

10 Overlooked positive traits in autistic people



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Autistic adults and children, including those with non-verbal autism, have a whole range of amazing skills, but too often are judged only by their weaknesses, even when many of these can be overcome by using augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) or a non-verbal app.

Non-verbal autism in particular has a very unfair reputation. Difficulty with speaking is frequently taken as a direct sign of low intelligence, but this is simply not the case.

Difficulty with speech has little or no bearing on ability and intelligence in other areas.

With all the technology now available to us, AAC using a non-verbal app is an easily accessible solution for a non-verbal child or adult. While there is plenty written about the challenges and difficulties faced by autistic adults and children, including non-verbal children, autism also brings many gifts and strengths.

All autistic people are different, and each has a unique mix of strengths and weaknesses. There are, however, some common strengths that appear in many. Here are 10 awesome traits of many autistic people.

Passion and focus

Autistic people can be a bit like a huge ship. They may take a while to get started but once something catches their attention there is no stopping them! They are hugely passionate about their interests, and once a task catches their attention and imagination, they may stay focused on it for hours, to the point of not hearing others speaking to them and forgetting to eat and drink. While this can cause health issues in excess, and gentle reminders to practice self-care when focused can be a good idea, this focus and passion can be a huge asset to autistic adults and children alike.

Justice

Many autistic people are passionate about justice and fairness. If a rule is required, they may be concerned to see that it is applied properly and fairly. Autistic people are often portrayed as lacking empathy, but frequently struggle because of a huge amount of empathy for others who they see as being treated unfairly.



Some autistic people may find it hard to move past any unjust or unfair situation without trying to help. While getting involved in what are frequently moments of conflict can be unwise for self-care, wouldn't the world be a much better place if we all tried to fight injustice and unfairness wherever we encountered it?

Challenge

Autistic people will often find themselves unable to stop themselves from challenging things that they think are wrong or where there is a better alternative that should be considered. Challenge is much misunderstood and often seen as an attack or a threat but is often extremely helpful.

None of us know everything and challenge is a way that others offer their views on how to tackle a problem or task. It is only a threat if the idea being challenged has not been properly thought through or is being pursued for reasons other than those given.



Autistic people tend to see things in a straightforward way and are often confused by the more subtle and roundabout approaches used by others, such as saying one thing when intending to convey a vastly different meaning using body language or tone. So if an autistic person sees or hears something that does not add up, they may well challenge it.

The straight-talking nature of autistic communication and AAC also contributes to this approach. This helps to make sure that decisions are properly thought through, consequences are properly identified, and alternatives are considered.

Honest and straightforward

Autistic people seldom lie. They say what they think and what they see, and usually do not understand the games that others may play with how they present things or sugar coat messages.

This can take some getting used to and at first may seem rude, but it can be really refreshing to just hear people saying what they think.

Autistic people do not intend to cause offence by their bluntness, and most would be deeply upset if they did upset somebody, but it simply just does not occur to them to say anything other than what they are thinking.

Why would someone be asking for their views if they did not want to hear what they actually thought?

This means that once you are used to it, communicating with an autistic person can be a lot simpler than with some others, even if the autistic person is non-verbal and uses AAC communication.

Ideas and Problem Solving

Brain scans of autistic babies and neuro-typical babies taken in the same circumstances have shown that more synapses fire in the autistic brain than the neuro-typical. Put simply, autistic brains have a lot of thoughts and seldom shut down, even if the brain's owner is trying to relax and go to sleep!

This does not mean that autistic people are any more intelligent than others, but it does mean that they are often a good source of ideas and creativity.

This can be particularly helpful in problem solving, when lots of thoughts and ideas to pick from combined with a different way of seeing the world can lead to new approaches as a result of autism. Again, being non-verbal does not mean without ideas, which can be communicated using AAC or a non-verbal app.

Connections and memory

Autistic people frequently have excellent memories and the ability to make connections with other things.

An autistic brain may see a problem in terms of the core issues to be addressed and then realise that this is a similar problem to another but appears distinct because of a different context and situation.

For example, when considering how best to tile an irregular space in a bathroom, an autistic brain may be able to quickly see the space as a series of geometric shapes and work out how to fill those rather than thinking of it as a bathroom at all.



Details

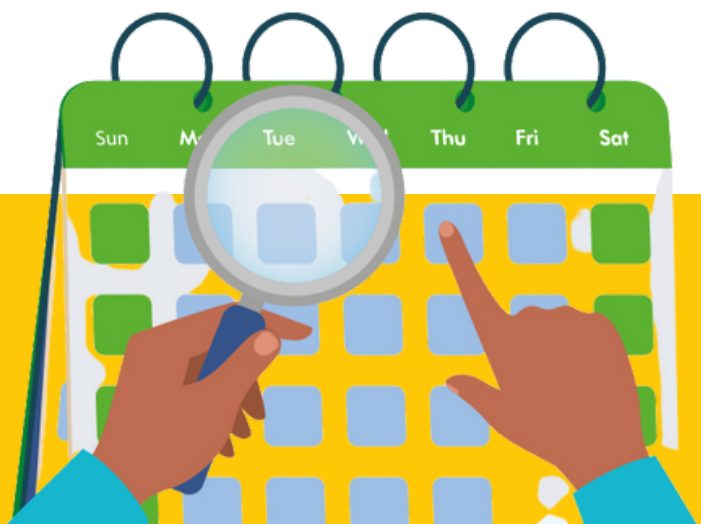
Details are important, and autistic people are often excellent at spotting and remembering them. They are good at seeing patterns that others may miss, and this helps with both noticing and remembering details.

Some autistic people may remember a huge amount of information and detail, such as all the specifications of a favourite car or all the songs by a favourite musician.

Routine

Routines are powerful. A lot of training for dealing with stressful situations, such as in the military or for emergency situations, is to make routines second nature so that when they have to be put into practice under pressure they come naturally and without thought.

Many autistic people rely on routines to manage large parts of their lives. The world can seem a very strange place to autistic people, so they establish routines to follow in their lives, so they do not have to continually work out how to cope with things that do not make sense to them.



They may have routines for making sure all the housework is done, for doing all they need to before leaving for work or school and so on.

These routines bring comfort and security, but it also means that autistic people that follow them are extremely reliable in these areas – they are not tempted to take short cuts or make random changes.

Encouraging original thinking in others

Autistic people can often be a catalyst for others to think about new approaches to situations and to think in different ways. So often things are done a particular way because they have always been done that way and nobody has thought to question why or consider if there is a better solution.

Autistic people start from a different place so may immediately question such situations when they first come across them, encouraging others to question things they may have otherwise continued to take for granted. Their alternative views and approaches may spark fresh ideas in others once assumed or traditional constraints have been removed.

Not influenced by social expectations

Many autistic people are used to being different. They may not always enjoy it and at times wish they could fit in more, but they will have spent much of their lives realising that they see and think about things in a different way. Combine this with their questioning nature and their desire for truth and authenticity, and they are much more likely to be their true selves than to feel obliged to follow social conventions or pressures. This can bring some much-needed freshness and openness into situations.

Autistic adults and anyone with non-verbal autism may well find much of life a struggle. But this is because the world is not designed for how their brains work, not because there is anything wrong with them. Autistic people frequently have amazing gifts, some of which have been described above. Combined with AAC and non-verbal apps where needed, autistic people have a huge positive contribution to make.

