

# Autism at Every Age

Autism is a Neurodiversity, one of many other neurodiversities and referred to as being Neurodivergent.

Being autistic is not all negative, there can be many positives too!

There are lots of myths surrounding autism, such as:

**It is a learning disability.** It isn't, but some may have an associated learning disability.

**They have no compassion.** They do, but it can be overwhelming and physically hurt.

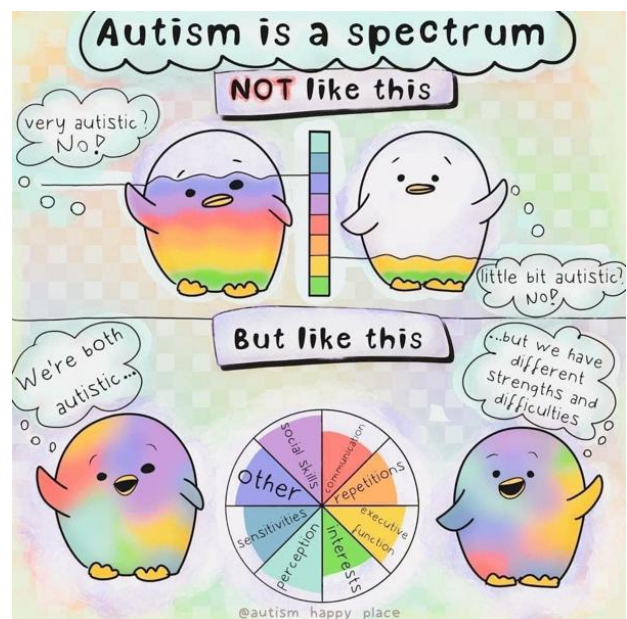
**You can always tell.** No, you can't. Even those who diagnose autism can miss it! Many Autistic people are lawyers, doctors, engineers, teachers, ministers and more. Many are married with a family. Not all are maths or art geniuses, but some may have specific interest and excel in that area.

**Some are badly autistic and some mildly affected.** This isn't the case (See the diagram). How Autism affects people isn't linear, everyone is different. Sometimes you can't see how autism affects an individual because they have become so good at masking the effects.

They are just badly behaved. Behaviour is rarely the issue. The environment around autistic people can sometimes cause a noticeable struggle. Some will refer to this as brain melt, meltdown or 'shutdown', where a time of regulation will be needed to recover. Some autistic people have learnt how to mask the impact of sensory overload, others will stim to help with regulating how their bodies react; this could be repeating a word, counting, rocking, tapping, flapping, using a tablet device or using a sensory toy. Each person will have their own way to regulate how they are coping.

You can grow out of it. No, an autistic person will always be autistic.

Many of our guests, of any age, will be autistic. They will choose where they are most comfortable to be in the various venues. Being able to walk around venues beforehand might be helpful and they may need information to inform that choice. The disability advisor on site will be able to help with this.



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**Seminars and workshops:** There may not be any issues, but lots of movement, inconsistent lighting and repeating sounds may make things difficult. Don't be surprised if some walk around to find the best place or opt to walk up and down at the back. Some may ask for notes to help them follow what is being said (listening is hard with constant ambient sound).

Questions may be blunt and precise; give clear and concise answers.

### **Across the site:**

If an autistic person becomes overwhelmed and distressed in an area where you can help, having lots of people offer help can be even more overwhelming. So, make sure only one person supports quietly and with as little intrusion as possible. Some autistic people carry a card with instructions that they will place next to them.

Eye contact is often painful and social pleasantries may not be top of their agenda.

### **Families who have autistic children:**

Having an autistic child is not a tragedy. But lots of people see the struggles and assume it is. Some will assume an autistic child's behaviour is just naughty. Some might see a smile and assume the behaviour is deliberate, but in a meltdown a smile is not what it seems.

If you see a family struggling, gently offer help and reassurance, especially if there are other children with them and a child is running away due to overload. If you can stay around and make sure they are not crowded, please do, but don't make it a big thing.

**Praying with Autistic people:** The best starting line is "What do you want prayer for?" Don't assume. Many autistic people would find the offer of prayer for healing offensive, and for good reason. Some may want prayer for aspects of their autism that are a struggle at that time, but like any other people they will want prayer for all sorts of things to do with their faith, family and their work or ministry.

Do not use touch or give consistent eye contact. Pray precisely for what was asked for and nothing else, but feel free to ask if there was anything else.

For parents of autistic children, again, they may not want prayer for healing but rather for specific struggles – for them or their child. It's fine to pray for the faith of their child!

NOTE: Autistic person is the preferred language of most autistic people, and not a person with autism. Face to face we should use the preference of individuals – which may occasionally differ, and not try to correct them.

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Written with support from autistic friends.

Graphic by @Autism\_Happy\_Place

