

Autism in Girls Checklist

Possible presentations <i>These may change in intensity depending on environmental/ social/health context. They will not all be present in one individual, but a significant number of ticks would suggest a referral for assessment might be helpful.</i>	
Friendships: lacks best friend/has just one or two intense friendships/fixates on one person/controlling or domineering/on the edge of things socially/imaginary friend/teased or bullied by peers /shy/timid/passive/flitting from group to group May struggle with group work. May obsess about possibility of a relationship particularly a love interest or feasible new friendship. <i>Strengths: May be very loyal</i>	
Maturity: different to peers; sometimes immature – may have special object for comfort e.g. teddy bear – may play with younger children - or older children <i>Strengths: Sometimes very mature</i>	
Intense interests that are very specific and restricted [may be similar to most girls e.g. books/animals/dolls/celebrities/fashion but more passionate, intense and repetitive and less imaginative]- likes to talk about one particular topic but may be very factual May have rich fantasy life – may be misinterpreted as psychosis <i>Strengths: Specialist in-depth knowledge which gives huge pleasure</i>	
School work: difficulty with starting work in lessons or with stopping work that is unfinished – lack of interest in lessons - issues with homework. Difficulty with change and or transitions Forgetful – disorganised Wanting things to be certain High standards/perfectionist/may spend a long time on work -horror of failure = mental burnout <i>Strengths: May be model student May produce work of very high calibre</i>	
Misunderstanding social norms– failure to recognise status/authority – rude to teachers; correcting adults and their peers; may not know how to be a ‘child’, rejecting play with other girls preferring boys <i>Strengths: Different take on what really matters – sometimes refreshing!</i>	
Communication - may have been referred for Speech and Language therapy; struggling with following verbal instructions; poor at chit-chat; difficulty with open questions; overuse of stock phrases; taking things literally; selective mutism; may be exhausted by social interaction ; not initiating conversations ; reluctant to answer questions in class Difficulties with appropriate facial expressions and responses - may laugh inappropriately – infrequent use of gesture <i>Strengths: May be able to learn ‘scripts’ successfully Some girls with autism have exceptionally good expressive language</i>	
Different behaviour at home to school e.g. anxious at home but ‘fine’ at school Find it very difficult to get up in the morning and ‘face the world’; trying hard to fit in at school but this comes at a cost: exhausted and emotional when safely at home	

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High levels of anxiety – may be misdiagnosed with mental illness – but may also develop mental health problems [e.g. depression, self-harm, OCD, demand avoidance]; emotionally upset for apparently trivial reasons; catastrophizing; ‘meltdowns’[shouting, aggressive] or ‘shutdowns’ [silent, head on desk, avoiding interaction, unable to communicate, blank stare, looking into space, withdrawn]	
Obsessive – organising things endlessly, doing the same thing repeatedly e.g. line up toys [rather than play imaginatively with them] Strengths: Ability to persist with something	
Lack sense of personal identity e.g. not sure how to describe themselves beyond physical appearance Over apologetic – appeasing others Strengths: Freedom from social constraints	
Gender may lack certainty about gender; may reject ‘feminine’ clothing preferring comfortable practical clothes; no interest in hair or make-up; Tomboy type; desire to present as male Strengths: Freedom from social constraints	
Sensory processing differences [noise/touch/light...] e.g. dislike having hair brushed or washed, dislike hand dryers, sensitive to clothes, resistant to hugs and kisses, need warning that someone is going to touch Flicks fingernails, picks skin, rubs hands, paces, clears throat Eating issues: limited diet; eating disorder Poor personal hygiene Strengths: May find great pleasure in certain sensory experiences	
Intense- may come across as opinionated; strong need to be right, Strengths: Strong sense of justice	
Copying others - studying people – watching in playground or on films/videos [repeatedly] and ‘act out’ what she has seen; practises what she is going to say, play may be about practising rather than having fun; lacking in spontaneity Observe and copy behaviour – may use repeated script when meeting people - mask the autism Analytical rather than intuitive Strengths: Observant	

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Early Years

- Separation anxiety from parent or caregiver
- Seeks and/or prefers the company of adults or educators throughout the day
- Intense emotions often observed by crying
- Sense of justice, adherence to rules, telling on others (or herself), described as bossy
- Can make friends but may have difficulty maintaining more than one friendship. It is the quality of the social interactions, as compared to her peers, that is the key indicator
- May be clingy to one peer
- Often has an advanced reading ability
- Correcting the teaching or others
- May be observed by herself and/or wandering around alone
- Teachers may view her as the odd one out, "odd" or "different"
- Passive and/or resistant to contributing to class group work/discussion and/or lack of interest in classroom activities
- May be viewed as the "teacher's pet"

The key social diagnostic characteristics include:

A. PLAY: may not be motivated to play with female peers. May play with boys or alone

B. IMITATION: using copying and mimicking to imitate and attempt to fit into the social world. This helps them cope with their social confusion.

C. INTEREST: a lack of interest in what their female peers are interested in or their typical play.

A tendency to role play adult roles. A tendency to spend the majority of the time "setting up" the scene rather than playing with it. The interests are often similar to their peers, but it is the "intensity" of the interest that is the difference. There are differences in the areas of play, friendship and social situation abilities and interests.

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This checklist has been developed using information from several sources including:

NAS 'Women and Girls' training module 2018 - input from T Attwood, J Gould, S Hendrickx

<https://www.autismonlinetraining.com/course/view.php?id=44>

The Education of Girls with an Autism Spectrum Condition? The hidden curriculum by J Ashton-Smith

<https://www.slideshare.net/NationalAutisticSociety/stream-2-session-2-jacqui-ashton-smith>

Girls and women who have Asperger's syndrome 'Safety Skills for Asperger Women' by Liane Holliday Willey. Foreword by T Attwood

<http://www.tonyattwood.com.au/about-aspergers/girls-and-women-who-have-aspergers>

NASEN - Girls and Autism: Flying under the radar by Barry Carpenter and Jo Egerton

<http://www.nasen.org.uk/resources/resources.girls-and-autism-flying-under-the-radar.html>

Early Years information taken from Tania Ann Marshall author of Aspien Girl books.

<https://taniaannmarshall.wordpress.com/2013/06/22/first-signs-of-asperger-syndrome-in-young-girls-pre-school/>