Could I Be Autistic? A Neurodiversity-Affirming Self-Reflection Guide for Adults

Many adults begin wondering if they might be autistic later in life, often because they've finally encountered language or stories that *feel familiar.* Have you masked for years without realizing it? Have social interactions, sensory environments, or expectations of "normal" always felt a little off, even if you couldn't name why? Or maybe you've always had deep, specific interests and unique ways of thinking that others didn't understand. Whatever brings you here, this guide was created to help you reflect on your experiences in a gentle, curious, and affirming way. There are *no right answers*, so be honest with yourself.

Autism is a brain-based difference in how people experience the world, communicate, and relate to others. It often comes with strengths like deep focus, creativity, unique problem-solving, and passionate interests, along with challenges such as sensory overwhelm, social burnout, or difficulty with unexpected changes. Many autistic adults (especially women, nonbinary people, and those from marginalized backgrounds) weren't identified in childhood because autism has historically been misunderstood and under-recognized in anyone who doesn't fit outdated stereotypes. Many autistic people have found ways to cope, mask, or succeed, sometimes at great personal cost.

Here are some questions to consider as to whether autism might be worth exploring. You can jot down thoughts, circle or star what resonates, or simply pause and notice your internal responses.

1. Social and Communication Style

- Do you find social rules confusing or exhausting to figure out?
- Do you prefer one-on-one conversations or deep connections over group dynamics?
- Have you ever felt like you're "performing" in social situations or unsure how to be your full self?
- Do you have difficulty with small talk or reading between the lines?

2. Sensory Experiences

- Are you especially sensitive to sounds, lights, textures, or smells?
- Do you get easily overwhelmed in noisy or chaotic environments?
- Do certain sensations (like soft fabrics, humming sounds, or repetitive motion) soothe you deeply?

3. Routines and Predictability

- Do you feel anxious or disoriented when plans suddenly change?
- Do you rely on routines or specific ways of doing things to feel regulated?
- Do you have "just right" ways of completing tasks that feel calming or necessary?

4. Interests and Focus

- Do you have deep, immersive interests that you return to over and over again?
- Do you get excited about learning everything there is to know about a topic?
- Have others described you as “intense” or “obsessive” about things you care about?

5. Emotional and Internal Experience

- Do you often feel misunderstood or out of sync with others?
- Have you been told you’re “too sensitive” or “too much”?
- Do you struggle with burnout, anxiety, or shutdowns that are hard to explain?

6. Masking and Identity

- Have you developed personas or strategies to “fit in,” even when they don’t feel authentic?
- Do you ever feel like people don’t see the real you?
- Have you changed yourself to match what others expect, even at a cost?

7. Pathological Demand Avoidance

- Do you experience intense internal resistance or anxiety when you’re asked or expected to do something, even if it’s something you *want* to do?
- Do you often feel a strong need to be in control of situations, especially when you are feeling overwhelmed or anxious?
- Do you strongly dislike being perceived (watched) by others?

What Now?

If many of these questions resonate with you, it might be worth exploring further. That doesn’t mean you *have* to seek an autism diagnosis, but for many people, an affirming evaluation provides clarity, self-understanding, and relief.

You might consider:

- Reading about autism from neurodivergent voices
- Talking with others who’ve gone through a late diagnosis
- Talking with close friends or family members to get their perspective.
- Exploring whether a neurodiversity-affirming psychologist feels like a good next step

There is no one way to be autistic — and no one way to explore your identity. Whether you pursue an evaluation, connect with community, or simply carry this awareness forward, you have the capacity to do what’s best for you. If you choose to pursue an evaluation, we would be honored to work with you. Reach out to admin@helpandhealingcenter.com for more information.