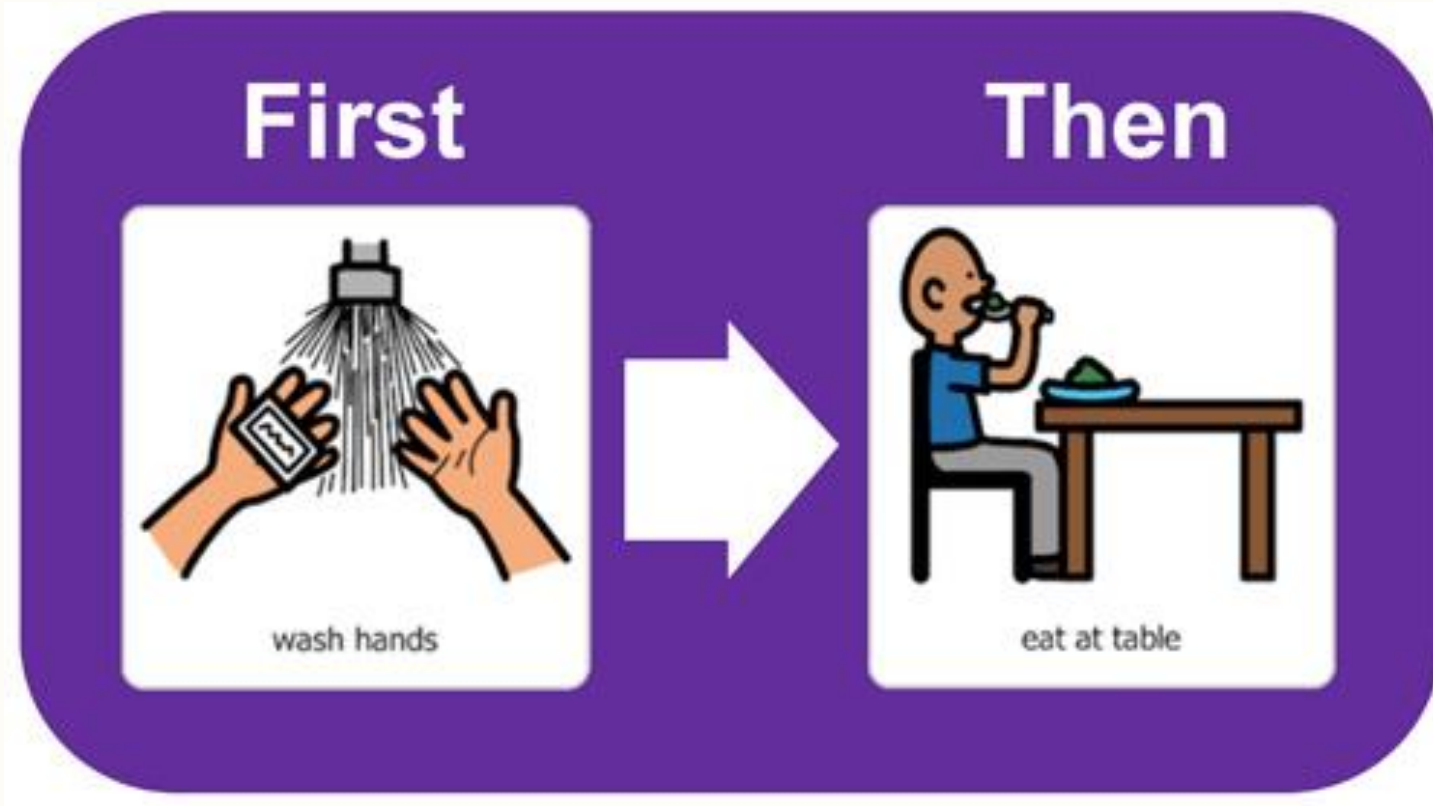
# Strategies and Tools

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Tips and Tricks to Handle  
Executive Dysfunction

# First/Then Boards

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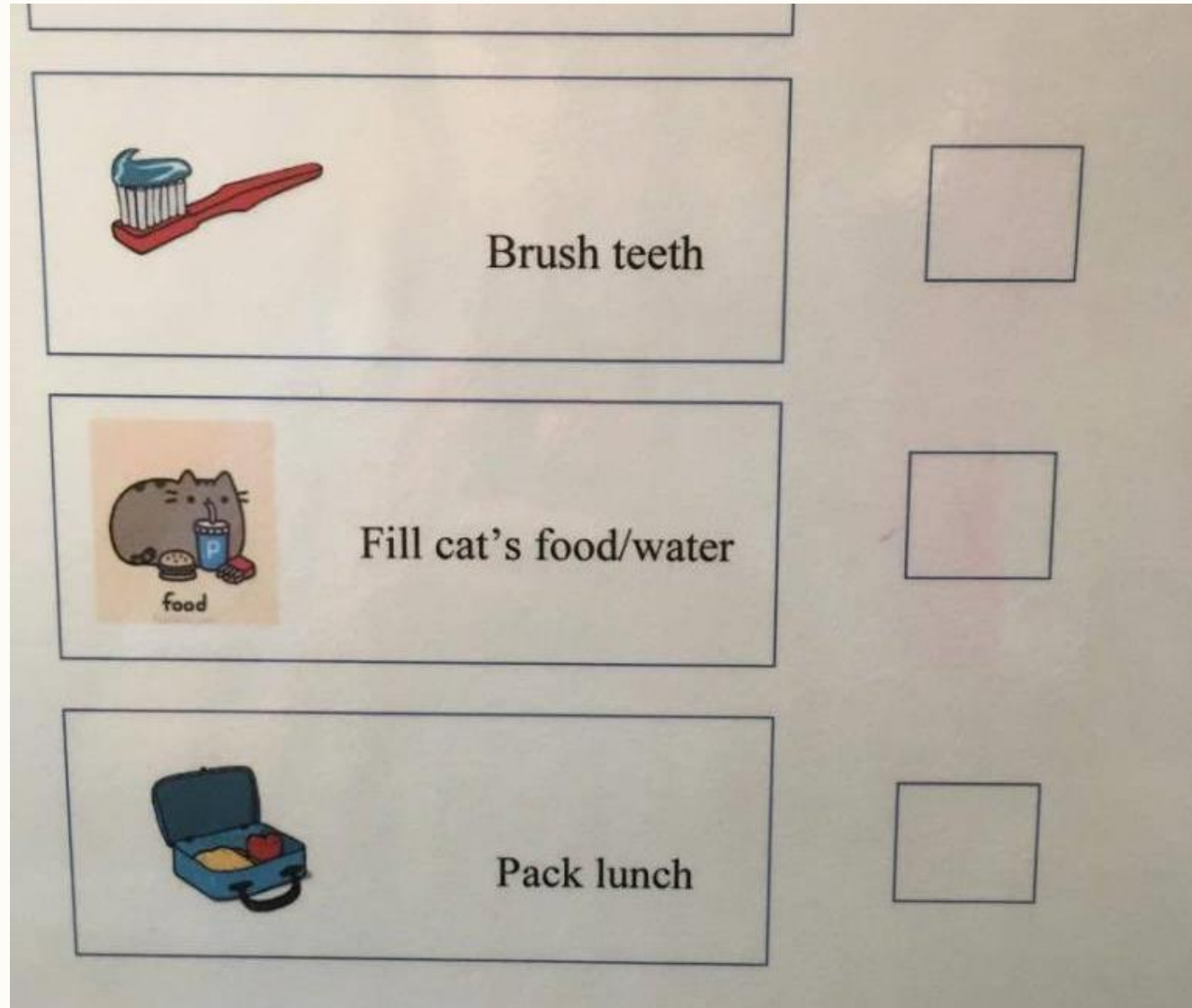
- These are used with young children – but they can also be helpful for short-term executive functioning tasks.

This First/Then picture is taken from a Vanderbilt ASD Module



# Visual Schedules

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- These are often associated with younger people, but if you're a visual person – it can be extremely helpful.
- You can make your own (and laminate it if desired).
- If it's laminated, you can use a dry erase marker to check it off as you would a check-list.
- You can also just use it as a reminder to do things.

One of my own personal visual schedules

# Post-it Notes



- Post-it notes are very versatile, and are great for reminders.
- Place them where you can't miss them!
- ...but make sure you move them occasionally, or you'll start ignoring them.

Collage of various post-it notes hiding in my room.

# Medication Boxes



Colorful, weekly medication reminder box.

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- Medication boxes are especially useful if you have several doses, or need to take them at different times.
  - You can find them in different styles and colors.
  - The biggest downside is remembering to fill them when you're out.

# Assistive Technology and Apps

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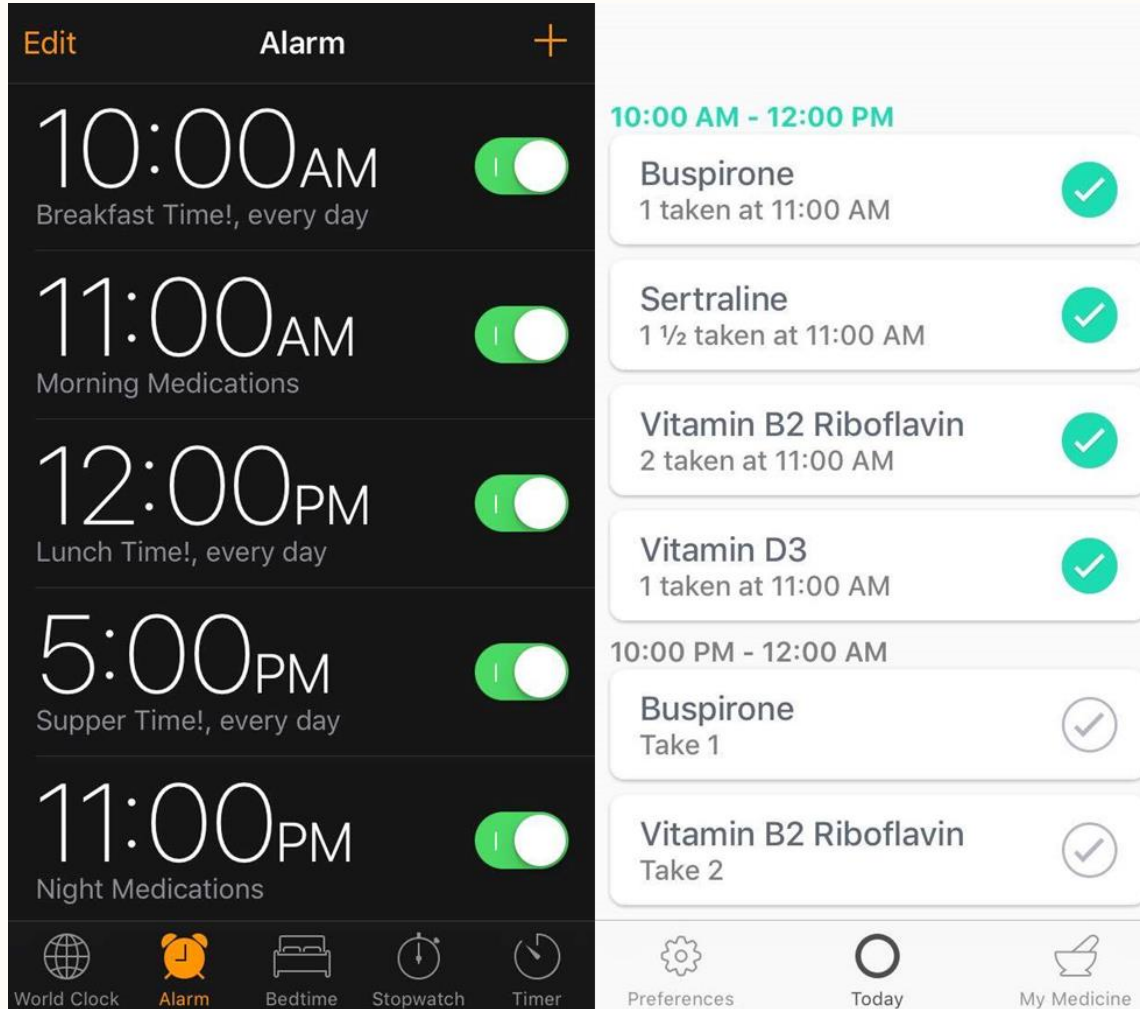
Because technology isn't as terrible as  
People think it is.



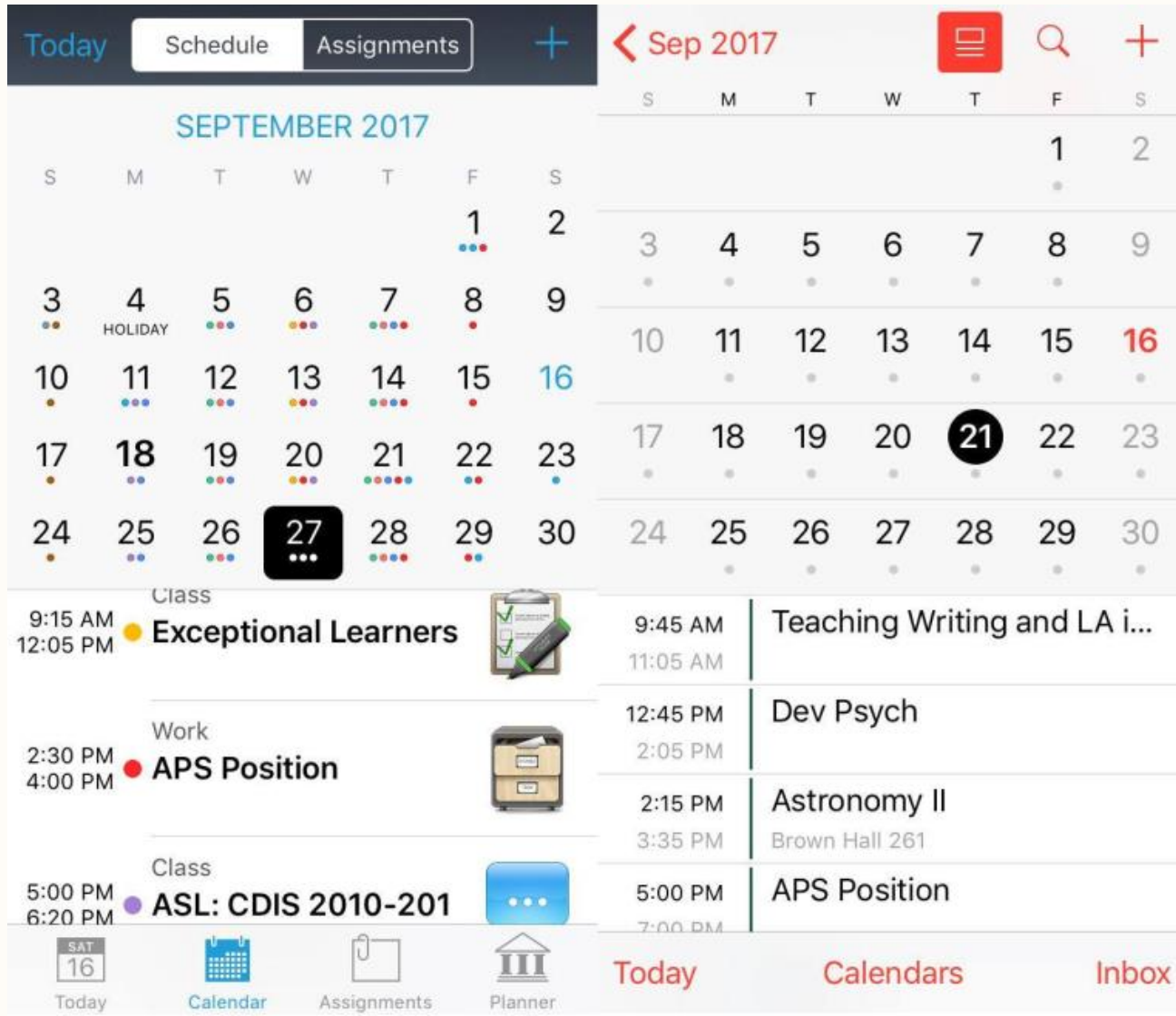
# Phone Reminders and Alarms

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- Many of you already have a useful tool for executive functioning: your smartphone!
- There are several apps to help prompt you to remember and do things.
- Alarms are helpful for reminding you to do things such as eat or take meds, while there are several apps that are extremely specific
  - This is especially important in remembering to take medications, as these apps can help organize and keep you on track.



iPhone alarms on the left, medication reminder app on the right.



# Phone Calendars and Organizers

- Phones often have apps that can be very helpful in keeping track of appointments, classes, meetings, or even personal chores.
- Some apps may even remind you to do a task, and can keep reminding you until you do the thing.
- These usually work with VoiceOver and other accessibility features, but not always.

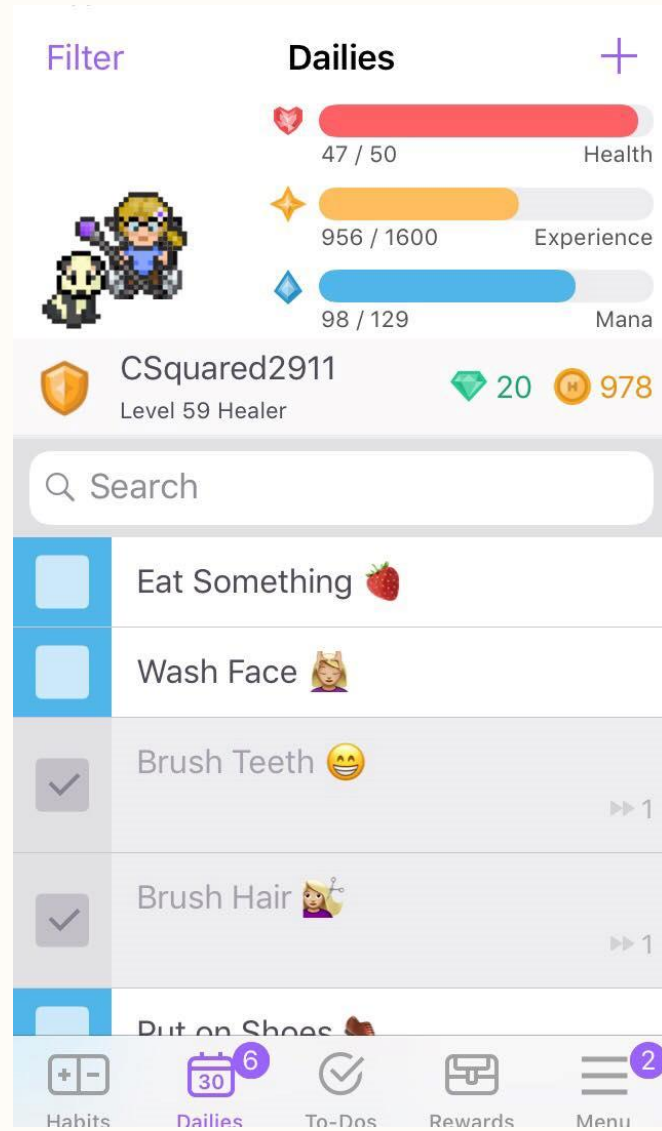
Left is an app called iStudiez, and the other is a phone calendar.



# Habit Trackers

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- Habit trackers are used to see how often you do things, and making sure that you stick to an important routine.
- There are apps that function as role-playing games (RPGs) that are specifically aimed at people who need help with organization, planning, and remembering things.
- Some people prefer to write them out and make their own.



This app is called Habitica.

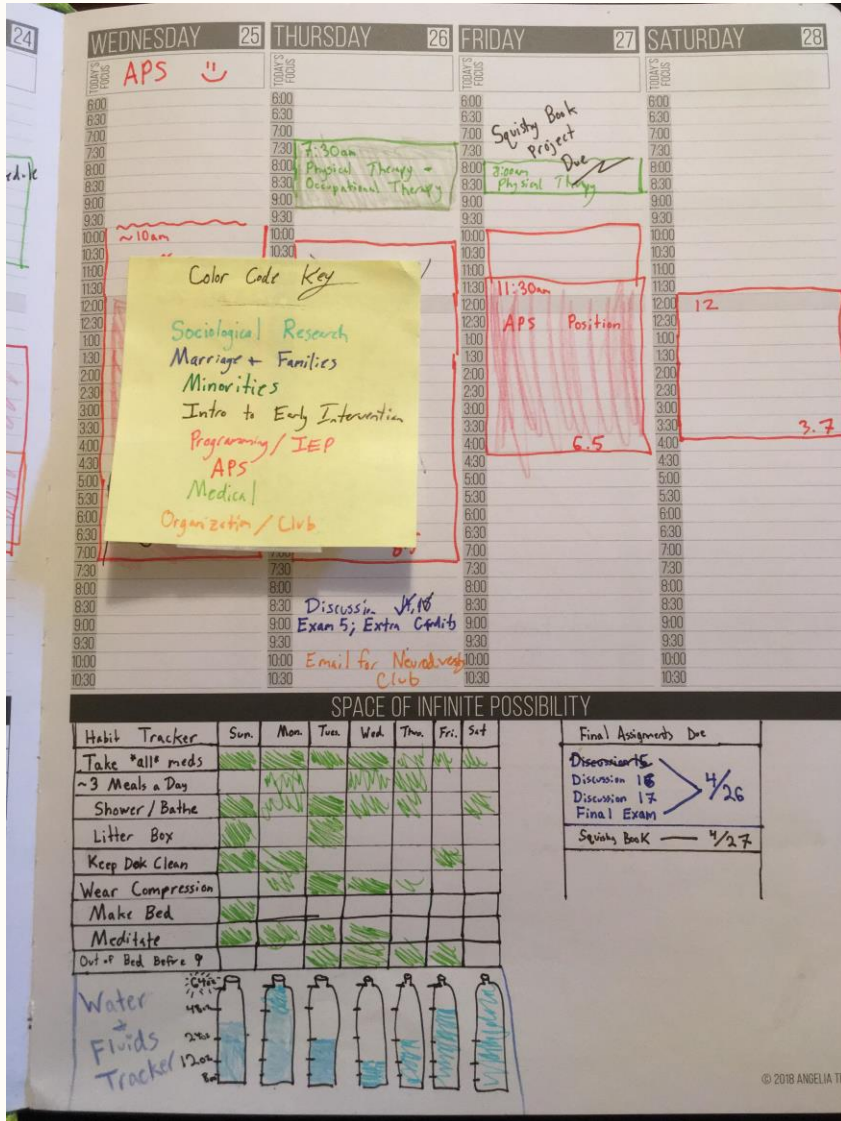
# Pen and Paper Methods

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Because sometimes writing stuff out  
is a good thing.

# Agendas and Planners

- For those who prefer pen and paper (or your brain does better when you write things down), an agenda or planner might be what you need.
- You can do a lot of things with a planner
  - Write reminders to do things.
  - Keep track of appointments, meetings, and classes.
  - Create your own habit tracker
  - Write down quotes
  - Take notes!
- Even typical wall or desk calendars can be beneficial.



This particular planner is called a Passion Planner.





# What if I have no motivation?

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- Sometimes, writing, organizing, and planning things out isn't always enough to motivate you to actually **do** the things.
- This is especially true for those of us who may have co-occurring conditions like depression, chronic illnesses, and other contributing factors.
- If you're absolutely too exhausted: **pace yourself.**
  - Break things down into steps.
  - Allow yourself to take breaks, but always make sure you get back on task.
  - If you are simply too overwhelmed, take a step back for a little while.
- Remember: Autistic adults can go through burnout if they overdo themselves.





# Burnout and Meltdowns

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- Sometimes when your executive function skills are not “up to standard,” it could mean that you are reaching burnout – when your brain/body has done too much.
- Remember that your health and safety comes first. If you feel like you might have a meltdown or nearing burnout, take a break.
  - This is your brain’s way of telling you to slow down and breathe.
- There’s no shame in taking a break, asking for an extension, or asking someone for help.
  - Again, interdependence is part of true independence; everyone relies on someone.





# Sources and Research Information

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- <https://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/module/asd1/cresource/q2/p06/first-then-picture-boards/>
- <http://autisticadvocacy.org/resources/>
- <https://www.additudemag.com/what-is-executive-function-disorder/>
- <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/science/key-concepts/executive-function/>
- <http://www.ilru.org/>
- <http://www.ldonline.org/article/29122/>
- <https://www.realsocialskills.org/>

# Any Questions?

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Thank you!

