

A Few Good Things to Know about Autism

Autism isn't something that can be caught from another person. Autism is just another way for people's brains to work.

Autism isn't something new. Autism has been around forever.

People on the autism spectrum are all different and totally unique. *Spectrum* means all different types of one thing gathered together in order, like all the colors in the world lined up in a rainbow. We say that people are on the *autism spectrum* because people with autism are as different from each other as the colors of the rainbow are different from one another. It might be hard to notice autism in one person while it is easy to notice it in another. If you have autism, you might be super good at drawing pictures while another person with autism might hate drawing pictures. One person with autism might be very, very quiet all the time. Another might not!

Some people with autism can have ticklish senses. Our main senses are touch, taste, sight, smell, and hearing. Some of these senses might be almost *ticklish* for people who have autism. For instance, if you have autism, you might be really bothered by a strong smell or a bright light that nobody else seems to notice. Or you might enjoy touching or tasting or hearing something so much that you want to touch, taste, or hear it over and over again.

Some people with autism use *stimming* to feel calm. *Stimming* can be body movements, like tapping, squinting, teeth grinding, hand-waving, or rocking. Stimming can be repeating the same words or sounds. Stimming can also be sorting objects or even chewing or sucking on objects. Most people stim in some small way when they feel nervous or excited. If you have autism you might stim more often, more noticeably, and for longer stretches of time, because it helps you feel calm.

Some people with autism can be very, very interested in certain things. Some people with autism can't get enough of one particular activity or idea. It could be doing math, building with Legos, or decorating cupcakes. Everything else might be *way too boring*, for now.

Some people with autism like routines . . . a lot. A routine is something that always happens at the same time, in the same order, in the same way. If you have autism, a routine—knowing what's coming—might make it easier for you (and for most people) to stay calm and in control.

All people with autism have feelings. Most people who *don't* have autism show their feelings on their faces or in the tone of their voices. If you have autism, you might have the same expression on your face or the same tone in your voice much of the time, because your feelings come out in other ways. Instead of smiles or frowns, you might rather use words to express your feelings or to learn other people's feelings. Whether you have autism or not, try saying "I'm sad" when you feel sad. Ask someone else how they're feeling if you're unsure about it.

All people with autism can be friends with people who don't have autism. People with autism can play games and go to birthday parties and get jobs and start families and do the usual things that people do. If you have autism, you might sometimes act in ways that make it seem like you'd rather be alone, but that doesn't mean you can't or shouldn't be part of the group. Join if you want to join! And if you know someone with autism, invite them to your party or to play in your game!

