

# Clearly on the Spectrum?

A guide for people with late-diagnosed autism  
and those with clear traits but no diagnosis



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## OVERVIEW OF THE AUTISM SPECTRUM

Adults on the autism spectrum can exhibit a wide variety of traits, and diagnosis is based on personal developmental history and behaviour. An autism spectrum diagnosis is often received in childhood, but it is also possible to be diagnosed as an adult as long as characteristics typical of autism have been present since childhood. The diagnosis is made by a doctor, usually a psychiatrist, often in collaboration with a neuropsychologist. Adults on the autism spectrum may exhibit traits such as difficulties in social relationships, narrow interests, difficulty understanding other people's feelings, and hypersensitivity or hyposensitivity to sensory stimuli in the environment. It is estimated that over 55,000 people in Finland are on the autism spectrum. In addition, there are a number of people who are not included in this figure, because they do not meet all the criteria for a diagnosis. However, they may still exhibit clear traits associated with the autism spectrum. This guide is for everyone who recognises traits of autism in themselves.

## COMMUNICATION AND INTERACTION

As someone on the autism spectrum, you may often find various social situations with non-autistic people difficult. You may feel both misunderstood and ignored. Understanding unwritten rules of interaction can be challenging, and it may be necessary to develop your own strategies for coping with these situations. Interactions may feel like you are partially speaking a different language than everyone else or that you are lost in a foreign culture. Understanding other people's thoughts and feelings can be a challenge. This can lead to misunderstandings in communication and interaction.

## HOW DO AUTISM TRAITS AFFECT SOCIAL INTERACTIONS?

The way you make eye contact and react using your expressions and gestures may be different from people without autism. Expressing emotions using facial expressions and other gestures may also be different, or their effect may not be visible at all on the outside. Your speech may sound flat and monotonous, meaning that your emotional states and mood changes may not be conveyed in your tone of voice in the same way as for non-autistic people. Your face may be expressionless and your speech steady, even though your mind may be in a turmoil. You may focus more on the actual verbal message and less on expressions, gestures and tones of voice, which can cause misunderstandings with non-autistic people, who tend to interpret communication more holistically.



## REMEMBERING NAMES AND FACES

You may find it hard to remember names and faces for a number of reasons. Distinguishing faces is difficult because when you are on the autism spectrum your brain processes visual information differently. Instead of the whole face, you may pay attention to a specific detail of the face or the person's hair. Situations involving social interaction can often feel challenging and puzzling, so you may not focus on remembering names and faces because your attention is focused on other social cues and situations.

## **INTERPRETING SOCIAL CUES**

You may find it difficult to interpret and understand social cues such as expressions, gestures and tones of voice. This can make group discussions confusing and difficult to follow. When you have only one conversation partner, there are fewer distractions. For example, at parties and social gatherings, it is often easier to withdraw somewhere to talk to one person rather than stay in a larger group. In one-on-one conversations, it is also easier to stick to one topic and focus on it. Group discussions can also be overwhelming for the senses.

## **MASKING**

It is typical for people to model their behaviour on others. This is useful for social interaction and the idea is to make it easier to cope in a particular situation, not to change your personality. Masking (also known as camouflaging) refers to the act of hiding traits associated with autism. This is different from taking on a particular role in certain situations. Masking often occurs as a result of a desire for social acceptance and social pressure, and its purpose is to conceal behavioural traits associated with autism. You can start learning to mask very early in childhood if you get negative feedback on your autism-related traits and positive feedback when you try to hide them. Masking is a kind of survival technique. It may be helpful in certain situations and environments. However, hiding one's own traits is exhausting and causes stress. Prolonged masking is a harmful coping mechanism and can lead to a loss of identity. An autistic person should be free to behave in a way that is natural for them.

## **DIRECTNESS**

You may often find it difficult to understand why the people around you cannot directly say what they think about things. For many people on the autism spectrum, honesty is the only possible way to function. Directness means expressing your thoughts and feelings directly and honestly, without mincing words or holding anything back. Many people on the autism spectrum find clear, direct communication easier and less complicated than indirect and suggestive communication. For you, directness may be a natural way of communicating. Your attitude towards criticism may differ from that of some non-autistic people; criticism is directed at the issue rather than the person expressing it. This directness can sometimes come across as blunt to non-autistic people.

## **INFORMATIVE COMMUNICATION VS. SMALL TALK**

You may often focus less on the social aspects of communication and more on the information that is shared when speaking, for example. You may find it hard to understand the importance of small talk in communication between people and therefore you may avoid situations where it occurs. This can sometimes seem a little rude to outsiders. Informative speech is concrete and direct and does not contain abstract figures of speech or vague expressions. Small talk is largely based on various social cues, such as tone of voice, expressions and gestures, which may be difficult for you to interpret. Small talk often centres around everyday events that may not interest you. Small talk is also often superficial and does not encourage deeper discussion, which may be important to you.

## NEED FOR FAIRNESS AND JUSTICE

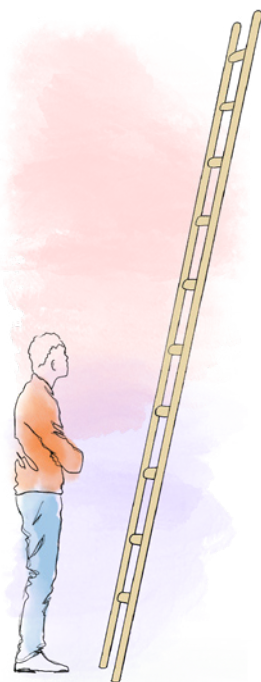
You may have a strong need for fairness and justice. This is a particularly important value for you, and you find it hard to deal with injustice in your environment. Lying, dishonesty and mistreatment, whether directed at yourself or someone else, can cause you emotional distress, stress and exhaustion. You may be very particular about everyone treating each other fairly and following rules and norms consistently. This can sometimes lead to difficult situations if certain rules are interpreted on a case-by-case basis or they are flexible.

## RUMINATION

Rumination means repeatedly going over something you have already experienced. On the autism spectrum, rumination is often linked to various social situations that continue to bother you. Rumination, which could also be called brooding or worrying, is a significant risk factor for depression in both autistic and non-autistic adults. Rumination originally has a positive purpose: to process something you have experienced and build strategies and models for future behaviour. However, it often increases masking and is more harmful than helpful, especially if you tend to focus on negative experiences.

## CHALLENGES AT WORK AND IN STUDIES

Approximately 75–90 per cent of people on the autism spectrum are outside the labour market, and many also drop out of education. The challenges of entering the labour market



are related to job seeking and the social, psychological and physical conditions of the workplace, which have an impact on staying at work. Social challenges that people face at work and in studies, a lack of sensory accessibility in the work environment, and difficulties with time management and organising tasks increase stress and anxiety. However, this does not have to be the case if the right support and reasonable accommodations are available.

### **SENSE OF COMMUNITY**

Spending time with other people on the autism spectrum can make you feel understood and accepted without having to explain or hide your unique characteristics. People on the autism spectrum often have similar experiences and challenges, which can create a strong sense of belonging. They may have similar communication styles and methods, which can make interaction easier and reduce misunderstandings. Many people on the autism spectrum have special interests that they can share and discuss with others like them. Being around other people on the autism spectrum can make you feel safer and less stressed, because you do not have to constantly adapt to the expectations and norms of non-autistic people.

### **HELPFUL TIPS FOR SOCIAL SITUATIONS**

- 1. Prepare in advance.** If you know you have a group event coming up, you can prepare in advance by thinking of a few topics of conversation or questions you could ask the others. This can help you feel more confident.
- 2. Start small.** If large groups feel overwhelming, you can start with smaller groups or individual conversations. This can help you get used to social situations.

- 3.** Find a support person. If possible, ask a friend or someone you know to accompany you to the event. They can provide support and help you feel more comfortable.
- 4.** Take breaks. If you feel overwhelmed, do not hesitate to take breaks. You can go outside to get some fresh air or withdraw to a quieter place for a moment.
- 5.** Focus on listening. If talking feels hard, you can focus on listening. Ask questions and let the others speak. This can take the pressure off you and help you feel more comfortable.
- 6.** Use humour. This is an effective coping mechanism for many people.
- 7.** Open communication. Ask people to point out if you say something offensive. This also reduces misunderstandings and increases mutual understanding.
- 8.** Accept your directness. Speaking directly can be a virtue, especially if it is based on honesty and authenticity. Although it can sometimes cause trouble, it can also foster clarity and trust in relationships.
- 9.** Treat yourself with compassion. Remember that it is perfectly normal to feel uncomfortable in new or large social situations. Treat yourself with compassion and give yourself time to adjust.
- 10.** Prioritise your wellbeing. It is important to recognise when trying to understand others is not mutual. By focusing on your personal wellbeing and setting boundaries, you can reduce stress and strain in social situations.

## SENSES, BODY AND STRESS

People on the autism spectrum often perceive and interpret sensory information differently than non-autistic people. Your nervous system is also easily overwhelmed, increasing your stress level. Using multiple senses at the same time can be hard, and sensory overload or underload can affect your everyday life. Sensitivities related to sight and hearing are usually the easiest to notice. Hypersensitivity (over-responsiveness) and hyposensitivity (under-responsiveness) can occur in the same sensory areas and can vary greatly at different stages of life. Variations can even occur on a daily basis. Sensory sensitivities often intensify when you are tired or stressed. Sensory overload can be triggered by various sounds, lights, smells and crowds. You can try to reduce this yourself by blocking out some of your senses, for example with sunglasses or noise-cancelling headphones. Withdrawing to a quiet place and calming yourself in a way that works for you, such as breathing and relaxation exercises, various stress management tools or stimming, can also help reduce sensory overload.



### SENSES

Your brain may process sensory information differently. This may be due to different neural connections and structural differences in the brain that affect how sensory information is interpreted and processed. You may be over-responsive to various sensations, such as sounds, touch, different smells and

tastes, as well as light, colours, temperatures and pain. This is known as hypersensitivity. For example, various background noises in the environment that rarely bother other people can sound quite loud and disturbing to you. This can cause anxiety and even physical pain. Hypersensitivity in a particular sensory area can vary from day to day and even from hour to hour. It is strongly linked to other stressors: the more overwhelmed or stressed you are, the more sensitive you are likely to be. You may experience both over- and under-responsiveness in the same sensory channels.

Under-responsiveness to sensory information is called hyposensitivity. If you have sensory hyposensitivity, you may seek out intense sensory experiences. You may crave strong or intense touch, sounds, lights, colours, tastes or movement. The same sensory channels may be both hypersensitive and hyposensitive. Every person on the autism spectrum is an individual, and their sensory perceptions can vary greatly. Some may be extremely sensitive to certain sensory stimuli, while others are not.

For many people on the autism spectrum, food-related sensory experiences are very significant, and the smell, taste and texture of food have a strong influence on what you can eat. These sensory experiences are often fairly permanent, and trying to unlearn them by getting “accustomed” to them will not change the situation.

## **BODY**

You may experience difficulties with fine motor skills, such as writing or tying knots. On the other hand, you may be very skilled at certain motor tasks. Motor difficulties can manifest themselves in gross motor skills (movements of your arms and legs) and fine motor skills (movements of your hands and fingers). The brain controls your motor skills, and when you are on the autism spectrum, your brain has developed differently than in people without autism. Being aware of the position of your body and judging how much force you should use may require extra concentration. Tasks that require precision, such as writing by hand or cutting a tomato, may require more effort. Sensory overload as well as under-stimulation can affect your motor skills: overload, for example, can make it harder to control your movements. Some people on the autism spectrum have difficulties with muscle tone and coordination. As usual, motor skills can vary greatly from person to person.

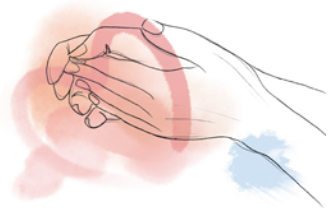
## **STRESS**

You have your own unique way of reacting to triggers that cause stress. Stress is a situation where you are faced with so many challenges and demands that it takes a lot of effort to cope with them. Various life events and external stimuli can further increase your stress levels. Since people on the autism spectrum often have high stress levels to begin with, the effect of a new stress factor is often greater than usual. You may be stressed by noisy environments, changing and unclear situations, and social interaction. For a person on the autism spectrum, excessive stress can be unbearable. In stressful situations, it becomes more difficult to inte-

grate, or receive, information through the senses. Your brain is overwhelmed and no longer able to convert all the information into structured knowledge. This overload can make you feel like you can no longer hear, see or feel things in the usual way. For example, one of your senses may stop working entirely for a moment. However, as the level of stress decreases, these sensations become less intense and disappear.

## RELATIONSHIP

Having a relationship and living with another person requires compromise from both parties. For people on the autism spectrum, challenges often have to do with having their own space and sensory overload. Having two separate homes can sometimes be the best solution if it is not possible to arrange this in one home. In a relationship, it is important that both parties are happy with the solution and that you can come to an agreement on your personal needs. As someone on the autism spectrum, you often have a greater need for your own time and space so that your nervous system can calm down from the stress. Even pleasant and enjoyable things can cause stress, including spending time with someone you love and cherish.



As you get older, you will come to terms with your personal needs and wishes. It is important for people on the autism spectrum to learn to understand and know how autism affects their lives. Time, knowledge and experience of the aids and strategies you need will help to regulate sensory overload. For people on the autism spectrum, overload and stress can manifest in many ways, such as intense emotional outbursts

(meltdowns) or withdrawal (shutdowns). These are ways of relieving stress when you are unable to ease your discomfort in other ways. Overload situations can manifest themselves as aggression, refusal, night-time waking or self-harm, among other things.

## **HELPFUL TIPS FOR SENSORY REGULATION AND STRESS MANAGEMENT**

- 1. Stimming.** Stimming (or self-stimulation) refers to repetitive movements, actions, sounds or speech that you use to try to calm yourself and regulate stress. Stimming usually increases when you are overexcited, nervous, tired, afraid or in pain. The purpose of stimming is to calm the nervous system and bring an overwhelmed nervous system back to a more normal state. It can also be used to release tension related to positive things.
- 2. Sensory regulation.** When you are getting ready for situations where sensory stimuli may be intense, such as a blood test or vaccination, inform the staff in advance of your hypersensitivity. This will help healthcare professionals prepare and provide, for example, a numbing patch to reduce discomfort. You can wear sunglasses, even indoors and regardless of the weather, if this helps you minimise sensory stimuli, especially in bright or flashing environments. Choose comfortable clothing that reduces sensory overload. If you hate the cold, do not hesitate to wear warm clothing, such as padded winter pants, even if it is not common. The most important thing is that you yourself feel comfortable. Limit your vision by looking down at the floor, for example, if your surroundings feel too overwhelming. You can also look at empowering images and phrases that you have chosen and that help you calm down and concentrate.
- 3. Quiet space.** When you feel overwhelmed, find a calm, quiet space, such as a school toilet or a disabled toilet, where you can

try to calm down. These places offer you a chance to withdraw for a moment and reduce sensory stimuli.

**4. Interests.** When you are feeling extremely stressed, try to focus on your interests for a moment. Doing something you enjoy can calm you down and help you destress.

**5. Timeout signal and safe word.** Agree on a timeout hand signal with your friends and family. Show this sign whenever you need a break. This can help you communicate your needs without using words and reduce stress. You can also use a safe word in meltdown situations. When you say this word, it means that you need peace and quiet and that you do not want to be rushed or asked to do anything. This can help the people around you understand when you need more space.

**6. Mutual understanding and agreements in a relationship.** Agree with your partner in advance how you will handle stressful situations. The main thing is that they know how you react to stress and understand your situation. It is also important to agree on the division of labour in your shared home, especially if you have children.

## SPECIAL INTERESTS, HABITS AND ROUTINES

You may have a special ability to concentrate

on one thing for a long period of time, notice even the tiniest details and gather information about things that interest you. You can devote yourself to your interests and spend as much time on them as you can. Special interests are also known as passions. Autistic people may have uneven skills. You may be very good at some things and have great difficulty with others. This can lead to overly high or low expectations from the people around you. Your abilities may also vary depending on stress, sleep and other factors. Routines are often important to you: you appreciate having a similar rhythm in your days and weeks, knowing in advance what is going to happen, doing things in a familiar way, sticking to plans and anticipating the future. Whereas non-autistic people may find it easier to change and break habits, you often need to develop your own strategies to manage change.

### SPECIAL INTERESTS

You may have very narrow, limited interests. You may develop a deep interest in certain topics or hobbies. These interests can vary in terms of content, quantity and duration. Your interests can also serve as a means of stimming and recovery. Focusing on a particular interest can have a calming effect, which helps to reduce anxiety and stress. Hyperfocusing on a special interest can also improve concentration and help to divert



your thoughts away from stressful issues and situations. Your special interest often brings you energy and a sense of calm and security. It allows you to enter your own inner space where you can be yourself.

### **IMPACT OF SPECIAL INTERESTS ON YOUR SELF-ESTEEM AND CAREER**

In the case of special interests related to knowledge, hyperfocusing can improve your self-esteem and give you more confidence. Many people on the autism spectrum pursue careers in fields such as art and science. For some, special interests can play a big role in their lives, affecting their performance in school and at work, but on the other hand, many have found a career in their special interests. The difference between a regular hobby and a special interest is that you devote yourself intensely to your special interest. You may, for example, be a fan of a band and know everything there is to know about them. You can devote yourself to your interests and spend as much time on them as you can.

### **FANDOM AND COMMUNITY**

Girls and women on the autism spectrum are often passionate about fandom. Since this is also typical of non-autistic people, the possibility that this is a special interest on the autism spectrum may go unnoticed. Being a fan can provide a sense of community and belonging with other fans. Focusing intensely on your interest brings you joy and satisfaction. You may learn to understand your interest better, which can also have a positive effect on your self-esteem. Spending time with a familiar interest also reduces stress and thus improves your wellbeing.

## **LIFELONG INTERESTS**

Lifelong, unchanging interests are common among people on the autism spectrum and can provide stability and continuity in life. It is often possible to develop deep knowledge about these interests, which feels rewarding and can be beneficial in your career, for example. Infodumping refers to your tendency to enthusiastically share large amounts of information about a particular topic that is important to you or a passion of yours, often in great detail. Sometimes infodumping may continue regardless of whether the listener is interested in the topic or not.

## **CHANGING INTERESTS**

It is not unusual, however, for your interests to change throughout your life. The purpose of a new interest may be, for example, to seek new sensory stimuli, curiosity or a desire for knowledge. A new interest can also provide a new way to manage and reduce stress or to relax. A new interest can also reflect the impact of a new environment or new friends on your life.

## **SOCIAL ACCEPTANCE AND LONELINESS**

Sometimes your special interest may seem strange or even inappropriate to outsiders and talking about it could cause trouble in your relationships with other people. If you cannot discuss your special interest with others, this can deepen your feeling of loneliness. Even if your special interest is not socially accepted, it is still simply something that you find interesting.

## COLLECTING

Collecting can be related to your interests and, depending on your interest, it can involve collecting objects or simply gathering information. Collecting is therefore a way of engaging with and focusing on your interest and can also be a means of managing stress. Collecting can also be a calming activity to immerse yourself in and it can provide positive sensory experiences (looking at and touching the objects you collect). Collecting can be a way to deepen your knowledge of a subject and may also create a sense of control and mastery.



## MANAGING YOUR INTERESTS

Sometimes your interests take up too much of your daily life and can get in the way of doing other things. If this happens, it is a good idea to consider limiting them and whether you might need outside support and help to do so. If you feel that your interest is limiting your ability to study, work or participate, it may be turning into an obsession. Sometimes work or study can become a special interest. In such cases, it can be hard for a person on the autism spectrum to limit how much work they put into a particular topic. Completing assignments perfectly feels particularly important when the topic is important to you. People on the autism spectrum also tend to be loyal and honest, which can make it harder to say no. A strong sense of responsibility also makes it difficult to refuse tasks. Sometimes you may also feel that you are unable to refuse a task politely enough or that refusing could cause conflict.



## **INTEREST IN DETAILS**

Your strength may lie in your attention to detail and your ability to remember them. As someone who focuses on details, you may be interested in a niche aspect of a particular topic. For example, when it comes to airplanes, you may be interested only in military fighter aircraft or, when it comes to plants, only in orchids. You feel deeply focused and passionate about your chosen topic and spend a lot of time learning about and studying it. Focusing on a specific detail of a particular topic can provide predictability and a sense of security.

## **IMPORTANCE OF ROUTINES**

Habits that create clear routines help increase your sense of security. When your life stays familiar and predictable, the stress caused by change and unpredictability is also reduced. Habits and routines also help to manage various sensory stimuli and reduce the likelihood of sensory overload. Clear and repetitive habits also help with performing daily tasks and transitioning smoothly from one activity to another.

## **BENEFITS OF ROUTINES AND PREDICTABILITY**

As an adult on the autism spectrum, you can benefit from clear routines and predictability. Changes and surprises can cause anxiety, but on the other hand, maintaining routines can be difficult. Establishing routines supports your ability to cope with everyday life. Doing things the same way can help you control your environment and reduce the number of surprises.

Changes in everyday activities can cause you anxiety. If this happens, certain patterns and routines can help you anticipate what is about to happen.

### **SENSE OF SECURITY**

Always choosing the same place or having some other habit or routine can bring a sense of security and continuity. When you always sit in the same place, you know exactly what to expect, and this can make it easier to manage stress. Many non-autistic people also have a habit of always choosing the same seat, but if this changes, they may not experience the same anxiety as you would. In addition, a familiar place may have fewer distracting noises, lights or smells, making the environment more comfortable and less stressful. Finding a new place and adapting to it can also take up resources that you might need for things like following a lecture or travelling.

### **ESTABLISHING ROUTINES IN A NEW ENVIRONMENT**

Establishing routines and transferring them to a new environment can take time. A new environment contains many factors that you are not familiar with from before. A new environment provides new sensory experiences, and adapting to them takes time. A new environment also requires a lot of information processing and takes up capacity that you would otherwise need for establishing routines. Maintaining routines also requires resources, especially when routines are useful but not very pleasant. The things you enjoy the most often become routines more easily than the things you find less enjoyable. Sometimes it is worth considering whether the difficulty in establishing routines is due to an unpleasant or unclear element related to a task.

## **IMPORTANCE OF ROUTINES AND STRATEGIES IN MANAGING CHANGES**

Routines can often be important to you: it is important to have a consistent daily and weekly rhythm, to know in advance what is going to happen, to do things in a familiar way, to stick to plans and to anticipate the future. Whereas non-autistic people may find it easier to change and break their habits, you often need to develop your own strategies for managing change. Many daily tasks and activities can cause stress to build up. Performing several tasks in one day is cognitively demanding, especially if you have challenges with executive functioning. Focusing on just one task can also help manage sensory overload and thereby reduce stress.

## **TIPS FOR ENGAGING WITH YOUR SPECIAL INTERESTS AND FOLLOWING ROUTINES**

- 1.** Schedule your interests. Choose a suitable day, time and place where you can immerse yourself in your special interest. This can also help motivate you to do some of the tasks that you enjoy less. Many also use this as a reward: focus on a task that you dislike for 30 minutes and then you can spend the next 30 minutes on your special interest.
- 2.** Start small when creating routines. You could decide to wake up at the same time every morning or always do your laundry on the same day of the week. You can also start creating routines around a hobby you enjoy: decide to spend time on it on a specific day of the week.
- 3.** Allow yourself routines that help you manage life. It is perfectly fine to always drink your coffee or tea from the same cup, do your chores at home in the same order, go shopping on the same day of the week, etc.

## PLANNING AND ORGANISATION

People on the autism spectrum can have a wide range of abilities and challenges when it comes to planning and organising things. These characteristics vary greatly from person to person. Many are very meticulous and precise, good at organising information and following precise instructions. On the other hand, changing plans or adapting to new situations can be difficult. This can lead to a need for more time and support in handling changes. Perhaps you yourself have noticed that anticipating the future and careful planning can make your life easier?



### PLANNING

You may be very systematic in many things. On the other hand, you may find it difficult to start a new task, estimate the time it will take or focus on the task itself. These are known as executive function challenges. It can be difficult to anticipate things, plan ahead and make sense of the time frames and order of tasks, for example. This makes it harder to understand how long it will take to do something and in what order you should do things to achieve the best possible result. Motivation often plays a big role in how smoothly things get done.

Transferring knowledge and skills from one environment to another is often difficult for people on the autism spectrum. For example, skills learned in a cooking class may not transfer smoothly to your home kitchen because the conditions and

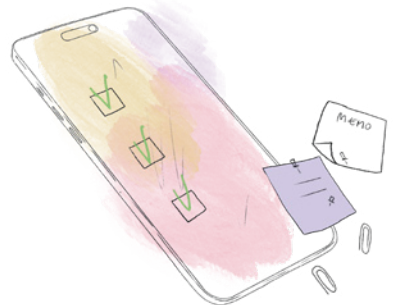
the environment are different. The so-called “automation” of behaviours can be difficult. This means that everyday activities, such as going to the shower, washing your hair or even making coffee, require concentration and active thinking. Paying close attention to details can make it harder to grasp the bigger picture and interpret other people’s behaviour.

## ORGANISATION

You may find it difficult to start and stop tasks for a number of reasons, often related to executive functioning challenges and autistic inertia. Executive functioning challenges often manifest as difficulties in starting and stopping tasks. For example, you may find it difficult to break larger tasks into smaller steps or to manage your time. This can be seen in everyday life as a tendency, for example, to postpone tasks that you do not enjoy. Autistic inertia may be caused by your ability to focus on and immerse yourself deeply in one task, which makes it difficult to switch to another task.

## WORKING IN A GROUP

Working in a group may turn out to be confusing and stressful. Many people on the autism spectrum also have difficulty expressing themselves in a group or understanding what others mean when they say something. This leads to misunderstandings and frustration when doing group work. You may approach both problem-solving and tasks from a different perspective and carry them out differently than non-autistic people. Group situations may feel overwhelming in terms of your senses and the social



environment. Group work can sometimes be disorganised and involve changing situations, which can increase your anxiety.

### **ESTABLISHING A STRUCTURE**

Establishing a structure and transferring it to a different environment can take time. Often, things you enjoy are easier to incorporate into your new daily routines than things you dislike. Perhaps there was something or someone in your childhood home who implemented and maintained routines? Sometimes it is also worth considering whether the difficulty is due to an unpleasant or unclear element related to a task.

### **SENSORY INFORMATION**

You often receive more information through your senses (vision, hearing, smell, taste, touch). All this information has to be processed by your brain. Organising items into piles reduces the amount of information received through the senses, reducing sensory overload. Organising items can also help to manage stress and overload.

### **PERCEIVING TIME**

There are many reasons why you may have difficulties with time perception. Your senses work differently, which may affect how you experience the passage of time. Created routines and behaviour patterns can also make it difficult to perceive the passage of time. This occurs especially if your routines are interrupted. Some people on the spectrum may find it difficult to understand the concept of time because it is abstract. This makes it harder to follow schedules. Difficulty in following schedules may also be related to working memory.

## **FOCUSING ON DETAILS**

Focusing on details rather than the big picture can affect how you interpret events and people's behaviour. This can make it more difficult to understand and predict connections between things and larger concepts. On the other hand, autistic inertia, where you have the ability to focus on something very intensely, can make it difficult to move on to something else or switch to a different thought. It is worth considering whether the things your mind gets stuck on have a positive or negative effect on you. If they are mainly positive, the most likely reason for getting stuck is a desire to stay with this positive thing or thought. Getting stuck on negative things, on the other hand, is a sign of negative or perhaps unresolved issues related to the matter and may also be associated with rumination.

## **HELPFUL TIPS FOR PLANNING AND ORGANISATION**

- 1.** Plan and schedule your day. Your phone is a great tool for this.
- 2.** Plan and schedule changes. Calmness, clarity and anticipation help you make changes.
- 3.** Ask for help. If you have difficulty starting and stopping tasks, you may find it helpful to have another person near you to monitor and support you.
- 4.** Use time management tools. You can use various alarms on your phone, timers for things like showering and eating a meal, and different calendar entries to indicate how urgent a task is, for example colour codes.
- 5.** Lists. Making lists of different things can be both enjoyable and helpful for organisation.
- 6.** Find a suitable method to help you study and do other

tasks. Many have found techniques such as the Pomodoro Technique\* and body doubling\* helpful.

\*You can find more information about these by searching for these keywords online.

## **SUPPORT AND ADVICE**

You do not need a diagnosis to receive peer support. Many benefit greatly from having the chance to talk with others who have had similar experiences. The peer and experience activities of Autism Finland can put you in touch with peer experts and experts by experience and provide peer support evenings and free webinars. Many member associations of Autism Finland organise peer support activities for young people and adults both locally and online. You can find more information about the association in your region and national associations and their activities on the website of Autism Finland.

You can contact the counselling service of Autism Finland if you need advice and support with matters related to the autism spectrum, such as questions about diagnosis.

[autismiliitto.fi/neuvontapalvelu](https://autismiliitto.fi/neuvontapalvelu)





**USEFUL LINKS:**

Autism Finland: [autismiliitto.fi](http://autismiliitto.fi)

Kirjokartta website: [autismiliitto.fi/kirjokartta](http://autismiliitto.fi/kirjokartta)

Step to Adulthood website: [askelajakuisuuteen.fi/en/](http://askelajakuisuuteen.fi/en/)

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