

How did you feel once it was confirmed that you were autistic?

We asked a number of autistic people from a variety of backgrounds and ages across Wales how they felt once it was confirmed that they were autistic and this is what they said.

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My diagnosis means I finally have a better understanding of myself. It helps me understand that some of the ways I interact with the world and others are okay, and those that I struggled with, why and how I struggled with them so much. I find it easier to try to set boundaries with people and be comfortable with my own limitations.

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Autism diagnosis set me free. I decided to come out as a writer because I firmly believe that if those of us who are on the autistic spectrum share our experiences openly, it helps other autistic people and it also helps neurotypical people better understand us and our behaviour.

Looking back at the last several years of my life, I have been thrown into navigating the most challenging aspects and life experiences, and there has been a complete cracking of all masks. The most significant benefit of this process is that I am learning again, like a child, to re-evaluate everything with curiosity and enthusiasm.

My life has been completely transformed, so I am now dedicating my life to ongoing discovery and transformation that can profoundly help other Autistic people's lives.

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My autism diagnosis means that I have a better understanding of myself. I have been diagnosed with Autism since I was 12. At the time I was on a transitional project called Real Opportunities, on the project I attended a course called Autism About Me? This was me fully understanding my diagnosis and coming to terms with it.

During comprehensive school I was told due to my autism I had a lack of understanding and at that moment in time a formal qualification would not be achievable such as a GCSE.

However with the right support I have always said anything is achievable, I finished comprehensive school with a hand full of GCSE's including an entry level in Spanish.

After school I entered voluntary work and from that I gained paid employment in my later years. I am now 26 and Autism is a huge passion of mine I talk to young people about my journey likewise to parents and carers and I have always had a motto which is A is not for Autism **A is for Achievement.**

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Learning I was Autistic from research I had done and interacting with the Autistic community online was a revelation. It allowed me to recover at the age of 50 from Autistic burnout and to better help my sons. Although it was nice to get an official confirmation that I was Autistic, the medical basis of understanding of what it means to be Autistic was stigmatising and very depressing. Rather than base an understanding on what scientists have, often erroneously, concluded about Autism, it would be so much better to hear from Autistic people about their lives. It took me a couple of years to overcome the stigma of being given a 'diagnosis' and to understand from the Autistic community that each individual is unique and can't be summed up by a list of deficiencies in a medical text book.

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Having a diagnosis has helped me receive an educational statement of needs. I am now in college and have a dedicated Learning Support Assistant. Honestly I still feel different and an outsider even with a diagnosis as we live in a world not catered for people who are deemed to be 'different'.

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Growing up in the 1970s and 80s as an unidentified autistic child and teenager was incredibly challenging. I learned from a very early age to mask and to just get on with life. But knowing you simply don't belong and not understanding why is painful and damaging. The combination of every day difficulties, extreme anxiety and a ubiquitous sense of complete failure left me feeling worthless and broken. Simply not good enough.

Realising I was in fact autistic all along was a complete game changer: almost overnight the quest to 'fix myself' stopped. I am learning to switch off that unkind, self-critical internal voice and I now have a self-awareness and understanding that finally makes sense of everything in my life. I think the word I am looking for is Acceptance. I am not broken, I am autistic. I belong to a different tribe and that is ok.

Since becoming a self realised autistic woman 3 years ago I have fully immersed myself in the autistic community and love chatting with my new autistic friends. We understand each other in a way I have never experienced previously, and this new found awareness has also helped me with my NT relationships.

Finally receiving a formal autism diagnosis at 52 has given me the validation I didn't know I was seeking.

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I feel it meant to me that people understood me. It made me see that it wasn't that I couldn't do something, it was the fact that I did it in a slightly different way. I feel that the diagnosis gave me confidence to know that I could achieve my goals, with the right support which was available to me.

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Receiving a diagnosis didn't miraculously magic my autism away, but it gave me that deeper understanding and the permission to take the time to understand myself and seek out others who would understand me, receiving my diagnosis allowed me to find my identity as an Autistic adult and allowed me to connect with my peers in the Autistic Community. I have learnt so much from them.

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My autism diagnosis means that I have a better understanding of myself. I have only had my diagnosis for just over 4 months and I'm still learning what it means to me. I feel that I now understand why certain situations, like the supermarket shop on a Saturday, are exhausting and am taking steps to make changes to routines which are beneficial to me and how my brain processes things. My diagnosis has helped me understand why I struggled with certain aspects of my job, particularly planning and organising. My line manager has been very supportive and has put steps in place to support me such as weekly catch-ups. I am learning to take notice of how I'm feeling and thinking more about what I have planned in the day or week and ensuring that I have enough time to recover from energy draining activities.

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Receiving the positive diagnosis for autism has overall been very worthwhile and has answered many questions I've asked about myself over the years and has indeed given me the greater understanding of self that I sought.

However, despite the overall positives of receiving my diagnosis from the North Wales Integrated Autism Service, there have been negatives as well. One such negative was that being diagnosed as Autistic raised new questions about my pre-diagnosed experiences, relationships and travails, in fact the whole of my pre-diagnosed life. Furthermore, the diagnostic process used to determine a person's autism status requires a very detailed examination of one's early life, which for many older Autistic people, was very traumatic due to a lack of understanding of the condition decades ago.

For me, like many Autists diagnosed in later life, reawakening traumatic memories that had been repressed for so long, realising that I was indeed 'different' and deciding who I 'revealed' my autism status to raised difficult questions that I now see I was not equipped to answer, unfortunately, neither was anybody else. With the oft-mentioned Autist's tendency to procrastinate and hyper-focus, the period following diagnosis is a time that Autists, their families, friends, and the professionals that support them need to monitor the mental health of the newly diagnosed Autist.

Several years on from diagnosis, I'm glad I decided to gain a better understanding of myself and that I am now part of a community of people that 'get me'. Diagnosis has allowed me to enjoy the positives that come from being Autistic and given me the tools to ameliorate the more negative impacts that being Autistic has.