

Autism Description by Charli

Hi! My name is Charli. I am 15 years old and I want to find out if I have autism.

I want a diagnosis so that I can have access to support through the rest of my education and life going forward. Advantages of having a diagnosis for me would be: access to support if I need it; understanding why I act the way I do and why I have felt like the odd one out (I have had a little bit of fun made of me for how I think and act – not a lot, but enough for me to notice); being able to allow others to know why I act the way I do; knowing how to cope in situations I find difficult; letting other people I am finding situations hard and not being dismissed; and being able to tell others in situations I feel it would be good for them to know.

I understand that it may take time, may be seen as something that holds me back or be something that is seen as negative. However, it will confirm for me what I have thought about ever since I first learnt about autism, and that would be amazing! :)

A major reason I have chosen now is for my GCSEs. I am finding it quite challenging to study for my GCSEs and I am very anxious for my exams because currently my sensory processing is making studying really hard and I don't want it to hold me back from getting good grades.

This also applies to university.

I am also very scared that when I grow up and live by myself I will struggle with managing myself financially, finding the best job for me and socialising, and I want support to be accessible for me at these points.

On the next pages I've written about what I have/do struggle(d) with and how I see the world (I have tried to split it into four categories, but I am sure if I have put the right thing in the right categories).

Thank you! :)

Sensory Processing

- I can have issues with bright lights, loud noises, certain textures (especially sticky – I hate sticky plants) and sometimes smells and food textures.
- I think I have certain sensory requirements too, especially tight hugs (or hugs in general) otherwise I can feel anxious and my skin feels odd (it's hard to explain).
- I have certain rules about physical contact (if I touch someone, there is a small window of time – usually 3 to 10 seconds – where they can touch me back. I am OK if I know someone is about to touch me, for example if someone shakes my hand but they shook someone else's hand before

- mine. However, if people make any physical contact with me outside of these circumstances I don't like it.
- I find it hard to cope with lots of sensory input – for example, we went to Camden Market and it was very loud and bright, everyone kept brushing past me and there was too much going on around me. I was able to cope, but it left me completely exhausted and overloaded (there was a Dragon Ball shop so that made me feel better).
 - In a quiet room, I can hear every single sound, which makes me distracted and stressed because it is hard to block it out.
 - It can take me a while to sleep if I can hear sounds in a room or around our house, so I listen to an audio box or white noise (like rain) to calm me down and give me a sound to focus on so that I can sleep.
 - I think that I have had sensory overload before that has been caused by lots of background noise, tiny sounds I can't block out or occasionally bright artificial lights. I start to shut down and I want to cover my ears and the texture of the paper (when I am writing) becomes borderline unbearable and I have considered asking teachers if I could leave a room to calm down. Afterwards, I am completely exhausted and drained. This is a huge concern for my GCSEs and revision (my first mocks are in July and I am very anxious for them). (I will also gently pull on my hair to help me focus).

Behaviour

- When I am interested in something, I pursue it with a lot of passion and enthusiasm (currently it's a series called Dragon Ball – my friends often have to tell me to shut up about it!).
- I will sometimes hit my wrists together to help me express joy or excitement.
- I can get stuck on and repeat a word if I am trying to get my thoughts out (this may be more general though – I'm not sure).
- I like having a routine – for example, I have a very specific morning routine. If something unexpected comes up 24 hours before (that I didn't plan myself) I can become disorientated depending on how big the change is.
- I am very specific with timings and time and I like knowing the time all the time if that makes sense!
- I have had a lifelong interest in Thomas the Tank Engine – when I was little I absolutely loved it (the oldest series with model trains, not the CGI one)! (Despite this, I would hide behind the sofa at certain points, especially when Thomas is pranked by the Troublesome Trucks and ends up covered in coal and he makes a face I still don't like which I have screenshotted on my iPod if you want to see it).
- When I was younger I would scratch my hand and hit my own head to express frustration. Now, I will sometimes bite the back of my hand or hit my leg to express frustration or anger.

- When I was 3 or 4 I was electively mute because I was scared of everyone around me.
- When I was in Year 6 one of my friends showed me Creepy Pasta, a website with scary stories. However, because I was very literal, I couldn't see that they were stories. Not only did this lead to me becoming very anxious about topics such as murder, but I withdrew from everyone apart from two close friends because the topics I was feeling scared about could involve anyone. I found being social and understanding everything incredibly difficult (I found it hard before that, but Year 6 was the worst!). I think part of it stemmed from not understanding what would motivate someone to do something as drastic as issues I was worried about, which made everyone frightening because I didn't know what they would do (if that makes sense).
- I like making lists because they calm me down if too much is happening at once.
- Sometimes I rock without realising if I want to calm down.
- I will bite the skin off my fingers if I'm feeling anxious. However Dad and I have had an idea to put lotion on my hands instead because it will help soften my hands and I like the way it feels on my fingers – it's an alternative way of helping me cope with my anxiety I have. I can bite my fingers if my routine is changed, if I'm struggling to focus or if I'm anxious about something.

Communication:-

- It can take me a long time to understand a metaphor or sarcasm, especially if sarcasm is in a normal tone of voice.
- I find it hard to cope if more than one person is trying to talk to me at once or if someone is giving me too much information at once (or too quickly). It takes me a while to process it. I also struggle with too much verbal direction from someone at once – I prefer it to be written in a list in order.
- I can take certain things too literally without realising (unless I understand that it's not something to be taken literally– even then, it can be hard to not take it literally).
- I can struggle to start a conversation or contributing to small talk (unless it's about a personal interest that I love).
- If I am talking about a special interest I can find it hard to let others input on it or my voice can increase gradually in volume. I also like to talk about my interests a lot!
- If someone has spoken to me and I've not understood something (like a metaphor) I will confirm what it means with someone else and add the metaphor to the database of metaphors in my head immediately after the conversation.
- I like having clear and slow explanation, otherwise I have to process too much at once and I can feel very stressed or nervous.
- I need time alone to recharge from being around people all day.

- In English (11/5/17) we were comparing persuasive texts. Firstly, we had to analyse the tone of voice, which I found hard to analyse because I couldn't understand it! There was also a phrase that read "a revolver being held by a hoodie on a BMX" and for a while I thought it was a limp hoodie on a BMX with a revolver wrapped inside one sleeve!

Social Interaction:-

- After I've had a conversation with someone, another person will point out things such as their eye contact and body language and I won't understand what they are talking about and how the other person knows all about that!
- My spatial awareness isn't great so I can sometimes invade someone's personal space without meaning to or realising. I can also bump into people or not move when they need to get past. This can make me anxious.
- If someone I don't know makes direct eye contact with me I can feel uncomfortable. I'm also not good at making eye contact sometimes.
- If I'm unsure as to how someone has reacted to something I've done or said that I feel is OK, I can feel incredibly anxious and unwilling to speak again in case it happens again.
- I don't remember understanding that other people had emotions until I was in Year 7 (understanding that others had independent thought processes came around Year 8 I think), so since Year 7 I have been mimicking behaviours from other people and taking advice from friends on how to act properly around others. Since Year 9 I have started to work it out by myself but it's still difficult sometimes!
- I can find large facial expressions scary and difficult to understand.
- I'm confident around people I know because I can try and predict what they will do. However, I struggle more with interaction if it's with someone I don't know.
- In Years 7 and 8 I had a few issues with being part of friendships and with getting to know all the new people at secondary school. I also suddenly realised that I acted quite differently to the people around me, so I thought something was wrong with me. This made me angry and upset, so I scratched my skin to help me express that. However, I'm now more accepting of my 'quirks' (as me and Mum call them sometimes!) and I have formed a few very close friendships with people who I've felt I could tell about the possibility of an autism diagnosis. When I told them, they promised their acceptance and support. I'm incredibly grateful for them!
- I find it harder to interact with new people.