

AUTISM FOUNDATIONS · 2.7

Why Autism Is Missed in Girls and Women

Autism in girls and women has been under-recognised for decades. This summary covers how it presents differently, why it gets missed, and what a proper assessment covers.

FOR

Women, families and parents

AUDIENCE AGE

All ages

REVIEWED

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PART OF

The NeuroFX resource library

IN SUMMARY

Why Autism Is Missed in Girls and Women

How autism shows up in girls and women

- **Often quiet, anxious and well-behaved at school.** A small number of close friendships, special interests that fit gendered expectations, perfectionism and high effort to keep up. The disruptive picture that historically triggered school referrals is rarely present.
- **Masking is more prevalent and more accomplished.** Autistic women mask at higher rates than autistic men on average. The version a clinician sees in the appointment can look fluent and well, while the difficulty at home is significant.
- **Sensory differences shape daily life quietly.** Specific foods, clothes and environments shape what is comfortable. Other people often frame this as fussiness, when it is part of the underlying neurology.

Why it gets missed

- **Diagnostic criteria were built largely from male samples.** Many of the behavioural examples still skew male: lining up cars, intense interest in trains. Autistic girls show the same underlying neurology in differently shaped behaviours.
- **Anxiety and depression often take the spotlight first.** These are common in autistic women and often present years before anyone asks about autism. The mood symptom gets treated; the underlying autism stays missed.
- **Other diagnoses sometimes get there first.** EUPD, complex trauma, bipolar disorder and chronic fatigue have all been over-applied to autistic women. Some are genuine co-occurrences; some are misattributions.
- **Gendered expectations absorb some of the difficulty.** A socially anxious, bookish girl with intense interests in horses or fiction fits cultural expectations of femininity well enough that the cumulative picture often does not look unusual.

How we can help

- **An assessment that knows what to ask about.** NeuroFX autism assessments explicitly cover masking, the difference between how you function at home and in public, sensory profile in concrete terms, and any co-occurring ADHD.
- **Both NHS and private routes are options.** Your GP can refer to NHS services. NeuroFX offers private adult autism assessment where waiting is a barrier.
- **Bring developmental history.** Old school reports, parental memories, recollections of how you functioned at twelve. The clinical picture is more complete with this evidence.
- **Treatment focuses on environment as much as the person.** Sensory adjustments, environment change, support for any co-occurring conditions, and (often) connection with other autistic adults usually make more difference than any single intervention.

WHEN TO SPEAK TO A PROFESSIONAL

Speak to your GP if autism has been on your mind for years and the picture fits across more than one area of life. NeuroFX offers private autism assessment for adults from our Bedford clinic. Seek same-day help via 111 (or 999 in an emergency) for any mental health crisis, including thoughts of self-harm or disordered eating in crisis.

SOURCES

Loomes et al. 2017 (JAACAP); Hull et al. 2017; Lai et al. 2015 (JAACAP); Bargiela et al. 2016 (JADD); NICE CG142

NEXT STEPS**Speak to NeuroFX**

Private ADHD and autism assessment for adults and children aged 6 and upwards.
CQC-registered. Bedford Consulting Rooms, 4 Goldington Road, Bedford MK40 3NF.

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