

Section 4: Autistic Women

Information for adults following diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

This pack has been put together from information available from specialist autism services, autistic people, and professionals working with autistic people.

Funding for this resource pack was kindly provided by the Edinburgh and Lothians Health Foundation, an operating name of the Lothian Health Board Endowment Fund, Scottish Charity Number SC007342

This leaflet may be made available in a larger print, Braille or your community language.

Resource Pack created by NHS Lothian Adult ADHD and ASD Resource Team

Autistic women

Autism is a lifelong developmental condition that affects how people perceive the world and interact with others.

It used to be believed that autism was largely found in boys and men. However, we now know that autism is more common in women than we thought. In 2015, the ratio of men to women accessing the National Autistic Society Adult service was approximately 3:1.

There are different theories as to why men are diagnosed more often than women. One is that women and girls may be more socially aware and that they may observe and imitate others in order to mask their differences and fit in (Tony Attwood 2007). This effort to imitate others and hide autistic behaviour can be draining and stressful and may contribute to increased mental health problems in women with autism (Dale Yauill-Smith 2008).

Another theory is that the way autism is diagnosed is based on behaviour that is typical of men and boys. Girls are less likely to be diagnosed as children because they behave differently to boys and do not act in ways that are considered typically autistic. For example, they may be very quiet and may have a strong interest in animals or fiction, or have an imaginary friend.

Women are more likely than men to have had referrals to health services and they are more likely to have other conditions diagnosed, including anxiety, depression, personality disorders and eating disorders. Not receiving a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder until adulthood means that some women may not receive the appropriate support they need.

Recommended websites and further reading- autistic women

- **Number 6**

Offers several women's groups

www.number6.org.uk

- **Scottish Autism: Right Click**

Scottish Autism has an online support programme, Right Click, for women and girls with autism. This provides information on a wide range of subjects.

Website: www.scottishautism.org



- **Scottish Women with Autism Network**

Provide peer support for women and girls, both virtually and face to face, through social events, a Facebook page, and a 'friends of SWAN' forum.

Website: <https://swanscotland.org/>

- **The Girl with the Curly Hair project**

Training and advice for women and girls by a young woman with ASD

Website: www.thegirlwiththecurlyhair.co.uk

- ***Women and Girls with Autism Spectrum Disorder***

Book by Sarah Hendrickx about understanding life experiences from early childhood to old age

- *An independent woman's handbook for super safe living on the autistic spectrum*

Book by Robyn Steward about recognising potential risks to personal safety. Topics include sex, relationships, drugs, money and mobile devices

- ***From Here to Maternity – Pregnancy and Motherhood on the Autism Spectrum***

Book by Lana Grant