

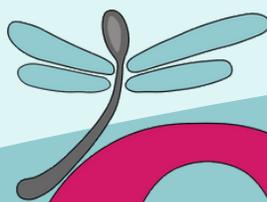
# Autistic Women & Nonbinary Network

INFORMATION & RESOURCES FOR NEWLY  
DIAGNOSED OR RECOGNIZED AUTISTIC  
WOMEN & NONBINARY INDIVIDUALS

**Welcome to Autistic Women &  
Nonbinary Network (AWN)!**

We are 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.

**You belong here!**



**a**



**awn**network.org

# **AWN respects and affirms the value of Autistic lives.**

No one person is the same as any other.  
Even twins can be very different from each other.  
Autism and Disability are just some of the many  
ways some people are different from other people.



**Our community is diverse and welcoming  
to all who seek to uphold our mission.  
AWN is happy to have you!**

## **Because autism is just one of the many ways people can be different from each other,**

we seek to respect and support them as full people and as equals. There are many ideals that we believe in and act on in order to better give that respect and support:

### **We believe in the neurodiversity paradigm.**

Autism isn't a kind of sickness that needs a cure, it is just one of the many different ways brains can develop to take in information and think through things. Support for autistic people should mean finding ways for them to go through their lives as they are instead of trying to find ways to "fix" their autism.

### **We believe in disability justice.**

Just like people have been treated unfairly by society because of things like race, age, or gender, people are also often treated unfairly by society when they have a disability. Often, the different ways people are treated unfairly by society are connected to one another. We believe that we should change society so that it no longer treats disabled people unfairly, and that this effort is connected to the other ways people are treated unfairly.

### **We believe in transformative justice.**

We believe in transformative justice. Many of the systems we live in respond to harm in ways that end up just making more harm. Instead of doing this even more, we think it is important that when harm happens we try to work together to figure out why the harm happened in the first place in order to prevent it from happening again. If the harm was a result of the systems we live in, we think it is important to work to change those systems so they don't continue to do the same harm.

**and we believe in having pride in our  
Autistic identities.**

**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 AWN, we hope to help you find the 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.

# 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 people who are reaching out across all disabilities and experiences to help one another."

- Sharon

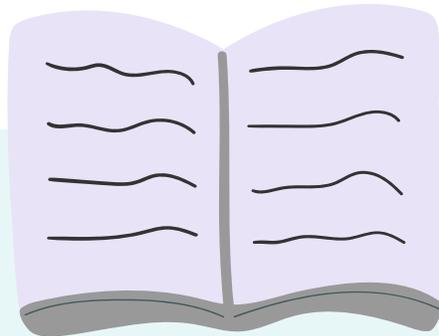
## "Welcome!

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



## "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

**“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 reacquainted 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**



## **"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

**"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"**



## **"Embrace what you are feeling.**

It's 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

## **"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

**"Love yourself because  
you're worth it!"**

**- Annalynn**



**"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



## **“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

## "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 condition that makes it hard to take part in the society we live in, and to have our needs met.

The spaces we exist in and the social patterns that are considered acceptable or not acceptable are based on the needs and expectations of people that are non-autistic and fit into a social standard that wasn't built to consider the ways that autistic people are different from non-autistic people.

**Because the differences between how we are and the way society expects us to be creates difficulties for autistic people trying to live and participate in society, autism is considered a disability.**



## Autism is considered a developmental disability

because the differences between autistic people and non-autistic people can be seen as early as when we're 2 years old, and those differences continue to show in the ways we grow in ways that are different from the ways non-autistic people are expected to grow.

Children are expected to be able to do certain things and pick up certain traits at certain times and ages when growing up. For example, some of the things children at the age of 3 are expected to be able to do are things like:

speak in small sentences,  
complete small puzzles,  
and be able to walk up and down  
sets of stairs.



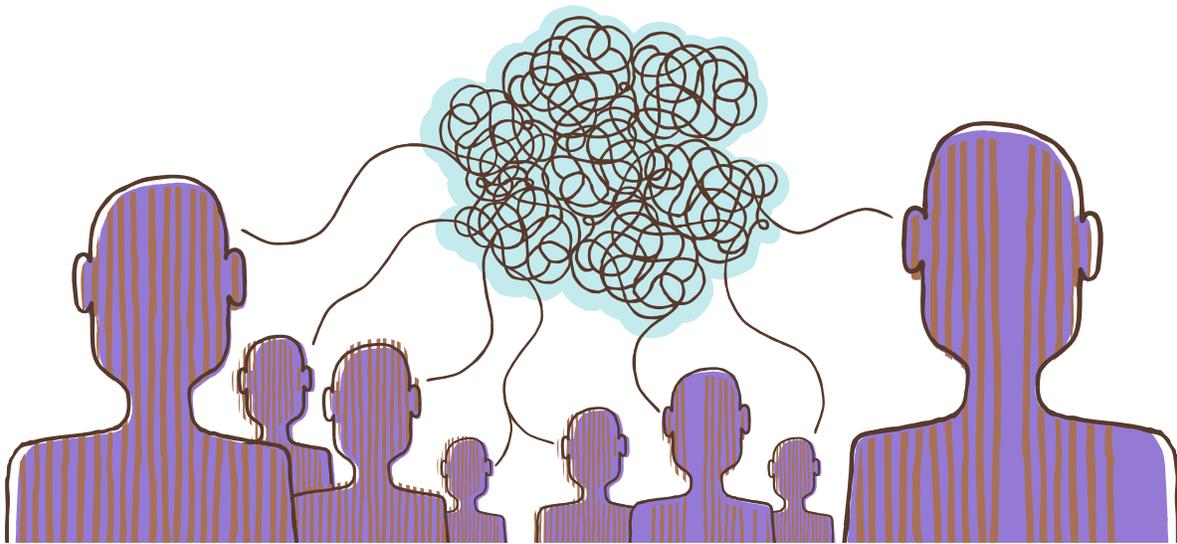
A developmental disability would be a condition that made it so that the child was only able to do those things at a later age, or was never able to do those things they were expected to do at that age.

It is common that autistic children can have many delays in developing the ability to do certain things at the same times a non-autistic child would be expected to, or not develop certain skills at all.

It is also nearly as common for autistic children to simply develop the ability to do certain things outside of the order children are expected to learn those things.

**The "double empathy" issue is something that happens a lot with autistic people,** most often when engaging with non-autistic people.

Non-autistic people communicate with each other in ways that are intuitive to them. They don't have to think twice about things like how certain non-verbal cues take on certain meanings, or even how subtleties in the way they say certain things convey a large amount of meaning among each other.



Unfortunately it can be difficult for autistic people to either convey or pick up on a lot of this meaning that non-autistic people are used to communicating to each other.

This creates difficulty for autistic people and their ability to engage with many of the people around them, as well as difficulty for non-autistic people to comfortably communicate with autistic people.

That being said, generally, autistic people tend to find it much easier to communicate with each other than to communicate with non-autistic people.



There are also many common autistic traits that are tied to repetition.

"Stimming" is one of those traits.

**"Stimming" is the name we give to repetitive things we do,** often in order to keep ourselves calm or to help deal with our senses being overwhelmed.

Common "stims" include things like rocking back and forth, wagging your hands around, spinning, or things like repeating phrases & noises, or singing aloud.

There is a very wide range of "stims" autistic people take on that isn't limited to what has been listed.



Another trait tied to repetition is that many autistic people enjoy having set routines for things, and can often find it distressing when they have to suddenly change from that set routine.

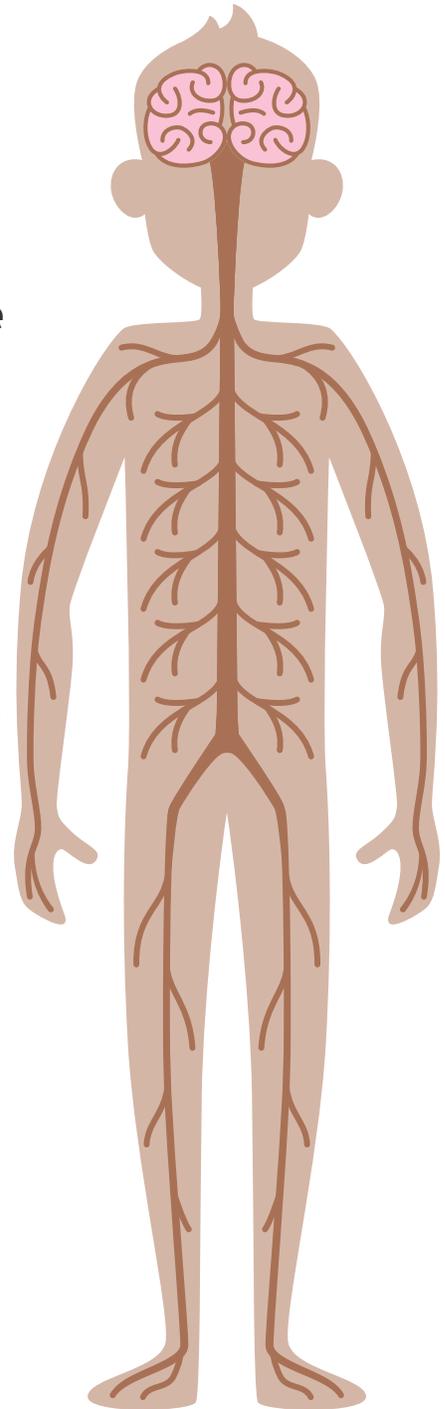
**While many autistic qualities are connected to how our brains work, autism doesn't just affect the brain, it affects all the parts of the body that our brain is connected to.**

The brain is connected to the rest of the body through a network of cell tissue called nerves that are connected through your whole body.

When you sense something it is because the organ in your body that makes that sense picked up a signal and sent it up to your brain through your network of nerves.

For example, when you taste something it is because your tongue has sensors on it that are sensitive to the types of molecules that are commonly found in food.

When the sensors on your tongue are in contact with one of those molecules it sends a signal from your tongue down through your nerves and up to your brain. Your brain takes that signal and turns into feelings and sensations. Similar steps take place for your other senses.



Autism often has an effect on many of the steps related to our senses because of how our senses are connected to our nerves and our brain.

This most often shows through autistic people either being more sensitive to certain things we come across or less sensitive than non-autistic people.

Differences in the connection between our brains and our bodies are probably why it is also common for autistic people to tend to have issues with things like balance and coordination.



While there are many qualities that have been listed, autistic people are as diverse as any other group of people with their 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 autistic person experiences and interprets the world around them in distinctly autistic ways.

**The best way to learn about autism  
is to ask an autistic person!  
Autistic people are the only true  
experts on autism!**

# AUTISM IS...



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

**- S.R.**

**"I view autism as realness. "**

**- Morénike**

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

**- Cynthia**

**"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

# WHAT IS ACCEPTANCE?

**“Autism isn't a choice,**

and we can't change it, but we can change our perceptions. Radical acceptance allows us to embrace Autistic life, with all of its joy and sorrow.”

- Autistic, Typing from 'Autism Moon'

**"Acceptance is loving a person as who they are, right where they are."**

**- Kassiane**

**“We are all multiple layers.**

“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



**"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, to me, looks like inclusion.

I am included because my neurology is respected. My identity as Autistic and Disabled is not seen 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



## "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

# THE MISSION

**Because autism is just one of the many ways people can be different from each other,** we seek to respect and support them as full people and as equals. There are many ideals that we believe in and act on in order to better give that respect and support:

## **We believe in the neurodiversity paradigm.**

Autism isn't a kind of sickness that needs a cure, it is just one of the many different ways brains can develop to take in information and think through things. Support for autistic people should mean finding ways for them to go through their lives as they are instead of trying to find ways to "fix" their autism.

## **We believe in disability justice.**

Just like people have been treated unfairly by society because of things like race, age, or gender, people are also often treated unfairly by society when they have a disability. Often, the different ways people are treated unfairly by society are connected to one another. We believe that we should change society so that it no longer treats disabled people unfairly, and that this effort is connected to the other ways people are treated unfairly.

## **We believe in transformative justice.**

We believe in transformative justice. Many of the systems we live in respond to harm in ways that end up just making more harm. Instead of doing this even more, we think it is important that when harm happens we try to work together to figure out why the harm happened in the first place in order to prevent it from happening again. If the harm was a result of the systems we live in, we think it is important to work to change those systems so they don't continue to do the same harm.

**and we believe in having pride in our Autistic identities.**



As the name of our organization implies, Autistic Women & Nonbinary Network works with women, as well as a large range of people that don't fit into traditional gender standards. Some of the many types of people we welcome include:

### **Cisgender Women -**

Women that were identified as women at birth and continue to identify as women.

### **Transgender Women and Men -**

People that were identified as a certain gender at birth, but identify as the opposite gender.

### **Non-binary People -**

People that don't identify either as men or as women.

### **Genderfluid People -**

People that don't have a single fixed sense of gender.

### **Two-Spirit People -**

This is a gender identity that is taken by many people with native roots in America. This identity reflects third genders that have been common to the historic cultures of many of the native people of America.

**And all other people of marginalized genders or who identify as having no gender.**

Along with affirming people's gender identities and expressions, Autistic Women & Binary Network also aims to respect people's needs and boundaries when it comes to disclosure, transition, and "going stealth".

Not everyone is comfortable with being out in the open about their gender identity, or how their gender expression doesn't match the gender role they were given at birth.

It can also put people who don't fit commonly expected gender roles in danger if information about their gender identity or expression is shared with the wrong people.



**For this reason certain information about people's gender identities or expression should only be shared in ways that are within the consent and boundaries of that specific person.**

We also know that not everyone who has a gender identity that is different to the one that was assigned to them at birth has the ability to have a gender expression that matches with how they identify.

**Even if this is the case, they should still be recognized and affirmed as the gender that they identify as.**

Within this group of autistic people also affected by gender marginalization, the Autistic Women & Nonbinary Network aims to give a space where they are able to feel welcome and connected to others who have gone through some of the same issues.



We also aim to help with working through many of the unique challenges that may come up in the lives of those that are autistic women or are autistic and don't fit established gender norms.

Additionally we want to give tools and materials that can be helpful in working through those challenges.

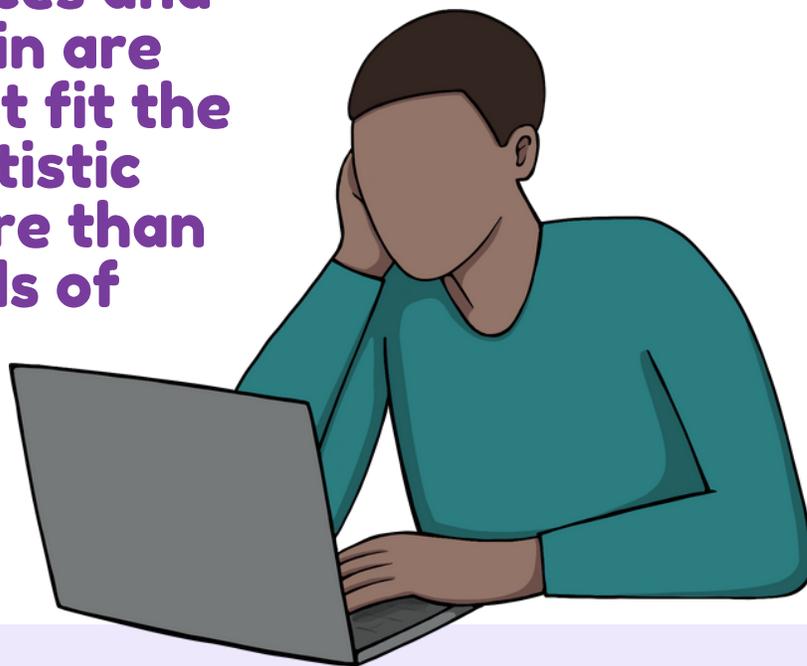
**Autistic Women & Nonbinary Network wants to build space where we can all respect and celebrate the ways we are all different as well as the many ways in which our experiences and challenges overlap.**

Our society is built around the needs of non-autistic people and how they expect things to be, so most people aren't very well informed about the needs of autistic people or the way that our brains work.

Many non-autistic people may not even be in any kind of regular contact with autistic people in their day to day lives. Because of this, it can be hard for people to understand the differences between the needs of autistic people and non-autistic people.

Often times, because people aren't aware of these differences in needs, presumptions can be made about autistic people that can cause harm.

**Many of the spaces and systems we live in are built in ways that fit the needs of non-autistic people much more than they fit the needs of autistic people.**



Because many spaces don't take into account the needs of autistic people, it is common that these spaces can be built in ways that are in fact very distressful for autistic people.

These distressing things can often go unnoticed by non-autistic people, so it can be common that the only times when they have been in contact with autistic people and have known so have been when those autistic people were under a lot of distress.



This can lead to many people only having a view of autistic people that is limited to how autistic people function when under high amounts of distress. Because many of these distressing things can be invisible to non-autistic people it is hard for them to tell why autistic people are under distress, and they can tend to make assumptions why based on how their own brains function instead of from knowing what autistic people are going through. These assumptions can be inaccurate and very harmful.

There can be a lot of fear and worry around being diagnosed as autistic because of these inaccurate assumptions and biases, which is not good because diagnosis can be the difference between an autistic person being able to have their needs met and to better connect with those around them.

For this reason we think it is important to share the facts about autistic peoples needs and things that we go through, and to correct false ideas and assumptions around autism.

**You are not alone! Welcome to a whole new understanding of you!**

# FURTHER READING

"Autism Moon" by Autistic, Typing  
[facebook.com/AutisticTyping/posts/413085455958525](https://facebook.com/AutisticTyping/posts/413085455958525)

"Autistic Women: Misdiagnosis and the Importance of Getting it Right"  
by Cynthia Kim  
[awnnetwork.org/autistic-women-misdiagnosis-and-the-importance-of-getting-it-right](https://awnnetwork.org/autistic-women-misdiagnosis-and-the-importance-of-getting-it-right)

"Blasting Stereotypes in Autistic Females" by Elesia Ashkenazy  
[awnnetwork.org/blasting-stereotypes-in-autistic-females](https://awnnetwork.org/blasting-stereotypes-in-autistic-females)

"Labels" by Amy Sequenzia  
[awnnetwork.org/labels](https://awnnetwork.org/labels)

"Understanding the Gender Gap: Autistic Women & Girls" by Cynthia Kim  
[awnnetwork.org/understanding-the-gender-gap-autistic-women-and-girls](https://awnnetwork.org/understanding-the-gender-gap-autistic-women-and-girls)

"From Ableist to Self Advocate" by Amy Sequenzia  
[awnnetwork.org/from-ableist-to-self-advocate](https://awnnetwork.org/from-ableist-to-self-advocate)

"The Gift of Self Knowledge" by Jean Windgardner  
[awnnetwork.org/the-gift-of-self-knowledge](https://awnnetwork.org/the-gift-of-self-knowledge)

"You Get Proud by Practicing: A Poem" by Laura Hershey  
[www.thenthdegree.com/proudpoem.asp](http://www.thenthdegree.com/proudpoem.asp)

"What Autism Really Is" by Radical Neurodivergence Speaking  
[timetolisten.blogspot.com/2013/11/what-autism-really-is.html](https://timetolisten.blogspot.com/2013/11/what-autism-really-is.html)

"25 Things I Know as an Autistic Person" by Corina Becker  
[autisticsspeakingday.blogspot.com/2011/11/25-things-i-know-as-autistic-person.html](https://autisticsspeakingday.blogspot.com/2011/11/25-things-i-know-as-autistic-person.html)

"12 People on What it Felt Like to Discover Autism" by Reese Piper  
<https://awnnetwork.org/12-people-on-what-it-felt-like-to-discover-autism>



[facebook.com/awnnetwork.org](https://facebook.com/awnnetwork.org)



[instagram.com/awn\\_network](https://instagram.com/awn_network)



[twitter.com/awnnetwork\\_](https://twitter.com/awnnetwork_)



[awn-network.tumblr.com](https://awn-network.tumblr.com)

## **AWN INITIATIVES:**

### **DIVERGENT**

[awnnetwork.org/divergent-when-disability-and-feminism-collide](https://awnnetwork.org/divergent-when-disability-and-feminism-collide)

### **HEALTH CARE RESOURCES**

[awnnetwork.org/autistic-womens-health-provider-survey-results](https://awnnetwork.org/autistic-womens-health-provider-survey-results)

### **AUTISTIC PEOPLE OF COLOR FUND**

[autismandrace.com/autistic-people-of-color-fund/](https://autismandrace.com/autistic-people-of-color-fund/)

### **SINCERELY, YOUR AUTISTIC CHILD:**

What People on the Autism Spectrum Wish Their Parents Knew About Growing Up, Acceptance, and Identity

[beacon.org/Sincerely-Your-Autistic-Child-PI685.aspx](https://beacon.org/Sincerely-Your-Autistic-Child-PI685.aspx)

**CONTACT:** [awnnetwork.org/contact-awn](https://awnnetwork.org/contact-awn)

**DONATE:** [awnnetwork.org/donate-to-awn](https://awnnetwork.org/donate-to-awn)