



# WHAT IS AUTISM?

*according to autistic Individuals*

*Autism is a developmental disability that affects how we experience the world around us. Every autistic person experiences autism differently, but there are some things that many of us have in common. Including:*

## Think Differently

“We may have very strong interests. We might be great problem-solvers, or pay close attention to detail. It might take us longer to think about things. We might have trouble with executive functioning (figuring out how complete tasks, or making decisions).”

“Routines are important for many autistic people. It can be hard for us to deal with surprises or unexpected changes. When we get overwhelmed, we might not be able to process our thoughts, feelings, and surroundings, which can make us lose control of our body.”

## Experience Senses Differently

“We might be extra sensitive to things like bright lights or loud sounds. We might have trouble understanding what we hear or what our senses tell us.”

“We might not notice if we are in pain or hungry. We might do the same movement over and over again. This is called “stimming,” and it helps us regulate our senses.”

## Move Differently

“We might have trouble with fine motor skills or coordination. It can feel like our minds and bodies are disconnected. It can be hard for us to start or stop moving. Speech can be extra hard because it requires a lot of coordination.”

“We might not be able to control how loud our voices are, or we might not be able to speak at all—even though we can understand what other people say.”

## Communicate Differently

“We might talk using echolalia (repeating things we have heard before), or by scripting out what we want to say. Some autistic people use Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) to communicate (spelling on a letter board, or pointing to pictures on an iPad).”

“Not every autistic person can talk, but we all have important things to say.”

## Socialize Differently

“We might not understand or follow social rules. We might be more direct than other people. Eye contact might make us uncomfortable. We might have a hard time controlling our body language or facial expressions, which can confuse non-autistic people.

“We might not be able to guess how people feel. This doesn’t mean we don’t care how people feel! We just need people to tell us how they feel so we don’t have to guess.”

## Live Differently

“It can take a lot of energy to live in a society built for non-autistic people. Parts of being autistic can make doing those things too hard (ex. cooking, cleaning, working, going out). We might be able to do things on our own sometimes, but need help other times. We might need to take more breaks so we can recover our energy.”

*This is the Autistic Self Advocacy Network (ASAN)’s short definition of autism. If you want to know more visit their website at [autisticadvocacy.org](http://autisticadvocacy.org)*

