

A speech about what Autism means to me

by Jamie Bullock

For those who don't know about me being on the autistic spectrum, you're about to find out as I share a positive speech in which I will express my experiences of being on the spectrum.

A person with a disability is not a negative thing to think about or to be around. They might forget things now and then, like manners or properly introducing themselves or even someone's name.

Being autistic isn't something that should be seen as a threat or an excuse. We would like you to be sympathetic with what we're talking about, our feelings or stuff we've done or enjoy doing. Some people are kind, patient and show sympathy towards us, but others just aren't.

A verbal person who is autistic doesn't want to be left out and alone, they want to be able to participate in things too. Being left out or feeling unwanted is a miserable experience. People with disabilities might be a bit different, but that's no excuse for ignoring them.

If someone with Autism were to ask someone a question in a friendly way, it is important to understand that they aren't trying to be rude or annoying.

Personally I wouldn't say it's a negative thing whatsoever living with autism, particularly if you are verbal. It must be much harder if you are non-verbal or don't speak English.

People on the spectrum have different behaviours and may act in a different way to what is considered "normal". Many people on the spectrum want to try new things. Some have jobs and even have their own homes and some may have special talents, whereas others don't know what they want.

Personally I can express my feelings by writing them down on paper or typing them up on a computer, which is easier for me to try and make other

people understand how I am feeling. Aspergers Syndrome is similar to Autism. People with Aspergers or Autism may want to be in a relationship, but that's another story.

Now for me, how would I describe Autism?

Well to me I would say it's definitely not a thing I would hide from anyone. It is something I want to explain to people, and tell them what being autistic means to me. For those who don't know it yet, I am on the spectrum and I also have Asperger Syndrome.

If something was to go wrong suddenly, or something happened that I didn't like or there was too much drama, or too many people were all talking to me or asking me questions at the same time or if I feel stressed, or tired sometimes I just can't take it anymore.

It's like an overload and there is too much pressure which suddenly causes an explosion inside me. I have sometimes had a meltdown and lost my temper, which I always regretted later.

Sometimes I think of the main character Christopher from "The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time". If I were to do something by accident, it isn't my fault at the end of the day, it's just a mistake I made.

We should forgive and learn from our mistakes and errors. Even though we can't get on with everybody or be everyone's friend, it's just the way it is.

Another thing to remember is to be careful who we choose as our friends. We don't want to get out of line, jump to conclusions or do something we'd regret later on.

This could mean watching out for people who are bad or might be unkind to others. That might leave us with nowhere to go, but come off the rails and into a trap.

Some people with Autism are afraid of loud noises and crowded places etc. Whereas that sort of thing doesn't really bother me now.

When I approach people and try to start a conversation, they are sometimes busy or not interested. However some people are accepting of me and willing to chat.

Although I'd like people take an interest in me and what I have to say, it's not a competition to make them be my friend.

One thing I do struggle a lot with is eye contact. I find eye contact a little creepy when I'm looking into someone's eyes. Thankfully I don't have nightmares about it though.

I can be a bit shy early on, especially in a group situation. To overcome that I sometimes get a bit loud and egotistical. I don't mean to be like that but I can't help it so I try to stay calm while thinking it through.

Now I'd like to share my own experiences and thoughts about Autism.

It was in early 2005, aged 8, when I discovered I had it, when I was reading a sentence about it. Occasionally there were times when I behaved in such a way that I got into trouble, (or I had my ups and downs).

It has taken me time to realize what I was like back then which was very different to how I am now. I can still be a little bit egotistical still though and I do occasionally land myself into small scrapes.

When I was very young, my Mum tried for years to find a school specialising in Autism for me (as there were none in my home-town). She eventually managed to get me into one that was 2 and a half hours from where we lived.

Back then, I could be a bit stubborn and refuse a few chores or lessons or get fed up of the same thing all the time. I was afraid of the loud noises made by some of the other students at my old school, some of whom were non-verbal.

I didn't always get on with the male staff, and I didn't enjoy my old school a lot towards the end (around 2012). Mainly because of students taking advantage of me, or some of the staff being too strict or a bit harsh. Since then the staff have seen that I've changed my ways and pulled myself

together and some have even praised me for who I am today.

I sometimes meet people who tease me because I am Autistic but I know it's best for me not to get worked up about these things. Others may have their own things to share with me. And there are people older than me who knew what I was like back then, when I was little and bouncy, as opposed to the mature grown-up young man I have since become.

Still to this day, I can behave strangely at times - sometimes I talk to myself a lot, when I'm on my own or when I'm on my devices or even when I'm watching something on TV or my DVD Player, even when I'm playing a video game. When I'm on camera doing some pretend acting or when I'm with people, it can prove to be challenging.

On social media I sometimes post comments on some of the users posts. Some of them give positive feedback or some praise me in return. On YouTube I comment on any railway/train related videos and it is really nice when the user replies positively with some information like a thanks or shows me how it was done.

I realise it might take time before I can be really active on social media, but meanwhile I find myself wondering what I could do to achieve my hopes and aspirations later on in life, and I appreciate that I will still need help and support from my parents and other grown-ups.

Sometimes when I'm learning new things or I'm in lessons at college, I do tend to rush a lot and make mistakes. I try to take my time revising and luckily I have a staff member and a teacher to help me to try and work out the right answer.

I really REALLY don't want to make too many mistakes and fail miserably in the process. So sometimes I do have to spend more time thinking things through properly, with support if needed, so that I get it right in the end.

I tend to eat too much, but it's something that I'm working on, to be healthier and build a good body. To accomplish that I know that I have to really cut down on treats and junk food.

Another thing I want to talk about is relationships. I had a few relationships in my previous college and most of them went okay. However there were some ups and downs now and then. Nowadays though when I think about having a girlfriend, I find it hard to know how to get into a relationship or how to maintain one.

I feel nervous and a bit scared about asking a girl out. Some just want to be friends, and others are probably not interested or are already in a relationship. I think there are some dating sites that might be useful for me to try, but I don't know if that would work.

The most important thing is to be careful what you say to a girl. Some girls have caused drama and then the relationship ends badly, like some of those drama shows and soaps like Made in Chelsea or Emmerdale.

For example rich people or couples might start arguing, or spread rumours, and secrets and stuff.

What I'm trying to emphasize is that relationships take time to build up and it is worth being patient and waiting for the right person.

Sometimes I look online for things to do or places to visit, or sometimes there's a specific item I want to buy. I'd need support to go to an event or a new place and help from my parents if I want to buy something online. Occasionally I go into shops and around the area to see interesting things, which gives me an idea for when I get a place of my own like a flat or a house.

Like many other people, there are loads of things in life I want to accomplish.

It is great to have freedom as long as we stay safe. Some places are safer than others so we have to be really careful and not too trusting. You also have to be really careful with people you meet as they aren't always decent or trustworthy.

No-one should plan revenge or trick someone by doing something bad.

Sometimes I don't worry as much as I should about safety, or about the area I'm in, or the people that are around, and I need to be reminded that

not everyone is safe to be around.

Luckily though there are Clubs, College, Work etc. where there are people we can trust.

One day I plan to write a really well written speech about what Autism means to me, maybe even copy some of the dialogue from this speech, and go back to my old school in Dorset and read it out in front of the staff. Some years ago another student who was there when first I started and later left, did something like that.

It doesn't matter who you are, whether you have a disability or not, don't be afraid to express your feelings, spoken or written, even if you have a disability like Downs Syndrome say.

I'm a bit of a slow learner, but it takes time to understand these things and we all have to overcome our fears and learn to express our emotions. In the end, problems are solved and solutions are found. Just please don't hide from your fears forever.

If you want to communicate with someone, remember they might be busy, or even have their own problems, but there will always be someone you can turn to who will try to understand how you are feeling and help you try and find a solution to your problems.

It's also nice to know that there are staff to listen to us if there has been some drama or something.

Counselling as well as emotions and well-being groups, have helped me to overcome my problems. Some of them didn't work that quickly and took time, but they did in the end.

My words can get a bit delayed sometimes, so try to be patient with me as I'm not one to stand any nonsense.

I think teasing someone with autism is negative. Instead help them to understand that they aren't being annoying and that way there won't be any regret.

Some people are eager to learn lessons and go forward, but others will just have to wait some time. Some of them use money, but tend to spend too much and need to be reminded that they can't get overdrawn too quickly.

So in conclusion I may still behave in a strange way sometimes, but that's who I am today.

I may still think my way is better, however I try my hardest to realise I'm equal to everyone else.

I may have made some mistakes with people in the past. I have occasionally lost friendships with people that I didn't understand, whereas others have forgiven me. I still think of mistakes I made and wish I could fix them.

I really wish to apologise to those I've acted badly towards in the past. I guess some things just get into my head and get the better of me. I wonder if some people will ever be able to trust in me again. I do hope they can see that I have changed and are able to forgive me. (Although I understand some may never do so)

Some of them can use social media, but will need advising to be safe online (which I learned the hard way).

Remember not everyone is going to be our friend. That's the way life is and we have to deal with it, but it's alright when those that are on your side show how much they care about you, even if some people don't.

Also wise words to remember, is that nobody with a disability like Autism or Asperger Syndrome should ever be teased or taken advantage of, no matter what age they are.

To wrap up this speech I want to share a few questions with you:

- 1. Did you know anything about Autism before today?
- 2. What are your thoughts or opinions about Autism now?
- 3. Do you know anyone who is on the Autistic Spectrum?

I would be interested in hearing your views.

One final thing I'd like to say is;
Thank You very much for listening to this speech
(Or for reading this)
And thank you for your patience.

From me
Jamie Bullock