

What made you begin to feel you were autistic?

We asked a number of autistic people from a variety of backgrounds and ages across Wales why they felt that they may be autistic and this is what they said.

“For 15 years I felt different, and I didn't know why. I sought an autism diagnosis mainly because I wanted to feel that there was a meaning for why I always felt like an outsider and felt alien on this earth. I also needed more support at school. If I had a diagnosis, it would be easier to get an educational statement of need. Unfortunately it is difficult to get much support without a diagnosis. It took 15 years for me to receive a diagnosis because I was academic and was really good at masking. But the professionals couldn't see the toll that having to act neurotypical was having on me.

“At Uni, I studied Social Inclusion and during a discussion on Inclusion, one of my lecturers made a few comments, I forget what exactly, and I thought “that would explain a few things” and so asked to be assessed. Prior to this point, I wasn't good at self-reflection and had limited self-awareness of how I came across to others, even though I struggled with making and maintaining friendships.

“ I always knew I was different and didn't fit in. I have spent my life on the outside looking in. My whole career has been in Social Services so I always talked myself out of getting assessed for autism, as the known criteria never seemed a good fit. It was listening to an open and honest conversation between 2 autistic people that finally opened my eyes: I recognised myself in everything they described. That conversation gave me the confidence to refer myself to IAS for assessment. I will always be grateful to them for changing my life 😊

“ I think one of the main reasons to seek a diagnosis is the benefit of professional advice and support throughout the time in education. By having a diagnosis, this gives the individual and their family access to services and knowledge that they may not have had if the diagnosis had not been given. Another advantage of having a diagnosis is gaining a better understanding of the spectrum.

“ I had been working in an autism service for a few years and I kept listening to autistic people talking about their experiences and I kept thinking, I do that or that sounds familiar. I kept thinking back through my life and experiences that I'd had and thinking that sounds like something an autistic person would do. These thoughts kept coming to me, and at the age of 39 I decided I needed to know one way or another if I was autistic. I didn't really have any expectation that I would get a diagnosis, but I wanted a professional to listen to me and be able to tell me if I was autistic or not.

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I've always known I was different but thought it was just me who was like this. At the age of 50 and after extensive reading and interaction online with Autistic people, I had concluded I was Autistic. I wanted to get legal protection at work and so pursued a formal assessment. (I won't use the word diagnosis as this refers to an illness and I'm not ill, don't have a condition and am not disordered!)

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There is not one thing that made me think or feel that I was autistic. I have known I was different all my life. I was diagnosed as autistic when I was 44 after years of never understanding why I struggled with life, or why I never really fitted in 10 years ago it was suddenly explained with one word- Autism! It's not been all positive seeking answers. I have struggled both pre- and post-diagnosis personally and as a parent but it did give me a direction to develop strategies.

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Having an Autistic son and seeing the similarity between his struggles and my own, both as a youngster and an adult, led to me at 56 years-old seeking a diagnosis as a way of gaining more understanding about my struggles.