

Autism Awareness Month

April 2022

What Comes to Mind?

What comes to mind when you think of [Kim Peek](#), the real-life inspiration for the movie Rain Man? Do you think of someone brilliant at math, but who repeats phrases, rocks and flaps their hands, and has a meltdown if their schedule is disrupted?

Now think about [Dan Ackroyd](#), [Carl Sagan](#), [Temple Grandin](#), [Elon Musk](#), and [Sir Anthony Hopkins](#). Do you picture highly accomplished actors, screenwriters, scientists, educators, entrepreneurs, and authors?

As vastly different as each of these people are from one another, they do have one major thing in common.

They are **ALL** autistic.



You Can't Tell By Looking

[Autism Spectrum Disorder](#), or ASD, first diagnosed in 1943, is a bio-neurological development disability that, according to the CDC, affects approximately one in 54 children, with approximately four boys being diagnosed for every one girl.

The disparity exists partly because males are affected more often, but also because the original [tests](#) used to diagnose ASD were designed to evaluate the behavior of boys; behaviors that are often "masked" by girls. Unfortunately, the tests have not changed much over the years and since most testing is still geared toward male children, it makes it more difficult to diagnose adults. There is no certain cause of ASD, but there is ongoing research into genetics, environmental factors, and nutrition during pregnancy.

Autism is referred to as a spectrum for its many forms and varying degrees of severity, which means ASD is not always apparent.

Children with obvious [symptoms](#), such as being non-verbal or having significant learning or developmental delays, can often be diagnosed with ASD as young as 18-months but many with outwardly mild symptoms, especially girls, can go undiagnosed until adulthood. Education and awareness have inspired more people who were either misdiagnosed or undiagnosed as children who as [adults](#), are reaching out for answers.



Autism: A Frustrating Challenge...

Especially for those who need more help to navigate their world, some of the most challenging aspects of autism are generally the things that come along with it.

Autism often presents with one or more comorbidities such as anxiety, depression, obsessive compulsive disorder, [Echolalia](#), and more.

Additionally, to varying degrees, many autistic people can also have trouble communicating, keeping a job, navigating work or social situations, they could have highly focused interests, and prefer structure in their environment. They can have trouble making eye contact, and/or hypersensitivity to sensory input.

"What would happen if the autism gene was eliminated from the gene pool? You would have a bunch of people standing around in a cave, chatting and socializing and not getting anything done."

~ Dr. Temple Grandin



...And an Amazing Gift

But, without autism, many of the greatest accomplishments in the history of science, technology, and medicine would never have happened. Some of our most celebrated art, literature and musical masterpieces would never have been created, and some of our largest companies would never have been founded.

Even though impossible to offer a retrospective diagnosis, it has been long speculated that a great many of the [most influential figures throughout history](#) perceived the world through the lens of autism, such as:

- Sir Isaac Newton
- Nikola Tesla
- Leonardo da Vinci
- Michelangelo
- Jane Austen
- Charles Darwin
- Amadeus Mozart
- Henry Ford
- Albert Einstein
- Samuel Clemens
- Steve Jobs
- Benjamin Franklin

Educational Resources

[Hidden Asperger's-- Girls with Asperger's | Niamh McCann](#)

[Why everything you know about autism is wrong | Jac den Houting](#)

[Autism: How to be normal \(and why not to be\) | Jolene Stockman](#)

[CDC: Links to Helpful Autism Resources](#)

[Temple Grandin: "The Autistic Brain" \(Lecture\)](#)

[The Autistic Brain: Thinking Across the Spectrum](#)