



# Cognus

No Limits on Learning

## Training for Autism Leads in Schools Session 2 – Autism and Girls

Alex Cozens

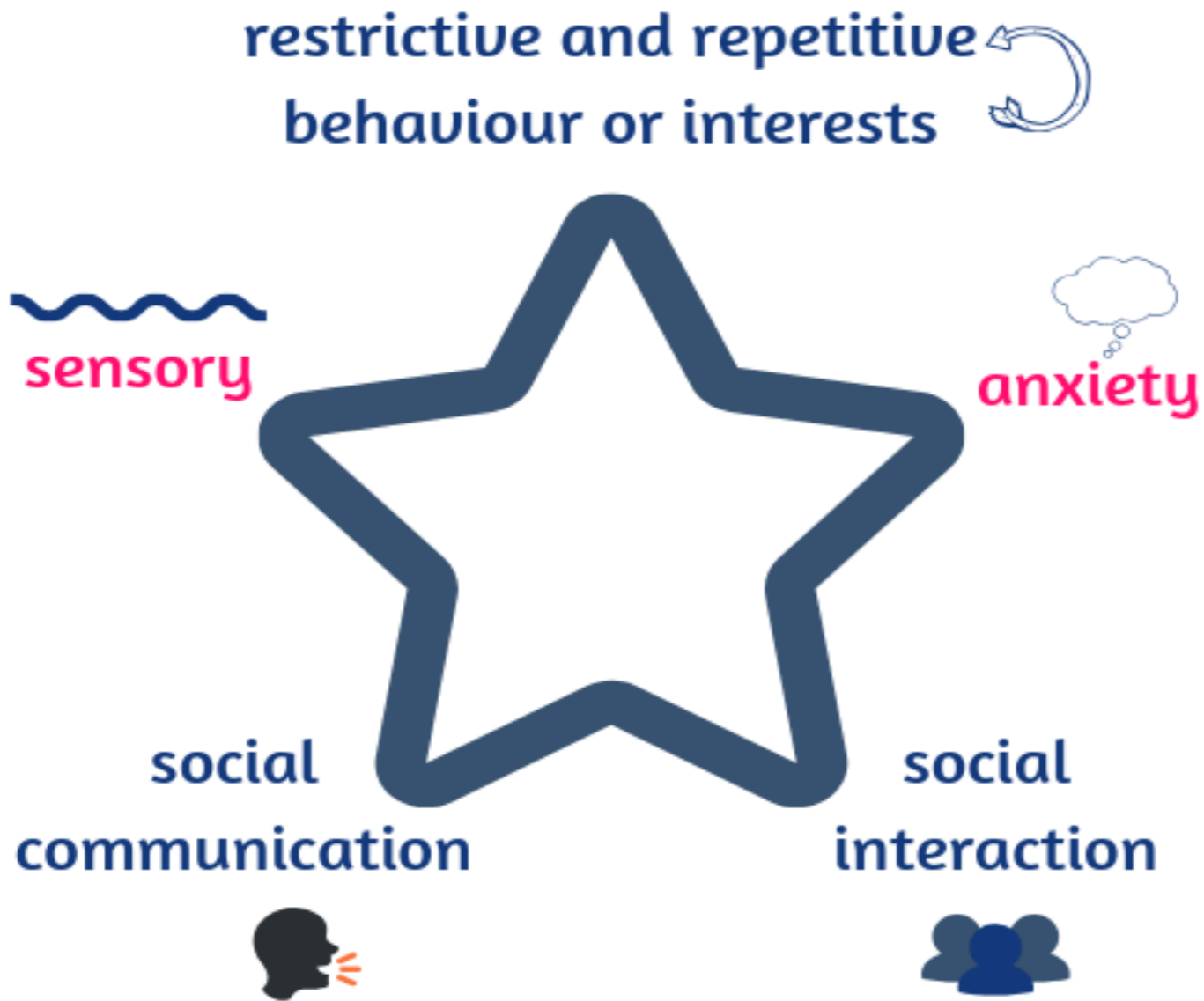
Advisory Teacher for Autism

MA (Special Educational Needs and Inclusive Education)

PGCE

BA (Criminology and Social Policy)

# Autism



# Today's session

## Theory

- Debunking myths
- Facts around gender difference

## Practice

- So what can we do?
  - Learn more about the presentation of autism in girls and use this to support girls in your setting
  - Gain and share knowledge of best practice
  - Share resources and strategies

# Debunking myths

- The autistic population is made up of mostly boys/men
- Girls are less likely to be autistic
- Girls don't get diagnosed

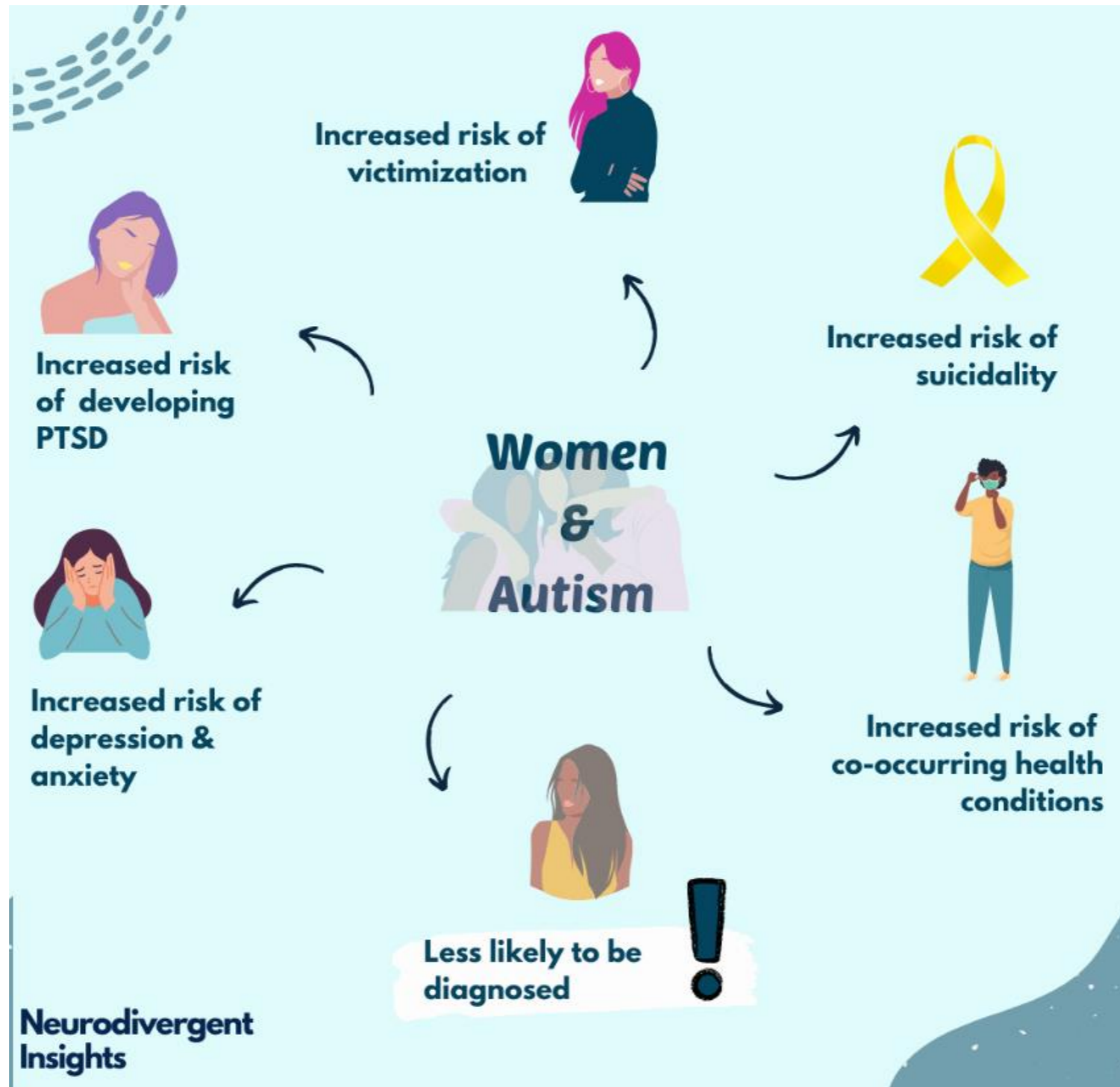
# Facts around gender differences

- Around forty years ago it was believed that the ratio of men with autism to women with autism was 15:1. In 2015, data from the National Autistic Society suggested it could be 3:1.
- Historically, autism was seen as a male-only condition (Hans Asberger, Simon Baron-Cohen)
- There is a bias towards males in the diagnosis process, with the specific needs of girls on the spectrum not sufficiently researched
- When boys display characteristics of autism, these are more likely to be recognised by parents, carers, teachers or health professionals
- Girls are thought to use masking or camouflaging more frequently than males, and are more reluctant to draw attention to themselves
- Girls tend to be diagnosed as being on the spectrum at a significantly later age than boys
- Girls are less likely to be diagnosed than boys, when they show the same level of behavioural 'symptoms'
- Some girls may present differently from the classic male presentation: lower levels of repetitive behaviour, interests may appear more similar to neurotypical e.g. makeup
- Girls often struggle socially but this is not always obvious

# So what does this mean?

- A huge amount of knowledge and research on autism has focused on its presentation in boys
- There is far less research conducted on how autism presents in girls – though this is beginning to change
- As less is known and there is less research about the presentation in girls, often autistic girls are not identified (as they present differently to boys) – This can mean that a diagnosis is not sought after and support is not put into place
- Autism in girls can be more subtle and less obvious

# The Impact



# Real experience


Voices

## *Women and girls with autism face double discrimination from a patriarchal society that fails to see them*

The idea that autism is simply an 'extreme of the male brain' has not only trapped generations of men in cliché, but has also prevented thousands of women from getting the support and understanding they need

Sophie Walker • Monday 02 April 2018 10:17 BST • [Comments](#)



 For people with **autism**, trying to understand the rest of us can feel like travelling to another country – **learning another language** and navigating a new landscape while brandishing a passport that allows you access but not acceptance.

For women and **girls with autism**, it's more like sneaking into the same country under cover of darkness, wearing a disguise during the daytime and hoping every moment that no one blows your cover.

My daughter has autism, she was diagnosed when she was eight. It took five years to get the diagnosis. At the time I thought it was because our local systems were underfunded and overloaded; **teachers** and **health professionals** too busy, undertrained and defensive. Now I think while all that was the case, a good part of the delay was because my child was not a boy.

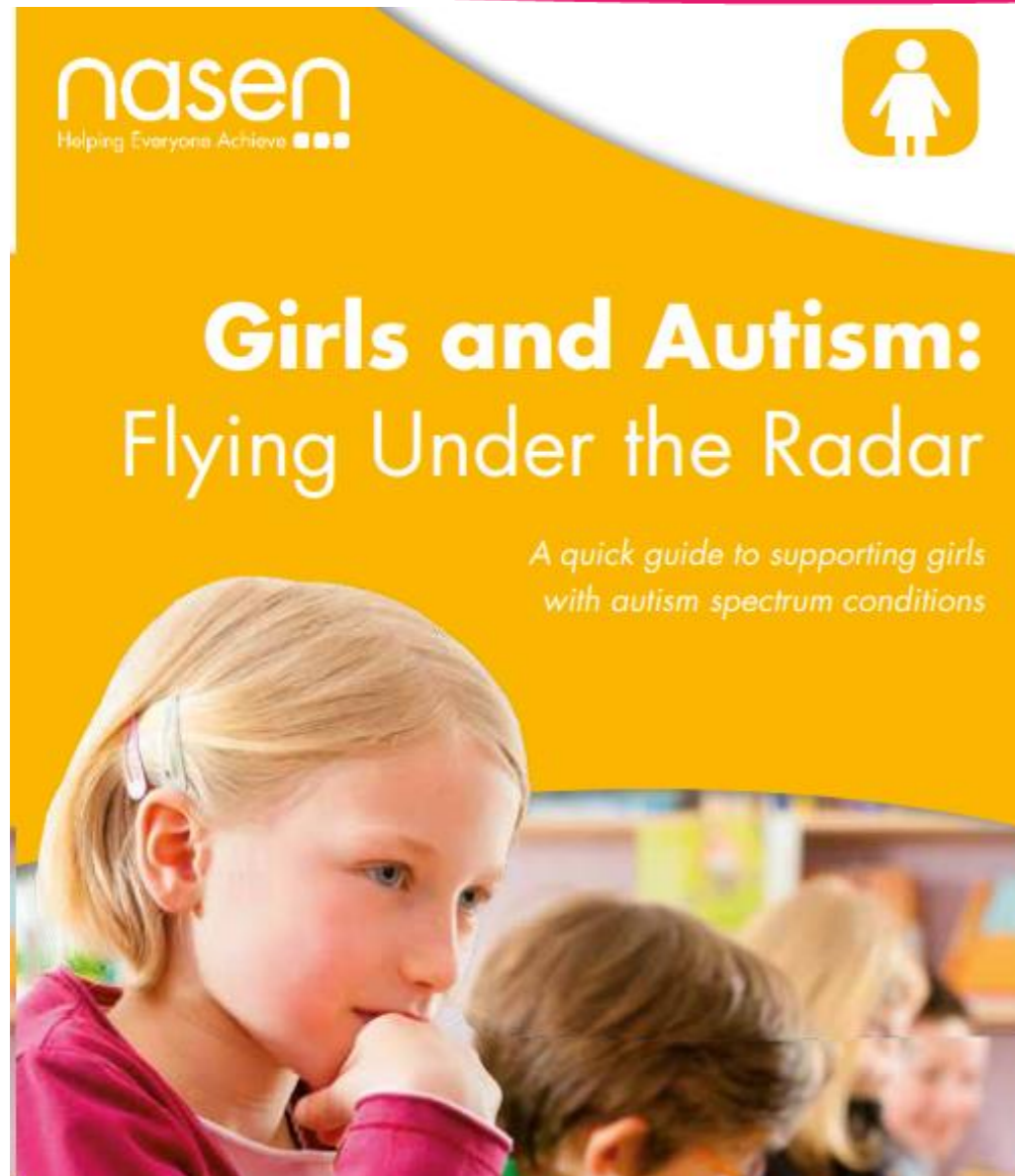
It's amazing that 30 years after its release, the film *Rain Man* still sets the bar for what we understand as autism: boys and men who are extremely good at maths and don't understand other people.

[The Independent](#) | [The Independent](#)



# Real experience

[girls and autism - flying under the radar 0.pdf \(nasen.org.uk\)](#)



## **Case study: Charlotte**

*Felicity Sedgewick, PhD student, Centre for Research in Autism and Education, University College London (see also Sedgewick et al. 2015)*

Charlotte (not her real name) is a quiet, well-behaved 14-year-old girl in a mainstream school. She has some teaching assistant support for dyslexia, but is in the middle sets for all her subjects. She has a tendency to sit at the back of class, almost never puts her hand up or answers questions, and has a best friend. This is not a particularly unusual profile, and in many ways Charlotte would not stand out.

However, Charlotte has a diagnosis of autism, and many of these behaviours are masking the more significant underlying issues she is facing.

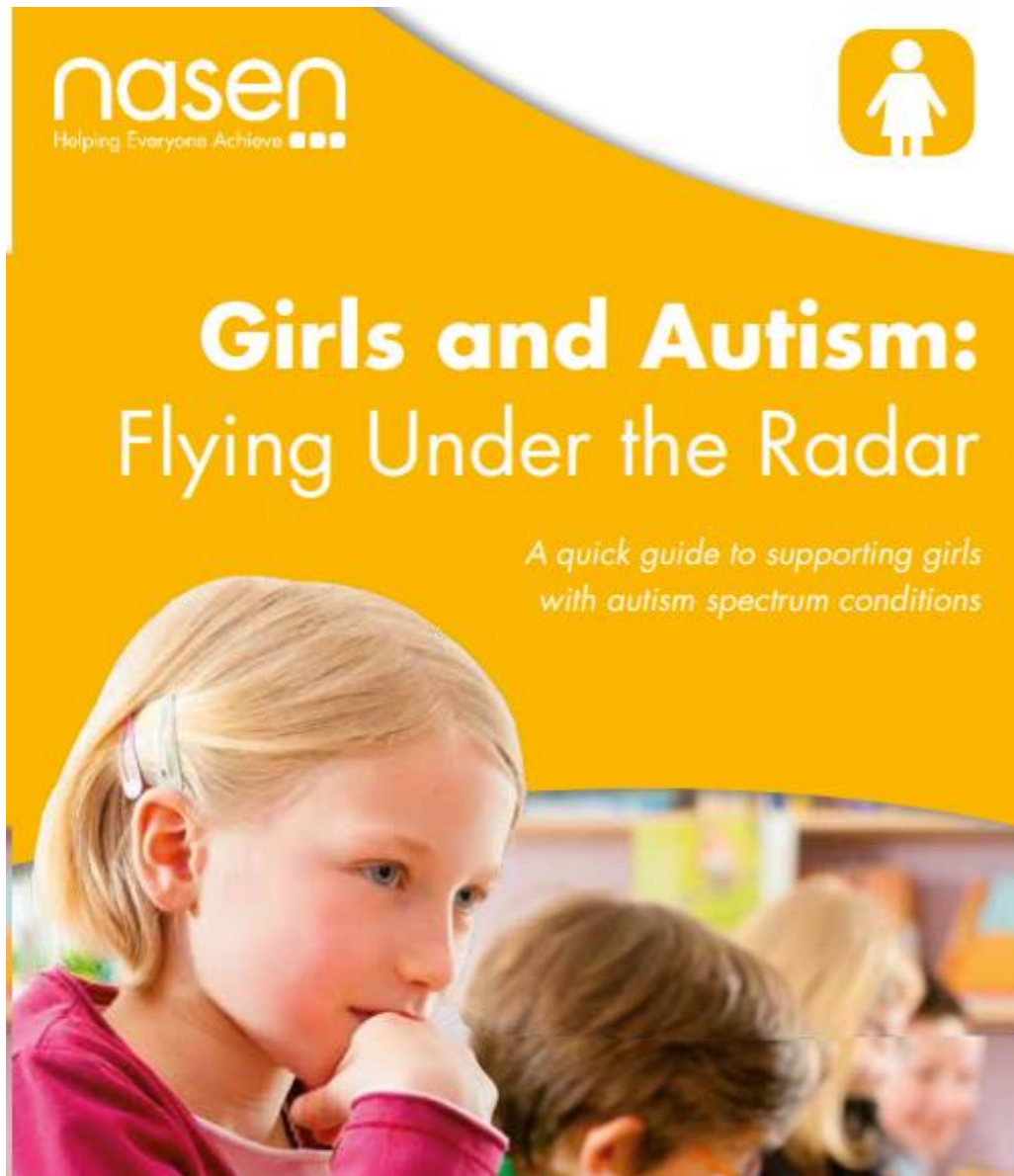
Sitting at the back of class allows her to observe her peers and plan her reactions according to what she sees other people doing, as she struggles to work out appropriate social behaviours on her own – she will always be the last to laugh at a joke, as she waits until she is sure that everyone else is laughing. Her good

behaviour stems from an over-reliance on rules and a literal interpretation of instructions. Her reluctance to answer questions comes from her strong perfectionism, as she does not want to attempt something she might get wrong, and even if she does know the answer, she feels too shy to open herself up to attention from her peers. Her best friend has significant learning support needs and is developmentally younger than Charlotte, and so puts her under fewer social demands than the other girls in her class. It is common for children with ASC to make friends with older or younger people who are either more understanding or less demanding than same-age peers.

Altogether, Charlotte feels as though she is struggling at school – she feels isolated, and she is permanently anxious about the quality of her work. Despite this, she is expected to achieve good results and go to university – she just needs more support to access the social world of her peers, to develop the self-confidence to approach the challenges of school life, and to not be missed through her lack of challenging behaviours. She may be quiet, but she is not automatically 'ok'.

# Real experience

[girls and autism - flying under the radar 0.pdf \(nasen.org.uk\)](https://www.nasen.org.uk/girls-and-autism-flying-under-the-radar-0.pdf)



## **Raising girls with ASC and why it is different**

*Carrie Grant, mother of three girls with ASC, singer, vocal coach and TV presenter*

Like most parents with girls on the spectrum, particularly the high functioning end, we've had the usual comments, 'Are you sure she is autistic? She makes eye contact?' and 'But she seems normal.'

What my girls carry is an overwhelming level of unseen anxiety. Their daily minefield of worries takes up a large portion of their headspace, and the concentration required to keep everything hidden takes up anything that is left! With all capacity used up, they are prevented from listening properly or learning effectively.

What can you do to help to lower this anxiety? Recognising it goes a long way! Becoming aware of the things that heighten anxiety like homework or the threat of detention. Autistic girls hate getting it wrong – they want to be seen as smart and popular.

My teenager wears make-up, has her skirt rolled over and is obsessed with social media, just like her friends... except that often she does not understand the nuances of teenage

girls' conversation. Boys can trade information, swap opinions, but girls talk about feelings, finish each other's sentences and seem to have unwritten rules about how to fit in.

What you can do to help these amazing (but often hidden) girls is to look beyond the exterior and understand that they are often feeling like isolated misfits who will never be like the other girls around them.

Boys with ASC possibly feel the same unless they go down the emo/geek route, which is often also a girl route – more isolated, more lonely.

A friend, and mother of a boy with ASC, describes her son as desperate to be sociable, a truth-seeker with a fearless sense of justice, super-perceptive about people but lacking conversational understanding. He and my daughter share similar challenges – the acute, sky-high anxiety with circular impacts on sleep, explosive outbursts and meltdowns. My friend's son manages his comprehension difficulties and others' code-speak, jokes and lack of logic through compulsive cross-checking and questioning. The consequences of his need to visualise, understand and predict unfamiliar situations minutely are extreme tiredness, anxiety and depression.

# What can we do to help?

- Learn more about the presentation of autism in girls and use this to support girls in your setting
- Gain and share knowledge of best practice
- Share resources and strategies

# Autism in Girls

- Behaviour
- Intense Interests
- Masking/camouflaging
- Friendships
- Mental Health



# Behaviour interpretations

## Gender and play

- Language skills that may appear to be advanced for their age
- A range of non-verbal communication skills
- A highly developed imagination and enjoyment of fiction, pretend and fantasy play
- Getting 'mothered' by peers at primary school

## Subtle differences

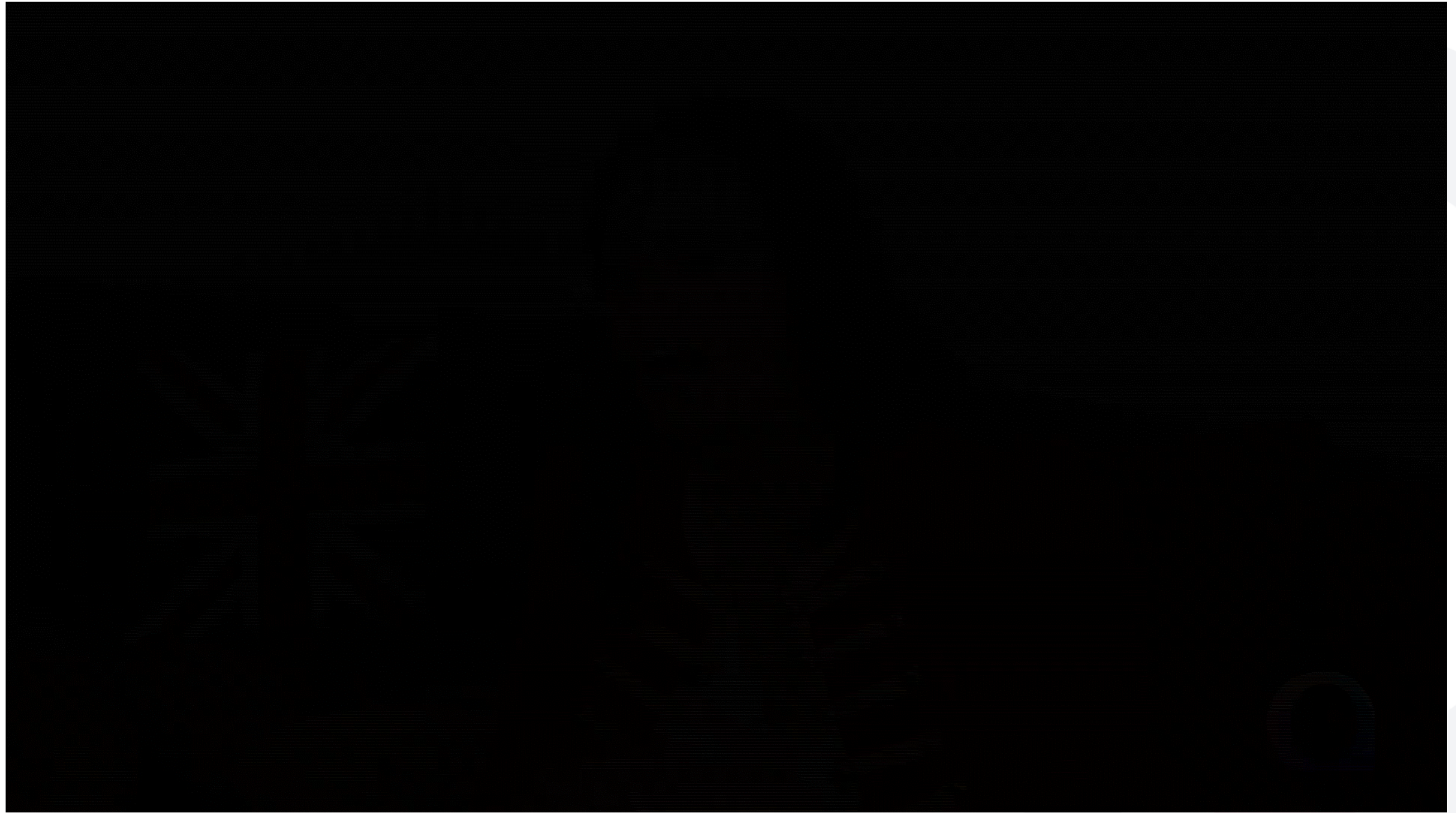
- Seen by others as quirky, or a daydreamer 'head in the clouds' rather than misbehaving
- Repetitive behaviours that are deemed 'normal', such as hair twirling, preening themselves, reading, art, playing an instrument (some of these are lone hobbies and reduce the need to communicate or interact- lowering anxiety)
- Being considered an overly fussy eater
- Perfectionism – studious with work, inability to stop working on something until time runs out, can become very down when they are unhappy with their work/or their results

# Intense interests

- May be the same as neurotypical peers
- May be advanced for their age
- May be focussed on culture, art, people, music or animals.
- Interests may stem from a desire to match those of their peers, or to fit in with others of the same age



# Intense Interests



# Masking/camouflaging

## WHAT IS 'MASKING'?

@21andsensory



THIS CAN LEAD TO AUTISTIC BURNOUT + SENSORY HANGOVER.

## MASKING + CAMOUFLAGING (AUTISTIC / SENSORY EDITION)

@21andsensory

CONSTANTLY FORCED TO PUT ON AN ACT, FRONT OR MASK TO APPEAR 'NORMAL' AND TO FIT IN



TRYING NOT TO ZONE OUT OF CONVERSATIONS BY FORCING YOURSELF TO PAY ATTENTION

BEING TOLD 'YOU DON'T LOOK AUTISTIC' BUT YOU HAVE MASTERED THE ART OF MASKING 24/7





# Masking/camouflaging

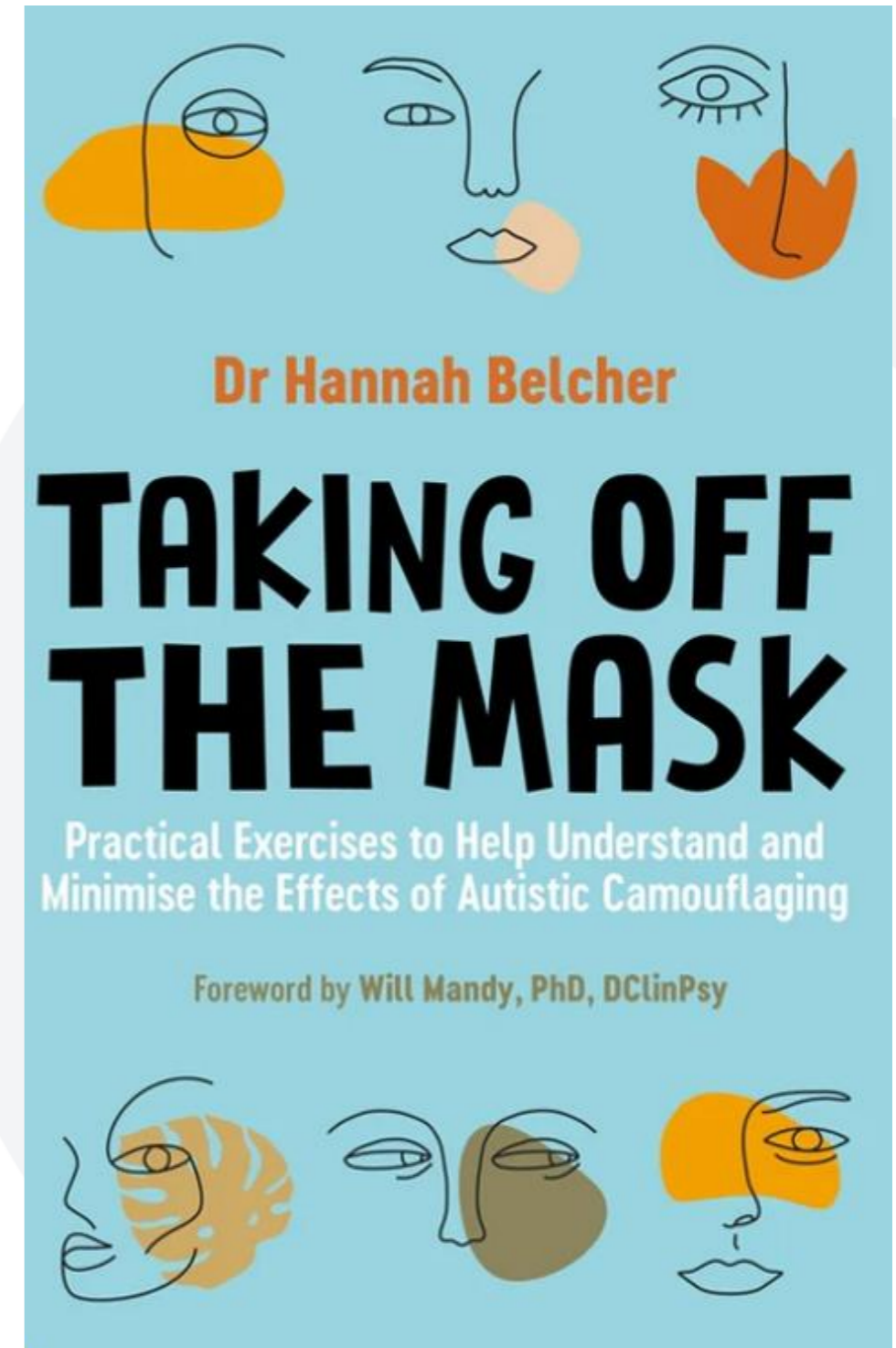


Jessi Crowther – Aged 12

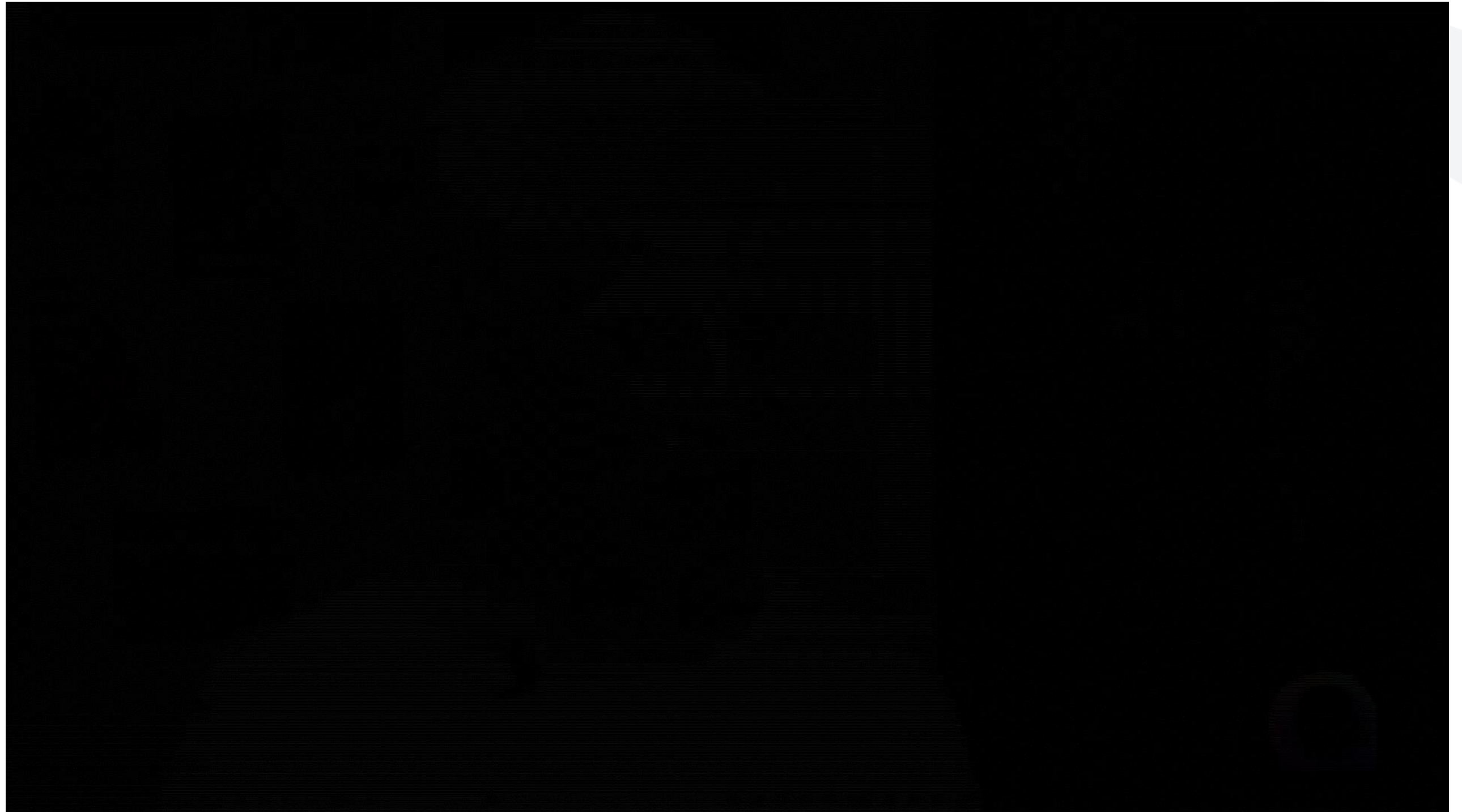


“This character is my persona mask is based on negative emotions such as sadness, misfortune and bit if an anxiety.”

“This picture was after the induction, as making new friends is quite hard for me.”



# Masking/camouflaging – Theory of Mind



# Friendships

The social struggle is not always obvious!

.Having a very limited number of close friendships

. A tendency to become very intense and possessive in friendships, which can also end very suddenly

.Avoiding or not seeking social interaction

.Being seen by others as excessively shy, or preferring not to engage with others

.Can be seen as extrovert when it comes to their interests and hobbies

# Friendship

- Often rule driven and potential for "**social policing**"
- May **fixate on one person**
- May be **controlling or domineering** in relationships
- May seem **on edge of a group, flit** between groups or **change** groups frequently
- May gravitate to **older or younger** students
- May **idealise** the perfect relationships
- Can be **over apologetic and appeasing** – vulnerable
- Can find it hard to separate from others' feelings so become **exhausted** by social interactions.

# Fragile mental health

**Autistic young men and women are more affected by psychiatric conditions and have an increased risk of hospitalisation as a result of their mental illness compared with non-autistic people. Autistic women are particularly vulnerable.**

**Women on the autism spectrum are more likely to be diagnosed with a co-morbid mental health disorder, such as depression, anxiety, or increased risk of self-harm than males with autism.**

**[Autistic Women Have Increased Risk of Mental Illness - Neuroscience News](#)**

## Medical misogyny is causing a mental health crisis among autistic women

22% of autistic women are hospitalised because of their mental health by the age of 25.

By Charlotte Colombo

21 June 2022

**[Autistic Women Are Experiencing A Mental Health Crisis | Glamour UK \(glamourmagazine.co.uk\)](#)**

A [2019 study](#) found that 1 in 2 women (52%) believe that gender discrimination negatively impacts their medical care, while nearly a third of women said they felt a need to “prove” the legitimacy of their medical concerns and symptoms for their doctors. Despite having my autism diagnosis for over ten years, I was put into a position where I felt the need to ‘prove’ myself to this occupational health doctor, and the sad part, is that I was one of the lucky ones.

# What can we do to help?

- Learn more about the presentation of autism in girls and use this to support girls in your setting ✓
- Gain and share knowledge of best practice
- Share resources and strategies

# Gain and share knowledge of best practice



Exclusively sponsored by:



**Girls with autism in the classroom: hidden difficulties and how to help**

[Research and new publications updates archive \(unitus.it\)](http://unitus.it)

**Author: Victoria Honeybourne**  
**25<sup>th</sup> August 2015**

# Gain and share knowledge of best practice

(10 minutes long)



<https://youtu.be/NwEH9Ui4HV8>



# Listen to autistic women and girls about their lived experience

(10 minutes long)

- 1. Autism covers a wide spectrum** – looking and acting autistic – lots of characteristics some of which some individuals score highly. Prefer high or minimal support needed.
- 2. We have high emotions** – we may not always express things in the way you might expect – feelings are felt more strongly or intensely – we can't filter them out and sometimes shut down.
- 3. Social interactions can be very challenging** – what comes naturally to you, an autistic person does it manually.
- 4. Diagnosis can happen at any age** – the diagnostic criteria historically geared to boys/white people.
- 5. Nuances can be challenging** – including subtleties of dating and sex (e.g. Netflix and Chill), lack of sex and relationship education, and more likely to be victimised as naïve and honest. Social aspects of sexuality and relationships are not always taught nor are they explicit.
- 6. Lots of interests** (not just maths/science) – bands, novels, arts, languages, makeup.
- 7. Bullying is hard** – but friendships can be hard too!
- 8. Improvement comes** – the future can be bright and hopeful. With more diagnosis and more social acceptance, you can meet your full potential!

[What Women With Autism Want You to Know | Iris – YouTube](#)

# Limpsfield Grange

- Limpsfield Grange School is the UK's only school solely for autistic girls.
- Outstanding special school, maintained by Surrey County Council.
- Day and residential places are available for students aged 11 – 16.
- [Autism Documentary: Inside the UK's only school for autistic girls – YouTube](#)



# Limpsfield Grange

Key advice for mainstream class teachers/TAs on supporting girls with ASC in a class situation	Key advice for senior leaders on supporting girls with ASC in a mainstream setting
<p data-bbox="524 609 998 676"><b>Learning – Social – Emotional</b> "We are different from the boys"</p> <p data-bbox="310 721 441 752"><b>Learning</b></p> <ul data-bbox="310 803 1168 1381" style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make learning concrete, contextual and visual;</li> <li>• Like routine, dislike change;</li> <li>• Understand fears, triggers and sensory overload;</li> <li>• Enjoy reading;</li> <li>• Check understanding. May not ask for help, or be avoidant, to mask difficulty;</li> <li>• May be quiet, shy, awkward, compliant, passive;</li> <li>• Incorporate their special interests;</li> <li>• May have a good imagination;</li> <li>• May prefer touch typing;</li> <li>• Perfectionists. Build flexibility in making mistakes and re-drafting work;</li> <li>• Very determined and may like to be in control: offer guided choice;</li> <li>• Help with all transitions: eg after school holidays;</li> <li>• Praise and reward.</li> </ul> <p data-bbox="310 1432 406 1463"><b>Social</b></p> <ul data-bbox="310 1514 1215 1831" style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Will mirror behavior;</li> <li>• May affect different personalities and may not have a strong sense of identity;</li> <li>• May be socially immature and vulnerable;</li> <li>• Need structured activities for social time;</li> <li>• Select partner/s to model behaviour;</li> <li>• Use video, role play, social scripts to show how to respond;</li> <li>• Encourage reciprocity to diminish scripted, controlling play.</li> </ul>	<p data-bbox="1517 609 2156 639"><b>Awareness – Girl Specificity - Home Liaison</b></p> <p data-bbox="1306 645 1786 676"><b>Build whole school awareness of:</b></p> <ul data-bbox="1306 721 2403 1340" style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creating an 'enabling' school environment;</li> <li>• Presentation of girls with ASC, their strengths and special interests;</li> <li>• Analysing patterns, function and triggers of ASC behaviors;</li> <li>• Social imitation causing exhaustion during the day;</li> <li>• Rising anxiety or mental health issues are indicated by increasing:             <ul data-bbox="1407 936 2403 1340" style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ demand for routines or sameness</li> <li>○ trouble sleeping</li> <li>○ meltdowns</li> <li>○ avoidance of social situations</li> <li>○ reliance on obsessions and rituals</li> <li>○ stimming</li> <li>○ self-harm (head-banging, scratching skin or hand-biting)</li> <li>○ poor attendance ('illness' allows control)</li> <li>○ eating problems (due to sensory sensitivities, control or demand avoidance. Lack of nutrition prevents menstruation and physical development);</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p data-bbox="1306 1385 1854 1416"><b>Specificity: Girl-Oriented Programmes</b></p> <ul data-bbox="1306 1457 2403 1925" style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need to build their own, age-appropriate, understanding of autism, sensory sensitivities and anxieties;</li> <li>• Extracurricular provision and resources match ASC special interests;</li> <li>• Social Language programme to navigate social rules, with peer mentoring schemes for friendship and bullying issues;</li> <li>• PSHE specificity to facilitate:             <ul data-bbox="1407 1678 2403 1925" style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ SRE: adolescence is unpredictable. Menstruation, growth of breasts and body hair heighten anxiety due to perceived lack of control;</li> <li>○ Independence, to reduce vulnerability;</li> <li>○ privacy awareness, personal space and touching rules;</li> <li>○ permission to say 'No': self advocacy;</li> <li>○ esafety and grooming: girls are more vulnerable to complying</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

# Limpsfield Grange

## Emotional

- Need to feel that someone "gets" them;
- May camouflage emotions or mask symptoms at school;
- Their 'Social imitation' mirroring exhausts them;
- Experience anxiety more intensely than others;
  
- May shut down or cry over small things due to sensory/emotional overload;
- Hate injustice;
- Use social stories and factual evidence to explain fears;
- Where appropriate, need to confirm that this is a "normal" reaction or feeling;
- Tell them it will be ok.

with a demand, more likely to respond to communication;

- self image, self esteem, assertiveness and confidence;
- gender identity;
- emotional wellbeing and mental health;
- developing vocational interests and leisure activities.
- Careers IAG specificity: Girls, who are systematisers, can prefer male-dominated occupations, where need to follow rules is high;
  - Celebrate the right to choose their own path ,despite 'female' cultural influences;
  - A big picture of careers pathway can ease current difficulty.

## Liaison with Home

- How is anxiety being acted out at home?
- Support independence and generalisation of skills, building flexibility into challenges;
- Practise dealing with fears and rehearse difficult situations in a safe environment;
- Parent support group to share experiences;
- Signpost to specialist services and local ASD support: eg Cygnet, Early Bird, CAMHs.



**Surrey Autism  
Outreach Service**

# Limpfield Grange

[Autism Documentary: Inside the UK's only school for autistic girls - YouTube](#)

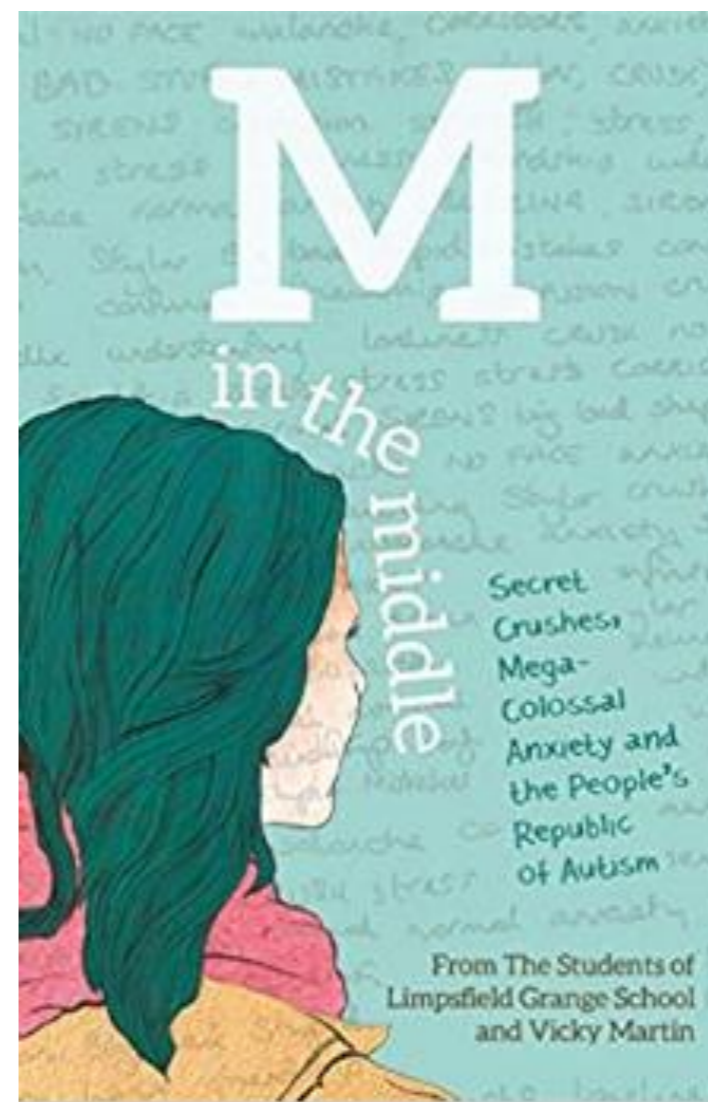
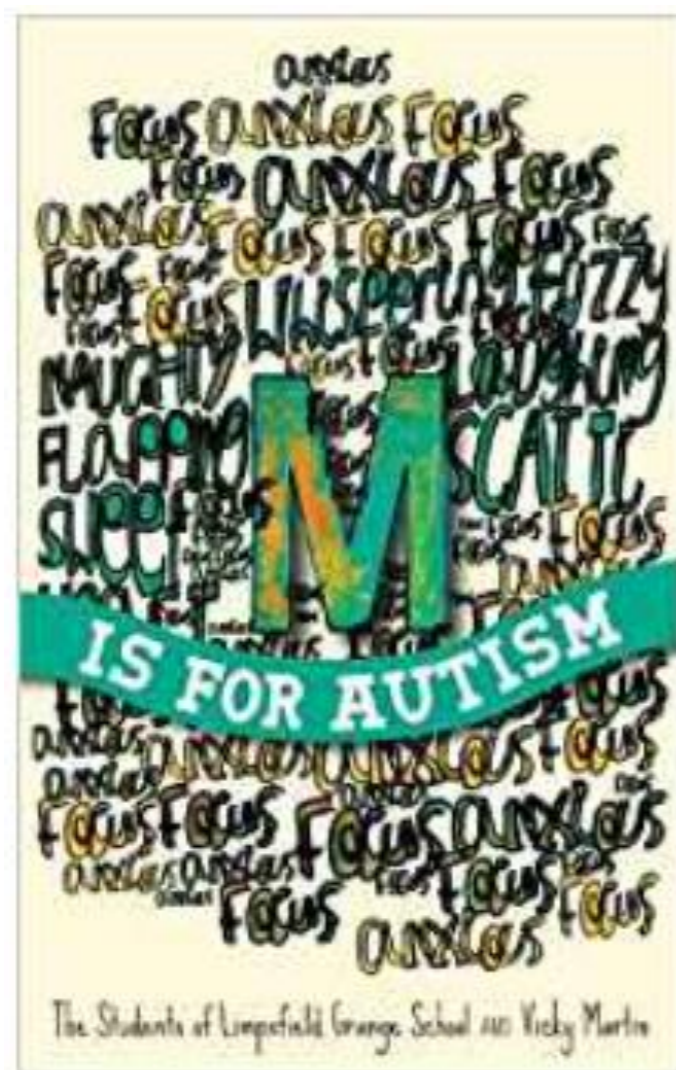
DOCUMENTARY



News

**GIRLS WITH AUTISM**

# Limpsfield Grange Resources



“Meltdowns are not fun. It’s like being stuck on a rollercoaster for eternity... In the dark with flashing lights. Everything else makes no sense.”

# Autism in Girls: Unofficial Checklist - Samantha Crafts

## Samantha Crafts

- Autistic woman
- parent of autistic son
- MA in Education
- created a checklist in an effort to assist health professionals in recognising autism:  
<http://www.myspectrumsuite.com/samantha-crafts-autistic-traits-checklist>

**Section A: Deep Thinkers**

**Section B: Innocent**

**Section C: Escape and Friendship**

**Section D: Comorbid Attributes**

**Section E: Social Interaction**

**Section F: Finds Refuge When Alone**

**Section G: Sensitive**

**Section H: Sense of Self**

**Section I: Confusion**

**Section J: Words, Numbers, and Patterns**

**(Optional) Executive Functioning & Motor Skills**



Suggested Use: Check off all areas that strongly apply to the individual. If each area has 75%-80% of the statements checked, or more, then you *may* want to consider that the individual *may be autistic*.

# Autism in Girls: Unofficial Checklist - Samantha Crafts

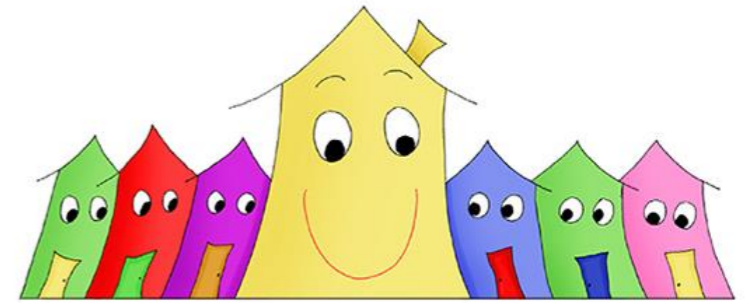
## Section C: Escape and Friendship

1. Survives overwhelming emotions and senses by escaping in thought or action
2. Escapes regularly through fixations, obsessions, and over-interest in subjects
3. Escapes routinely through imagination, fantasy, and daydreaming
4. Escapes through mental processing
5. Escapes through the rhythm of words
6. Philosophizes, continually
7. Had imaginary friends in youth
8. Imitates people on television or in movies
9. Treated friends as “pawns” in youth, e.g., friends were “students” “consumers” “members”
10. Makes friends with older or younger females more so than friends her age (often in young adulthood)
11. Imitates friends or peers in style, dress, attitude, interests, and manner (sometimes speech)
12. Obsessively collects and organizes objects
13. Mastered imitation
14. Escapes by playing the same music over and over
15. Escapes through a relationship (imagined or real)
16. Numbers bring ease (could be numbers associated with patterns, calculations, lists, time and/or personification)
17. Escapes through counting, categorizing, organizing, rearranging
18. Escapes into other rooms at parties
19. Cannot relax or rest without many thoughts
20. Everything has a purpose



# Gain and share knowledge of best practice

- Get better at identifying characteristics that may point to autism in girls.
- Observe carefully and support using the strategies we discussed last week.
- When it comes to friendship difficulties:
  - Establish what the problem is and who it is a problem for.
  - Consider if there is a *thinking difficulty* – if so, gently challenge thoughts about the person or situation e.g., exploring different perspectives.
  - Consider if there a *specific problem* – if so, perhaps support the young person to explore options for themselves and decide the solution they think will work best.
  - Consider specific teaching to help them to understand some of the “hidden” social rules e.g., filtering what they say and how.
  - Tools: Social skills and friendship interventions e.g. Friendship Terrace. Comic strips to unpick social understanding.
- With parent support and consent help them to understand their diagnosis.
  - They may need to understand the impact of social interactions on them. May need additional time to prepare for and recover from social events (autistic burn out/exhaustion).
  - Help neurotypical peers to understand difficulties autistic young people struggle with and promote .
  - Promote understanding in the school community.



## Friendship Terrace

by Sue Nicholls

A friendship pack containing 10 fun little stories to help children learn about friendship skills



# What can we do to help?

- Learn more about the presentation of autism in girls and use this to support girls in your setting ✓
- Gain and share knowledge of best practice ✓
- Share resources and strategies

# Further Resources and Strategies

## Books by autistic women and girls

[Autistic women and girls \(autism.org.uk\)](https://www.autism.org.uk)

The following books were suggested by NAS staff:

### Non-fiction

- *Autism and masking: how and why people do it, and the impact it can have*, Helen Ellis, with Dr Felicity Sedgewick and Dr Laura Hull
- *Safeguarding autistic girls: strategies for professionals*, Dr Carly Jones MBE
- *Spectrum women*, Barb Cook and Dr Michelle Garnett (editors)
- *Supporting spectacular girls: a practical guide to developing autistic girls' wellbeing and self-esteem*, Helen Clarke
- *Taking off the mask: practical exercises to help understand and minimise the effects of autistic camouflaging*, Hannah Belcher
- *The independent woman's handbook for super safe living on the autistic spectrum; The autism-friendly guide to periods; The autism-friendly guide to self-employment*, Robyn Steward
- *Women and girls with autism spectrum disorder*, Sarah Hendrick

### Autobiography

- *Drama queen: one autistic woman and a life of unhelpful labels*, Sara Gibbs
- *Odd girl out: an autistic woman in a neurotypical world*, Laura James
- *Travelling by train: the journey of an autistic mother*, Laurie Morgan

### Fiction

- *A Kind of Spark*, Elle McNicoll
- *Can You See Me?*, Libby Scott and Rebecca Westcott

# Further Resources and Strategies – From autistic women and girls

**[Sara Gibbs](#)**, autistic comedy writer, told us: *"I think there is a lack of understanding of how autism can present in girls, who are often socialised differently."*

**[Charl Davies](#)**, autistic tattoo artist, said: *"I find that being a female I am expected to behave a certain way to fit in socially which is why I have spent so much time masking."*

**[Dr Camilla Pang](#)**, autistic scientist and author, explained: *"I feel autistic women are more likely to be described as 'anxious' and an autism diagnosis overlooked, since it can challenge gender stereotypes."*

**[Dr Kate Fox](#)**, autistic poet and comedian, said: *"I don't think there's an inherent difference between autistic men and women. What there is a difference in, is how society treats and socialises males and females."*

[Autistic women and girls \(autism.org.uk\)](http://autism.org.uk)

[Purple Ella – YouTube](#)

[Crazy Girl in an Aspie World \(aspie-girl.blogspot.com\)](http://aspie-girl.blogspot.com)

[Jessi C'Artoon: 'Girl in a mask' draws out school fears - BBC News](#)

[Autistic girl praised for 'life as perfectionist' account - BBC News](#) – Libby Scott



# Further Resources and Strategies

Guide to Periods	M Books	Books by Holly Smale
		
Written by an autistic female, this includes direct advice on what periods look and feel like and how to manage hygiene and pain.	Books written by students from Limpsfield Grange based on their own experiences of feeling different. Aimed at ages 9-13	Holly herself is autistic but was only diagnosed as an adult, so only recently realised her main character is also autistic! Aimed at 11+

NAS campaign for girls and non-binary people: <https://youtu.be/9WHftgSJNF4> [Now I Know \(autism.org.uk\)](#)

[Autism symptoms in GIRLS – YouTube](#) [Autism in girls - I was wrong - YouTube](#)

[Autism and gender identity](#)

Girl who initially hated her diagnosis: [https://youtu.be/2\\_tyB1WyB\\_Y](https://youtu.be/2_tyB1WyB_Y)

## AUTUMN TERM

### Masking

Masking is the act of hiding your true self, as a result of pressures from people or society, to be a certain way.

Masking is seen as a social survival strategy. It can include behaviours like these:

- forcing or faking eye contact
- imitating smiles and other facial expressions
- mimicking gestures
- hiding or minimising personal interests
- developing a repertoire of rehearsed responses to questions
- pushing through intense sensory discomfort including loud noises
- scripting conversations
- disguising stimming behaviours (e.g. hiding a jiggling foot)



**HOW ALLISTIC\* PEOPLE CAN HELP**  
\*non-autistic

Persistent autistic masking can result in anxiety, depression, isolation, & burnout. Here are some ways to help:

- Don't make judgments about behavior or feelings.
  - I'm upset.
  - You're too sensitive! I'm glad you told me. Want to talk about it?
- Be aware of sensory needs.
  - Is it too loud in here? We can study somewhere else.
- Allow for multiple methods of communication.
  - I don't know how to explain it.
  - I've got paper if you'd like to sketch out your idea.
- Respect the need for personal space.
  - If she's in your group, why is she over there?
  - Cause she wants to be?

by Kate of Girls Autistic Journey | illustrated by @introvertdoodler

Autistic people will mask less when they feel safe and comfortable to be themselves.

How can you create a culture of accessibility, support and acceptance?

## AUTUMN TERM

### Autism and Girls

- Diagnosed at a later age than boys.
- Less likely to be diagnosed than boys (same behaviours).

**WHAT IS 'MASKING'?**

THIS CAN LEAD TO AUTISTIC BURNOUT + SENSORY HANGOVER.

- Friendships - may lack best friend/fixate on one person/on the edge of things socially
- Maturity - may play with older/younger
- Intense interests - similar to most girls but more intense
- Perfectionist/may have issues with homework
- Misunderstanding social norms - rude to teachers, correcting adults, plays more with boys
- Communication - poor at chit chat, takes things literally (may also have very good expressive language)
- Different at home - anxiety but 'fine' in school
- Poor attendance - stress of masking takes its toll
- Obsessive organisation
- Lack sense of personal identity, not sure how to describe themselves, over apologetic
- May lack certainty about gender
- May find great pleasure in certain sensory experiences
- May come across as opinionated, strong sense of justice
- Struggles to realise what others may be thinking
- Copies others - analytical rather than intuitive
- May also have dyslexia, dyspraxia, hypermobility, ADHD, ADD, epilepsy, anorexia...

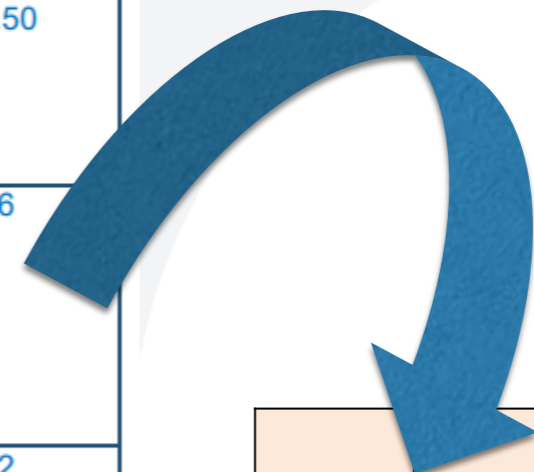
# AUTISM

Ref	Title	Description	Unit	Unit Price until 31/3/2024
AUT001	Autism CPD	Provision for bespoke training or advice to school staff (or other settings/organisations) in supporting autistic children and their families.  Depending on the topic, this can be a 2/3 hour INSET or across two staff meetings.	Staff team	£397
AUT002	Autism Observation /Pupil Advice	Specific pupil advice. 90 minutes spent at your premises. A combination of: observation, parent meeting, staff meeting and written recommendations.	Per person	£198.50
AUT003	Autism Report and Intervention Plan	Following observation, report detailing analysis of behaviour from observation, discussions with relevant parties and recommendations for support. May be used for statutory assessment.	Per person	£198.50
AUT004	Direct Pupil Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understanding diagnosis/Autism identity</li> <li>• Emotional Wellbeing</li> <li>• Sibling Support</li> <li>• 5 x 45-minute sessions plus tailored feedback meeting for school and/or parents.</li> </ul>	Per pupil	£496
AUT005	Autism Friendly School Audit	One-day school audit including learning walks, observations and consultation considering policies, teaching, learning, assessment and staff training. Report with summary and recommendations for action.	Per package	£992  £1,984.50 with follow-up visit and certificate

Bespoke packages can be developed and purchased, please contact the Autism Team for more information.

Please note, Autism orders for academic year 2023/34 must be in by 30 April 2023 as there will be limited capacity for orders that come in after this point.

For further information email: [theautismservice@cognus.org.uk](mailto:theautismservice@cognus.org.uk)



Session	General Plan for Content
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Introduction</li> <li>•My physical identity</li> <li>•My personality</li> <li>•Neurodiversity</li> </ul>
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Autism</li> <li>•Videos and facts</li> </ul>
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•What does autism mean to me?</li> <li>•Masking</li> <li>•Boundaries and scripts</li> </ul>
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Our senses</li> <li>•Advocacy</li> <li>•My autism identity statement</li> </ul>
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Toolkit</li> <li>•Other autistic individuals</li> <li>•Signposting to further information and support</li> </ul>

# What can we do to help?

- Learn more about the presentation of autism in girls and use this to support girls in your setting ✓
- Gain and share knowledge of best practice ✓
- Share resources and strategies ✓

Questions and comments?



# Questions and Answers – from you!

- **Inclusion strategies for girls to be supported socially**

- Teach pupils about difference, neurodiversity and autism in the setting (I can send some information on famous autistic individuals and their strengths and achievements).
- Review what you currently offer – based on what you have learn today it might be worth auditing your provision – you could do this in consultation with your pupils (I can send you some ways to do this).
- Ask the children what they want (clubs, activities for play/lunch times, spaces that could be used for calm times) and come up with a plan to make improvements to the provision.

- **What steps can be taken to promote awareness among educators and peers about the unique needs and strengths of girls on the spectrum?**

- Please share with them the information I have shared with you today. I'll email out all the videos and links too – please share!
- The Cognus factsheets are accessible and might be a good place to start if its all a little overwhelming.

- **Resources to support teachers to gain better understanding.**

- The school needs to commit to regular autism CPD (like this course) to drip feed information and strategies.
- Cognus offer whole school training too on our traded offer – this may be worth considering if there is budget for it.
- There are some training/courses offered by other providers that staff can take (some are free!) but consider how realistic these are when staff are already so pressured for time and completing a course is additional pressure.

- **Classroom strategies for getting an autistic child into class. (I currently do 121 with an autistic boy but i currently cannot have him in the classroom because he struggles to cope)**

- Have you asked the child what the problem is?
- Consider auditing the environment to see if sensory/anxiety/communication support can be improved to make the school more accessible.
- Reward charts, celebrating small steps (even 5 mins in the room), implementing movement/brain breaks after short stints in the classroom
- Have a look at the AET tools for teachers document that I'll send through to you – it have lots of practical tips and ready-made/editable tools
- Emotional Based School Avoidance workshop is in the pipeline for parents – if professionals think this will be helpful, I can offer a professional version?

# WE ARE LOOKING FOR AUTISTIC YOUNG PEOPLE TO FORM A '**YOUNG RESEARCHERS GROUP**' TO MAKE DECISIONS ABOUT AUTISM RESEARCH



## What is the research about?

This research will look at the experiences of **Autistic people from Asian backgrounds.**

We are interested in what being Autistic and being Asian means to people.

## How can I help?

Autistic young people should have a say about research that is conducted with them in mind. In group sessions you will be able to discuss and make decisions about aspects of the research, like which aspects of identity to focus on or what questions we will ask young people in the interviews.



## Can I take part?

You can join the advisory group if you are:

- An Autistic young person (either with or awaiting a diagnosis).
- In secondary school.
- Of Asian ethnicity (this can be mixed or full ethnicity).
- Are willing to share your views in groups of 3-4 people through verbal or non-verbal (written) methods.
- Are able to attend 3 group sessions either online or in-person that will last approximately 1 hour each (we can decide these details at a later date).

## What will I gain by taking part?

You will meet other Autistic young people and you will get to make decisions about this research. You will be reimbursed with a £10 voucher after each session.

**IF YOU ARE INTERESTED IN JOINING OUR ADVISORY GROUP,  
OR IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS, PLEASE EMAIL:**

**leah.walsh.22@ucl.ac.uk**

# Feedback

<https://forms.office.com/e/wvVVa4VUne>

## Autism Training feedback: Professionals 2023-24





# Cognus

No Limits on Learning

[Alex.cozens@cognus.org.uk](mailto:Alex.cozens@cognus.org.uk)

[theautismservice@cognus.org.uk](mailto:theautismservice@cognus.org.uk)



# Cognus

No Limits on Learning

## Training for Autism Leads in Schools Session 2 – Autism and Girls

Alex Cozens

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MA (Special Educational Needs and Inclusive Education)

PGCE

BA (Criminology and Social Policy)