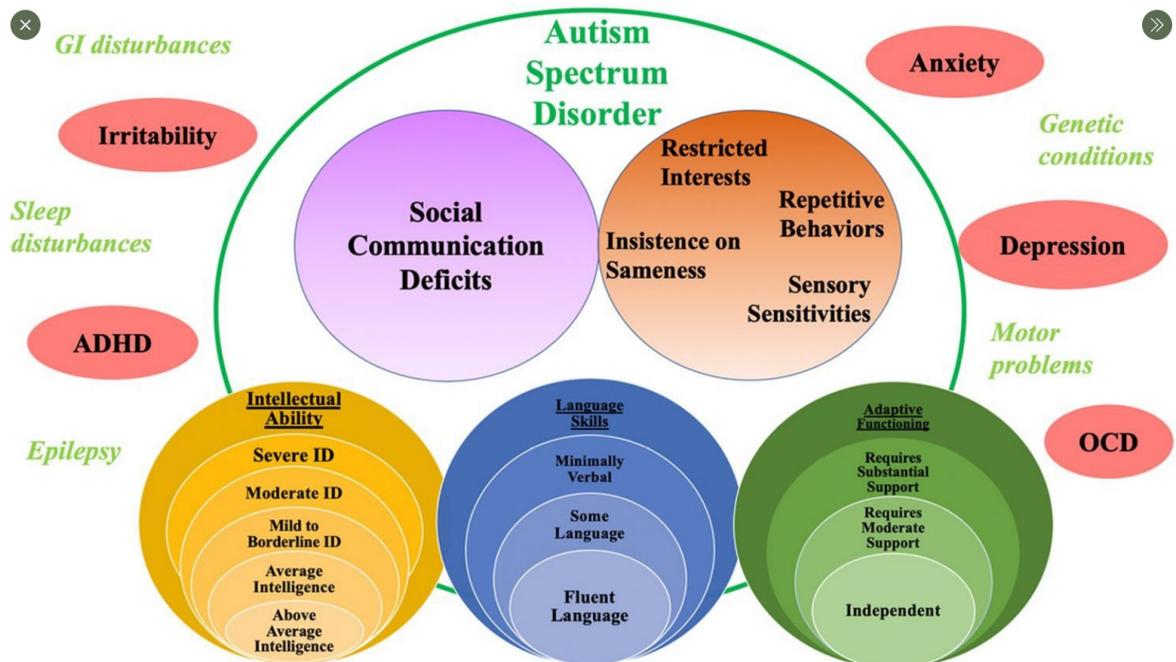


**What is Autism?**

Autism is a complex, lifelong developmental disability that typically appears during early childhood and can impact a person’s relationships, self-regulation, communication and social skills. While there is not a known single cause of autism, early diagnosis helps a person receive the support and services that they need, which can lead to a quality life filled with opportunity.

Nearly 1 in 54 Americans are affected by autism. Autism is a spectrum that each individual experiences differently. If you have met one person with autism, then you have met one person with autism. Autism is an infinite number of people presenting an endless number of different lived experiences. Signs and symptoms vary from person to person and between male and female. People with Autism will not usually have all of the signs and symptoms.



The shift in the use of terminology from “Autism Awareness Month” to “Autism Acceptance Month” aims to foster acceptance which can ignite change in the lives of those with autism and their families.





**WORDS MATTER**

THE NEED FOR ACCEPTANCE IS GREATER THAN EVER, AS WE STRIVE FOR AUTISTIC INDIVIDUALS TO LIVE FULLY IN ALL AREAS OF LIFE.

ACCEPTANCE IGNITES CHANGE FOR OPPORTUNITIES IN LONG TERM SUPPORTS.

  
 AUTISM SOCIETY

**Autism Acceptance Means:**

- As we work to create a more accepting society, we must also accept autistic individuals for who they are. Acceptance is often one of the biggest barriers to being valued and finding and developing a strong support system.
- Fostering acceptance is an essential step to improving opportunities in education, employment, accessible housing, affordable health care and more.
- It is not enough to be aware of autism, our society needs to accept the autism community and take actionable steps to better support individuals to live quality, meaningful and supported lives. Acceptance puts pressure on our leaders to dedicate more funding in support services for the autistic community.

“While we will always work to spread awareness, words matter as we strive for autistic individuals to live fully in all areas of life. As many individuals and families affected by autism know, acceptance is often one of the biggest barriers to finding and developing a strong support system.” states Christopher Banks, President, CEO of the Autism Society of America The shift in terminology fosters acceptance to ignite change through improved support and opportunities in education, employment, accessible housing, affordable health care, and comprehensive long-term services.

I Do Not Want "AWARENESS"

I want you to accept me.



Accept my need for routine and quiet.

Accept my sensitivity to noise

Accept my swaying & rocking & flappy hands

Accept my lack of eye contact

Accept that I don't do small talk or chit chat

Or sometimes, I don't speak at all

I'm glad you are aware I exist

Now it's time to **ACCEPT ME** for who I am

## Autism

### AWARENESS VS ACCEPTANCE

Neurodiversity is not just a conversation topic! Help build a community that welcomes Autistics into your world, into your and your children's friendships, into your neighborhood gatherings, into your workplace, places of worship, schools and playgrounds!

- 1

Awareness means you know it exists  
Acceptance means you connect personally and learn more
- 2

Awareness means you can identify it  
Acceptance means you talk to people and gain understanding, compassion, and sensitivity
- 3

Awareness means you know something is happening  
Acceptance means you offer help and support without judgement
- 4

Awareness means you cope with it deal with it tolerate it  
Acceptance means you embrace it, grow from it, and build relationships with people who have it not only those who love someone with it!
- 5

**Awareness Is Not Enough**  
acceptance is the next step towards a truly inclusive and community driven society!

Acceptance comes with understanding, and while individuals and families living with autism live this life everyday, there is still a need for factual education and awareness for the general public. Knowledge promotes acceptance because it allows people to understand how to be more inclusive, and build more supportive

### HOW AUTISM AFFECTS A CHILD

#### At School

- Attention
- Transitions
- Language skills
- Peer social skills
- Academic skills
- Following directions
- Inappropriate behaviors



#### At Home

- Life Skills (getting dressed, toileting, brushing teeth, bathing)
- Family relationships
- Independently playing toys/games appropriately
- Requesting of preferred items/activities
- Cleaning up after oneself
- Feeding
- Inappropriate behaviors

#### How to Calm a Person with Autism

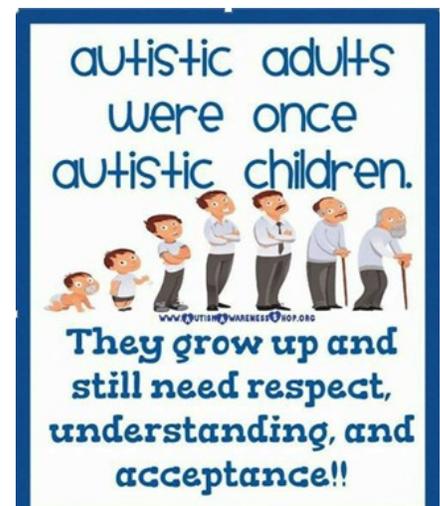
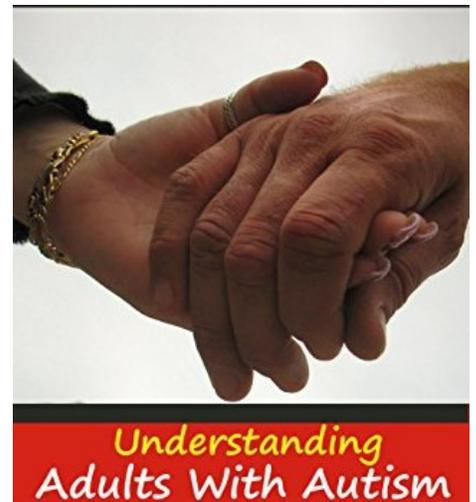
- Give them space and ask them what they need.
- Keep your language simple and let them respond with behaviors, as words often fail when they are distressed.
- Provide a safe sensory environment. Some needs are a quiet personal space, dim lighting, and a gentle pressure touch (i.e.; weighted blanket)

#### What Not to Do

- Don't punish them for being distressed. A lot of aggression and self-harm behaviors are rooted in deep, deep pain or frustration. A meltdown is an involuntary neurological reaction. It can't be prevented, only responded to.
- Don't bombard them with questions. Autistic people often don't process information well when upset.

#### Common signs and symptoms of ASD in adults can include:

- Clumsiness
- Difficulty making conversation
- Difficulty making or maintaining close friendships
- Discomfort during eye contact
- Challenges with regulating emotions
- Extreme interest in one particular topic, such as a specific period of history
- Frequent monologues on the same subject or subjects
- Hypersensitivity to sounds or smells that do not seem to bother others
- Involuntary noises, such as repetitive throat clearing
- Issues understanding sarcasm or idioms
- Lack of inflection when speaking
- Only having an interest in a few activities
- Preference for solitary activities
- Problems reading the emotions of others
- Trouble understanding facial expressions and body language
- Reliance on daily routines and difficulty dealing with changes to routine
- Repetitive behaviors
- Social Anxiety
- Superior abilities in mathematics and related disciplines
- Need to arrange items in a specific order



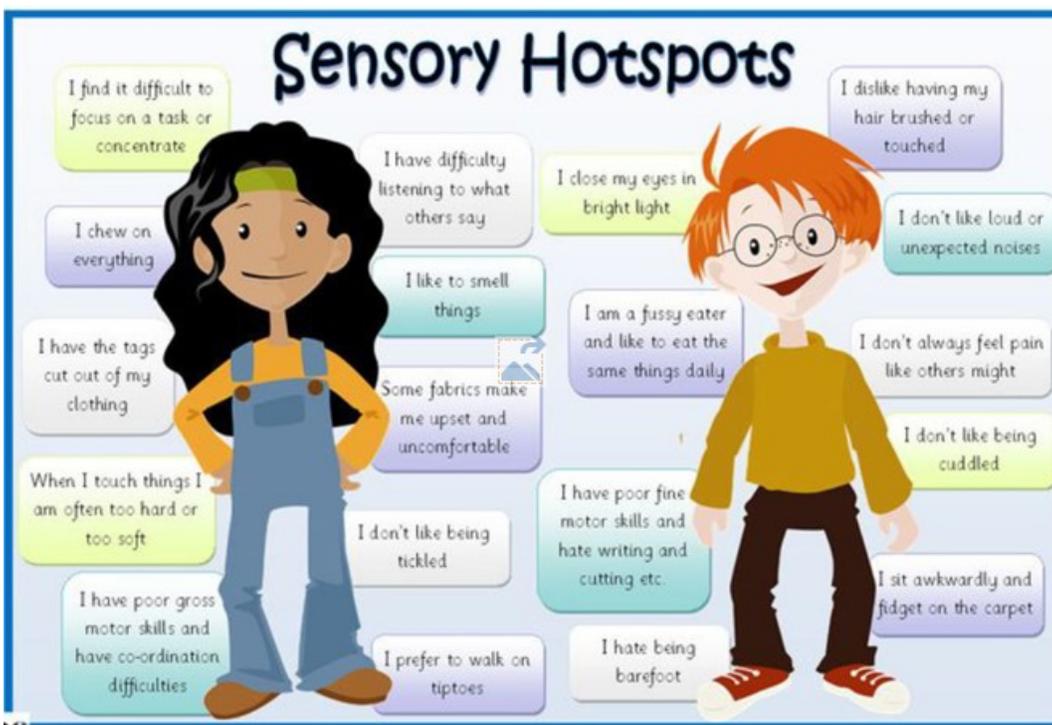


# Sensory Processing & Stimming Are Common in Autism



## The Impact of Sensory Processing

It was only in 2013 that sensory processing issues were added to the list of symptoms to diagnose Autism. Those living with Autism can tell you it has a huge impact on their lives. Sensory issues are very common among autistics, This might be seen by others as someone being dramatic (saying something is loud when it doesn't seem loud to you) or even rude (wearing headphones in a restaurant) but it's important to understand that just because it doesn't seem loud, bright, or overwhelming to you doesn't mean the autistic person is experiencing it the same way you do.



Have you ever seen light streaming through a window and noticed the dust?

Some people with Autism mention they can see light waves like that *all the time!*

High pitched noises and minor keys are both mentioned as sounds that caused a fight or flight reaction.

Smells can also be overwhelming and be triggers.



### What is Stimming?

Autistic people stim for all kinds of reasons, but it's generally a way to regulate emotions and sensory input, you might find a person who flaps their hands when excited or rocks when upset. Various forms of stimming are:

Visual - Staring at lights, repetitive blinking, moving fingers in front of the eyes, hand-flapping.

Auditory -Tapping ears, snapping fingers, making vocal sounds

Tactile -Rubbing the skin with one's hands or with another object, scratching

Taste - Placing body parts or objects in the mouth, licking objects

Smell - Smelling objects, sniffing people

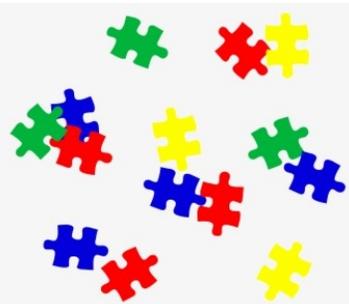
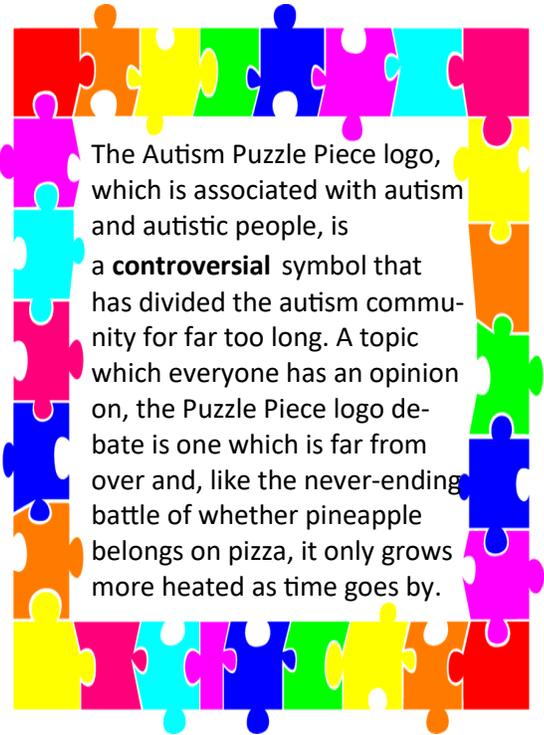
Vestibular (Sense of Balance) - Rocking front to back or side to side, continually shaking leg or foot.

# Controversy in The Autism Community

## Autism: which symbols?

Most people within the Autistic community have strong preferences (with good reason) about particular symbols associated with autism. How do you get it right? Remember that autistics' preferences take precedence over neurotypical allies'. Here's a quick guide:

✓	✗
 <p>Autistic Self-Advocacy Network (ASAN) by autistics for autistics</p>	 <p>Autism Speaks Does not speak for autistics Regarded as a hate group by the autistic community</p>
 <p>Neurodiversity designed by autistics to represent the diversity of the autistic spectrum</p>	 <p>Light It Up Blue Autism Speaks' genderised manipulation of World Autism Awareness Day</p>
 <p>National Autistic Society (UK) Not perfect but does listen to autistic voices and encourages acceptance</p>	 <p>Puzzle piece Old symbol for autism Widely rejected now by the autistic community</p>
 <p>Autistic Pride Official Autistic Pride flag Autistic Pride Day: June 18th</p>	 <p>Autism Awareness Awareness not acceptance Autistics reject the puzzle piece</p>



A major issue with the puzzle piece is what it insinuates. A puzzle piece is part of something unfinished. A puzzle piece by itself inherently means that the puzzle is incomplete. It implies that we are not complete people, that autism is something to be ashamed of because it means we are missing a piece of ourselves.

When the puzzle piece is used as the symbol for autism, it tells autistic people not to embrace their experiences but instead be ashamed of them until hopefully, someone comes by one day with the missing piece that fixes us. But I'm not missing any pieces, and neither are other autistic people. We need to be accepted, not "fixed."

What is clear though is that the meaning behind the symbol still elicits strong reactions, both positive and negative.

## Before you donate to Autism Speaks, Consider the facts



**Very little money donated to Autism Speaks goes toward helping autistic people and families.**

Only 4% of Autism Speaks' budget goes towards the "Family Service" grants that are the organization's means of funding services. While 44% of its budget goes toward research, only a small percentage of this research is aimed at improving the quality of life of autistic people. Most of the research that Autism Speaks funds is devoted to causation and "prevention," including the prospect of prenatal testing.

**Autism Speaks talks about us without us.**

There is not a single autistic person on Autism Speaks' Board of Directors or in its leadership. Autism Speaks is one of only a few major disability advocacy organizations which refuses to include a single individual with the disability it purports to serve on its board of directors or in anything more than token positions within its ranks.

**Autism Speaks' fundraising strategies promote fear, stigma, and prejudice against autistic people.**

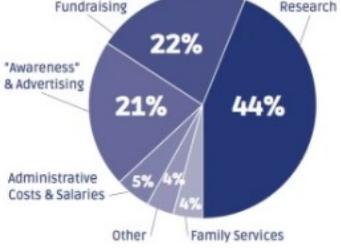
Autism Speaks uses damaging and offensive fundraising tactics which rely on fear, stereotypes and devaluing the lives of people on the autism spectrum. Autism Speaks' advertisements and "awareness" campaigns portray autistic adults and children not as full human beings, but as burdens on society that must be eliminated as soon as possible.

**Autism Speaks is not financially responsible.**

Although Autism Speaks has not prioritized services with a practical impact for families and individuals in its budget, its rates of executive pay are the highest in the autism world: some salaries exceed \$400,000 a year. Its fundraising expenses exceed spending on most of its core programs, and Charity Navigator rates its financial health as a 2 out of 4.

## Autism Speaks' Budget

source: Autism Speaks 990 Non-Profit Tax Exemption Form, 2010



**Instead, donate to organizations that help autistic people:**

- Autistic Self-Advocacy Network (ASAN)** provides support, community, and public policy advocacy, by and for people on the autism spectrum. [autisticadvocacy.org](http://autisticadvocacy.org)
- Autism Network International (ANI)** is an autistic-run self-help and advocacy organization. Every year ANI hosts Autreat, the autism conference designed to be accessible and welcoming to autistic people. [autreat.com](http://autreat.com)
- Autism Society of America** works to increase public awareness about the day-to-day issues faced by people on the spectrum, advocates for appropriate services for individuals across the lifespan, and provides the latest information regarding treatment, education, research and advocacy. [autism-society.org](http://autism-society.org)



## Glossary of Terms And Myths

**ASC/ASD:** Autism spectrum condition / Autism spectrum disorder. While ASD is the term in common diagnostic use currently, many Autists prefer the term ‘condition’ as being more neutral than ‘disorder’.

**Asperger’s Syndrome:** has been incorporated into a category titled “Autism Spectrum Disorders”. Although Asperger’s Syndrome is out of date now, lots of people still use it, Some people object to its incorporation into the Autism category who would prefer to be distanced from what they almost invariably call “low functioning Autistics”.

**Auditory processing:** In very simple and practical terms, this is the processing of spoken information. It can sometimes be delayed in Autistic people, and for many (not all), speaking on the phone can be very difficult, and written communication is preferred.

**Burnout:** This is a long-term response to a long-term build up of stress. Most Autistic adults who experience burnout describe trying to act neurotypical for too long, and then one day, the mask is no longer available – it’s not possible to pretend any more. It is usually accompanied by a sudden loss of daily functioning, along with anxiety and depression, and appears to be particularly prevalent among people who either did not know they were Autistic (and therefore didn’t know what they needed to do for self-care), or who have previously been suppressing their Autistic responses in an attempt to be seen as competent in a competitive world.

**Executive function:** This is a term used for the way the brain processes the tasks we have to do. It involves planning the steps of a task, maintaining attention, working memory, (i.e. remembering the information needed for the task – like a temporary folder), and the reasoning and problem-solving processes required to complete the task. These are the basic processes affected in ADHD (which often co-occurs with ASCs), and can be quite challenging for Autistic people even if ADHD is not present. These processes are easily affected by stress, anxiety, illness, and depression, whether or not you have an underlying executive dysfunction.

**Functioning labels:** Terms such as “high-functioning” and “low-functioning” are strongly rejected by a very large proportion of the Autistic community (note, this is the actually Autistic people, not necessarily the surrounding parents, careers and professionals). The objection is for several reasons, but one of the most commonly expressed issues is that to give a functioning label creates an impression that the level of functioning ability is fixed and immutable, whereas the experience of Autistic adults is that the capacity to function (as we’re expected to by societal pressures) fluctuates day to day, and based on external and internal circumstances. Burnout, for example, can mean that someone who was previously perceived as highly capable can lose many aspects of their capacity, whereas delays in development that led to the label of ‘low-functioning’ may well be caught up given time, support and techniques (e.g. alternative communication options, assistance dogs). People labelled “low-functioning” have their strengths ignored. This group of people have traditionally been recommended for institutionalization; even if this did not happen, they are frequently not given opportunities to use their gifts and strengths. Even today, many parents tell Autistic Adults that their child is “too low functioning ever to be able to make choices for themselves” – dismissing the fact that these Autistic adults may have had similar challenges as a child. People labelled “high-functioning” instead have their challenges ignored. Many people spend a lot of time and energy masking their difficulties, afraid to be seen as ‘different’ or less capable.

**Meltdown: This is not a tantrum.** Tantrums are relatively deliberate, made in order to get one’s own way. The child (or adult) is often able to stop a tantrum if the person it’s directed at gives in or ignores it. A meltdown is an outward ‘explosion’ in response to a sensory overload. This is not a deliberate action, the Autist usually has very little control over it, and it will happen whether or not there is anyone there to watch it. For a visual type of analogy, a tantrum is like shaking a bottle of soft drink (soda) and taking the lid off. A meltdown is more like the internal pressure blowing the lid off. (See Shutdown)

**Neurodivergent (ND):** different (from the typical) in neurology. This includes autism as well as other neurodivergences including ADD/ADHD, dyslexia, acquired brain injuries, OCD, giftedness and other conditions. The term is used as a neutral term to avoid pathologizing or stigmatizing differences in neurology.

**Neurotypical (NT):** having typical or average neurology. Not just not Autistic, although it is often used in that way by members of the Autistic community. Sometimes described as “normal”.

**Sensory Overload:** One of the commonalities in Autism is that we have differences in sensory perception and sensory processing. This can seem like the world is turned up too loudly, too brightly, and there is no filter or way to reduce the barrage of input. A sensory overload usually occurs when the sensory input is too much, and there's nowhere to go to escape from it. Senses – awareness of noise, touch, smell, brightness and movement – keep heightening and soon become too much to bear; it all becomes completely overwhelming. Sensory overload is very likely to end in meltdown or shutdown. Avoiding loud, bright or otherwise stimulating situations that you can't remove yourself from goes a long way to avoiding these responses.

**Shutdown:** This is an alternative response to sensory overload, as opposed to a meltdown. A shutdown is like the consciousness removing itself from the outside environment. This may not look like being curled up in fetal position – although it may. It may include becoming immobile and staring off into space, or becoming so absorbed in a special interest or somewhat mindless activity that you become unresponsive to people calling your name.

**Stimming:** The word ‘stim’ comes from the vaguely uncomfortable term ‘self-stimulating behaviors’. It's a habit or action that people use to comfort, settle, or relax themselves. Hand-flapping is one example of this, but it can be as diverse as sucking a thumb or finger, fixing makeup frequently, tapping feet or fingers, repeating words or phrases, knitting, fiddling with hair, or spinning in circles.

## **AUTISM MYTHS AND STEREOTYPES**

**Autism is a childhood condition.** Signs of autism start very early in childhood, but it is a lifelong condition. Autistic kids don't grow out of their autism—they grow up to be autistic adults.

**Autistic people have something wrong with them that needs to be fixed.** Autism isn't a disease like diabetes or asthma, and there is no cure for it. Many autistic people say they wouldn't want to be cured. The way they see it, autism is like their gender or nationality—it's part of who they are. Think of autism as a different way of processing information and making sense of the world. Autistic brains find some things more challenging, like relating to others, but they tend to excel in other ways, like noticing details and remembering information.

**If someone can't speak, it means they can't understand.** For a long time, doctors thought that if someone couldn't speak, they couldn't possibly be intelligent. Now we know that many non-speaking individuals are very smart, they just have trouble getting their bodies to obey their minds. You can show respect to non-speaking autistic people by talking to them like you would talk to anyone else their age.

**Autistic people learn slower than others their age.** Some autistic people do take longer to learn new things, while others learn very quickly, and most are somewhere in between. Every autistic person has strengths and challenges, just like everyone else.

**Autistic people are “in their own world.”** People often mistake common autistic behaviors, like fidgeting, covering ears, and lack of eye contact as signs that autistic people are spacing out. Actually, these behaviors do the opposite. If you've ever been to a country where you don't speak the language, you know how overwhelming it is when you don't know what others are about to do and aren't able to communicate with them. That's how autistic people feel all the time! Their behaviors aren't a sign of being lost—they're a sign of working hard to stay calm and focused.

**All autistic people are the same.** Autistic people share a few traits, like challenges communicating and relating to other people, but they are unique in every other way. You can find autistic people everywhere—they are athletes, doctors, teachers, actors, Youtubers, counselors, artists, and even moms and dads.

**Autism is more common than it was in the past.** Autism used to be very rare because it was only diagnosed in children who showed an exact list of challenges. Today, the autism spectrum is much broader, ranging from those who need a lot of help to those who need a little extra help in certain areas. It's not that there are more autistic people, we've just gotten better at identifying it.

**Autistic people don't want to make friends.** If an autistic person doesn't respond the way expected, it doesn't mean they don't want to be your friend. It takes a lot of effort for many autistic people to interact. They may need a break, a quieter place to hang out, or a different way to communicate (like texting or using a special app). If they seem shy or anxious, keep in mind that they might have been teased or bullied in the past. Remember—you don't need special knowledge or skills to be friends with an autistic person. Just be kind, be yourself, and be accepting of others and their differences.