

# Autistic Women & Nonbinary Network

INFORMATION & RESOURCES FOR PARENTS &  
CAREGIVERS OF NEWLY DIAGNOSED AUTISTIC KIDS



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

We are a community by and for autistic women, girls, nonbinary individuals. We strive to provide information, support and advocacy to autistic women, girls, nonbinary people, our families, friends and allies.

**AWN 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 the neurodiversity paradigm, disability justice, transformative justice and pride in our Autistic identities.



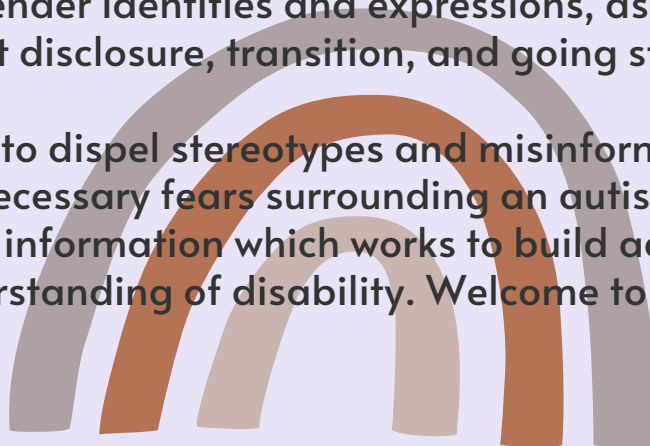
The mission of Autistic Women & Nonbinary Network (AWN) is to provide community, support, and resources for Autistic women, girls, transfeminine and transmasculine nonbinary people, trans people of all genders, Two Spirit people, and all others of marginalized genders.



AWN 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, transfeminine and transmasculine non-binary and genderqueer people, Two-Spirit people, trans people of all genders, 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.

Our goal is to dispel stereotypes and misinformation which perpetuate unnecessary fears surrounding an autism diagnosis. We seek to share information which works to build acceptance and understanding of disability. Welcome to AWN!





**As the parent of a newly diagnosed autistic child, you may have many questions and concerns.**

**WHAT IS AUTISM? WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE AUTISTIC?  
WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE? HOW CAN I BEST SUPPORT AND  
HELP THE AUTISTIC CHILD IN MY LIFE?**



**To help answer these questions, we looked for answers from the real experts: autistic adults.**

We have also reached out to experienced parents for their first hand knowledge, insight and wisdom in helping you to understand what can be a confusing time. It can be difficult to navigate the amount of often conflicting information available on autism today.

## GUIDANCE

"After years of believing I was just as positive and accepting a parent as I could be, I stumbled upon AWN and blogs by autistic adults, and realized, I still had a lot of work to do, with fixing my own perceptions and now trying to forward the messages of autistic self advocacy. One day, my little girl will be an autistic woman, and it is my job to guide her there. This is where this organization comes in, because I had NO idea how to do it. I have no personal living as autistic knowledge. I want to be the best parent I can be, because I want her and her sister to be the best women they can become no matter what their neurodiversities are."

-Dawn

## SELF LOVE

"Help her love who she is: when she is playing or studying or spinning or singing or painting or drumming or bouncing or screaming or crying or finding beauty in the most unlikely places."

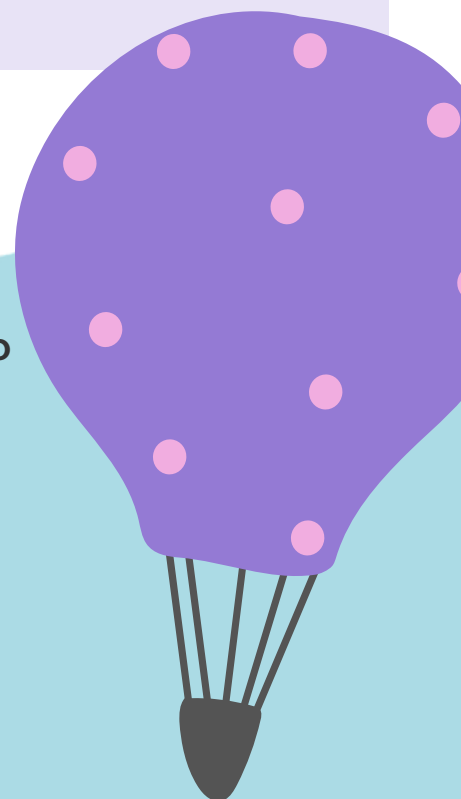
- Karen Lean, Sincerely Your Autistic Child: What People on the Autism Spectrum Wish Their Parents Knew About Growing Up, Acceptance, and Identity




## "PRESUME COMPETENCE."

-ARIANE

"Supporting my daughter's needs was paramount to helping her be happy and to healing the fear in our family. Knowing more about how her brain worked solved many mysteries for us. The daily details of this include lots of sensory activities, respecting specific daily routines, respecting her need to pull back when overwhelmed, and not getting angry when she's overwhelmed and melting down."

-Kathryn



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1. Relax. Don't freak out...your child will be okay, and so will you. They are the same child they were before you knew they were autistic. They need you not to view them as defective or broken, because a large portion of the world will be seeing them that way.
  2. There's already great variability on the spectrum as is, and layered on top of that, the way some genders present is often different than the way people expect autism to be manifested. This may cause your child to be ineligible for certain services as they may be perceived as not in need of them. Or their autistic tendencies may be missed, misinterpreted, minimized, disregarded, or a combination of some or all of those.
  3. It might be a lonely road for them and for you. I've gone to "autism playdates" where my child is surrounded by a sea of boys. She were in a therapy program where for nearly a year she was the only girl. And a lot of literature, research, and even anecdotal material one might come across is very heavily male-skewed.
  4. You might have to "unlearn" nearly everything you know about autism because a lot of it is likely very biased and comes from a deficit-based perspective.
  5. The way many people raise their children may not be the best way for you to raise yours. In order to be the parent that they need, there are likely going to be some things that you have to leave by the wayside, and others that you might have to embrace. And that's okay.
  6. **PROTECT THEM.** The rate of sexual and physical abuse that children with disabilities encounter is astounding. Furthermore, there might be characteristics that they have as an autistic person that may unfortunately make it more challenging for them to always be able to discern when they are being taken advantage of and/or when they're at risk. You might have to be very explicit and very blunt about things. You might be uncomfortable doing that, but you'd be a lot more uncomfortable later if you could have possibly helped them avoid a horrible experience.

- Morénike

# LISTEN



"Your child is a gift, first and foremost. You have the opportunity before you to raise a strong, amazing woman, no matter her diagnosis. Chances are the success she finds in life will not look like you imagine it to look, but it doesn't mean it will be less fulfilling for her. Be sure to learn her strengths and work in them and ALWAYS LISTEN."

- Tara

## DO

Accept your daughter, love her, accommodate her needs, advocate for her, listen to her, teach her how to assert boundaries and respect those boundaries once asserted, encourage her passions and interests, and shut down any bullying and teasing targeted at her in your presence.

## DON'T

Demand that she look or act normal, blame her for being bullied, suggest that she could overcome [difficulty] if she "tried harder," blame her or make fun of her for her meltdowns, or discourage non-hazardous stimming. Remember the following: she's trying as hard as she can, she is more confused and baffled by allistic people than they are of her, and meltdowns are not tantrums but rather a human reaction to stress overload.

-ischemgeek

**"DON'T SPEND YOUR DAYS AND  
NIGHTS WORRYING SO MUCH,  
BECAUSE YOU WILL MISS THE JOY  
OF WATCHING YOUR CHILD GROW."  
-KIMBERLY**



# WHAT IS AUTISM?

**AUTISM IS A PERVERSIVE DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITY THAT IMPACTS COMMUNICATION, MOVEMENT AND SENSORY PROCESSING.**

"Pervasive" means that autism affects every part of the person because it is their neurology.



**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!

# WHAT IS ACCEPTANCE?

**"CHANGING THE WORLD FOR MY CHILD AND  
NOT CHANGING THEM FOR THE WORLD. "**

**-GEE**



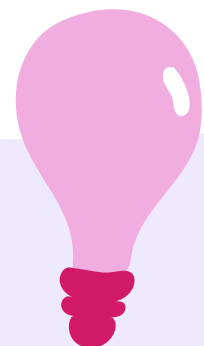
"It means not changing what fundamentally makes my child who she is. It means respecting her stims, it means respecting her sensory needs, it means presuming that my child is as competent as the next. It means giving her the space and accommodations to succeed with her unique neurology."

**-Sandy**

"That one's autism diagnosis should be viewed in the same manner as other core characteristics of that individual--as part of who they are, and as such something to be celebrated. Just as someone might be proud of being Latina, or proud of being a woman, etc, they should identify with and be comfortable with who they are. And Autistic is who they are--along with all of the other components of their personhood.

**Autism acceptance is critical."**

**-Morénike**







"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 MEANS NOT TRYING TO CHANGE WHO I AM."  
-TERRI**

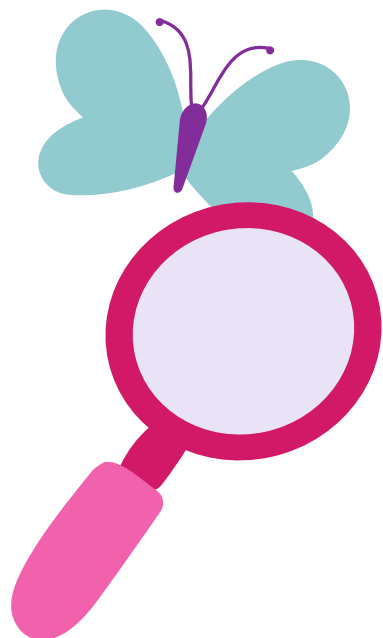
"Parents who practice acceptance will not allow anyone to devalue their children. They will not allow anyone to value their children on the basis of what they can do, but on the basis of their humanity."

-Amy Sequenzia, [awnnetwork.org/autism-acceptance-requires-action](http://awnnetwork.org/autism-acceptance-requires-action)



"If you want your child to learn to love  
themselves for the amazing person that  
they are, then you must learn to accept  
that they are Autistic, and they are  
exactly who they were meant to be."

-Lei



"I'd ask parents and caregivers to recognize that she does NOT have to change or hide who she is in order to find someplace where she fits in or can be accepted in the world. The world is big. We do not live in a monoculture. Autistic girls learn and gain skills and develop relationships differently from most people, not in a way that's inherently defective or insufficient. It's not wrong that the way she works is very different from most other people. People find all different ways of living in the world."  
-Emily




**"Fear is the enemy. Hope is everything.  
Acceptance is how it happens."**

-Lynne Soraya, *Sincerely Your Autistic Child: What People on the Autism Spectrum Wish Their Parents Knew About Growing Up, Acceptance, and Identity*

"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

**"SUPPORT. INCLUSION. RESPECT."  
-A.H.**







People will tell you 'they're still the same child they were before the label' and that is true. You already know your child -- the label is confirmation, not change. People will also tell you your child is not defined by their autism, that it is something outside of who they are and that they can overcome it. This is not completely true.

Autism is pervasive -- that is to say, there is no "place" inside your child that is the not-Autistic place. They are not defined by their autism, yes -- they are many, many things and will become many, many things through the years and autism is only one of those things.

However, autism is big and you cannot ignore it away or define it away or trick it into going away by not using the words about it. Autism is the way your child's brain is put together. If you believe in a marvelous God, then you must believe there is a purpose for the unusual and beautiful way your child's brain was made. If you do not believe in God, then you must come to accept that nature has mysterious ways and has produced this wonderful and beautiful child of yours that you are tasked to love and accept the way they were born.

You cannot peel away the autism. You cannot discipline it away, drug it away, cut it away with surgery. It is an indelible part of who your child is and your job as parent, grandparent, caregiver, person who loves this child ... your job is to help them grow up to be the best Autistic person they can be. They may speak; They may never speak.



They may drive a car; driving may be beyond their abilities. They may marry, raise children, live in the suburbs with a dog and a cat. They may live their life alone and happy to be that way. You cannot predict the adult they will be by looking at the child they are -- this is true of all children, but infinitely more so with your Autistic child.

We are still learning about autism across the life-span but one thing we do know is that Autistic children who might appear nearly identical at age six turn out to be completely different at age twenty-six.

So focus on who you have in front of you right now and don't let fear lead you down paths that damage your beautiful child for the uncertain promise of a future outcome. Talk to other parents of Autistic children. Talk to grown Autistic adults. Learn as much as you can directly from people living it and filter the words of "experts" through the sieve of lived experiences. Finally, if you still feel tempted to try to remove your child's autism as if they were an apple and you could wield a corer, skillfully dissecting and discarding everything you deem not-normal about them, I would like you to read a short story by Nathaniel Hawthorne, "The Birth-Mark." Read it and reflect on what it might mean for you as the caretaker of an Autistic child.

-Maxfield



# FURTHER READING

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

**We Are Like Your Child**  
[wearelikeyourchild.blogspot.com](http://wearelikeyourchild.blogspot.com)

**"What is Acceptance?" by Parenting Autistic Children With Love & Acceptance**  
[autloveaccept.wordpress.com/2015/03/12/what-is-acceptance](http://autloveaccept.wordpress.com/2015/03/12/what-is-acceptance)

**"Here, Try on Some of My Shoes" by Radical Neurodivergence Speaking**  
[timetolisten.blogspot.com/2013/09/here-try-on-some-of-my-shoes.html](http://timetolisten.blogspot.com/2013/09/here-try-on-some-of-my-shoes.html)

**"The Cost of Compliance is Unreasonable" by Love Explosions**  
[loveexplosions.net/2013/01/30/the-cost-of-compliance-is-unreasonable](http://loveexplosions.net/2013/01/30/the-cost-of-compliance-is-unreasonable)

**Non Speaking Autistic Speaking by Amy Sequenzia**  
[nonspeakingautisticspeaking.blogspot.com](http://nonspeakingautisticspeaking.blogspot.com)

**Emma's Hope Book**  
[emmashopebook.com](http://emmashopebook.com)

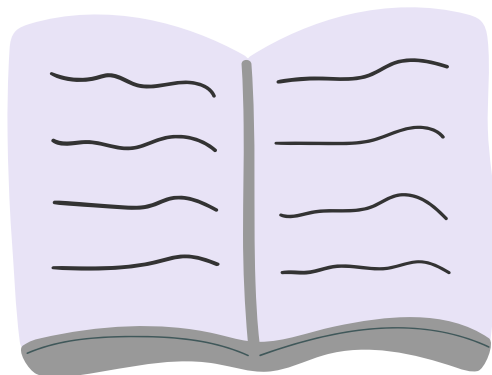
**Autistic Spectrum Parenting**  
[asparenting.com](http://asparenting.com)

**Ollibean**  
[ollibean.com/blog](http://ollibean.com/blog)

**Foundations for Divergent Minds**  
[divergentminds.org](http://divergentminds.org)

**Behavior Plan for Parents & Caregivers of Autistic Kids**  
[neurodiversitylibrary.files.wordpress.com/2017/01/parent-plan-1.pdf](http://neurodiversitylibrary.files.wordpress.com/2017/01/parent-plan-1.pdf)

**"Are We Trying Too Hard to Teach Our Autistic Children?" by Suburban Mamma**  
[suburbanautistics.blogspot.com/2014/08/are-we-trying-too-hard-to-teach-our.html](http://suburbanautistics.blogspot.com/2014/08/are-we-trying-too-hard-to-teach-our.html)





[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)