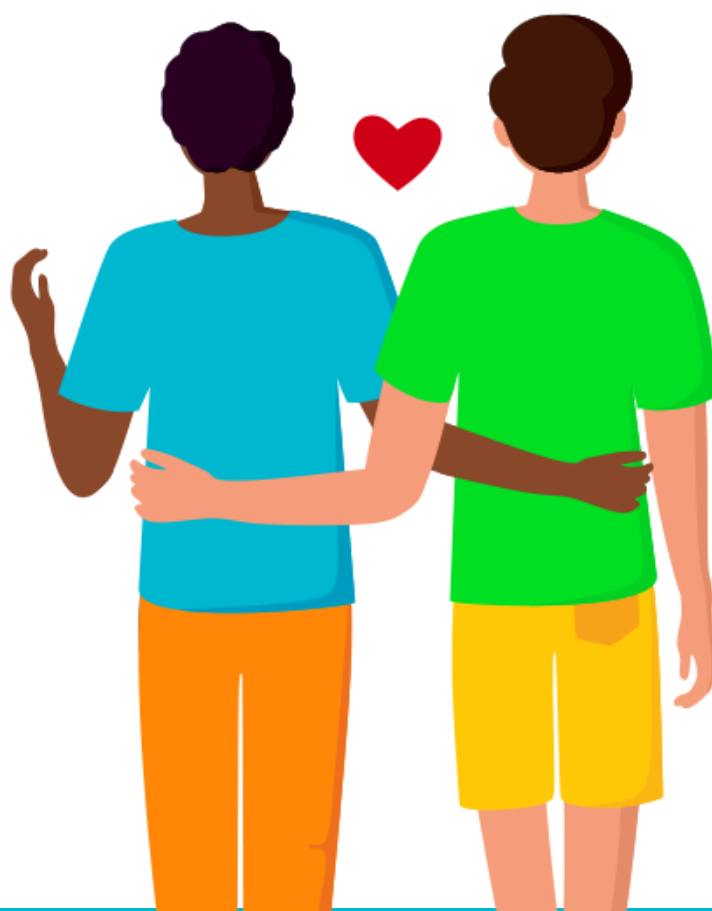


Autism and LGBTQ+: What are the challenges?



For many people, positive relationships provide happiness, fulfillment and a sense of belonging. Here we examine some of the unique challenges faced by individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) who are also LGBTQ+.

Being ASD and being LGBTQ+ each comes with its own set of challenges. So what impact is there for individuals who belong to both communities?



LGBTQ+ and autism

LGBTQ+ is an expression that covers a range of terms to describe someone's sexual orientation or gender identity. It stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer or questioning. The 'plus' represents identities such as intersex, asexual, agender, and pansexual.

A 2021 study by Cambridge university contradicted a common assumption that people with ASD are often uninterested in sexual or romantic relationships, and suggested they are, in fact, more likely to identify with a diverse range of sexual orientations than their non-autistic peers.

However, research also shows uncomfortable realities of being LGBTQ+. UK-based LGBTQ+ rights charity Stonewall states that only 46% of lesbian, gay and bi people, and 47% of trans people feel able to be open about their sexual orientation or gender identity to their family.



What challenges do autistic people who are LGBTQ+ face?

Family acceptance

Autistic people who are LGBTQ+ can struggle to find understanding within their own families and communities, leading to isolation and even rejection.

Navigating relationships

People with ASD often encounter difficulties in interpreting social cues and norms. Dating often relies on subtle forms of communication, non-verbal cues, and social expectations that can be difficult to decipher.

Awareness within the community

While the LGBTQ+ communities are generally accepting and supportive, there can still be limited awareness of ASD. Additionally, some LGBTQ+ events, such as Pride, may not be suitable for some people with ASD, especially those with sensory sensitivities or communication issues.



A sense of self

Autistic people who are LGBTQ+ may experience a sense of confusion or uncertainty about their own identities, as they navigate both their autism and their sexual or gender orientations. This internal struggle can lead to feelings of frustration and being misunderstood.

Mental health issues

Stereotypes and misconceptions about both autism and LGBTQ+ identities can lead to misunderstandings and prejudice. The combination of discrimination and internal struggles can equate to higher rates of anxiety, depression, and self-esteem issues often found in both autistic and LGBTQ+ communities.

Ideas for autistic individuals who identify as LGBTQ+

Despite the challenges posed by the intersection of autism and LGBTQ+ identities, there are so many ways to connect with like-minded individuals.

Celebrate Pride, your way

Whether it's an online celebration, a gathering with friends, attending a Pride event, or simply an item of clothing that reflects an individual style, encourage

loved ones to find their own way of celebrating their identity.

Explore creators

Help loved ones find content creators who resonate with them. This can open up new discoveries, networks and online communities.

Find communities

There are many LGBTQ+ communities 'in real life' too that can feel safer for people with ASD. These may include cafes, bookshops or board game groups.

By recognising and addressing our unique challenges, we can help create a more accepting and inclusive environment for people with ASD who are also members of LGBTQ+ communities.

