

# What to look out for in an internal presentation of autism



## Friendships

- May be on the edge of friendship groups or have intense friendships vulnerable to falling out.
- May be very uncomfortable with conflict.
- May prefer to play in their own way.



## School

- May not raise a hand in class or be reluctant to speak when called on.
- May be unable to use strategies like Time Out cards because of situational mutism.
- May misunderstand pop culture or trends.
- May experience less difficulty and anxiety if seated with a friend, and if the seating doesn't change.
- May also vastly prefer pair or group work with a friend – it's difficult and anxiety-inducing to speak to someone they don't know well.
- May mask at school, explode at home.
- May be disinterested in sport.
- May use compensation techniques to disguise difficulties from teachers.
- May get by in primary school but transition to secondary is an explosion in sensory and cognitive input – a step too far.
- May have an ability to spot patterns and/or consider a subject without bias (if you can get them talking in the first place).
- May avoid or be uncomfortable with unstructured time at school and need support for these times more than lessons.
- May find aspects of school uniform (or other clothes) difficult or impossible – reasonable adjustment needed.
- May find transitions between classrooms very difficult.
- May be unable to eat in the dinner hall due to the sensory aspect of smell and so many people.
- May find assemblies difficult due to proximity of so many people.
- Will be startled and scared by teachers shouting at them or at the class.
- May find lessons like PE (or perhaps Food Tech and Design and Technology) difficult due to lack of structure or predictability and sensory reasons.
- Will need specific and adapted sex education.

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## Anxiety

- May have situational mutism.
- May be prone to extended absence from school.
- May have an eating disorder.
- May self harm.
- May have anxiety manifesting in physical symptoms eg. stomachache.
- May be more likely than peers to have mental health issues.



## Emotional

- May experience intense empathy (including with animals or objects).
- May pretend to be a cat or other animal.
- May value soft toys and plushies for longer than their peers (or not stop).
- May seem emotionally and socially younger than their peers.
- May shutdown (freeze, stop processing what's going on and/or isolate themselves) as likely as meltdown.
- May exhibit a strong love of animals.
- May have Alexithymia (difficulty identifying and expressing emotions).
- May internalise problems and when unrecognised as autistic for too long may hear voices or develop an internalised presentation of OCD.



## Sensory

- May have a strong sensory reaction to clothes, touch, noise or smell.
- May avoid baths and showers, hair brushing, tooth brushing for sensory reasons.
- May have poor Interoception (identifying physical sensations in the body which can be linked to identifying emotions).
- May self-soothe sensory overload by listening to music with headphones, pacing up and down or other favoured technique.

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## Social

- May try hard to understand and learn social codes.
- More likely than peers to be LGBTQIA+.
- May be more likely to be bullied than peers.
- May have a strong sense of social justice or moral compass – likely to stick up for the underdog in whatever way they are able to.
- May not play along with society's rules or recognise authority figures as anything other than equals.
- May laugh at inappropriate moments.
- May use echolalia (repeated, scripted speech) likely to be from TV shows etc.
- May have a tendency to people please and give the answers they think you want to hear (fawning).
- May be more likely to self-identify as Emo and/or Geek.
- May work extra hard to understand people.
- May have intense interests in common topics for their peers – eg. animals, fiction (especially Harry Potter) and also psychology and marginalised groups.
- May be less conforming to gender stereotypes eg shaving legs and armpits, long or straightened hair.
- May be more likely (when old enough) to have brightly coloured hair and multiple piercings.
- Masking or lots of 'peopling' will cause exhaustion.
- May need time alone to recover from the 'peopling'.



## Autistic Inertia

- May have difficulty with organisation.
- May find it difficult to get started on a project or assignment.
- May find it difficult to build a plan without breaking it down into much smaller segments.
- Likely to have an intense focus on what is of interest.
- May find it difficult to be interrupted when 'in flow'.
- Likely to find transitions of all kinds difficult.

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## Other possibilities

- May have a vivid imagination.
- May enjoy collections – collecting IS the play, rather than doing something with the items collected.
- Can be perfectionists.
- Stimming (repetitive behaviours) less likely to be noticeable – small movements or internalised.
- Likely to have strong opinions when not masking in a safe space, and difficult to convince they are wrong.
- May have trouble with directions.
- May have a large or advanced vocabulary.
- May make strong use of routine or ritual.
- May have poor posture.
- May have restricted eating choices.
- As likely to be creative as into STEM.