

Social Stories

The journey to understanding

Frankie

Discovering I am autistic too

My name is Frankie, and I was diagnosed with ADHD when I was nine years old. Teachers noticed I fidgeted a lot, got distracted, and spoke out of turn. I had boundless energy and was full of ideas, but I struggled with schoolwork. My parents and teachers helped me find ways to manage, and for years, I thought ADHD explained everything about me.

Realising there was more

As I got older, I noticed there were things that didn't quite fit. I always felt different from my peers, as if I was watching social interactions instead of being part of them. I had deep, consuming interests, but I learned to hide how much I cared. I copied others' expressions and responses, never quite sure what was expected. Social situations were exhausting, but I masked it well.

At university, everything became harder. Without the structured environment of school, I started experiencing burnout and depression. I struggled to keep up with socialising, overwhelmed by unspoken expectations I couldn't quite name. It felt like everyone else had a rulebook that I had never been given.

Seeking answers

One day, while researching ADHD in adults, I stumbled across a discussion about autism in people who were diagnosed with ADHD first. I related to so much of it – the sensory sensitivities, the need for routine, the constant exhaustion from masking. It was like a lightbulb turning on. Could I be autistic too?

I decided to speak to my doctor, who referred me for an autism assessment. It felt strange going through the process as an adult and there was a long waiting time. However, when I received my diagnosis, everything suddenly made sense. I wasn't broken or failing – I was autistic, and I had been my whole life.

Embracing my neurodiversity

Since my diagnosis, I have started to unmask and allow myself to be who I am. I no longer force myself into social situations that drain me, and I embrace my need for downtime. I have connected with other autistic people, and for the first time, I feel seen.

Having both ADHD and autism shapes how I experience the world. Now that I understand myself better, I can finally move forward with self-acceptance, knowing that I am not alone. My journey has been different, but it is valid – and I am exactly who I am meant to be.



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