

## Supporting Autistic Women

### World Autism Awareness Day 2018

#### Background Information

Most autistic women are either afraid to disclose their diagnosis through fear of discrimination or are unable to access a diagnostic assessment, often because of high costs.

Most advocates for children are mothers. Please be aware that the mother of an autistic child may be autistic herself.

When an autistic woman is not able to explain her support needs or ask for help, she is limited in her ability to advocate for herself or for her children.

It is important to support girls and women in seeking diagnosis so that they learn strategies which help them express their opinions and needs confidently and positively.

#### How do you recognise autistic women?

A woman may be struggling with autistic characteristics when she appears to demonstrate one or more of the following behaviours:

- Blocks communication and/or frequently misinterprets non-verbal cues
- Is detached from interactions with others
- Rejects offers of help instantly
- Displays fear or anxiety in communication by arguing strongly and/or raising her voice
- Displays unusual and repetitive mannerisms.

Girls and women may appear to occupy the same social roles in society as their peers but at the same time, they may differ in the way they express their gender, explore and communicate their interests or present themselves to the world.

#### How do you support autistic women?

- Give her time to answer questions. She may have difficulty following your meaning. Check in to ensure that your meaning has been understood.
- Use simple sentences. Avoiding similes and metaphors.
- Give paperwork two or 3 days in advance of appointments.
- Understand that a request for help with housework or managing money is not just being lazy. It is related to her ability to organise her life.

- When explaining processes or sequences of instructions, create a flow chart showing the sequence of events, who to contact at each stage and what that person can do to help.
- Ask her about the adjustments she needs to engage more effectively with your organisation. These are usually very simple (eg, turning off fluorescent lights).
- Engage the woman by talking about her interests and skills.

#### **More Information:**

Multiple and Intersecting Forms of Discrimination Against Autistic Women

<http://www.australianautismalliance.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Autistic-Women.pdf>

Autism Women Matter <http://www.autismwomenmatter.org.uk/survey/>

Yellow Ladybugs <https://www.yellowladybugs.com.au/advocacy>

Girls and Women on the Autism Spectrum

[https://www.autismspectrum.org.au/sites/default/files/Factsheet\\_Girls%20and%20women%20of%20the%20autism%20spectrum\\_20170401.pdf](https://www.autismspectrum.org.au/sites/default/files/Factsheet_Girls%20and%20women%20of%20the%20autism%20spectrum_20170401.pdf)

Girls and Women on the Autism Spectrum

<http://www.amaze.org.au/girls-and-women-on-the-autism-spectrum/>

#### **About the author:**

**Geraldine Robertson** is a parent, professional and has an ASD diagnosis herself. Geraldine has supported autistic students from Early Learning to University level in matters such as life transitions, workplace support, work experience, IEP meetings, growth coaching, social skills development and daily living skills. Geraldine also has an interest in Mindfulness meditation as a means of overcoming fears and managing anxiety and depression. Geraldine is Secretary of the Autistic Self Advocacy Network Australia and New Zealand (ASAN AUNZ) and Chairperson of Autism Tasmania Inc. ASAN and Autism Tasmania are both partners of the Australian Autism Alliance and Geraldine serves as the ASAN representative.