

Social Stories

The journey to understanding

Ashley

Struggling with high school

My name is Ashley, and I always did well in primary school. I followed the rules, got good grades, and made my teachers happy. But when I moved to high school, everything changed. The classrooms were bigger, the noise was overwhelming, and I had to move between different teachers all day. I wanted to fit in, so I copied what other kids did, laughed when they laughed, and tried not to stand out.

By the time I got home, I was exhausted. I couldn't hold it in any longer. I would get angry over small things, cry without knowing why, and feel completely drained. My parents were confused – why was I fine at school but struggling so much at home? I didn't know how to explain it.

Refusing school and seeking answers

After months of trying to manage, I couldn't do it anymore. The thought of going to school made me feel sick. I started refusing to go, and my parents didn't understand why. Teachers said I was doing well, so they didn't see a problem. But at home, I was overwhelmed and breaking down every day.

Eventually, my parents knew something wasn't right. They talked to the school, and then to a doctor. When I finally had started my autism assessments, I was nervous, but I also wanted answers. I realised that I had been masking – pretending to be someone I wasn't just to get through the day.

Getting a diagnosis and support

When I was diagnosed as autistic, things started to make sense. I wasn't lazy or difficult – I had been pushing myself too hard to fit in. My parents and teachers began to understand that I needed adjustments, like quieter spaces and clear expectations.

I started learning ways to express myself and set boundaries. My parents found support groups where I could meet other autistic teenagers. I finally felt like I wasn't alone. I still had hard days, but now I knew why, and I had people who understood me.

Learning to be myself

Now that I know I'm autistic, I'm learning to stop masking so much. I take breaks when I need them, and I don't force myself into situations that make me uncomfortable. I have special interests that bring me joy, and I don't feel ashamed of them anymore.

I know I'm different, but that doesn't mean I'm broken. I have strengths, and I deserve support just like anyone else. I'm learning to accept myself, and that's the most important thing of all.

