

JOHN PENDAL: Coaching For People Who Feel Like Outsiders

Adjusting to an Autism Confirmation

If you've just found out that you're autistic: congratulations! This might have been something you suspected for a while or it might have come as a total surprise.

There are lots of different reactions to hearing the news. This blog post is written for folk who might be finding parts of it a challenge.

I found that there are benefits to knowing, but it took me a while to get there. I do think that I'm happier now and it's answered many questions about why I'm the way that I am. Here are some of the steps that I found useful in case they help you too:

THERE'S NOTHING WRONG WITH YOU

I'm very grateful for a therapist who looked me in the eye and said *"There's nothing wrong with being autistic, there's nothing wrong with you. You can let that shame go."*

If no-one has told you this before, please may I be the first: *"There's nothing wrong with being autistic, there's nothing wrong with you. You can let that shame go."*

"Letting my shame go" is something I'm still working on, but that was definitely a turning point for me.

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EMOTIONAL ROLLERCOASTER

You might go through some different emotional states. Not everyone can name their feelings, but some of the people who can name them describe the following:

- You might start with some joy or happiness that you have validation at last
- That might morph into frustration that it took so long
- Sadness for a 'lost childhood'
- Anger at some of the ways you've been treated
- Then as you revisit decisions you've taken there might also be some guilt and shame to deal with

It's worth noting that for autistic folk this emotional churn is WORK. On top of employment, being a partner, a parent or family member, running a house and all your other obligations there is an extra load on your body as it processes these feelings. That load is increased if your sleep is also disturbed.

Imagine a friend came to you and said *"I'm struggling to pay my bills so I've taken on three extra part time jobs"*. Any advice you give to your friend you are allowed to take yourself. You're doing an extra job at the moment, processing in the background, so you're allowed to take things a bit easier.

This isn't the only emotional reaction people have. Some people have no feelings at all, or are completely fine with the news. Others might be frustrated, angry or depressed. Your feelings are valid and have meaning, whatever they are.

REFRAMING MEMORIES

After I found out I was autistic, I had a lot of disturbed sleep going over memories which troubled me. The thoughts went round and round in my brain, and only stopped when I learned to lay down revised versions of the memories with new endings.

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There are two sentences I use for rewriting the endings, one is *"I did the best I could with the information I had at the time"* and the other is *"I didn't get anything wrong, I got it right for an autistic person."*

I'm learning to give my younger self the voice I didn't have at the time, and that's stopping the memories upsetting me now.

AFFIRMING SOURCES OF INFORMATION

My head was full of misinformation about autism, and I had a lot of work to do changing how I saw myself so that instead of telling everyone I felt *"broken"* I was able to say *"I'm different"*.

Fortunately there are lots of affirming materials available. Here's a selection of things that have helped me or clients have recommended. This isn't a complete list, it's just a few examples – there are lots of others out there.

Websites

<https://autismunderstood.co.uk>

<https://neuroclastic.com>

Books

"Looking After Your Autistic Self: A Personalised Self-Care Approach to Managing Your Sensory and Emotional Well-Being" by Niamh Garvey

"So, I'm Autistic: An Introduction to Autism for Young Adults and Late Teens" by Sarah O'Brien

"Strong Female Character" by Fern Brady

"Unmasking Autism" by Dr Devon Price

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YouTube

Autistic YouTuber "Yo Samdy Sam":

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/Uck5aCrQAppGZ8atiOpgYZ1A>

Instagram

Sonny Jane Wise "Lived Experience Educator":

<https://www.instagram.com/livedexperienceeducator/>

Comic Strip

"Autie-Biographical": <https://www.tumblr.com/autiebiographical>

Podcasts

The Late Discovered Club gives late discovered autistic women and marginalized genders a voice: <https://www.podpage.com/the-late-discovered-club/>

Neurodivergent Moments Podcast by comedians Abigoliah Schamaun (ADHD) and Joe Wells (Autistic): <https://shows.acast.com/neurodivergent-moments>

The Neurodivergent Woman Podcast is hosted by clinical psychologist Monique Mitchelson and clinical neuropsychologist Dr Michelle Livock: <https://www.ndwomanpod.com/>

Square Peg Round Whole Podcast - how to embrace our neurodivergent kids at home, at school and in the work place: <https://www.squarepegroundwhole.com.au/podcast>

The Yellow Ladybugs Podcast explores the world of autistic girls, women and gender diverse individuals: <https://open.spotify.com/show/5VrHmhxRZlaWteWAVe8f7y>

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Hashtags

#actuallyautistic #AutisticWhileBlack #BlackAutisticPride

If you'd like to chat to someone I'm part of the **Neurodivergent Practitioners Directory** – a searchable database of Neurodivergent therapists, coaches and assessment services: <https://neurodivergentpractitioners.org>

I also have a blog at <https://www.johnpendal.com/blog.html>

I hope that helps. Please send me a message if you'd like to chat further.

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