

Common Misconceptions About Autism/Aspergers/ASD

Many people are not sure of the difference between the terms 'Autism' and 'Aspergers'. Essentially, the terms 'Autism' and 'Aspergers' both refer to the one same condition, which is now called 'Autism Spectrum Disorder' (ASD or Autism for short). I explain this in more detail under the section on my website called, [“What do I mean by “Autism Spectrum Disorder, or what some people call Aspergers”?”](#)

COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT 'AUTISM':

- **People with Autism are usually male.**

IN REALITY: People with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD or Autism for short) can be male or female.

- **People with Autism usually have a low IQ.**

IN REALITY: In the past, Autism has been associated with having a low IQ. Among other difficulties, people with ASD have sensory and communication issues. These days, many people, myself included, wonder how accurate the results of an IQ test can be, if the person being tested was hampered by the difficulties associated with having ASD at the time of undertaking the IQ test, such as sensory issues due to the environment where the test took place, and communication issues due to the way in which the test was implemented.

According to the current standard tests for IQ, some people with ASD have been found to have low IQ, some to have average IQ, and some to have high IQ. Personally, I strongly suspect that the range of IQ that people with ASD can have is probably the same as that of people who don't have ASD, i.e., some have low IQ, some have average IQ, and some have high IQ.

- **People with Autism usually cannot cope with crowds, loud noises and/or bright lights, and have an extreme reaction to these things, i.e., they have loud, obvious, public ‘meltdowns’ or tantrums in response to these things.**

IN REALITY: Many people with ASD do have difficulty coping with crowds, loud noises and/or bright lights, due to sensory issues. Some do have an extreme reaction to these things, which is obvious to other people. However, many have reactions that are not obvious to other people. Many learn ways to cope with these sorts of sensory issues.

My ‘Handbook for Teenagers with ASD/Aspergers, and their Parents’ (*which is available for free on this website*), contains a section called “**Sensory Issues**”, which explains this topic in more detail.

- **People with Autism usually cannot talk much or at all.**

IN REALITY: Some people with ASD cannot talk much or at all. However, many people with ASD can talk perfectly well. They might just find it extremely difficult to talk in certain situations, when they feel overwhelmed.

- **People with Autism say things that don’t mean anything.**

IN REALITY: Sometimes, a person with ASD might say something that seems quite random and meaningless to a neurotypical (i.e., ‘mainstream’) person. However, the person with ASD usually is trying to communicate something. They’re just doing it differently to how a neurotypical person would probably communicate that same thing.

Many people with ASD lose the ability to speak while stressed, and are unable to form full sentences. Becoming frustrated tends to make the situation worse. For example, a person with ASD might want to ask for a door to be closed or opened, because it’s making an annoying noise, or they might be worried about something coming in or out of the door, or something else entirely, but all they are able to say in that moment is, “Door”. To an average neurotypical person, this might seem to be random and meaningless.

In a scenario like this, a person with ASD might need another person who is present to help them out, by calmly asking questions like, “Do you want me to close/open the door, or something else?”

- **People with Autism usually cannot interact well with others, i.e., they either:**
 - **avoid social interaction, and when they are around other people, they appear to be very nervous, or grumpy, act in an odd manner, and do not talk very much or at all; OR**
 - **are doggedly insistent on having their own way, easily have tantrums, and are even prone to pushing, hitting and/or kicking other people, when they get upset.**

IN REALITY: Many people with ASD do behave in the above ways. However, many do not. Whilst many people with ASD find social situations difficult, many really enjoy social interaction. People with ASD tend to like to follow the rules. Whilst many people with ASD have difficulty understanding and navigating social rules, many people with ASD are very good at learning and following social rules (although they might find it exhausting).

- **People with Autism usually have very obvious, odd-looking repetitive behaviours, such as rocking or hand flapping.**

IN REALITY: Some people with ASD do have very obvious, odd-looking repetitive behaviours. However, many have repetitive behaviours that are not very odd-looking, or they have learnt to control their repetitive behaviours for periods of time. They might have learnt to refrain from doing their repetitive behaviours until they are in private, so that other people don't make fun of them.

Repetitive behaviour is also called 'stimming'. My 'Handbook for Teenagers with ASD/Aspergers, and their Parents' contains a section called “**Stimming (also known as repetitive behaviour)**”, which explains this topic in more detail.

COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT 'ASPERGERS':

- **People with Aspergers are usually male.**

IN REALITY: People with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD or Autism for short) can be male or female.

- **People with Aspergers are usually math/science/computer technology geniuses, who can spout off information like robots, and have well paid professional jobs.**

IN REALITY: Some people with ASD are math/science/computer technology geniuses. However, many people with ASD are not very good at these things, many have absolutely no interest in these things, and many cannot stand these things. People with ASD can be good at anything, including Art, literature/writing, languages, music, acting, comedy, dancing, and even sport. However, not all people with ASD are geniuses. As per the rest of the population, most are not geniuses. Not all people with ASD have well paid professional jobs. Many have difficulty obtaining and coping with paid employment, due to their ASD issues.

- **People with Aspergers are socially awkward, i.e., they either:**
 - **avoid social interaction, and when they are around other people they appear to be very nervous, or grumpy, act in an odd manner, and do not talk very much or at all; OR**
 - **are interested in things that most people find boring, and they talk incessantly about those boring things, in a monotone, robotic sounding voice, and they often come across as rude and insensitive to others.**

IN REALITY: Many people with ASD do behave in the above ways. However, many do not. People with ASD tend to like to follow the rules. Whilst many people with ASD have difficulty understanding and navigating social rules, many people with ASD are very good at learning and following social rules (although they might find it exhausting). Many really enjoy social interaction.

People with ASD can be interested in anything, including things that many other people are interested in. They can be very likeable. They can be very funny, intelligent and interesting. They can be very talkative and fun to be around, and/or gentle and kind, and/or like to be led. Some people with ASD, especially females, can be very empathetic and expressive.

My 'Handbook for Teenagers with ASD/Aspergers, and their Parents' contains sections called "**Social Issues (& Communication Issues)**" and "**Emotional Issues (& Communication Issues)**", which explain these topics in more detail (I mention tone of voice at pages 97-98 of my Handbook).

Further, a young adult friend of mine*, who has experience with ASD, through people she knows with ASD, and research she has done on the topic, has advised me that:

"The tone of voice is something autistic people might struggle to regulate, so sounding rude or angry or flat often isn't intentional."

- **People with Aspergers are usually like the characters Sheldon Cooper (from the TV show 'The Big Bang Theory'), or Shaun Murphy (from the TV show 'The Good Doctor'), i.e., brilliant academically, but lacking in emotion or empathy for others, or lacking the understanding or ability to have 'normal' relationships with other people.**

IN REALITY: Some people with ASD are like the TV characters Sheldon Cooper or Shaun Murphy, but most are not. Many have difficulty with the environment at mainstream schools, and/or the way things are taught in mainstream schools. Some find their own ways of learning. However, many need a lot of support with their schooling. As per the rest of the population, some are simply not very good at schoolwork or academic learning.

Most people with ASD experience extreme emotions, usually in response to their ASD issues. However, they often have difficulty with understanding, and/or processing, and/or expressing their emotions. Some people with ASD, especially females, can be very empathetic. Many people with ASD do have good relationships with other people.

COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT 'AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER' (ASD OR AUTISM FOR SHORT):

- **People with ASD just want to fit in and be 'normal', and they feel bad if other people make them feel that they are not 'normal'.**

IN REALITY: Telling someone with ASD that they are 'fine' and 'normal', is not always helpful. People with ASD are usually aware that they are not able to cope with certain things as well as most other people can. If they are made to feel that they are 'fine' and 'normal', that can make them feel that there is no good reason why they can't cope with things as well as most other people can. That can make them feel that they are to blame for their inability to cope, i.e., they are not trying hard enough, they are lazy, bad or weak. Knowing that they have a condition, i.e., ASD, that makes it more difficult for them to cope with things, usually provides the person with ASD with a great sense of relief that they are not to blame, i.e., because of their ASD, no matter how hard they try, they will probably always have more difficulty coping with certain things than most people do, so they are not lazy, bad, or weak.

Many people with ASD are well aware that they are not 'normal'. Some do really want to fit in and be 'normal'. However, that is not always the case. It's often more a case of them wanting other people to understand them for who they are, and to be on their wavelength (and in some cases, to be as smart as them), which is what most people want. However, when a person with ASD reaches a stage of development (often during adolescence) when they realise that no-one else is quite like them, it can feel very scary and lonely for them.

- **People with ASD love timetables/schedules, and hate to deviate from them.**

IN REALITY: Whilst many people with ASD do love timetables/schedules, and hate to deviate from them, some people with ASD absolutely HATE timetables/schedules (like my daughter). Having a set timetable/schedule can make a person with ASD feel that there is a lot of pressure on them to do certain tasks/activities at certain times, and within a certain timeframe. This can cause them to feel a great deal of stress.

Many people with ASD are perfectionists, and prefer not to have a time limit to complete a task. They might feel that they cannot complete a task to perfection within a certain timeframe. Due to their ASD issues, many experience frequent periods of physical, mental and emotional exhaustion. At these times, they need to rest, and they know they will not be able to perform at their best, or produce their best work. They might prefer to have the option of putting off doing certain tasks/activities at times when they are feeling exhausted, until a time when they are feeling at their best.

- **People with ASD are like robots who only understand scientific logic, and are devoid of human emotion.**

IN REALITY: Whilst most people with ASD are very logical, they are not all logical in exactly the same way. Sometimes, they simply have their own unique kind of logic, which is different to that of most people. Most experience extreme emotions. Many are very empathetic.

- **People with ASD have social anxiety.**

IN REALITY: Personally, I don't think that the term 'social anxiety' is very helpful when it comes to ASD. Many people with ASD have difficulty with being in social situations, and with social interaction, for a variety of reasons. It is often nothing to do with being around other people, or interacting with other people, in and of itself. Rather, it is often due to sensory issues, and the fact that people with ASD process information in a different way to most people.

Further, people with ASD tend to think differently to most people, and express themselves differently to most people. They often have difficulty understanding neurotypical people, and neurotypical people often have difficulty understanding people with ASD. However, it is usually the person with ASD who has to try to interpret what neurotypical people really mean, and to 'fit in' with neurotypical people. People with ASD often feel that they have to put on a 'mask' (this is often referred to as 'masking'*) when they are interacting with neurotypical people, in order to 'fit in' and be accepted and understood by neurotypical people. This can be exhausting for the person with ASD. Therefore, they might only be able to cope with limited social interaction.

Due to their ASD issues, many people with ASD experience frequent periods of physical, mental and emotional exhaustion. At times like these, a person with ASD might feel that they are too tired to put on their 'people mask', and that they just can't cope with interacting with people. At times like these, being around people, and interacting with people, can make a person with ASD feel irritated, flustered, overwhelmed and/or distressed. At times like these, a person with ASD often finds that their mind is blank, or they can't put their thoughts into words, and can't explain themselves to other people.

*I explain 'masking' in more detail in my 'Handbook for Teenagers with ASD/Aspergers, and their Parents', under the section called "**Social Issues (& Communication Issues)**", at pages 86-88.

- **People with ASD love the online digital world, researching facts on the internet, and being able to communicate by text or email, without having to speak to people 'in person', in 'real time', either face-to-face, or speaking on the phone. People with ASD love to 'live' in the online digital world to work, to create, and to take part in gaming, which involves a lot of role play, especially in the genres of fantasy and science fiction.**

IN REALITY: Some people with ASD do fit the above stereotype. However, many HATE the online digital world, and/or Information Technology. A lot of people with ASD cannot cope with too much information all at once, and can find it overwhelming. When faced with a lot of information all at once, a lot of people with ASD find it difficult to discern which points are important, and/or valid, and/or relevant. What is the internet? Too much information all at once, much of which is not important, and/or valid, and/or relevant, and then some.

Some people with ASD might like the fact that they can communicate by text or email, instead of having to speak to people 'in person', in 'real time', either face-to-face, or speaking on the phone, where they don't have much time to process the information being spoken to them, before they are expected to respond. However, some people with ASD are also dyslexic, which means that communicating via reading and writing, such as via text or email, is hard work for them.

Also, although some people with ASD find face-to-face interaction overwhelming and distracting, for some people with ASD, if they have to communicate 'in person', in 'real time', they'd prefer to do it face-to-face, rather than speaking on the phone. This is because speaking on the phone is still 'in person', in 'real time', but it lacks the aid of visual cues, such as non-verbal cues, which some people with ASD actually find helpful. Yes, some people with ASD are very good at reading non-verbal cues. They might not interpret these correctly every time, but they still find it more helpful to have those non-verbal cues, than not.

Some people with ASD hate the abstract nature of the online digital world, and having to use IT tools to do work or create, and have no interest in online role play gaming. Many people with ASD much prefer the natural world and doing practical things in real life, to the online digital world.

However, not all people with ASD prefer just the online digital world, or the natural world. People with ASD can like a combination of aspects of both.