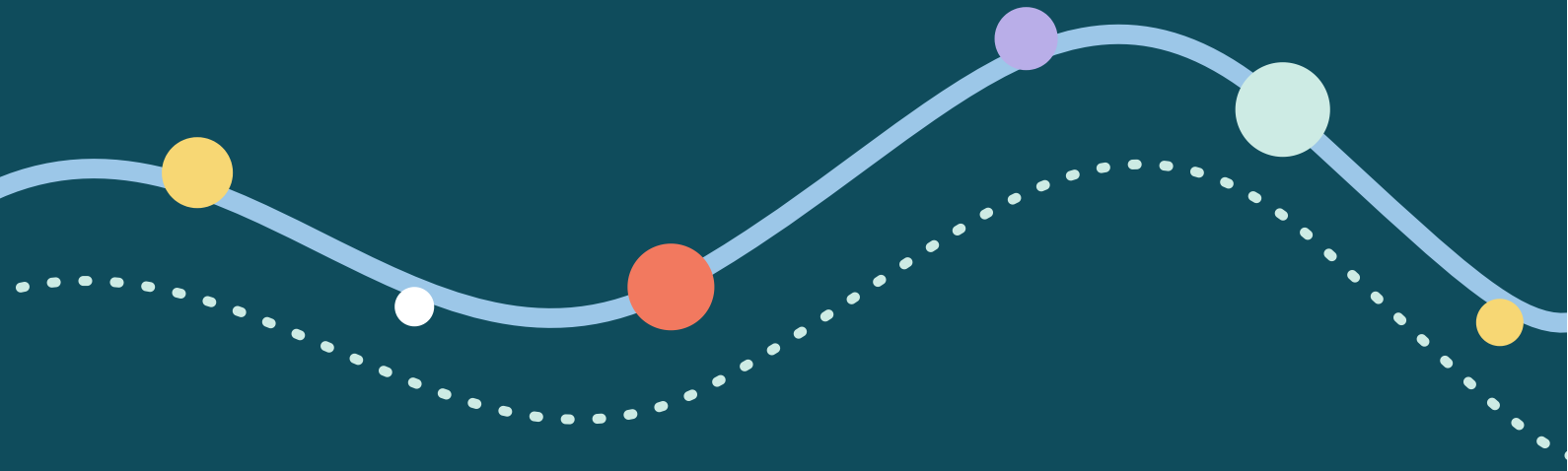
FOR AUTISTIC TEENAGERS

Wired my way.

A guide to understanding your autistic brain, written for you.



This guide belongs to .....

ANDREW RYDER

Neuro-affirmative resources

So, you're autistic.

Maybe you saw it coming. Maybe it is a surprise. Either way, this guide is here to help you make sense of it, at your own pace.

Right now I feel... (circle any)

relieved | confused | annoyed | proud | worried | curious | not bothered | not sure yet | all of the above

Every one of these is normal. Lots of people feel different things on different days.

Your diagnosis does mean

There is a real reason for some things you have noticed about yourself.

You have a right to support and adjustments.

You are part of a big, varied autistic community.

It does not mean

You have changed. You are the same person you were yesterday.

Something is wrong with you.

Anyone else gets to decide what you can do with your life.

How to use this guide

Any order. Read the pages that matter to you first.

Your pace. A page now and then is fine.

Write in it, or don't. It works either way.

It's yours. You choose who sees it.

Being autistic is not something that happened to you. It is part of how you have always been.

What autism actually is

A lifelong difference in how your brain takes in, processes and responds to the world. It is not an illness, and it does not need curing.

What the criteria say	What it might look like for you
Differences in social communication	Small talk feels pointless or draining. You prefer deep conversations. Group chats move too fast.
Intense, focused interests	You can spend hours on something you love and know everything about it.
Needing routine and predictability	A last-minute change of plan can throw your whole day.
Sensory differences	The canteen is unbearable. Some fabrics, lights or sounds are just too much.

Neurodiversity

Human brains vary, like fingerprints. Neurodiversity is the idea that autistic, ADHD, dyslexic and other brains are natural variations, not broken versions of a "normal" one.

Myth vs fact

~~Autistic people don't have empathy.~~

Many feel other people's emotions strongly, and show it differently.

~~You can tell by looking.~~

There is no autistic look. Many people are recognised in their teens.

~~Parenting or vaccines cause it.~~

No. Autism is mostly genetic. You were born autistic.

~~Autistic people don't want friends.~~

Plenty do. Friendship often just looks different.

Your words, your identity

There is no single right way to talk about being autistic. You get to choose the words that feel like you.

"I'm autistic"

Most autistic adults in the UK prefer this. Autism is part of who they are, not something they carry around.

"I have autism"

Some people prefer this, and that is OK too. You can change your mind as often as you like.

Other words you might hear

Neurodivergent	A brain that works differently from what society expects. Includes autism, ADHD and dyslexia.
Neurotypical	A brain that works in the way society usually expects.
AuDHD	Being autistic and ADHD. This is really common.
Asperger's	An older term, no longer used for new diagnoses. Some people still identify with it.



The spectrum is not a line

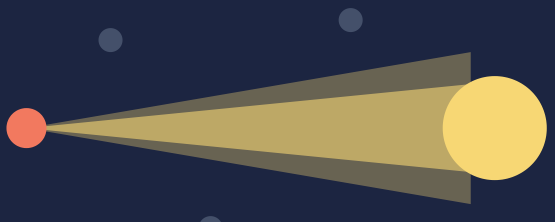
It is not "a little bit autistic" at one end and "very autistic" at the other. Each autistic person has their own mix of strengths and needs across senses, focus, communication, routine, movement and emotions. Your mix is yours.

Words I like for myself

Tunnel vision, in a good way

Lots of autistic people focus deeply on a few things at a time. Autistic researchers call this **monotropism**, and it explains a lot.

Attention spread out



Attention in one deep tunnel

The upside

Flow. Deep knowledge. Joy and calm. Noticing details others miss.

The tricky bit

Switching tasks. Being interrupted. Forgetting to eat or drink. Missing things outside the tunnel.

What helps

A warning before switching. Timers. Stopping at a natural break. Saying "I'm mid-flow".

Your interests are not obsessions to fix. They are fuel. They recharge you, connect you to people and can lead to future jobs.

My interests right now

Interests I've loved before

Your sensory settings

Your brain might turn some senses up loud and others down low. Knowing your settings helps you plan your day.

Set your sliders

Draw a line where each sense sits for you



Inside signals means things like hunger, thirst, needing the toilet, heartbeat and feelings. Many autistic people find these hard to notice.

Too much? Try...

Noise-cancelling headphones or loop earplugs. Sunglasses or a cap. Hood up. Sitting near the door. Leaving early. A quiet space at break.

Need more input? Try...

Moving, walking or the gym. Music. A fidget. Something heavy to carry. A weighted blanket or a snug hoodie.

About stimming

Flapping, rocking, tapping, humming, pacing, repeating a favourite phrase: stimming is how lots of autistic people regulate, focus or show joy. If it is not hurting anyone, it is valid. You do not have to hide it.

Masking: the invisible effort

Masking means hiding or changing the autistic parts of yourself to fit in. Most autistic people do it, often without realising.

What people see

- smiling and nodding
- joining in
- making eye contact
- "seems fine at school"

What is going on underneath

- rehearsing what to say
- copying other people
- holding in stims
- ignoring sensory pain
- tracking every unwritten rule
- running on empty

The after-school crash

Masking all day uses huge amounts of energy. That is why lots of autistic teenagers seem fine at school, then crash, melt down or shut down at home. That is not you being difficult. It is the cost of masking.

Unmasking, at your own pace

Start where you feel safe, like at home.

It is OK to keep some masking for safety.

Notice when and where you mask most.

Find people you do not have to mask around.

Where I mask most

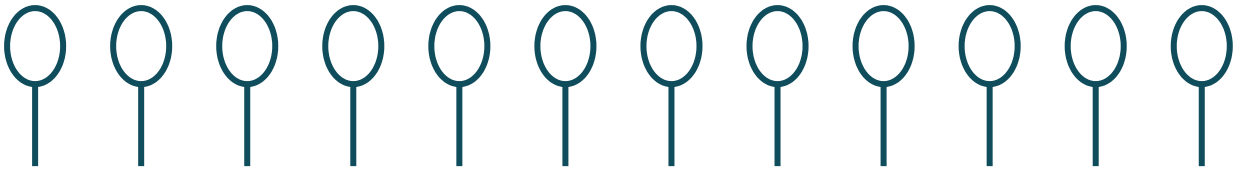
Where I can be fully me

Energy, spoons and burnout

Everyone has limited energy. Autistic people often use more of it just getting through a day built for other brains.

Spoon check

Imagine starting each day with 12 spoons of energy. Everything you do costs some. Colour in a spoon for each one you use today.



Idea from spoon theory, created by Christine Miserandino.

Drains me

e.g. busy corridors, group work, small talk, last-minute changes

Recharges me

e.g. my interests, music, gaming, quiet, being outside, pets

Autistic burnout

If you run on empty for too long, you can hit burnout. It is more than being tired. Signs can include:

- Everything feels much harder
- More meltdowns or shutdowns
- Needing to be alone a lot more
- Losing skills you usually have
- Senses turned up even louder
- Sleep and rest not helping

Burnout needs rest and fewer demands, not pushing through. Tell an adult you trust. It is real, and it does get better.

Meltdowns and shutdowns

When your brain gets more input than it can handle, it overloads. That is your nervous system hitting its limit, not bad behaviour.

1 Calm

I can think, talk and cope.

Helps: regular breaks and doing things I enjoy.

2 Building

Irritable, fidgety, short answers, need to escape.

Helps: fewer demands, a quiet space, my break signal.

3 Overload

Meltdown or shutdown. Thinking and talking go offline.

Helps: safety, space, fewer words, no questions.

4 Recovery

Wiped out, maybe embarrassed, need to be alone.

Helps: rest, comfort, no lectures. Talk later if I want.

Meltdown

Overload that comes out: shouting, crying, running, throwing things, not being able to stop.

Shutdown

Overload that goes in: going quiet, losing words, freezing, needing to hide or sleep.

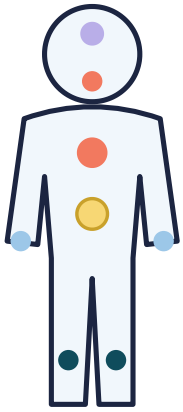
My early warning signs

What I need from people around me

If you ever feel unsafe or have thoughts of hurting yourself, talk to someone you trust. **Childline 0800 1111** (free, any time). Or text **SHOUT to 85258** if talking feels too much.

When feelings are hard to name

You might feel things intensely but struggle to say what the feeling is. That has a name: **alexithymia**. It is very common in autistic people.



Start with your body

Feelings often show up in your body before your brain can name them. Where do you notice something? Racing thoughts, a clenched jaw, a tight chest, a churning stomach, shaky hands, restless or heavy legs?

Try a scale instead of words. How full is your tank, from 1 to 5?

1 chilled | **2** OK | **3** wobbly | **4** a lot | **5** maxed

Handling anxiety

Anxiety is really common for autistic people, often because the world is loud and unpredictable. Things that help many people:

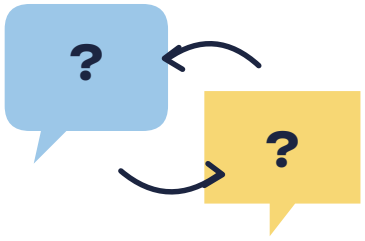
- Knowing the plan in advance
- Moving: walking, stretching, bouncing
- Time on your interests
- Writing worries down to get them out of your head
- Grounding: name 5 things you can see
- Telling someone you trust

Getting support

Molehill Mountain is a free app made with autistic people to help understand and manage anxiety (from Autistica). **Kooth** offers free, anonymous online support for 11 to 25 year olds in many areas. Your GP or school can also help, and therapy should be adapted for autistic people. You are allowed to ask how.

Talking, texting and being understood

Autistic communication is not broken. It is different. And misunderstandings go both ways.



The double empathy problem

Autistic researcher Dr Damian Milton showed that when people who experience the world differently talk, both sides can misread each other. Research shows autistic people often communicate really well with each other. It is a mismatch, not a "you" problem.

Phrases to keep in your back pocket

- "I need a minute to think about that."
- "Can you put that in writing?"
- "I'm not ignoring you. I'm processing."
- "Can you tell me exactly what you mean?"
- "I'd rather message than call."
- "I need a break. I'll come back."

All valid

- not making eye contact
- preferring text
- info-dumping about your interests
- being direct
- talking less in groups
- writing or typing when words go
- using a communication app

My own go-to phrases

Friends, relationships and staying safe

Connection on your terms. You get to decide what friendship looks like for you.

Quality over quantity

One or two people who really get you is plenty.

Bond over interests

Clubs, gaming, fandoms and online communities.

Recharge after

Needing alone time after hanging out is normal.

Green flags

- Respects your "no"
- Likes you as you are
- Is fine with you being direct
- Gives you space when you need it

Red flags

- Pressures you to do things
- Asks you to keep secrets
- Asks for photos, money or personal info
- Is only nice when they want something

Your body, your choice

You can say no to any touch, at any time, and you can change your mind. Everyone else gets the same right. If something feels off, you do not need a reason to stop.

Staying safe online

People online are not always who they say they are. Never share nude images or personal details. If something feels wrong: **block, screenshot, tell** a trusted adult. You can report an adult online to **CEOP** at ceop.police.uk. If an image of you has been shared, **Report Remove** from Childline can help get it taken down.

If someone hurts you or treats you badly, it is never your fault. Tell someone you trust.

School, college and your rights

You have a right to support. You do not have to struggle in silence to earn it.

What the law says

The **Equality Act 2010** says schools and colleges must make reasonable adjustments. In England, needs are met through **SEN Support** or an **EHCP**, and exams can have **access arrangements** like extra time. Other UK nations have similar systems.

Adjustments you could ask for (tick yours)

- [ ] Leave lessons a few minutes early
- [ ] A quiet space at break and lunch
- [ ] A time-out or exit card
- [ ] Headphones during independent work
- [ ] Instructions and homework written down
- [ ] Warning about changes or cover teachers
- [ ] Not being picked to answer out loud
- [ ] Choice of seat, like near the door
- [ ] Alternatives to group work
- [ ] Uniform or PE kit adjustments
- [ ] A named adult to check in with
- [ ] Extra time in tests and exams

How to ask

"I'm autistic, and I find _____ hard. It would really help if _____. Could we try that?"

Try your SENCO, form tutor or head of year. You can send it as an email, or ask a parent or carer to come with you.

College or uni next? Contact the support team early. At university, Disabled Students' Allowance can fund a mentor or assistive tech.

Telling people (or not)

Your diagnosis is your information. Who you tell, when you tell them and how you say it is up to you.

Who	Why you might	Worth thinking about
Close friends	They understand you better and can back you up	Choose people you trust to keep it private
School or college	Access to adjustments and support	You can ask for it to stay with key staff only
Wider family	Less explaining at family events	Some may need time or information
Online	Finding community and others like you	Posts can stay up for a long time

Ways you could say it

Short: "I'm autistic. My brain works a bit differently, so things like noise and last-minute changes can be hard for me."

Longer: "I found out I'm autistic. It explains a lot, like _____. You don't need to treat me differently, but it helps if you _____."

If it does not go well

Some people still believe old myths. That says more about what they know than about you. You can share a link with them, or just leave it there.

People I might tell, and when

My one-page profile

Share this with teachers, coaches or anyone who needs to know how to work with you. Update it whenever you like.

Name

Year or class

I prefer to be called

Best way to contact me

What I'm good at

What I'm into

What I find hard

What helps me learn

Signs I'm overloaded

What to do if I'm overloaded

Please do

Please don't

Find your people

Hearing from other autistic people can be the most helpful thing of all.

Read

The Spectrum Girl's Survival Guide by Siena Castellon

M is for Autism by the students of Limpsfield Grange and Vicky Martin

Untypical by Pete Wharmby (older teens)

So, I'm Autistic by Sarah O'Brien

A Kind of Spark by Elle McNicoll (a novel)

Unmasking Autism by Devon Price (older teens)

Listen

1800 Seconds on Autism on BBC Sounds: autistic presenters talking honestly about autistic life.

Scroll wisely

Follow autistic creators who leave you feeling understood, not more anxious. Skip anyone selling cures.

Connect

Spectrum Gaming	Autistic-led charity running online communities for autistic young people. spectrumgaming.net
Ambitious about Autism	Youth projects and ways to have your say. ambitiousaboutautism.org.uk
National Autistic Society	Information and resources for autistic teens. autism.org.uk
Autistic Girls Network	For autistic girls and gender-diverse young people. autisticgirlsnetwork.org

Need to talk to someone now?

Childline 0800 1111, free, any time (under 19)

Shout text SHOUT to 85258, any time

PAPYRUS HOPELINE247 0300 102 2470 or text 88247

Samaritans 116 123, any time

In danger right now? Call 999 or go to A&E.

Wired your way.

You are not broken.

You are not too much.

You don't have to earn support.

Your interests matter.

Rest is not weakness.

You get to define yourself.

Being autistic is one part of you. The rest of your story is yours to write.

A note to future me

A note for the adults

Wired My Way is written for autistic young people aged around 12 to 17. It sits alongside wider post-diagnostic support and the children's booklet, My Brilliant Brain.
It uses identity-first language and frames autism as a difference to understand and support, not a deficit to fix.

Respect their ownership

Offer the guide; do not set it as homework.

Ask before reading what they have written.

Let them decide who is told, and when.

Welcome mixed feelings, including anger or rejection of the label.

Words that help

Instead of	Try
"has autism"	**"is autistic"**
"symptoms"	**"traits"**
"challenging behaviour"	**"distress" or "overload"**
"refusing"	**"can't right now"**
"high or low functioning"	**describe support needs**

The ideas behind the pages

Page 5 draws on **monotropism**; page 7 on research into **masking and camouflaging**; page 8 on **spoon theory**, energy accounting and **autistic burnout**; page 11 on the **double empathy problem**. Page 13 reflects the Equality Act 2010 and the SEND Code of Practice, which require support based on need.

When to look for more support

Speak to the GP or school SENCO if a young person seems to be in burnout, is struggling to attend school, is withdrawing significantly, talks about self-harm or suicide, or has worrying changes in eating or sleep. Emergency: **999**. PAPYRUS HOPELINE247 (**0300 102 2470**) advises anyone worried about a young person. Childline: **0800 1111**.

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Consultant Speech and Language Therapist

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