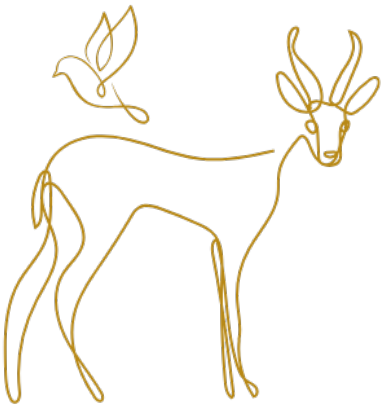

Autistic-First Ethics

A Wake-Up Call for Coaches and Practitioners

By: Tabitha Jayne

/2026

Selected *Endorsements*

This article is an honest and necessary wake-up call for the coaching profession. Grounded in lived experience and professionalism, Tabitha shows how practices that appear ethical can still cause harm when shaped by unexamined neurotypical assumptions. She reminds us that ethical sensitivity and growth do not begin with new tools, but with awareness, humility, and a willingness to learn from credible research and autistic-led education. For anyone working with influence over others' wellbeing and development, this is not optional reading, it is an ethical imperative.

Karen Liebenguth
leadership coach and founder of the Ethics in Leadership Programme

Autistic-first Ethic is a profound and thought-provoking piece that has made me question what constitutes ethical coaching practice. Tabitha's framing of the issue, 'The question isn't whether you're a good person with good intentions. The question is whether you can handle discovering that your good intentions might not be enough' resonated strongly with me as that has been part of my journey to becoming an ally and advocate for neuroinclusion. It reminds me that we need to do the work to examine our assumptions, beliefs, and behaviours from a neuroinclusion lens. This paper is essential reading for anyone who is genuine in their desire to help neurodivergent individuals succeed in their way.

Joan van den Brink
coach and author of Wired Differently, Understood Together

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The Blind Spot Revealed

I was causing harm to myself for years, and I didn't even know it. Neither did the professionals around me.

I was causing harm to myself for years, and I didn't even know it. Neither did the professionals around me. This is one of the blind spots that's putting our entire profession as coaches and practitioners at ethical risk. At 42, I was formally diagnosed as autistic in May 2022 after entering what I now know was the worst experience of autistic burnout I'd experienced in my life. In part, this was caused by being undiagnosed autistic in coaching spaces with other coaches and struggling to function effectively because I didn't understand what was going on. I'd also been questioning whether I was autistic for the previous seven years but I didn't think I needed a label to define me. If I had known then what I know now, I would have run to get diagnosed. Because the brain, body and nervous system I possess are structurally different. Without an understanding of that I was causing harm to myself.

Now, with the awareness and understanding I have of what it means to be autistic, I see the systems and structures that continue to exclude and marginalise me. I see well-meaning people unintentionally causing both me and other autistic people harm because they do not understand the systems and structures that exclude and marginalise autistic people. For me, this is an ethical issue. This personal experience brought clarity into the struggles that I faced in professional coaching and the challenges I saw in wider leadership contexts.

Professional ethics exist to protect people from harm and ensure that helping relationships actually help. Yet across multiple fields—coaching, consulting, therapy, education, research—autistic people report experiencing exclusion, misinterpretation, and harm within professional relationships designed to serve them. This occurs not because professionals intend harm, but because current ethical practice often assumes non-autistic ways of communicating, processing information, and experiencing professional relationships as universal standards. This paper emerges from a simple observation from both lived experience and

the existing evidence-base that already exists: when autistic people report that ostensibly ethical professional practices cause them distress, exclude them from services, or override their self-knowledge, something fundamental needs examination. Not the validity of ethical principles themselves, but the sophistication of their application across neurobiological differences.

The purpose of this paper is to invite you to examine whether the current ethical frameworks we work with are robust enough to serve everyone they claim to protect. This examination reveals gaps, not in ethical intention but in ethical implementation. These gaps become visible when we start from an autistic-first perspective. This is not about political correctness or identity politics. It is about professional effectiveness and ethical integrity. When a significant portion of the population cannot meaningfully access services or thrive within an organisation that claims to be universally beneficial, this represents a failure of professional practice to achieve its stated purposes. When ethical frameworks consistently fail to protect a particular group from harm, this suggests the frameworks require refinement rather than the group requiring adaptation.

> The question guiding this work is precise and practical:
>
> *What changes when we take existing ethical commitments seriously from an autistic-first perspective?*

The answer reveals not the inadequacy of current ethics, but their incompleteness. It demonstrates why protecting dignity, ensuring consent, maintaining appropriate boundaries, and preventing harm requires more sophisticated understanding when practiced across neurobiological differences.

This paper positions autistic people as ethical subjects with expertise about our own experiences rather than as case material for professional analysis. It recognises that ethics are not neutral—they embed assumptions about communication, cognition, and social relationship that may inadvertently exclude the very people they claim to serve.

The stakes are immediate and practical. As awareness of autism increases and more autistic people seek professional services, coaches and practitioners face a choice: develop inclusive practices proactively or wait for professional conflicts, legal challenges, and community organising to force change. This guide offers a framework for the former path—one that enhances rather than constrains professional effectiveness by ensuring that skills and knowledge actually serve their intended purposes.

The challenges autistic people face in professional relationships span the full spectrum of autistic experience. This includes diagnostic oversights, masking expectations, sensory accessibility barriers, communication style invalidation, processing time inadequacy, and interpretive displacement of autistic self-knowledge. These patterns affect all autistic people regardless of support needs, communication methods, or intellectual capacity.

Within this paper I do not adopt the perspective that autism is a deficit. However, I do adopt the perspective that autism is a disability because of the systemic issues that exclude autistic people from fully participating in society and because of the harm this causes. I have included further reading at the end of this paper if you wish to learn more about this.

As a certified coach, I realised that the very ethics I was bound by might need deeper examination to truly serve autistic people. As a professional certified coach (PCC) with the International Coaching Federation (ICF), I am required to comply with their code of ethics. This is a living code of ethics that is updated every three years. Even our updated 2025 ethics code—the most progressive yet—still contains a glaring omission: no mention of neurodiversity. This silence is not neutral; it's complicit. Yet in this revision, there is a level of accountability woven into the code of ethics that is inherently systemic. I have individual responsibility to serve broader community

protection by ensuring that everyone in my professional ecosystem meets those same standards. I am also asked to not just avoid harm but to actively do good and to recognise that this code of ethics is the baseline and that I am asked to go beyond what's required in the code of ethics to ensure I remain ethical.

For me, as an autistic person, this means I have to adopt an autistic-first perspective. With the lived experience I have and the knowledge I've gained from understanding what it means to be autistic to not share this is unethical. Staying quiet means that I am complicit in both the harm of myself and the harm of other autistic people. That is not an option for me.

The ICF Code of Ethics provides a robust foundation for me to build an autistic-first perspective to ethical practice. Coaching is fundamentally understood as a partnership between equals, built on trust, respect and mutual responsibility. For me, without an autistic-first perspective to ethical practice we unintentionally risk creating the very same patterns of exclusion and marginalisation that already exist. If I, as a PCC coach, was unknowingly harming myself through lack of autistic understanding, how many of you are unknowingly harming your autistic clients right now and how many of you have clients that don't even know they're autistic?

While there is no mention of neurodiversity within the current ICF code of ethics, this is something that I am committed to addressing in the next revision and am in conversation with the ICF about who have responded positively to my feedback. What is currently implicit within the code of ethics needs to become explicit. To engage in true partnership means creating space for different communication styles and ways of processing information. To adopt a consent-based approach means having frameworks that ensure the relationship between a coach and a client serves the client's best interests and not the coach's own interests. To ensure accountability means having ways to catch problems before they create harm and to actively explore what's needed to reduce harm on an ongoing basis.

But most importantly, the ICF code of ethics recognises that we as individuals have agency. We have our own wisdom and knowledge with the capacity to make our own choices. This, by the very nature of the code of ethics extends to everyone we work with. Autistic or not. An autistic-first ethical perspective builds on this foundation

rather than replacing it. The ICF's code of ethics provides the necessary groundwork for ethical practice with autistic people. However, these ethics may not fully account for the specific ways autistic people experience professional relationships, process information, or encounter harm in systems designed around neurotypical norms.

> Where traditional ethical frameworks might assume certain communication patterns, processing speeds, or social structures, autistic-first ethics asks:
>
> *What happens when we take these existing ethical commitments seriously while also recognizing that autistic people may experience consent, partnership, responsibility, and harm in different ways?*

This is not about creating special rules for autistic people, but about ensuring that universal ethical principles actually serve everyone they claim to protect. When ethics are truly universal, they account for human diversity rather than requiring people to fit predetermined moulds in order to be protected.

The strength of ICF's ethical foundation makes it possible to build something more inclusive without starting from scratch. It allows us to examine how ethical practice might need to be understood and applied differently when autistic people are involved in coaching and practitioner relationships.

This grounding in existing ethics serves an important purpose: it demonstrates that advocating for autistic-first approaches is not about abandoning professional standards or creating exceptions to ethical requirements. Instead, it's about taking

these ethical commitments seriously enough to examine whether they're being fully realised in practice, and whether current applications might inadvertently exclude or harm the very people they're meant to protect.

The question isn't whether you're a good person with good intentions. The question is whether you can handle discovering that your good intentions might not be enough.

Autistic-First: The Need for an Ethical Shift

Ethics are not neutral. Despite their aspirational universality, ethical frameworks inevitably embed assumptions about how people communicate, process information, and experience professional relationships. An autistic-first ethical lens reveals how current practice—however well-intentioned—may systematically exclude or harm autistic people while claiming to protect them.

The Assumption Problem

Current ethical practice assumes certain nervous system configurations as standard. When we require "clear communication," we often mean non-autistic communication patterns. When we expect "timely responses," we assume non-autistic processing speeds. When we design "comfortable environments," we default to non-autistic sensory preferences. These assumptions become invisible barriers that can transform ethical protections into exclusionary practices.

Consider the ICF principle of informed consent. The framework requires that clients understand "the nature of coaching" and can make autonomous decisions about their participation. This appears straightforward until we examine what

"understanding" and "autonomous decision-making" actually require. If information is presented at overwhelming speed, in ambiguous language, or within sensory environments that cause distress, can meaningful consent occur? The ethical principle remains sound, but its application may systematically exclude autistic people from the protection it promises.

This is not about intellectual capacity or decision-making ability. Many autistic people are highly capable of making complex decisions when information is presented in accessible ways and adequate processing time is provided. The barrier lies not in autistic cognition, but in professional practices that confuse non-autistic communication patterns with universal standards of clarity and accessibility.

How Autistic People Experience Professional Relationships

The relationship between autistic people and coaches and practitioners is shaped by histories of misdiagnosis, dismissal, and invalidation. Many autistic people, especially women, have been systematically excluded from services or had their self-knowledge overridden by professional interpretations. When we enter professional relationships, we bring this history with us and often encounter the same patterns of invalidation in new forms.

As an undiagnosed autistic person in coaching spaces, I struggled to function effectively because I didn't understand what was happening to me. I experienced coaching environments designed around neurotypical communication patterns, processing speeds, and sensory preferences that excluded my participation while claiming to be inclusive. Even after my diagnosis, when I've spoken up about exclusion and marginalisation, these concerns are often dismissed, minimised, or reframed as evidence of my "inflexibility" rather than recognised as valid feedback about inaccessible professional practices.

Most critically, when autistic people do raise concerns about harm, these concerns are frequently dismissed or reinterpreted as evidence of autistic pathology rather than legitimate feedback about professional practice. This dismissal compounds the original harm while positioning autistic people as unreliable witnesses to their own experiences.

The Interpretive Authority Question

Perhaps most critically, autistic-first ethics asks:

Who has authority over interpreting autistic experience and communication?

Traditional professional relationships often position non-autistic professionals as experts on autism, even when working directly with autistic people. This can create situations where autistic people's own understanding of their experiences, needs, and preferences becomes secondary to professional interpretations of what they "really" mean or "actually" need.

An autistic-first approach reverses this assumption: autistic people are presumed to be the primary experts on their own experiences unless clear evidence suggests otherwise. This doesn't mean coaches or practitioners have no expertise to offer, but it means autistic perspectives hold primary authority when interpreting autistic experience and evaluating whether professional relationships are serving autistic interests.

The Ethics of Assumption

The shift to autistic-first ethics requires recognising that current practice makes choices about whose perspectives count as authoritative, whose communication styles are treated as clear, and whose needs are considered reasonable to accommodate. These are not neutral professional decisions—they are ethical choices that distribute power, access, and opportunity.

When professional training emphasises “reading between the lines” over responding to direct communication, that’s an ethical choice. When consent processes prioritise professional efficiency over client processing needs, that’s an ethical choice. When environmental design defaults to non-autistic sensory preferences without considering alternatives, that’s an ethical choice.

Autistic-first ethics doesn’t reject professional expertise or eliminate the need for skilled guidance. Instead, it asks us as coaches and practitioners to examine whose interests their expertise serves and whether their skill in working with non-autistic clients translates into competence with autistic clients. It requires developing new forms of expertise—in accessibility, in diverse communication styles, in environmental design, in power-sharing—rather than assuming that good intentions compensate for limited understanding.

This shift is urgent because research shows that a large majority of autistic people are still undiagnosed. Without frameworks that account for neurobiological differences, these relationships risk replicating the patterns of exclusion and harm that have characterised other professional contexts.

Professional Fascination as Ethical Failure

The following example illustrates how professional curiosity, when left unchecked by autistic-informed ethics, can slide into epistemic and relational harm.

As a professional coach with a master's in consciousness, spirituality and transpersonal psychology, I am frequently in spaces and conversations where The Telepathy Tapes are mentioned. What I see happening makes me deeply uncomfortable—not because I question autistic intelligence or abilities, but because I now recognise the same patterns of exploitation that have harmed autistic people for decades, wrapped in positive language and supernatural claims.

The Telepathy Tapes is a 2024 podcast presenting nonspeaking autistic participants as "evidence" for telepathy. I understand the appeal. Who wouldn't want to challenge deficit narratives about autism? Or see humanity as capable of so much more. Yet I'm watching coaches and practitioners who I respect abandon critical thinking entirely when faced with claims that make them feel good about autism, or not even think about autism because they're so excited about the claims made for telepathy.

Here's what's actually happening: The podcast uses facilitated communication methods that have been scientifically discredited for decades. Non-autistic facilitators position themselves as essential bridges between autistic consciousness and the world, with little examination of how their expectations might influence the messages produced. Autistic participants become evidence for extraordinary claims rather than autonomous agents with their own perspectives on their communication and abilities.

This isn't validation of autistic intelligence—it's objectification with a spiritual twist. The fascination centres on what autistic people might do for science and society

rather than recognising their inherent worth and self-determined goals. Revenue and media attention flow to non-autistic creators while autistic participants face public exposure and potential abandonment when the spotlight moves on.

But here's the real ethical failure: coaches and practitioners are celebrating this without asking basic questions about consent, exploitation, or long-term impact on participants. They're so eager to embrace a positive narrative about autism, or proof of telepathy, that they've stopped thinking critically about power, authority, and harm.

It becomes even more complex when you have families who have been told their non-speaking autistic child has a deficit when you as a parent can see something more. I imagine it's comforting to think that your children are actually special and are being validated in this way.

> *Ask yourself:*
>
> If these were neurotypical participants being presented as evidence for supernatural abilities through discredited methods, would you be equally uncritical? Or does something about autism make you lower your ethical standards while telling yourself you're being supportive? Or are you so excited about the "proof" of telepathy that you haven't even considered the ethics behind it and whether they're enough?

The Broader Pattern: Professional Fascination as Ethical Blindness

The Telepathy Tapes represents a microcosm of much larger patterns throughout professional practice—where marginalised groups become evidence for claims they don't control while being excluded from the power structures that benefit from their participation.

This same dynamic appears everywhere:

- Applied Behaviour Analysis positioning autistic children as evidence for compliance training effectiveness while autistic advocates are excluded from program design
- Advocacy organizations using autistic people as symbols while maintaining minimal autistic representation in leadership
- Research institutions studying autism without meaningful autistic involvement in research questions or methodology
- Coaching programs claiming neurodiversity awareness while their curriculum excludes autistic perspectives

The pattern is always the same: professional expertise is used to justify practices that serve non-autistic interests while claiming to benefit autistic people. Even when the intentions are positive, even when the language is respectful, even when the goals seem aligned with community values.

Here's what we consistently don't see:

- **Autistic authority** over how their experiences is interpreted and represented
- **Financial benefit** flowing to autistic participants rather than non-autistic professionals
- **Long-term support** that extends beyond the research or media project
- **Consent processes** that account for how participation might be used to support broader claims
- **Community accountability** to autistic advocates who raise concerns about these practices

Professional fascination—whether with deficits or abilities—consistently overrides basic ethical considerations when autistic people are involved. We get so excited about our theories, our discoveries, our positive intentions that we stop asking whether our practices actually serve autistic interests or just make us feel better about autism.

The Professional Comfort Zone

Using the ICF Code of Ethics and Core Competencies an anchor, here's what's actually problematic: When we look at how the Telepathy Tapes are being celebrated, core coaching competencies that are recognised in professional coaching as evidence-based standard are being violated.

Cultivating Trust and Safety requires us to 'seek to understand the client within their context' and 'demonstrate respect for the client's identity, perceptions, style and language.' Yet when non-autistic facilitators are positioned as essential interpreters of autistic communication, we're overriding autistic self-expression rather than respecting it.

Listens Actively demands we 'focus on what the client is and is not saying to fully understand what is being communicated' and 'reflect or summarise what the client communicated to ensure clarity and understanding.' But facilitated communication methods make the facilitator's interpretation more important than the autistic person's actual communication.

Facilitating Client Growth calls us to 'acknowledge and support client autonomy' and 'partner with the client' rather than positioning ourselves as necessary intermediaries. When we celebrate approaches that make professionals essential bridges to autistic consciousness, we're undermining the very autonomy our competencies require us to support.

The Telepathy Tapes reveals how easily ethics can be abandoned, albeit unintentionally when something appeals to us emotionally. From the values outlined in the ICF Code of Ethics, coaches are required to embody:

Professionalism that demonstrates "responsibility, respect, integrity, competence, and excellence" while "being true and accurate in our statements." When we uncritically celebrate discredited methods, we abandon professional competence for comfortable fiction.

Collaboration requires "partnering with others, both within and across multiple social-identity groups" and "being mindful and intentional in our participation." True collaboration means including autistic voices in evaluating practices that affect autistic people—not just using autistic people as evidence for our theories.

Humanity calls us to be "open to other points of view," "create authentic relationships that support honesty, transparency, and clarity," and avoid "any behaviours or communication that suggest superiority in any way." When we override autistic self-knowledge with our interpretations, we claim superiority over autistic lived experience.

Equity pledges us to "recognise and respect all identity groups and their contributions," "maintain equality and partnership," and "explore to understand social diversity, systemic equality, and systemic oppression." The Telepathy Tapes perpetuates systemic patterns where autistic people provide evidence for claims while non-autistic professionals receive the benefits.

When we celebrate facilitated communication without examining power dynamics, consent processes, or long-term impacts on participants, we violate every single one of these core values. Whether you're an ICF accredited coach or not, ask yourself if this is really something that you want to do?

These same power dynamics have excluded and marginalised autistic voices in society for decades. Before my diagnosis, I was unknowingly complicit in perpetuating these dynamics within my own personal and professional practice.

The moment I integrated my diagnosis and realised what it meant to be autistic with the brain, body and nervous system I have; I faced a choiceless choice: either invalidate and ignore my lived experience as a late-diagnosed autistic woman, or start looking critically at the structures my work was embedded within.

I was devastated. The tension I'd experienced in transpersonal ways of working? Explained by the autistic brain, body and nervous system. The social dynamics that made me feel small. Explained by the autistic brain, body and nervous system.

Trauma was an acceptable area of exploration in transpersonal psychology, especially collective and intergenerational. Instead of exploring if I was autistic when I first suspected, I threw myself into trauma work, which was supported by the activation of what, if I had spent long enough in the NHS, could have been diagnosed as complex PTSD.

I used to describe my childhood trauma as something I'd worked around and put in a box while tidying up everything else. The moment that led me finally realise that I needed to get a professional assessment for autism was after I'd tidied up the box and yet structurally something was still there and getting in the way of how I engaged and interacted with other humans.

After the diagnosis, I still sat in many coaching spaces, especially those related to conscious and transpersonal approaches. As I learned about what it meant to be autistic, I started to see the same patterns within wider society at play within these spaces with leaders and organisations I valued and respected unconsciously holding the patterns.

I originally wanted to do a PhD about Earth connection in transforming business and how the intelligence of Earth was more important for us to learn from compared to adult development. Yet the more I sat within these spaces I'd matured in, the more I realised I needed to start with an autistic-first perspective. Because even as

autistic intelligence was celebrated, it was also structurally being marginalised. And I needed to address this first. After all, I knew the secret pain I'd hidden as I'd shown up in these spaces. I'd been unintentionally masking with no awareness of how deep this ran until after I started learning what being autistic actually meant.

The PhD I'm now undertaking at the University of Strathclyde in Work, Employment and Organisation is ensures that my real passions does not unintentionally exclude me or others like me. I'm exploring adult development theory from an autistic-first perspective so that I can develop a truly neuro-inclusive Earth-systemic approach. This is not a deviation. It's a development.

Over the last year and a half, I've reviewed the ICF L1 NatureProcess Coach Training Programme from an autistic-first neuro-inclusive perspective. To meet this approach required me to completely rewrite the communication within the programme and also to update five sessions spread across two modules because while the evidence-base I'd used was accurate, it was also ableist and neuro-exclusionary.

The Uncomfortable Question

If I, as an autistic coach with lived experience and professional expertise, had to completely revise my own training program after recognising its exclusionary elements, what does that say about practices designed by people without autistic experience or insight?

If someone with both autism and advanced training in consciousness work still embedded ableist assumptions in their professional approach, how confident can you be that your practices serve autistic clients effectively?

The measure of success isn't whether you follow diversity checklists or use inclusive language. It's whether your practice actually serves autistic clients' self-defined interests and whether autistic people have meaningful authority over their own experiences within your professional relationships.

This requires ongoing learning, regular feedback from autistic sources, and willingness to change practices that don't serve their intended purposes—even when those practices feel comfortable, familiar, or professionally validated.

Again, the question isn't whether you're a good person with good intentions. The question is whether you're willing to discover that good intentions without structural understanding create the same harm as deliberate exclusion.

From personal experience that harm hurts even more when it's done with a smile and good intentions. It requires more cognitive processing, more nervous system regulation because we, as autistic people, have to do the additional labour to recognise it wasn't malicious even if it caused harm. Then we have to evaluate whether we speak up about it and risk being invalidated even more.

Moving Forward

The evidence is clear. The ethical violations are documented. The personal cost of exclusionary practices is real. The question now is what you do with this knowledge.

Some of you will dismiss this as too challenging, too disruptive to comfortable professional practices. That's a choice. Some of you will engage with token gestures - adding neurodiversity to your marketing while changing nothing about your actual practice. That's also a choice.

But some of you will recognise that professional evolution requires more than good intentions. It requires structural change, community accountability, and the humility to learn from the people you claim to serve.

If you're in that third group, here's what moving forward looks like:

Start with your own ethical code. Look at it from an autistic-first perspective. If you don't know what that is, work with someone who does. This goes beyond the broader neurodiversity movement. You can design a neuro-inclusive space that still excludes autistic people. When I challenged an organisation that I attempted to receive services from on how their communication excluded autistic people I was told they'd already had neurodiversity training. When I further pointed out what was neuro-exclusionary in their entire communication response, they actually conceded that they had much further to go to embed the training within their organisation and asked my permission to use my email as a training tool.

Research in autistic inclusion, and other fields, highlights that this is more common than you would think. Autistic people, and other marginalised groups, being asked to educate and train on the very exclusion they're experiencing for free. Don't be like that. Pay for training from autistic trainers. Include autistic voices in your professional development - not as inspiration, but as expertise.

Examine your own practices with the same rigour you'd apply to the Telepathy Tapes:

- Where do you position yourself as interpreter rather than partner?
- Where do you override autistic self-knowledge with professional assessment?
- Where do you override autistic self-knowledge with professional assessment?

Once you know your stance ethically and how this is informing the evolution of your practice, start communicating it. In a time of ongoing stigma and violence towards autistic people, the autistic community is willing to work with professionals and organisations who are ready to listen. Do the work. Take a leadership position in your field. Stand out. Because the autistic community needs your support.

Before You Move to Action

If this paper has prompted you to think, to question, or to want to "do something differently," pause here. The instinct to move quickly into action is understandable. As coaches and practitioners, we are trained to respond, to apply, to implement. But urgency can also become a way of moving past discomfort rather than learning from it. When we rush to solutions, we risk recreating the very dynamics this paper names—prioritising professional movement over reflection, usefulness over responsibility, and action over understanding.

Before you change your practice, sit with what this brings up for you.
Notice:

- Where you feel challenged or defensive
- Where you recognise yourself or your profession
- Where uncertainty or discomfort arises
- Where you feel a pull to immediately "fix" something

These responses are not obstacles to ethical development. They are part of it.

Ethical growth does not begin with new tools. It begins with awareness, humility, and a willingness to examine how our existing assumptions, training, and environments may unintentionally exclude or harm. That kind of reflection takes time. It cannot be rushed, outsourced, or resolved through a checklist.

It is also important to recognise that insight into autistic experience does not come without cost. Much of what professionals now seek to learn has been shaped by years—often lifetimes—of navigating exclusion, misinterpretation, and systemic barriers. When autistic and neurodivergent people share their knowledge, they are not offering abstract ideas. They are offering hard-won expertise grounded in lived reality. That expertise is not a public resource to be informally accessed or expected without reciprocity. It is skilled labour. It deserves to be valued, resourced, and compensated in the same way any other professional knowledge would be.

Responsible engagement therefore means more than asking autistic peers for insight or expecting individuals to explain what should change. It means investing in your own learning, seeking out credible research and autistic-led education, and supporting the people and communities whose knowledge is shaping this shift. It means recognising that inclusion is not achieved through intention alone, but through sustained commitment, resourcing, and structural change.

So, before you move to action:

- Slow down
- Reflect on what you have read;
- Allow it to challenge how you think about ethics, authority, and professional responsibility.

Change, when it comes, will be more meaningful—and more ethical—if it emerges from that foundation rather than from the need to respond quickly.

This is not a call to inaction.

It is a call to begin in the right place.

And if you need somewhere to begin, step away from the screen. A walk in the natural world can offer the space needed to reflect more deeply, to notice what has surfaced, and to let understanding unfold at its own pace.

Further *Reading*

Underdiagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder: A Narrative Review of Gender Differences and Systemic Barriers

Loud Hands: Autistic People, Speaking
Autistic Self Advocacy Network

How Neuroaffirming is Your Practice?

Breslin, H. & van den Brink, J. (2026) Medium
https://medium.com/for-difference/how-neuroaffirming-is-your-coaching-practice-57f1e9d6f975

Just Believe: The Strange Story of Facilitated Communication

Fisher, N. (2025) British Psychological Society
https://www.bps.org.uk/psychologist/just-believe-strange-story-facilitated-communication

Facilitated Communication and Authorship: A Systematic Review

Schlosser, R.W. et al. (2014) Augmentative and Alternative Communication, 30(4), 359–368
https://doi.org/10.3109/07434618.2014.971490

About *Tabitha Jayne*

Tabitha Jayne is an autistic researcher, coach, and the founding director and director of education at Earthself Community Interest Company. Her work explores the intersection of Earth, leadership, and coaching through an autistic-first lens, examining what it means to lead, coach, and organise on behalf of Earth rather than extraction or performance alone.

Drawing on lived experience and professional practice within leadership and coaching systems, her work focuses on ethical responsibility, neuro-inclusion, and the limits of existing developmental frameworks to hold complexity, vulnerability, and ecological reality. Her doctoral research at the University of Strathclyde examines how autistic intelligence is marginalised within leadership development and coaching, and what becomes possible when those foundations are re-imagined.

She was born in and lives in Scotland, where place, history, and questions of responsibility and stewardship continue to shape her work.

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This paper forms part of an emerging body of autistic-first research and practice. In many ways it is the origin story — the moment of clarity that led to doctoral research at the University of Strathclyde and to a wider autistic-first inquiry into Earth-systemic leadership. What begins here as a professional ethics argument becomes, in that wider work, a fundamental examination of what leadership, decision-making, and our relationship with complex Earth systems might look like when autistic intelligence is no longer excluded from the foundations.

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