

Autistic Women & Nonbinary Network



**Information & Resources for
Newly Diagnosed or Recognized
Autistic Women & Nonbinary Individuals**



awnnetwork.org

AWN Network is a community by and for Autistic women, girls and nonbinary individuals. Some of us were diagnosed as children, many were diagnosed or recognized later in life. We all share a common Autistic identity. Our community is diverse and welcoming to all who seek to uphold our mission. Welcome! AWN Network is happy to have you.



Image is a word cloud in a field of flowers and spoonflies on a green background. Word cloud reads: trans inclusive, respect, neurodiversity, intersectionality, community, disability rights, autism acceptance

This can be a confusing and exciting time for you, with many questions and uncertainties. It is also often a time when a lifetime of questions have finally been answered. At AWNNetwork, we hope to help you find resources and community to navigate all the information on autism that is available. We want to assure you that you are not alone. There is a vibrant and welcoming community of Autistic women & nonbinary people who have been where you are and are waiting to help support you on your journey of self discovery. AWN Network respects and affirms the value of Autistic lives. We believe that Autism and Disability are natural variations of the human experience. In doing so, we seek to support, accommodate and respect Autistic individuals through the ideals of neurodiversity and pride in our Autistic identities.

You Belong Here!

Advice & Support for the Newly Diagnosed or Recognized Autistic

"Welcome! Congratulations! It will be better than OK. It will be great. Our community has a need for someone just like you. Please don't let anyone make you second guess yourself because you're 'too feminine' or 'not like their autistic nephew' or whatever. We come in all flavors of girly and not, and we DON'T tend to present like boys. You are not required to suffer fools kindly, even if you've spent your whole life doing so. This isn't something to mourn. You are not a failure. You are perfect. And there are a lot of us out here who want you in our lives exactly as you are."

-Kassiane

"Be kind to yourself. Often, a later in life autism diagnosis and/or recognition is met with a strange sense of relief and overwhelming angst. Don't expect that your story will be exactly like another person's. We are all individuals in our own right. Our life experiences play a big role in how we learn to accept who we are, so be open to learning from others. Be careful not to buy into myths like "high/low functioning" as these labels are not representative of Autistic people overall. Lastly, reach out to the greater disability community. There are so many wonderful women who are reaching out across all disabilities and experiences to help one another."

-Sharon

**"You know
you see the
world
differently.
You know
you think
differently.
And that's a
beautiful
thing."**



-Anonymous

"Don't commit to anything right away. Give yourself time to find your feelings. The time right after being told that you are Autistic is like a roller coaster and you will have many emotional ups and downs. You need time to reflect on your personal history, viewing everything again through this new lens of information you have: the knowledge that your life history is an Autistic life history. Take this time to get re-acquainted with yourself and don't be too quick to commit to things and people until you feel a little more like you have your feet underneath you. Until then, just drink in the flood of new information and spend time being gentle with yourself as you learn anew who you are."

-Maxfield

"You're not broken, and this is nothing new. It's how you are, how you've always been, and this is just the name of it. You are wonderful!"

-Lorraine

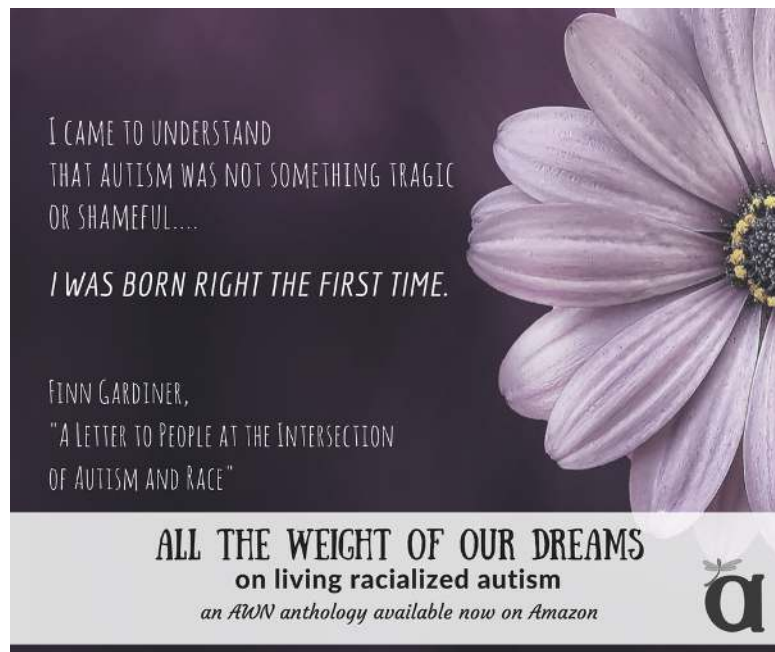


Image: "I came to understand that autism was not something tragic or shameful....

I was born right the first time."

Finn Gardiner, "Letter to People At the Intersection Of Autism and Race" All the Weight of Our Dreams on living racialized autism an AWN anthology available now on Amazon Background photo of a blooming flower in purple hues

"Be gentle with yourself as you review your life through a new perspective. You will likely be reviewing your life through your new set of "eyes" for a significant time. This could potentially bring about some sadness and anger, especially if your autistic traits were ignored by the people around you for a very long time. I know, for myself I was angry at the many professionals that I sought out to help me over the years. Be relieved, you've found who you are, had unanswered questions answered and it can only get better from here on out."

-Kimberly

"Embrace what you are feeling. Its a pathway to liberation of who you have always been. You are not alone in how you view the world. Its ok to experience a variety of emotions or none at all. Take the time to process the information and seek other women like us who are willing to be a safe space."

-Sabrina

"This is a good thing. No, really, *this is a good thing*. Diagnosis means you're going to have access to ideas for coping strategies and tricks to help your brain into not being mad at you/the universe/everything around you. This is not a punishment or a sentence; this is a description that gives you access to resources. This is empowering!"

-Taennyn

"Welcome! Take your time working through this information and your feelings about it. Whatever you're feeling is fine. Our society makes it hard to be autistic and to make sense of our experiences in light of that, and that's not your fault. Consider doing some things differently in your life to make things easier on yourself. There's no mandate to do things in a way that's as hard for you as possible. Read about experiences of invisible disabilities other than autism. A lot of the things we go through with having our experiences denied or hidden or being made to feel lazy, wrong, or incompetent, have commonalities with people with other disabilities, and they have a lot of valuable things to say. "

-Emily



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"Use this as a tool to seek balance in your life. It can be a good place to start to identify which things about your life can be changed to fit you (like sensory things that stress you out a lot more than you may realize), which things you can work on to improve your quality of life (healthy coping mechanisms, assistive technology, social skills that are worth the work to develop), and which things should not be part of your life (abusive relationships, attempts to fit certain social norms that are destructive, etc.) My diagnosis was the start of a process of self-examination that let me build a life I want to live, rather than just enduring someone else's idea of what my life should be like. "

-Angela

As someone who was diagnosed late in life, at age 44, I can guess what you're feeling -- relief, curiosity, excitement, confusion. With knowledge comes power, and self-understanding and awareness can give you a new sense of confidence & self-acceptance, both very powerful tools."

-Donna

"You didn't just "get" autism. Autism is a name for a collection of traits you've had your whole life, that are part of you. This diagnosis doesn't make you a different person. Autism presents us with challenges, but it's not something negative or shameful, and doesn't make us deficient or less valuable. Don't be ashamed to need accommodations or help. We're all interdependent as a race; nobody accomplishes anything on their own."

-Angela



"Love yourself, because you're worth it."

-Annalyn

"You are not alone! Finding others who have similar experiences and ways of being can be one of the most helpful things in learning to understand yourself better. It also can feel really good to be a source of support and understanding for others. Especially look for other autistics who have found positive ways to maximize the really awesome parts of being autistic, while learning to understand and manage the more challenging parts. Learn what accommodations you can make for yourself (or ask of others) that will help you most, and never feel badly about these, because proper and timely accommodations will keep you strong and healthy, and at your best. It is completely possible to live a good and fulfilling life as an autistic person."

-Julia

"Be yourself, whoever that is. People will tell you that you have to be 'masculine brained,' 'good at math,' 'bad at math,' 'delicate and sensitive a la "Aspergirls,'" or any number of other outlandish things. Ignore anyone who tells you how to be an autistic woman.

There are as many ways to do it as autistic women. No one who wants to tell you how to do it is your friend.

Find your own voice."

-Larkin



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"Accept yourself. Accept who you are, and accept that autism is part of who you are. Accommodate yourself and your needs (what those are varies person to person). Don't fight to appear "normal", trying to look "normal" is futile and miserymaking. Instead of trying to be a second-rate allistic person,

be the best autistic person you can be."

-ischemgeek

What is Autism?

Autism is a pervasive developmental disability that impacts communication, movement and sensory processing. "Pervasive" means that autism affects every part of us because it is our neurology. Autistic people are as diverse as any other group of people and we each have our own strengths and weaknesses.

The amount of support that each autistic person needs can vary greatly between individuals and even in the same person from day to day.

However, each and every one of us experience and interpret the world around us in distinctly autistic ways.

The best way to learn about autism is to ask an autistic person! We are the only true experts on our own lives!

"Autism is not what we have. Autistic is what we are."

-S.R.

The way I love? It is deep. Autism is deep love. People write it off as special interest or obsession, but even if it's not something I can excel at, I can excel at loving what I love, loving what I do, loving who I love. Autism is being able to be consumed by love and interest; it is giving 100% because it is an insult to the thing one loves to give any less. Autism is going big or going home"

-Kassiane

Autism is different for each of us. It's hard and joyful and confusing and wondrous. Just like life.

-Cynthia



"I view autism as realness."

-Morénike

What is Acceptance?



Image: "Acceptance is loving a person as who they are, right where they are" - Kassiane, autismwomensnetwork.org.
Background is light blue with a dark gray band at the bottom and blue/white/purple snowflake shapes scattered around.

"We are all multiple layers. Not one of us has only one identity. Seeing all of my identities and the intersections. Providing room at the table to share my experiences without expectations that I will have to sensor, filter, or become invisible."

-Sabrina

"Acceptance, to me, looks like inclusion. I am included because my neurology is respected. My identity as Autistic and Disabled is not seem as a source of shame, but as a part of who I am, and a natural part of human diversity. I am seen as valuable and not a set of deficits. I am seen as worthy of supports, accommodations and help when I do need them because my contributions matter. I matter. Autistic people matter. All of us, including you!"

-Lei

"Calling myself an autistic woman without shame. Shedding that shame and loving myself for who I am, not who others need me to be."

-Kat

"Acceptance means a sense of having everything you need to feel comfortable with who you are. It also means that you and the people most supportive of you fully recognize your areas of competence, while allowing for any accommodations you need without making a big deal out of them. So that you feel encouraged and empowered to discover and fulfill your potential."

-Julia

Further Reading

Autistic Women: Misdiagnosis & The Importance of Getting it Right by Cynthia Kim

Blasting Stereotypes in Autistic Females by Elesia Ashkenazy

Labels by Amy Sequenzia

Understanding the Gender Gap: Autistic Women & Girls by Cynthia Kim

From Ableist To Self Advocate by Amy Sequenzia

The Gift of Self-Knowledge by Jean Winegardner

You Get Proud by Practicing by Laura Hershey

What Autism Really Is by Neurodivergent K

25 Things I Know as an Autistic Person by Corina Becker

12 People On What It Felt Like To Discover Autism by Reese Piper



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The mission of Autistic Women & Nonbinary Network (AWN) is to provide community, support, and resources for Autistic women, girls, nonbinary people, and all others of marginalized genders.

AWN Network is dedicated to building a supportive community where we can share our experiences in an understanding, diverse and inclusive environment. AWN is committed to recognizing and celebrating diversity and the many intersectional experiences in our community.

We welcome all women, transgender and cisgender, non-binary and genderqueer people, Two-Spirit people, people who have at anytime identified as women or girls, and all other people of marginalized genders or of no gender. AWN recognizes and affirms all people's gender identities and expressions, as well as choices about disclosure, transition, and going stealth.

**You are not alone!
Welcome to AWN
Network and welcome
to a whole new
understanding of you!**

awnnetwork.org



AWN Initiatives:

Divergent: when disability & feminism collide

Committee on Autism & Ethnicity & Autistic POC Fund

Health Care Provider Database

AWN Publications:

What Every Autistic Girl Wishes Her Parents Knew

All the Weight Of Our Dreams: On Living Racialized Autism

Volunteer Opportunities

Donate to AWN Network

