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ISSUE!**

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Letter from the Editors

Dear Reader

'THIS READS LIKE A BEST FRIEND'S GUIDE TO AUTISM'

- ADELE DEVINE, SPECIAL NEEDS TEACHER



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Well, this is it. The very last issue of AuKids magazine. Twelve years of our careers have been dedicated to sorting through the autism advice that's out there and bringing you the very best of it. It's been so much fun, and we'll miss you all. Our readers are very special. You're always positive and appreciative, and you feel like our extended family. So although it's goodbye in this form, don't forget that we are still on Facebook and Twitter and you still have our archive at www.aukids.co.uk to delve into. Also do write to us at aukidsmag@gmail.com if you need pointing in the right direction for information; we'll try our best for you!

Although this year has been a difficult one, hope is on the horizon that we'll soon be protected from Covid-19. As we forge ahead, we hope that the best is yet to come in the world of autism, too. As our understanding grows, so will our compassion and ability to tailor services to suit autistic people. Have a look at what our experts hope for in the coming years, in **My Crystal Ball** on Page 12.

Some great news for 2021, too! Debby Elley has just signed a new book contract and will be teaming up with a new collaborator for another autism release towards the end of the year. We will keep you updated on social media. Tori and Debby also continue to generate ideas, the latest of which is the new blog and Instagram page [#stylemespecial](https://www.instagram.com/stylemespecial), aimed at inspiring you to find practical and fashionable items for your autistic youngster.

The practical bit; all automatic Paypal and Direct Debit agreements should have now been cancelled by us. Everyone whose subscription was due to run past Issue 50 this year has been given a code to spend on past print issues online, which you need to use before the end of February. If you've any payment queries, please write to aukidsmag@gmail.com

Print magazines are available to buy from www.aukids.co.uk until the end of February this year. After

that our website will operate for free downloads only – use it as your own little autism library. If you can't find what you're looking for, ask us. Our e-mail will continue to run.

AuKids has had a difficult year, but thanks to your support we've had enough money left to pay our suppliers and produce this issue. Some leftover issues will be given to support groups, so get in touch if you're able to collect any from Stockport.

Your personal details will be erased from our membership system by March 1st 2021 and rest assured that no details will be kept on our files.

We wish we could give you all a big hug in person (except for those who don't want one!) but we can't, so we'll just say thank you from the bottom of our hearts for all the support and encouragement you've given to us as we've pushed our way from being the first UK autism parenting magazine in 2008 with just a few followers, to a bit of a game-changer quite frankly (brag).

Take care of yourselves and your very special youngsters. As a parting gift, we're pleased to say that Jessica Kingsley Publishing is offering you 15% off both our books until the end of February. Just use the discount code **AUKIDS15** at www.jkp.com to buy either **15 Things they Forgot to Tell You About Autism** by Debby Elley and/or **The Ice Cream Sundae Guide to Autism** by Debby Elley and Tori Houghton.

Love and good wishes to all of you,

Debby, Tori, Jo & Tim

From the Team Behind AuKids...



Go to www.jkp.com and use promo code **AUKIDS15** for a 15% discount

Perfect for kids, siblings, teaching and training!

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The opinions expressed in AuKids magazine are those of the contributor. Please seek medical advice before embarking on any therapy or behaviour intervention. All articles are copyright AuKids.

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AND IT'S GOODBYE FROM US

AuKids is a team of four. Debby Elley and Tori Houghton are its founders. Our graphic designer Jo Perry runs the animation company Periscope Studios. Tim Tuff is our autism advocate. Here's a little look back on what we've brought to the magazine, and what it's given back to us.



Debby Elley



I'm generally a positive thinker and when we were told our twins

had autism back in 2006, I didn't want the fun to stop. In launching AuKids, we wanted to take an upbeat perspective.

As a mum meeting many other carers, I hope I've informed our editorial through a knowledge of what others need. I'm hopelessly intolerant of waffle or of being patronised – I look for practical, timely advice. If you know your subject you should be able to put it in down-to-earth terms that everyone can understand, don't you think?

As a journalist I have also been wary of people pedalling their own agendas and mistrustful of magazines that take articles from so-called 'scientists' without putting them through rigorous two-sided questioning. Our impartiality is something that I'm especially proud of. People may not realise this, but at AuKids we've tried hard to achieve a balance on the

information we've produced to ensure that it's credible and scientifically sound.

Because of the combination of our characteristics, we've achieved AuKids through the smallest team possible! Tori is a mover and a shaker, an ideas person with a passion for involving others, good at generating new material. I'm a theorist and reflector, a careful reader but a creative writer, good at bringing diverse elements together and making sense of them. Jo has that unusual combination of being highly creative but also very thorough and exacting. Tim brings the inside perspective to what we do. All of us are highly visual thinkers.

I hope that although we've stopped printing new issues, you'll all continue to use our online library to download what you need. So much love and care has gone into every single issue and our practical advice will stand the test of time.

Tori Houghton



I had no real 'connections' with autism until my first clinical placement

as a Speech and Language Therapy student, which was in a specialist nursery for autistic children. Initially confused and bewildered by autism, I soon fell deeply in love with the kids and spent the next few years improving my therapeutic skills and lapping up as much knowledge as I could about the condition.

The idea for AuKids came to us when I was working with Debby's twins, not long after their diagnosis. I found Debby to be an inspiring parent – so positive, knowledgeable yet so open to ideas. The sessions were fun, her boys full of giggles and we'd work truly collaboratively together – me sharing approaches I'd tried before, Debby sharing tips that had worked with the boys. She was a mine of information on local events suitable for autistic kids and the idea of creating some sort of publication to share both events and ideas

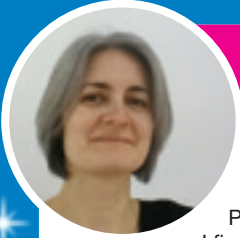
with other parents seemed an obvious progression of our working relationship.

AuKids has enabled us to share our stories, our successes, our strategies. It has given us the platform to publish our first book together – explaining autism as WE see it – in a positive, colourful way to young children and hopefully inspire the next generation to be advocates and supporters of the autism community.

I really feel that autism found me – it has defined my career – both as an SLT and now, a director of a specialist support agency for autism. I've genuinely met some of the BEST people and friends along the way – those I've worked with, families I've supported, young kids who have captured my heart and helped me see the world from their perspective.

This might be the end for AuKids magazine in print form, but this is certainly not the end for us – we will continue to spread our autism positivity as much as we can.

Jo Perry



I was working as an animator at Catalyst Pictures when I first met Debby.

We'd just released 'The Space Place', a 3D animated series designed to help children with autism to recognize the link between certain facial expressions and emotions. Debby came to interview Nik Lever, the director of the series, and the company recommended me for AuKids as I had a background in graphic design.

Debby told me they didn't want anything that looked too corporate. I understood her straight away and I try to arrange the information in a way that's engaging, colourful and easy to follow – I enjoy developing their creative ideas. I started on Issue

2, and a lot's changed – I now run my own animation company with my husband. Over the years I've drifted into children's book illustration too, and I've enjoyed illustrating Debby and Tori's latest best-seller, the *Ice Cream Sundae Guide to Autism*.

I give the magazine its final proofread and so I've become fairly knowledgeable about autism. It's helped me on quite a few occasions when my son Tom has befriended children with autism and I've been able to show understanding.

Before AuKids I'd assumed that people with autism were like Raymond in the film *Rain Man*. Now I understand that it's a hugely varied spectrum. I feel richer to have the knowledge that AuKids magazine has given me.

Tim Tuff



When I started at AuKids I wanted to help people

understand autism more. I would deliver magazines to support groups in our area. By doing this and attending events with the AuKids team, I started to chat to more people.

I grew in confidence because I knew that parents were interested in learning about autism. After a few years I became less overwhelmed at events and I could stay at them for longer, and move around the room, introducing myself. These days I roam around the stands at exhibitions, giving them a copy of the magazine and

chatting. It's been a great way of making new contacts for me and it's helped AuKids with their contacts, too.

Tori and Debby have asked my views for articles and sometimes I've come up with ideas, too. With Debby, I've developed my own talks and had some presentation training. I've really enjoyed sharing my own experiences. People have given great feedback, it's made me very happy.

Having suffered at school because of my autism, I'd never really fitted in at various workplaces. But after I started at AuKids, it was the beginning of me truly becoming myself. I'm really proud of AuKids and my part in it.



All Dogs Have ADHD

(Hardcover)

By Kathy Hoopmann

Published by Jessica Kingsley

£10.99

ISBN 9781787756601



Reviews



This is a gorgeous little book about ADHD and its associated traits, it's a perfect way to educate children and adults alike as the photographs are very endearing, each one complementing the text which is both enlightening and witty at the same time. There are some really tender moments that highlight many of the difficulties people with ADHD face and it's respectfully written to highlight how others can help, using patience and understanding.

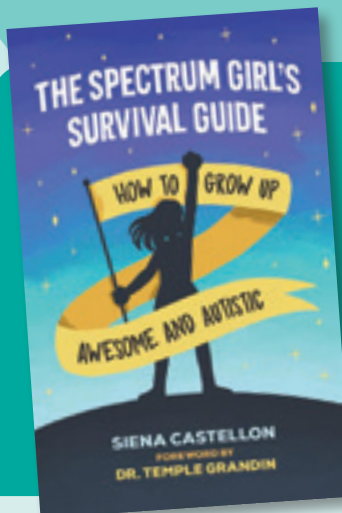
As a mother of a child with ADHD there were several ideas within the book that struck a chord; the section pointing out that often those with ADHD can be fearless but that unfortunately their bodies are not so invincible

felt especially true. It reminded me of yet another trip to A&E after my son broke his arm swinging from a tree!

From a personal perspective, I would have found it useful if the book had featured some of the traits often associated with inattentive ADHD, these are still part of the condition but aren't as common and can be particularly associated with girls. I've found there isn't a lot of information available on this which has made it harder to explain things to my daughter.

Overall, this book ticks the boxes for introducing ADHD to people of all ages in both a playful and sensitive way.

Review by Kerry Tibenham



The Spectrum Girl's Survival Guide: How to Grow up Awesome and Autistic

By Siena Castellon

Published by Jessica Kingsley

£12.99

ISBN 9781787751835

This is the book I have been waiting for, written from personal experience by a girl slightly older than mine and living in the UK.

I absolutely love the way the book is written with such honesty and positivity and how Siena sees her autism diagnosis as a blessing and embraces her differences, something which I have always tried to instill in my daughter.

Siena covers just about everything anyone could want to know about life as a teenage girl with autism, from sensory differences, school life, socialising, bullying, hygiene and self care to gender identity, understanding emotions and many other topics.

Her personal experience of day to day life with autism means she explains things in such a knowledgeable, informative manner, such as her dislike of the high/low functioning ASC labels, which she explains in a way I haven't come across before yet and which makes perfect sense.

She explains the importance of having friends who also have autism, she gives insight into what social exhaustion and sensory overload feels like and gives lots of advice and tips for managing them. There are some excellent tips throughout the book, such as when having trouble getting to sleep, suggesting a notepad by the bed to write thoughts down or trying a weighted blanket.

She also suggests a sensory toolkit for when out and about, a waterproof speaker for use

in the bath/shower to help with timing (i.e. hair and body washing should last the duration of a set number of songs) and a plastic pump-action bottle to help dispense the right amount of shampoo. She recommends products which she finds preferable such as bamboo towels (which are lovely and soft), soft toothbrushes and toothpastes which are less likely to cause sensory issues.

Though my daughter was diagnosed 13 years ago, I have gleaned much from reading this book and will be going out to purchase some of the recommended items and try some of the tips which Siena suggests. As well as covering all things autism, Siena also discusses a selection of co-existing conditions, including anxiety, dyspraxia, hypermobility and even bowel and digestive issues, which is something which often gets ignored yet is very common.

I would highly recommend this book as it covers pretty much everything you could want to know about life as a teenage girl with autism and most importantly it has lots of advice and tips. It is written in a concise, informative way with topics grouped accordingly in chapters which are short enough that they can be read through pretty quickly.

This book is not only perfect for teenage girls who have autism, but also for their parents, siblings and anyone else who loves them.

Review by Michelle Hayes



Make anything from art to androids. Work towards an Arts Award or just learn some new skills and make friends.

Technically Brilliant Club run regular classes in animation, game design and model making. Sessions are two hours long and cost £20 per person. Young people aged 10 years and above are welcome, especially those with ASC.



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For more information visit:

www.technicallybrilliant.club or call Matt on 07516 070710

THE AUKIDS TOP 20!

Here are just SOME of our favourite autism books, compiled from over 12 years of reading.

General

Autism as Context Blindness by Peter Vermeulen

A game-changer in understanding autism. Gives a whistle-stop tour of how the brain works to interpret context before covering context in perception, in social interaction, in communication and in knowledge.

Explaining Autism by Clare Lawrence

In an easy reading style combined with humour, the author brings you a detailed overview of what autism is and its implications for a person with the condition. Then it moves on to offer some great practical advice. Great explanation for beginners.

My Son's Not Rainman by John Williams

Hilarious, powerful, warm and observant, comedian John Williams describes his awesome relationship with his autistic son. No answers, just camaraderie.

Neurotribes by Steve Silberman

Winner of the Samuel Johnson prize for non-fiction, this engaging read by an investigative reporter sheds light on the growing neurodiversity movement and answers some important social questions.

Ten Things Every Child with Autism Wishes You Knew (updated and expanded) by Ellen Notbohm

Written by a mother of an autistic child, and full of great quotes and positive affirmations, this guide serves as the voice of the child with autism, giving important key messages.

The Reason I Jump by Naoki Higashida

Written by a pre-verbal 13 year-old and translated into English from Japanese, this astonishing book is divided into short chapters answering popular questions.

Therapeutic Adventures with Autistic Children by Jonas Torrence

Should be called Diary of an Amazing Therapist. The real benefit of this book is not the strategies that Jonas uses but in how he unravels challenges through a flexible approach to behaviour, individualising his approach and looking for motivations and solutions specific to each child featured.

Uniquely Human by Dr Barry Prizant

A global name in autism shares a treasure trove of his own recollections, forged through a 40-year career of working with autistic youngsters. The result is a deeply informative masterclass in autism.

Zak Makes New Friends by Wendy Usher

A wonderful children's book featuring an autistic zebra (you read that correctly) whose animal friends show readers how they happily include him without forcing him to adapt.

Sensory

Making Sense by Rachel Shneider

In just ten short chapters, the vivacious author gives a brilliant explanation of the complexities of Sensory Processing Disorder. The author's own experience of SPD adds empathy to the material. A perfect pocket guide.

Sensory Perceptual Issues in Autism and Asperger Syndrome by Olga Bogdashina

The definitive guide to understanding sensory behaviour and finding solutions to combat difficulties caused by Sensory Processing Disorder, told by a parent-professional with vast experience in the field.

The Out of Sync Child by Carol Stock Kranowitz

A fantastic guide for anyone who's new to sensory differences, with case studies. For practical ideas, read Kranowitz's *The Out-of-Synch Child Has Fun*.

Social Skills

My Social Stories Book - by Carol Gray and Abbie Leigh White

Contains over 150 examples of Social Stories that can be adapted and personalized. Includes guidelines on how to write your own Social Story™ as well as how these should be introduced to your child.

The Incredible 5 Point Scale by Kari Dunn Barton and Mitzi Curtis

Two American teachers discovered the easiest way of helping autistic children to recognise and regulate their behaviour was by using a five-point scale. In doing so, they were able to morph abstract-based notions into concrete social direction. This British version explains how scales can be used in a variety of situations, such as regulating voice volume, anxiety or anger.

Sexuality

What's Happening to Tom?/What's Happening to Ellie? series by Kate Reynolds

Frank illustrations accompany this series of three books for pre-pubescent boys and girls to help them understand their developing sexuality and to behave in ways that are socially appropriate and will keep them safe.

Therapies

Choosing Autism Interventions by Bernard Fleming, Elizabeth Hurley and The Goth

This book hasn't been updated for various reasons, but remains the only one that impartially evaluates a multitude of interventions for safety and effectiveness as well as stating whether research on them is yet conclusive.

Early Schooling

Flying Starts for Unique Children by Adele Devine

If you work in a primary school with autistic children, whether it's mainstream or specialist, this should be compulsory reading. Read it and it will make you into a SEN Ninja warrior. Addresses early school issues in a way that is highly comprehensive and yet easy to navigate.

Emotions

The Parents' Guide to Managing Anxiety in Children with Autism by Raelene Dundon

Fantastic, comprehensive guide by a fabulous author. Covers causes, solutions and explaining anxiety to others, especially schools.

What to do When your Temper Flares by Dawn Huebner

Written for over sevens with a good understanding of language, this uses simple language and clever metaphors to build strategies for diffusing anger safely.

What to do When you Worry too Much by Dawn Huebner

For ages six and up, addressing worries with and without obvious causes. Plenty of strategies help kids to minimise the time they spend worrying, to 'switch channels' when worries take over, to question the worries themselves and to deal with their negative effects. Something you can revisit repeatedly.

Other authors to look out for

Tony Attwood, clarity and wisdom on all things autism-related; **Phoebe Caldwell**, sensory and interaction guru; **Joel Shaul**, conversation and social skills for young children and **Jennifer Cook O'Toole** – amazing practical, lively books including a fabulous girl's guide to autism.

Write to us on Facebook if you're looking for particular recommendations, we're still here!



“ My child is desperate for friends. What’s the best way she can make them? She feels so isolated. ”

We’ve often been asked about friendships and we’ve tried to tackle the issue in a number of different ways. This time, though, we asked those who had faced the same battles when they were younger.



Photo credit page 10

Bianca Toeps

Bianca is a Netherlands-based web developer, photographer and blogger at toeps.nl. She’s autistic.

I believe that the best way to make friends as an autistic is through special interests. At least, that’s how I did it. When I was younger, I was Disneyland obsessed. I joined a message board and was on there almost every day. On the board, people wrote trip reports and discussed new and existing rides. I don’t think I met any of those people in real life, but I also had a blog on which I posted my adventures, and through that I met my ex-boyfriend. (Come to think about it, I also met the boyfriend after that on the blog platform, even though he wasn’t in the theme park scene and wrote about repaying his debts, mostly.)

A few years after my theme park obsession began, I got into being an extra in TV shows and commercials, and I started photographing people. Mainly other extras, who needed photos to submit to potential jobs. By the way, being an extra was great: every social scene all of a

sudden has a script!

Photography brought me a lot of friends. Ruud, basically my mentor, is an older photographer who I met because I wrote something nice about his work on a message board, after which he invited me for a shoot. I met my friend Maan through him: she modelled and Ruud thought it would be great if we’d create something together. After working with Maan two or three times, she invited me to visit her in Tokyo. So I did.

My friend Hannah and I met because I photographed her school project. She’s a stylist for Vogue now, and we don’t actually work together anymore - although I do manage her website. My friend Aafke and I were introduced to each other on Twitter because we tweeted the same snarky comments about a crappy TV show. “You two must like each other,” people said. We decided to find out over a cup of tea, and yeah, they were right. My friend Charlotte is a make-up artist who Maan once brought along. She visited *me* in Tokyo a few years later.

I think the most important thing in making friends is to trust your gut feeling. When I started my photography career, I had to figure out who liked *me*, and who just wanted free pics. But after a few hard lessons, I can say I made some friends for life, even though I rarely take pictures anymore. But “that’s how you know we’re true friends,” Hannah said.

See our Inside Angle on page 10



Tim Tiff

Tim is AuKids’ researcher, distributor and autism advocate. He gives talks around the country about his experiences of autism. He is also part of the Greater Manchester Autism Consortium, helping to achieve more autism awareness within the region.

I prefer making friends face to face rather than online. The way I’ve made friends is to go to clubs and events around my special interests. Then you can always find something in common to talk about. I go to postcard fairs and always get into interesting conversations and I belong to a Ticket Collectors Society which meets regularly. In fact everyone chats so much before the meeting that it takes at least half an hour to sit everyone down!

To keep in touch with my friends, I’ll do a quick catch up text once a week that

goes to everyone I know and I’ll do a longer catch up by text or phone call maybe once a month. My mum has guided me on this, so that I don’t contact people too often. It took some getting used to as I’m thinking ‘What day is it?’ - I’m quite conscious of when it’s time to contact someone. Something I’ve also learnt is to take an interest in other people’s interests. So, when I look around charity shops or secondhand bookstores I’m always on the look out for the things that interest my friends. In a way it means that my own interests are extended - I always have a keen eye for something rare I can collect for someone else who may not be able to spot it as easily.

I think one of the things that’s made it easier to befriend me is perhaps that I don’t expect everyone to understand autism. I’m happy to explain. I don’t get offended unless people are rude to me.

I’m also quite a happy, positive person. I think when you smile people enjoy talking to you more. I like being around people even though the company can sometimes get overwhelming. If I’ve done something sociable then I make sure I have time to relax and be alone afterwards.



Chris Bonnelo

Chris (aka Captain Quirk) is a special needs tutor with Asperger Syndrome, formerly a primary school teacher. Since 2015, he has become a national and international speaker on autism issues, and the multi-award-winning writer behind autisticnotweird.com.

In my experience, relationships of literally any type are usually strengthened by common ground. In fact, this is how a huge amount of friendships begin in the first place: two people find something they have some shared experience or interest in, and that becomes the starting point of everything that follows. The two people could be entirely different in many other areas, but those differences become less significant as the friendship develops (and besides, it's fine to be friends with people who are different from you!).

I met my first godson (then aged 11) on a church camp, but we never really spoke until

he made a passing reference to Avatar: The Last Airbender. One long geeky conversation later, we got on fantastically for the rest of the weekend. A few months later he was baptised and I was honoured to become his godfather. I'm forever thankful to that TV show for giving me and him that bit of common ground when we first met.

It works for adults too: when I went to university among a crowd of thousands of strangers, the first two places I went to were the Christian Union and the Taekwondo Society. I immediately shared at least a little common ground with everyone in the Christian Union as soon as I walked through the door, and two thirds of the people visiting the Taekwondo Society had never done taekwondo before either so even that was something we had in common! And clearly it worked, since the latter two years of my university life were spent living in a "taekwondo house" with housemates I'm still friends with today.

The question is, what opportunities might work best for your daughter? What are her interests, and what kind of things might she be willing to experience alongside other people?

I will also say - bear in mind that online friendships are entirely valid. Some of my closest friends don't even live on the same continent as me, but through the power of common ground (and practising appropriate online safety) there are some I've been close to for nearly twenty years.

All the best to her! Whatever her interests are, I can guarantee she's not the only one who has them.



Alex Manners

TV and radio presenter, Asperger's champion and speaker and author of 'That's Not Right! My Life Living with Asperger's'

Fortunately, I always found it quite easy to make friends as I am quite a sociable person and I am not nervous about talking to new people. I also lead a very active life meaning that I am always meeting lots of different people. Away from school I was a member of a squash club, golf club, youth club and used to go to football matches regularly. Therefore, I met a lot of my friends from these out of school clubs. That is why if your child has an interest, whatever that may be, then you could try and find a local club that caters for their interest. If your child likes boxing, then enrolling them in a boxing club or paying for them to have boxing lessons will mean that they will be meeting other people who also share this interest.

One of the most important things to remember is that age is just a number. If your child gets on with someone or enjoys being in their company then that is all that matters. They must not feel as if they can only be friends with people of the same age. For example, because I like children's TV and 50s music then I often share these interests with people who are younger or older than me. I think it is important to have friends of all ages.

Although I had lots of friends in school, I tended to hang around with the same groups of people. It gave me a routine as many of my friends would go to the same place each break and lunchtime. At school we had a 'lunch club' and I used to go there every lunchtime. Because of this I made quite a few friends who would also go there each day. If it had not been for this club then I don't think I would have been friends with some of them. Your child's school may not have a club like this, but it is a great strategy for children who struggle to make friends or find unstructured times difficult.

Also, be aware that there are often special autism groups that your child can join and charities that can help support your family. I attended a youth club for people with autism that was run by a local charity. Again, I managed to make lots of friends from these clubs and now I am older I volunteer at the clubs once a week.



Maura Campbell

Maura is a feature writer for Spectrum Women, an international online magazine for and by autistic women. She was a contributing author for the book *Spectrum Women - Walking to the Beat of Autism* and is one of three authors of *Spectrum Women - Autistic Parenting*, published by Jessica Kingsley.

I've always found friendship hard to navigate, especially so during my teenage years and early twenties. As a child, I was naïve in comparison with my peers, who mistook my shyness for being 'stuck-up'. Nothing could have been further from the truth - I

desperately wanted to fit in but had no idea how to do it.

I used to stand in the corner of the playground and hope someone would invite me to play since I hadn't a clue how to approach the other kids. As I got older, I started to figure out how to behave to get other people to like me but it came at a cost: I sacrificed my sense of self while I morphed into whoever I thought other people wanted me to be.

Even now, in my fifties, I'm often unsure whether I can call someone a friend or not. I worry about having a group of friends much less nowadays, though, since I've come to realise that quality is much better than quantity - having one or two loyal friends is way more important than being a social butterfly!

I find that my friendships now are often rooted in common interests and shared experiences. If your child has one or more intense interests, that's a good place to start. Finding others within your peer group who have the same passions makes conversation come easily and naturally, and it feels much more satisfying than small talk. I also find that autistics worry less about what age their friends are and generational differences melt away when we're in full flow on a topic of interest!

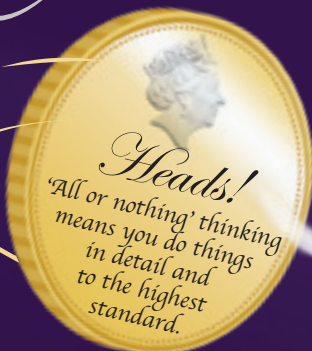
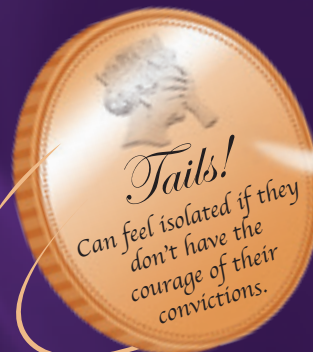


A huge **thank-you** to those of you who have contributed to Ask the Experts over the years. Particular thanks to our regulars Dr. Luke Beardon and Dr. Heather Mackenzie. You've been amazing!

AUTISM

The Flip Side

Autistic kids are generally only too aware of their differences and often attention is drawn to the negative side of autism. If we look at autism as a different operating system, however, we can start to see that common traits can be looked at in a negative or positive way depending on the situation and people's responses. So how about explaining each difference to your children in terms of two sides of the same coin? Here's how...



Heads!
Great patience with things they like, leading to great knowledge.

Tails!
Can be inflexible with others and struggles with changes.

Tails!
Hard to influence - leading to rigidity.

Heads!
Sticks to routines and is highly reliable.

Heads!
Not easily led - generating original solutions!

Heads!
Thinks differently.

Tails!
Overlapping spoken language in groups can be hard to follow.

Heads!
Great at communicating in online forums, built for the modern world!

Tails!
Can be easily overwhelmed by outside pressure.

Heads!
Internally driven towards their own goals.

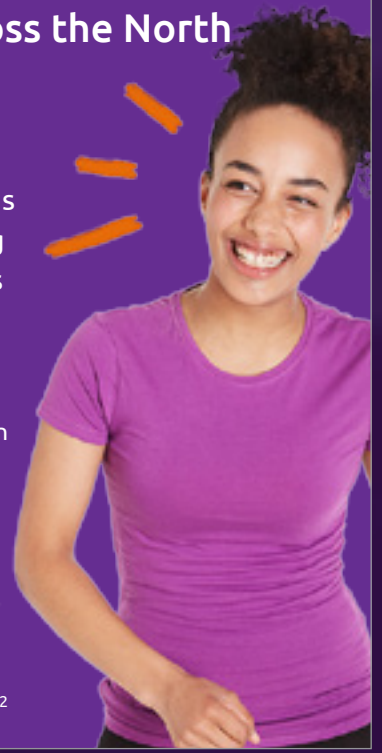
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With thanks to Helen Clarke of Helen Clarke Autism (www.helenclarkeautism.com) and Alis Rowe of The Curly Hair Project (www.thegirlwiththecurlyhair.co.uk) for their contributions.

I'll have double empathy to take away, thanks

Bianca Toeps is 36 and from the Netherlands, although she now spends three to six months a year in Tokyo. She divides her time between building websites, photography and her online shop. She photographed and designed the cover of her 2019 book, **But you don't look autistic at all**, which has now sold more than 15,000 copies in The Netherlands and has recently been translated into English. Bianca received her autism diagnosis at the age of 25.



In my book, *But you don't look autistic at all*, I look at a number of misconceptions about autism. One that bothers me a lot is the idea that autistics wouldn't feel empathy. To quote from my own writing:

'In 2007 a silverback gorilla named Bokito escaped from Blijdorp Zoo in Rotterdam. He attacked a woman, who sustained hundreds of bites, various broken bones and a shattered hand. The woman was under the impression she had a special bond with the ape: he "smiled" at her and made eye contact. That by making eye contact she was provoking Bokito never occurred to her. Not even after the zoo staff's repeated warnings.'

'The misinterpretation of animal behaviour is a well-known phenomenon. Pet owners, for example, often project their own feelings and thoughts onto their pets, and you can hear them say things like "my cat is really stubborn" or "my dog felt guilty".'

'According to Damian Milton, a researcher at the University

of Kent, a similar difference occurs between autistics and neurotypicals: the double empathy problem.

'People like to fill in thoughts and emotions for others. They do this based on their own experiences: "After hearing news like that I'd cry, so if you don't, that means you feel less sadness." Even though Milton's theory poses that the empathy problem works both ways (hence the word double), it's the neurotypicals of this world who determine the desired, "normal" reaction to all sorts of events and emotions. It's the neurotypicals who are in the majority and therefore determine how we view autism'.

This has caused me trouble numerous times. Apparently it's not okay to make jokes about deaths or disasters, not okay to question certain details about well-intended (but ill-informed) activist social media posts and very not okay to get all worked up about something other people perceive as small, when there's still war and hunger in the world.

I still don't really understand why jealousy seems to imply that someone cares, or why people who ask for an opinion get offended when that opinion is not as positive as they'd like.

But I'm telling you these things now, so I do know these are unacceptable behaviours in the eyes of most people. I learnt it. Mostly the hard way - albeit not as hard as the lady who thought that Bokito was her friend.

Still, it hurts when people assume you have bad intentions, or think you don't give a damn about them. Especially when you do care, but are just too scared to go to their birthday party, give them a call or write them a postcard.

"Who's afraid of that?" Well, me. What if I come across as clingy, or stalker-y? What if they don't actually like me, and secretly want to get rid of me?

I think my history of wrong interpretations has shaped me, and made me even more cautious. I can obsess over scenarios for hours, analyse other people's words and writings, and my own actions, over and over again. Did I do something wrong? Did I say something silly? When I was younger, I often tried to clarify my words or actions later on, but that usually only made things worse.

.....

"I often feel forced to code-switch, to switch between two different types of behaviour."

.....

Then, when I read about the double empathy problem, I realized: Wait, this isn't just on me. The other party has a responsibility, too. They're not silverback gorillas, they're people.

As an autistic, I often feel forced to *code-switch*, to switch between two different types of behaviour: my own and that which is socially desirable. In my book I wrote about an instance at my yoga class:

'My yoga teacher pulled out a small plastic battery-operated

ball. "I will now demonstrate how powerful human energy is," she said prophetically. She asked us to sit in a circle and hold hands. Two people then touched the little ball, which closed the circle. A light went on. "Wow!" my fellow yoga students exclaimed. I didn't say anything, but in my head I was screaming, "We're just connecting a negative and a positive here, this is first-grade physics!"

'You can't say things like that. Well, you can, but people won't like it. They will assume you think you're better than them, they will say you're arrogant. But putting my opinions aside, nodding along, smiling and keeping my mouth shut makes me feel uncomfortable, empty and angry. It sets off too many error alerts in my head, so I try to avoid such situations'.

Code-switching can be rather exhausting, and worse, it makes me feel empty and alone. So I decided to change. I'm now more unapologetically myself, accepting the fact that it might cause people to misunderstand me.

I also try to raise awareness. Every time I hear or read something about autistics presumably lacking empathy, I switch it up: Did your daughter really not understand how to behave at Uncle James' funeral? Or did you not understand her way of dealing with these emotions? Does your son really hate his baby sister? Or did you miss the fact that her crying sends him into sensory overload right away?

I hope my book will contribute to a better understanding of autistic people, by making people see things from our point of view.

We've been studying "being normal" for our entire lives. It's time for the neurotypicals to practice *their* empathy skills.

The Language Layer Cake

From the Archive

In normal language development, words seem to appear almost magically. One minute they aren't there - the next minute, bingo! Speech seems so simple, it's easy to forget the amazing process that goes into it. So what do our autistic kids need to conquer before they can speak? We've made our own layer cake. Start at the bottom and work your way up...cup of tea, anyone?

P.S.
This is a simple recipe and these are basic ingredients, not all of them by any means.

Speech is what we wait for, the attractive and visible part of our language cake. But it is only the superficial topping of a complex language system. Speech is merely the motor process by which we articulate a sound to make a word. It isn't the same as language, which is assigning meaning to a sound. Although we really like the icing, it's the cake (language) that counts. If we're lucky, the icing will come in time. If not, the cake, if it's a good one, can be just as satisfactory on its own!

Sometimes in autism, messages get scrambled between forming in the brain and being pronounced. This can happen in the early part of the message's journey, or in the very later stages of its journey, where the mouth, tongue and lips struggle to sequence sounds properly (this is known as verbal dyspraxia).

For an autistic person, being able to generalise may be difficult, so something learnt in one context can't always easily be transferred to another.

Autistic kids have difficulty processing language. They may have to hear a word four times as much as anyone else in order to understand it.

To process language, we have to accurately listen to and interpret it, before assigning a meaning to it. This means we filter out background noise and attend to voices. Kids who have sensory processing difficulties (SPD) as part of their autism have less ability to filter sounds that aren't voices.

To understand words, you need to make the correct connections. You have to know that the thing someone is pointing at has a name. Assigning random sounds to an item is an abstract concept, and autistic brains struggle with abstract ideas.

For most of us, the motivation to communicate comes naturally. But as the motivation to speak is social, it may not come naturally to people with autism. This is why any sort of attempt at communication - even troublesome tantrums - should be viewed as a message to be decoded.



SHOW-STOPPER: Speech

TECHNICAL CHALLENGE: Coordination

BAKING FOR THE OCCASION: Generalisation

NOT SUCH A SPONGE: Understanding

SIEVING WITH CARE: Filtering

THE SAME RECIPE: Joint Attention

CAN'T COOK, WON'T COOK: Motivation

Feel free to share our Language Layer Cake, but please note that the idea is copyright AuKids magazine, so mention us when you do.

My Crystal Ball

What's coming next in the world of autism? We ask three of our favourite experts.



Maura Campbell
Author and Journalist
(Professionally identified with Asperger's in 2011).

The year is 2035. Fluorescent lights have been banned and cold-calling is a criminal offence. People who engage in too much small talk are supported to overcome their social obsessiveness, bless them.

Well, maybe not, but a girl can dream...

A more realistic prediction is that by then we may, hopefully, have moved towards a greater understanding of autism as a different way of being – a valid one – as opposed to a failed version of 'normal' (whatever that means). The terminology used about us will no longer be heavily pathologized and a more balanced view will be taken of our individual strengths and challenges, rather than us being seen simply as a list of deficits. It will be no big deal to tell somebody you're autistic.

We will understand that making sure autistics have the supports they need to thrive is more important than chasing 'cures', and that providing the right interventions at the right time is an investment rather than a cost to the public purse. We will understand that these supports will vary from person to person and at different times. We will understand more about how autistic needs change as we progress through stages of life, like when we become a parent or experience menopause.

We will understand that autism might mean something different for those who are female, non-binary or BAME.

We will understand that autism is about so much more than being a bit socially awkward. We will understand the issues a person may experience with anxiety, executive functioning, emotional regulation, personal safety, self-care and gender identity.

We will encourage intense interests.

We will understand the importance of respecting sensory needs... and that fluorescent lighting is Satan's sunshine.



Dr Heather Mackenzie
Canadian autism and self-regulation speaker, author and researcher (based in France).

Have we made progress in the field of autism? Maybe some. The increased use of internet-based intervention and training is improving access to services, especially people living in more remote areas.

However, some of the services are 'big businesses' that have lost their humanity – their goal seems more to make money than help autistic people.

Hundreds of millions of dollars go into autism research each year worldwide, but a good chunk of funds are dedicated to prevention. More research funding is needed to help autistic children and adults live to their highest potential.

Staff training isn't a given – not everyone receives the 'basics' about autism before working in the field. Some of the materials I've reviewed are downright scary; there needs to be proper updating of information and a more informed depiction of autism.

We need so much more focus on the 25 per cent or so of autistic people who are low or non-verbal. The knowledgeable use of augmentative and alternative means of communication is sparse.

We still don't have clear ideas about the most effective educational practices. There's too much attention on dealing with behaviour and too little on preparing children to be independent, self-determined adults.

We need improvements in services from childhood through to adulthood.

We're finally seeing the neurodiversity movement take up the mantle. But we have a long way to go before autistic individuals are considered part of the human spectrum, rather than people to be feared or controlled.

With the help of autistic adults, their families, and knowledgeable professionals, advances can be made.

I pray that in future we see changes in how autism is represented and who is representing it.



Dr Luke Beardon
Author, autism lecturer and presenter.

So – this isn't strictly what I think will happen, but it is what I *hope* will happen, based on my concept of 'Autopia' – Autistic Utopia for the future.

Autopia is where *all* autistic people lead happy, fulfilling lives, not tormented by being constantly rejected by society. Kids are happily being educated at school, at home, by the river, in a log cabin, often with the involvement of autistic teachers. Those same children are encouraged to follow their dreams in terms of their passionate interests and supported to utilise their enthusiasm in ever more imaginative ways, so that they are productive and sought-after members of society.

No longer are individuals and families forced to wait to understand whether they are autistic or have an autistic child. Systems are in place so that everyone has the same opportunities for an autism identification, should they choose to gain one.

Authistory – autism history – is taught as standard; children create pieces of work criticizing how the world used to be, and they are amazed at just how much discrimination existed towards autistic people in the past.

Exams are an option, never the norm. Alternative assessments to understand how knowledgeable a student is across all academic life are widespread; educationalists scratch their heads in bemusement at how archaic and unfair the system used to be.

Autism theory has long since been consigned to the bin; society understands that being autistic is part of humankind, and no longer is the autistic population pathologized; any research in the autism field is all about enablement and autistic well-being and led by autistic academics.

Employment opportunities are rife for the autistic adult. Interviews are an option, not a necessity; alternatives are always available. Job descriptions reflect autistic profiles; no longer do autistic employees have to pretend to be someone else, simply to 'fit in'. Autistics get paid to do a job, not to do that job in the same way as everyone else does it.

No longer are autistics traumatized, just for existing in a world that does not take their need into account.

The world has grown up. The playing field has been levelled.

JUST OUT!



If You're Happy and You Know It, Draw A Face!

"That was a dis-arrrrrrs-terrrrrr!"

Nope, it's not Craig Revel Horwood talking about a Strictly performance; it's your autistic child's uncanny ability to catastrophize even the smallest event.

Tiny calamities hit us daily. They're like small meteorites bouncing off us. They're annoying but they don't steer us off course.

Autistic children aren't as resilient, though. It doesn't take much, does it, for them to write off an entire day based on one tiny and slightly negative experience? Our kids can lack the ability to assess a situation objectively, put it into context and get it into perspective. Here's where they desperately need our help.

Fear, worry and anger are curious things; they're as big as you want to make them. To help your child cut them down to a realistic size, you need some tools. One very simple tool that can be used with all ages and abilities is a mood diary.

You will need: a blank diary. That's it.

For the school day, you can use a mood diary for each lesson and for break times. The teacher simply asks the child to rate them each with a happy, neutral or sad face. Send the book home at the end of each day. Or, if the child is older, they can fill it in at home after each day next to each lesson title.

Bingo, as an adult you've got an immediate temperature gauge. For the child, they can see in a very concrete way that although they may feel that they've had a 'bad' day, it may have been only a small proportion of it that didn't go well. Help them to focus on the things that went well by looking at the happy faces, because if their responses weren't as strong for the good stuff, it may be harder for them to recall.

Later, when they're ready talk about the things that went not so well, you can both think about how we could 'turn that into a happy face'.

The beauty of this idea is its simplicity. As no major analysis is required, children are usually happy to comply with drawing a face. At the end of the day, count up the happy faces or the more mathematically minded can even derive great satisfaction from saying that 75% of the day actually went really well: undeniable proof that perspective can be slightly awry.

A week to view diary is particularly handy. This allows you to look at general moods over a longer period. As autistic kids tend to focus on small things that they don't like much, it may surprise them to see how much enjoyment they're getting out of their day. The sad faces start to look more in proportion and become more manageable.

What if there are a lot of sad faces?

If a child is often distressed, it's helpful to know what aspects of their environment are making them that way. It's also good to help them rate how upset they are. Introduce a traffic light system of sad face sub-categories – from mildly peeved to really upset. Get them to label the face to say whether it's anger or fear (if they know).

When they're calm, talk about their thinking – why have they given that part of the day that particular rating? Is there a pattern? This will help you get to the bottom of it. For kids who find it hard to pinpoint why they're feeling like they do, this can really help, as patterns are easy to spot.

For children who are non-verbal, a happy or sad choice is a great one to give. It helps them to tune into their feelings and shows them that you acknowledge and care about their responses to their experiences – and that they can affect what happens to them. For those children, it's important that you ask them either during or right after the task and you may need a picture symbol to show them what the question relates to.

CASE STUDY 1

TIM



We introduced a mood diary for Tim at our office to help him summarise his week. At first, his weeks always seemed fairly negative, usually because of one upsetting moment in his other job. Gradually, his assessment of the past week was far more balanced. He says that the diary prevented him from reaching emotional overload. "Instead of the 'bad week' feeling building up, I could just draw the sad or confused face, write down next to it why I felt like that and then I wouldn't feel as bad. I'd look at all my happy faces for that week (sometimes I put why, like I would be meeting a friend) and it would make me feel better as I could focus more on them."

CASE STUDY 2

BOBBY



At school, Bobby's mood diary helps him and his mum keep tabs on how secondary life is going. "We do a verbal happy/neutral/sad face count immediately after school so it's a quick sum up without detail," says his mum, AuKids co-editor Debby. "I immediately know how his day has gone and I promise him that I won't talk about it until later. He doesn't have to go into it when he's tired. Then before bed, when he's relaxed, the faces are talked about in greater detail. It's a great way of zoning in on problem areas. We also dwell on the amount of happy faces to underline how well he's doing."

PS. Parents can use mood diaries, too, to help them get problems in perspective!



Is Our 'New Normal' Better for Autism?

Ten lessons from lockdown

Covid-19 wrought havoc in 2020 and shifted our patterns of working and our way of thinking. There's nothing good to be said about a pandemic, but some of our adaptations in the face of it may bring about some positive change for autistic people. It's the slimmest silver lining in the darkest cloud, but let's focus on the new ways of thinking – and working - that we hope could be here to stay.

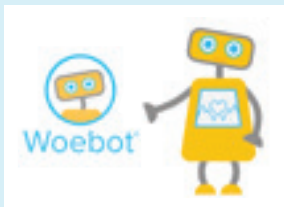
By Debby Elley and Tori Houghton, co-editors of AuKids



Mental Health Apps

Headspace is a meditation app with a kids' section, aimed at combating anxiety and teaching mindfulness. Free two-week trial available. www.headspace.com £49.99 a year. (Google Play, Apple).

Woebot is a free chatbot that monitors your mood and helps you through Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) techniques. Suitable for 12+ (Google Play, Apple).



Positive Penguins teaches children to recognise negative thinking and helps them reframe it. (Apple or Android). Age 4+

HappiMe is a non-profit, free app for children and young people that aims to raise self-esteem and happiness. (Apple, Android)

Strong Minds helps kids to understand their feelings. (Android)



Over the last year, non-autistic people have experienced first-hand some of the same feelings consistently experienced by autistic people. It will give us a common language to refer to and hopefully a deeper empathy. The two experiences that have jumped in intensity for us are uncertainty and anxiety.

During the pandemic, constant shake-ups in routine have been anxiety-provoking for all of us and have threatened our mental health. People have had to live with the kind of uncertainty that is a daily experience for autistic people.

Want to explain how your autistic child feels about smaller changes in their routine? Use the experience of the pandemic.

A major challenge was not knowing what was coming next and having no control over some major decisions about our lives. It's exactly those things that affect our youngsters, too.

What autistic people need is some predictability, plus warnings and an element of control when change is about to happen. This helps them to become more flexible. It's the same for any of us; their tolerance may be lower, but their feelings are the same.



The autistic adults we meet describe anxiety as a constant companion. It's always there, the oppressive feeling that something bad is going to happen, partly because you can neither predict change nor trust yourself to cope with it adequately.

Horrible, isn't it? But since background anxiety is now a universal experience, at least now we know how it feels.

Is it any wonder that autistic people love to immerse themselves completely in a special interest? Haven't we all been trying to do the same, distracting ourselves from a nasty feeling we can't control? At the start of the pandemic, we were clearly immersing ourselves in other things, embarking on the biggest spring clean of all time, info-bombing each other about banana bread and getting creative with rainbows.

We were looking for something to keep our minds busy and something that fell under our own control.

Then, consider this scenario - there's a clear floor sticker marking a two-metre distance, but someone in the queue hasn't the vaguest idea about it. A person on the bus removes their mask to have a chat. They're breaking the rules! Your angry feelings are the same experienced by an autistic person when clear rules are broken in everyday settings. So now we know how that feels...

Since the pandemic, we've all experienced barriers to communication. It's harder to read others' emotions when they are wearing a face mask and hard to understand what they're saying, too. What better training can we have to know how it feels when we can't accurately 'read' another person? Let autism training across the world take this into account!



Social distancing has actually been pretty welcome for a lot of our autistic friends. Whilst we shouldn't encourage total isolation, the world has a lot to learn about how draining social contact can be for autistic people. No unexpected visitors? Lovely! No one invading personal space? Super! Crossing the road rather than crossing paths? Perfect. This state of affairs suits

many autistic people (although not always the sensory seekers). In fact, as Maura Campbell says 'It seems like everyone's on the spectrum these days'.

Perhaps in future others will be more respectful of personal space, keeping our distance and phoning with our plans before we 'drop by' unexpectedly. Let's hope so. Changes in school environments – such as lack of assemblies and noisy canteens, have also suited some children rather well.



Yes! For once no one knows where they're going or what they're doing. We have been given clear visual signposts showing us which entrances and exits to use at shops and other buildings. Doesn't it feel great to have those unmissable visuals so that you don't make a mistake? These signs are becoming part of our daily lives.

If a place which was in the past confusing is now clear as crystal, give positive feedback. Encourage that positive change to remain whilst the will and the understanding is present. Explain how these visuals help to reduce anxiety when things aren't clear.



In some cases, physical examinations may be unavoidable. But there are many other types of appointment that work just as well – no, even better - virtually. It's just until now we haven't used the technology. Anyone who has tried to find a space in a hospital carpark, negotiate their way to the correct wing, amuse their child in the waiting room and try and engage them when in front of a specialist will know exactly what we mean.

NEUROTYPICAL NORM

In our virtual appointments we do away with the waiting, we do away with the odd smells, sounds and sights, we do away with tense parents running late because they don't want to back their car into a piece of scaffolding! We even do away with the ticket meter that takes almost as long to understand as the appointment itself...

Personal experience has now informed us that for both the practitioner and the patient, remote appointments have a lot to offer. In fact, since many autistic people are used to using their phones and computer as a social interface, this has the power to actively break down barriers. In the safety and comfort of their own home, autistic people are far more relaxed and no doubt able to give a better account of how they are feeling.

Now that we've been forced to make a change, we don't see any reason why some of these can't continue, saving time, money and anxiety – and creating many efficiency savings. Not to mention freeing up hospital and GP surgery carparks for those in need of physical examinations.

6. Mental Health Apps
In 2020, concern for the general public's wellbeing led to the development of new apps to improve our mental health. Although they can't replace seeing a professional, they can certainly help to address some of the more minor symptoms for those experiencing anxiety.

Autistic people in particular can really stand to benefit from the best of these, since they don't rely on face to face contact and can be done from the comfort of home and at any time. See in the box for some suggestions for younger people.

As well as apps for mental health, schools are finding that pupils are more willing to take up mental health support through technology than face to face. Partly this is because they feel they can attend more anonymously (rather than risk being seen entering a support room) and partly it's because they feel more comfortable sharing their feelings using technology.

7. Distance Learning
Well, let's not hold our breaths here. Remote learning isn't going to join the curriculum overnight. We know from our readers' experiences, however, that there's much to be said for online lessons. For a start, material can be revisited and processed in a pupil's own time. Plus, there aren't the usual noisy distractions of a classroom environment that make it so hard for autistic pupils. Days away from the classroom environment can also allow autistic children to top up their batteries, away from social demands.

Proper adaptations for autistic pupils are well overdue. Good schools already produce visual summaries for lessons and this is a change worth welcoming.

8. Distance socialising
Family members who can't visit are now used to using computer applications such as Zoom. Recorded messages have also been a very helpful way of socialising! Anything recorded can be played repeatedly, giving the listener time to process and form a response - kind of like a slow-motion social life! This is a great way of learning social skills without the instant demands of a conversation. Parents have had to be more techno-savvy and that's not a bad thing when you consider the needs of our kids.

9. Special Interests
If we didn't already know it, lockdown has proved that special interests are not only great for our children's mental health, they also form a doorway to new learning. Many of our parents now know that given time and space to themselves, their children can use their special interests as a jumping off point to learning new information and develop new skills.

Some of you have told us that your kids have surprised you with their efforts and capability. We've seen how pivotal these interests can be

when it comes to inspiring and motivating our children. Now we need to communicate this to our schools.

10. Slower Pace
Without our usual activities we've been forced to slow down. Sometimes this has resulted in a strain on relationships, we can't deny it. However, it's also helped to develop relationships and maybe we've learnt to find pleasure in small things that we can do at home together.

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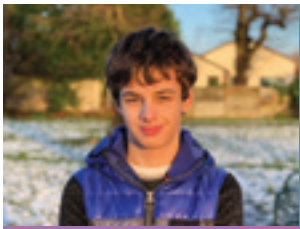
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Very The Last Word

By Bobby Elley

Bobby Elley was four when his mum Debby co-founded AuKids with Tori Houghton. Now he's 17, he's reflecting back on some of his mum's early columns. Here he addresses echolalia - a trait common to autism that involves direct repetition of words or sentences picked up from another source.

Quoting This And That

By the time I was nine years old, I had a lot of obsessions. And when I had obsessions (or special interests), I used to tend to repeat them out loud, which is known as echolalia. I'll explain this to you in some detail.

Because I was so obsessed with some TV shows and video games at the time, I repeated them in normal conversations. Why? I'll give you two possible reasons. The first one is that I didn't know what to say in a normal English conversation, so I just used echolalia.

Autistic people tend to be so talented at echolalia! They have such great memories because of what they see and hear - and they tend to copy and speak the same quotes. It's a monkey see, monkey do thing. Neurotypical people tend to not really understand what we're saying as quotes, as if we're speaking a different language.

Think of it this way. We use echolalia to help us relax and not get stressed out with which words to use and how to use them. It can be confusing for us to just try and put a sentence together in a conversation. That is why some people with autism use echolalia. That is why we tend to repeat things like parrots, and the fact that we can repeat these quotes and sentences in detail, means that we can memorize anything we put our minds to.

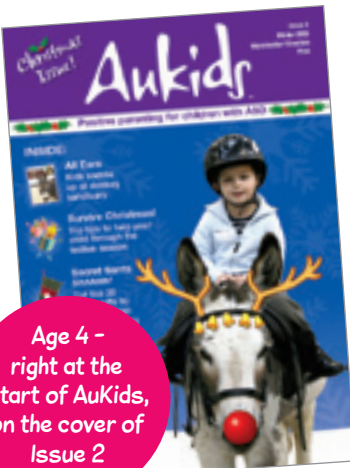
Another reason for echolalia is the fact that we autistic people don't like unexpected surprises. And even people saying different things to us can be confusing for some autistic people. So, we use echolalia to try and familiarise ourselves with sentences and meanings we don't know.

Sometimes in fact, autistic people can alter their echolalia so that they use it in conversation, but in the same tone they originally heard it in. This can apply when they're stressed and they just blurt out random angry sayings they've processed.

So, the main reason why autistic people (especially kids) use echolalia is that we find it hard to express certain things with our own words. We search our memory banks for something similar or sometimes we just repeat it to ourselves for our own amusement. It can be a song, a script of a film, anything.

"We use echolalia to familiarise ourselves with meanings we don't know."

The second reason is basically me being so obsessed with a certain quote, saying, etc, from one of the TV shows and video games, that it came as a knee-jerk reaction, and I just played it back like a parrot, often repeating an entire You Tube video.



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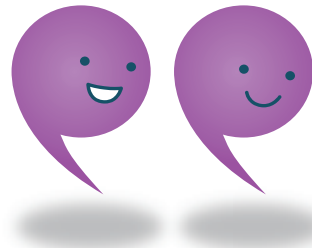
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Sensory Spectacle educate about & create awareness of Sensory Processing Disorder internationally using immersive learning for parents, professionals & students.

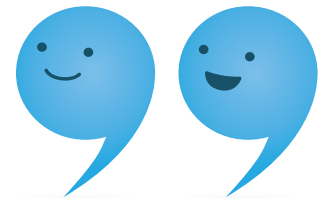


by confusion over social rules and how we communicate. But it's a good thing. Because of their ability, autistic people can memorise things they focus on and retell them perfectly with almost no flaws.

I used echolalia a lot during my early childhood, but nowadays I just don't use it that much. Over time, I've learned to express myself a lot better and matured by using original words. I know I've developed my vocabulary a lot more as I've got older and because of my development of social skills, I'm a lot more used to speaking normally and being part of a conversation.

This skill is one of the unique things about autism. It may be confusing for neurotypical people at first, but so is learning another language. You don't learn it first try, but once you really get to know what they're saying with their echolalia, you can understand them better.

I still stutter a lot, but that's because I have a bit of social anxiety. And I still use echolalia, but not really in public anymore. I can't say the same about other people with autism, but I do know that echolalia is nothing to be concerned about.



Overall, in my opinion, echolalia is a part of autism. It's caused

When we all understand one another, we can communicate in perfect harmony. And that's how you can unite with people with autism.

