

I FIT IN TOO

(A young boy's story about Autism)



By Joan David, Ph. D.

Hi, my name is Andrew Coats and I am writing a story about myself. I am writing this because I want you to know some things about me. I am 8 years old and I am in the 3rd grade. I live with my parents and my little sister and brother in Minnesota. I go to school there and I really like my school. One other thing about me is that I have Autism.

I am really not sure what Autism is but my mom says a lot of people have it. I looked it up online one time and what it said kind of scared me, it said that my brain is wired differently than other people. My mom told me that like with everything else, I am unique and special and that not two people who have Autism are alike just like not two people with blue eyes are alike or two people who are nervous are alike. When she said that it made me feel better so, I want to tell you what is it like to have Autism since I have Autism.

I have friends and they seem to like me. When I meet a person for the first time, I can tell right away if I like them or if I don't like them and some of these people I don't want to be around because they make me feel uncomfortable. When I meet people for the first time, I ask a lot of questions about them because I am curious about them. If they ask me questions I will answer but I usually don't give a lot of information. I can talk a lot if it is about some I really like, for example video games, politics and history. Those are my favorite subjects. Many times, if it is about something else you will get a "Yes", "No" or "I don't know," or I might just ignore you.

One of my favorite things to do is to play video games, I would play for hours nonstop if my mom would let me. Mom thinks that video games help me to have a focus and can help me to be calm. Also, when I play video games, I don't have to talk a lot. I also like to read some things like History and Science. Science is cool and in History I really like learning about all of the wars and some of the dictators. I have a really good memory for most things and I have a lot of facts in my head.

I really do like to be with people, my mom says that I have a great sense of humor because I say funny things and because I love to laugh. Some times I get "triggered", I am not always sure why and I have a hard time sorting this out but sometimes I get so angry that I just want to explode. It feels like a switch goes off, like my brain lights up so much that I cannot hold back. Like every feeling that I have ever had happens all at one time. It takes a long time for me to calm down and find comfort again. I think if I can learn what my triggers are and how to stop that before it starts, that would be a good thing.

The other thing about me that my mom talks about is my sense of protection. I am very protective of my mom and my younger sister and brother. I try to protect them from all harm, I guess that makes me a pretty good big brother and a pretty good son.

I have some problems too, one is with my senses, Mom calls it sensory processing. I cannot eat many things especially things that seem “mushy.” I can only eat a few things like; chicken nuggets, chicken strips, chicken patties, hamburgers, chips, hotdogs (no buns) and pizza with cheese and pepperoni. Food also makes me feel safe and comforted, but I can’t eat too many things because it makes me sick. Mom says I have a texture problem. I also do not like cloth that feels hard or tough, I only like soft material. I also cannot handle a lot of noise, it hurts my ears and confuses my brain. I cannot be with a crowd of people even people I know, that makes me too nervous and I want to run away or get away.

I like things to be the same, same house, same people, same food, same schedule. I do not like change so much and if there is something different in my schedule, my mom has to give me a lot of notice and tell me exactly what is happening. Things being sprung on me make me very nervous and some times afraid. I have a hard time seeing change or difference or as my mom says, “imaging that.”

I also have a hard time with things like sarcasm, my grandpa once told me he was going to “send me to the moon.” He was joking but I thought to myself, he doesn’t have a space ship, how could he do that. People need to be very concrete with me, give me short instructions and say what they mean. I am not good at reading between the lines.

My mom says that I have many strengths, and I have some things that I need to work on, just like everyone one else. I am good on the computer, I have a good memory and I really do like people. The older I get the more I will grow in my strengths and cope with my weaknesses. My mom also says, that everyone deserves right from birth to be loved and respected, everyone. So, while I am a little bit different, so are you and we all need to find a way to fit in.