

WHY SO MANY AUTISTIC WOMEN GO UNSEEN



Many autistic girls grow up undiagnosed because they don't match common stereotypes.

Instead of being recognized, they're often **misunderstood**.



MOST SYSTEMS FOR RECOGNIZING AUTISM WERE BUILT AROUND HOW IT SHOWS UP IN BOYS, NOT GIRLS

THE "STANDARD" AUTISM PROFILE IS BIASED

Early research and diagnostic criteria were based mostly on boys, so people learned to look for:

- Social withdrawal
- Obvious communication differences
- Visible repetitive behaviors

Girls often don't present this way, so they don't "match" what clinicians, teachers, or parents expect.

GIRLS ARE MORE LIKELY TO MASK

From a young age, many girls:

- Observe and copy social behavior
- Learn scripts for conversations
- Force themselves to meet expectations

So instead of standing out, **they blend in just enough to be overlooked.**



THEIR TRAITS ARE MISINTERPRETED

What might actually be autism often gets labeled as:

- “Shy” or “quiet”
- “Sensitive” or “emotional”
- “Perfectionist” or “high-achieving”

The **underlying differences** are there, they're just **explained away differently**.



INTERNAL STRUGGLES ARE LESS VISIBLE

Instead of external behaviors, many girls:

- Internalize stress
- Experience anxiety or burnout
- Hold it together in public, then crash privately

Since the struggle **isn't disruptive**, it's **easier to miss**.



THEY'RE OFTEN MISDIAGNOSED FIRST

Before autism is considered, many are diagnosed with:

- Anxiety
- Depression
- ADHD
- OCD

Autism may only be recognized **later**, sometimes in **adulthood**.



THE HIDDEN COST OF MASKING

Masking can help autistic girls and women “fit in,” but it often comes at a real cost.

Over time, constantly performing can lead to:

- **Chronic exhaustion** from always monitoring behavior and reactions
- **Burnout** from keeping up with social expectations
- **Anxiety** and **depression** from feeling like you’re never fully yourself
- **Loss of identity** from not knowing what is authentic vs. performed
- **Delayed diagnosis** because struggles are hidden from others

Many women describe masking as feeling like they are **always “on”** or **playing a role they can’t turn off**.

Even when things look fine on the outside, the **internal effort** can be overwhelming.

HOW WE CAN SUPPORT AUTISTIC GIRLS & WOMEN

Support starts with understanding that **what you see on the outside may NOT reflect what they’re experiencing internally**.

1. Create spaces where they don’t have to perform

- Reduce pressure to make eye contact or “act normal”
- Normalize quiet, breaks, or stepping away

2. Believe and validate their experience

- Take sensory sensitivities seriously
- Don’t dismiss struggles just because they seem “high-functioning”

3. Notice the hidden effort

- Pay attention to burnout after socializing or school/work
- Recognize that doing “well” can still be exhausting

4. Support without forcing conformity

- Avoid pushing them to fit social expectations at all costs
- Focus on comfort, not just appearance or behavior

5. Encourage self-understanding

- Help them learn about autism in ways that feel empowering
- Support identity, not just coping

6. Advocate!

- Push for assessments that recognize how autism presents in girls
- Speak up in schools, workplaces, and healthcare settings

