



Autism for Beginners

Surfing the Spectrum

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**Surfing the
Spectrum**

Jimmy Huston



Hello.

This book is meant to be simple.

It is merely an introduction for those who are encountering autism, whether as an individual or a family member or an acquaintance.

Autism is such a wide-ranging subject that it can't easily be reduced to an introductory level.

The far side of the spectrum is outside our reach, so this book will address the closer side—in a non-clinical way.

**PARENTS!
READ THIS NOW!**

If you have an infant or toddler who you think shows symptoms of autism, close this book and find a professional to evaluate your child right away.

This is important because the earlier a child is diagnosed, the better the chances that the child can be helped—and waiting lists for evaluation can mean a months-long delay in getting help.

Do it now. The book will still be here after you’ve made your appointment.

If you’re wondering if you may be on the autism spectrum, welcome.

This book is dedicated to you.

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please send an email to *office@cosworthpublishing.com*.

(If there are things in this book that you want your parents to know, show those pages to them.)



Don't worry if you think you might be on the autism spectrum.

Despite what you may have heard, that's not a bad place to be.

Autism isn't a negative. It's a blend. A collage. A symphony.

It's a story. Like any story, there are highs and lows. There are peaks and valleys, obstacles and downhill runs. There is conflict.

Autism is a journey. And it's a battle. There are heroes and there are villains. There are surprises and there are disappointments. There is humor. There is heartbreak. There is growth.

Yes, if you're autistic, you're a story. Many challenges will come along. Enjoy the ride.

But don't worry. No matter what you've heard, it's certainly not all bad.

So go ahead. Read this book.

First, you'll learn what autism is, and what it's not.

Then we'll talk about the spectrum thing, and Asperger's. It's a little confusing, but we'll try to make sense of it.

You probably know what autism *feels* like, but that's in here, too.

Who "gets" autism? Well, that's covered a bit, too. (Hint: it's not contagious.)

What should you look for to see if you have it? That covers a lot of ground, but we'll try.

Maybe you'd like to know what causes autism. And what can help.

What about your future? You're only a kid for so long. After that, what's life with autism going to be like when you grow up?

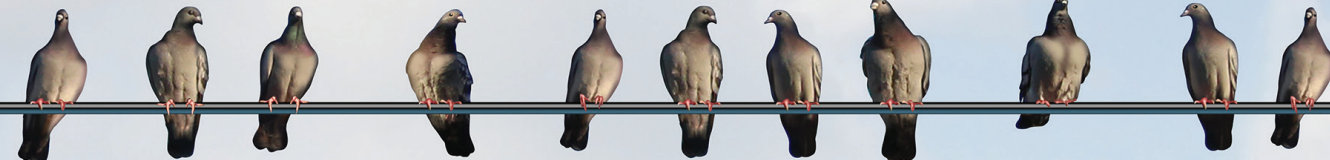
Then there's the really big question. What's it like for an autistic person to have a family?



Maybe you just want to be left alone.



Maybe you want friends, but you have trouble connecting with them.



Maybe you have trouble getting others to understand how you feel.



Maybe you're interested in different things than others are.

Problems getting along with others are common with autism. It's not just you.
It's one of the most common characteristics of people on the spectrum.



Good news! You are not alone.



Today, one in thirty-six children are born with some degree of autism.

That means two of these kids would have it. Can you tell which ones? That's right. You can't.

What Are Autism?

Autism is not singular. It's many different behaviors, lumped together into one big pile.

Autism is just a word—a name—for that assortment of symptoms or behaviors. It's about how you act. Your behavior. Perhaps your abilities.

There's a wide variety of signs, symptoms, and diagnoses of autism. Some are more common, such as difficulty with social interactions, or having obsessive interests, or repeating behaviors. Others are less common. Also, the degree of these symptoms can vary widely.

Everybody is different, and there are so many different behaviors that one word—autism—wasn't enough to describe them. Such a variety has to be described as a range of things—an infinite series of differences—a spectrum.

The term Autism Spectrum Disorder—sometimes called ASD—was created, and it's often referred to as simply “the spectrum.” That includes the prior meaning of autism, which was generally considered to be negative and severe, and adds a much wider range of behavior and actions, including positive ones. It also envelops the older term “Asperger's syndrome” which is still preferred by some because it is defined by milder characteristics.

At one end of the spectrum, behaviors are barely noticeable. At the other end, behaviors are undeniable. Most people are somewhere in the middle.



When a big word like autism—that includes many meanings—is replaced by a bigger word that has even more meanings, it can be confusing. Now the words “autism” and “spectrum” are usually considered interchangeable, and Asperger's is still in the mix.

When parents are told their child has Autism Spectrum *Disorder* they may be alarmed. Perhaps they should be told something more like, “Your child thinks and acts differently and may have special or unusual abilities, skills, and interests.”

If the term “Autism Spectrum Disorder” is intended to be inclusive of all types and degrees of autism, then it's fair to say that the word “disorder” is prejudicial. Some people understandably object to it. (If everyone else were labeled with “Average Neurotypical Disorder” there would certainly be objections to that.)

Not only are there many autistic behaviors with varying levels, some people have extraordinary gifts and talent. Where do you belong?

So, you know your idiosyncrasies. Do you think you're on the spectrum? Maybe?



You are most certainly not alone.

The Center for Disease Control says that in the U.S. today 1 in 36 kids are born with autism. The World Health Organization says it's 1 in 100 worldwide. With a world population of eight billion, you don't have to do the math. That's a lot of autism.

Many people are starting to find out, figure out, and admit that they are autistic.

It's not a curse. Today we know there are more people on the spectrum who are average—or *above average*—in intelligence, than people who have below-average intelligence.

The simple fact that you're reading this is already a pretty good sign.

One way to think of autism is that it's simply a word describing things that you do, a label for behaviors. It's not a disease, or an infection, or a broken bone. It's not caused by a germ, or a vaccine, or something you ate. It's caused by the way that you think.

Our brains can be thought of as the organ of the mind—or perhaps the gland that secretes thoughts—but *your* brain processes things differently. That's really what autism is.

Your brain may tell you to do something unusual, or to do something repeatedly. It may make you fascinated with things that no one else notices.

And, your brain may not care what people think about what you're doing. Well, that's one of the symptoms of autism.

Maybe you just want everyone to leave you alone. That's a symptom, too.

Do you feel awkward in social situations? Yep. Another symptom.

But, one or two symptoms don't qualify you as autistic. It takes a combination of behaviors, evaluated by a doctor or therapist, to give an informed diagnosis.

Even though you can't diagnose yourself, you can recognize patterns of your behavior that can tell you to seek the opinion of a professional.

Do some noises bother you? Or too much light?

Do you have thoughts and feelings that you can't get across to others?

Maybe you can't think of anything you want to say.

Maybe you'd rather be where you are, doing what you're already doing, than move on to somewhere else to do whatever someone else thinks you should be doing.

Are you puzzled that everyone else has trouble with math, and it just seems so clear to you?

Are details very, very, very important to you? All details!

Do you need more time to do it? (Whatever "it" is.)

What's everybody laughing about? Is it you?

Maybe you don't find talking (or listening) to people easy. Your attention moves away from them pretty quickly.

What is it about things that repeat? Over and over and over and over and over.

Do you hate change? All change!

Why do you have this book?

So why can't they all just leave you alone?

Got stress?

You get the idea. It's a lot. Everyone has their own personal form of autism.



For years, autism was only associated with the disabling qualities of the deep end of the spectrum. Down at the shallow end anything positive was ignored or attributed to something else.

Among the millions of people with autism, approximately a third have above-average intelligence, and many people are surprised to learn that some of the brightest minds of all time have been autistic.

Sometimes genius is just another aspect of the spectrum, and many different positive behaviors are considered symptoms of autism. They are typically accompanied by other symptoms that are considered negative—but are they symptoms, or are they simply side effects of a different thinking brain?

For instance, Albert Einstein was one of the great thinkers of all time and had a massive impact on physics thanks to his obsessive interests and brilliant, concentrated thinking. But, he also had difficulties in social relationships, late language development, problems communicating, and echolalia (repeating things). Were they just side effects? He sure kept functioning.

The brilliant artist, inventor, engineer, and scientist Leonardo da Vinci's intense creative focus was mixed with a lack of discipline and sleep issues. Side effects.

Super-composer Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart composed incredible new music, but he was supersensitive to loud sounds, had a short attention span, and repeated odd facial expressions. On one occasion, he was seen somersaulting over tables, meowing like a cat.

Another master artist, Michelangelo Buonarroti, had an unparalleled career as a painter, sculptor, architect, and poet—despite limited interests, poor social skills, and temper issues.

Many experts look back on these geniuses as people with autism. There's no blood test, chromosome test, x-ray, or autism gland, because autism is behavior, more than biology. It's observable, and when people are doing great things, other people watch them—and they make comments and notes.

The sum of these historical observations—assuming they are true—can be a pretty valid description of autism. And, it's no insult.

It's an explanation. It's why they could do these things and the rest of us can't. Their achievements are no less valuable or incredible if they were on the spectrum. They provided the earthquakes and breakthroughs that defined important moments of our history. There are times when autism should be celebrated, not denigrated.

What about you? Maybe you have some special interest at which you excel—something that you spend more time at than most people, earning you expertise in that area.

Maybe you don't listen to people much of the time, because you've got more interesting things on your mind. It could be something as complex as the universe, like autistic astronomer Carl Sagan.

Or, perhaps you're extremely shy like Eminem or introverted like Courtney Love. They found their way, boldly expressing themselves to millions of fans through their music.

Do you rock back and forth, or speak in a monotone? That's okay. They say the same thing about Bill Gates, and he did pretty well because he is highly intelligent and has a prodigious memory.

What if it's your nature to be quiet and withdrawn, but part of you wants to perform? Like Dan Akroyd and Sir Anthony Hopkins.

Are you extremely obsessive and ritualistic? Hans Christian Andersen was, and he was considered socially immature and a loner, but he was certainly a great storyteller.

The spectrum is filled with success stories—people who struggled with different traits of autism, but found their own path. You can do that, too.

CONGRATULATIONS!

Certificate of Autistic Excellence

This is to certify that

YOUR NAME HERE



**is recognized as exhibiting all of the admirable qualities
of a member in good standing on the Austim Spectrum
and is entitled to all of the rights and duties thereof.**



**Bearers of this certificate, after reading this book, are hereby qualified to
receive all of the privileges and perks of being a citizen on the spectrum.**