

Identity and Intersectionality

» **SEAN:** Being autistic is an integral part of who I am.

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» **SEAN:** Welcome back to the second video in the Embrace Autism series.

This video is about identity and intersectionality.

After realising that you're autistic, many autistic people start to question their identity and ask themselves questions like "who am I really?" with this new knowledge that they're autistic.

For some people, the realisation that you're autistic can lead to reflecting on your life and thinking what "is my real identity as the authentic autistic me?".

Autistic people are as diverse in who we are as any other group of people. When you meet or hear from other autistic people, there's no pressure that you have to be just like them to be considered valid as autistic.

One of the things we'd like to talk about as well is the impact and importance of language.

It's up to you what you want to describe yourself as, what you want to describe your community as.

There is no right or wrong way.

The general preference within most of the autistic community would be to describe themselves as an autistic person as opposed to person with autism.

But again, that's entirely up to you.

There is no right or wrong way of doing this.

Use what feels right for you and what makes you feel good. It's also ok if this changes over time too.

One of the words that you'll hear quite a lot in autistic spaces is "intersectionality".

Very briefly, what this means is anything else that is a part of your identity and that is a part of who you are, that might impact how you navigate the world and also, how the world might perceive you.

Intersectionality is the acknowledgment that everyone has their own unique experience of discrimination and oppression, and we should consider everything and anything that can marginalise people – gender, race, class, sexual orientation, physical ability etc.

To help you with this, we've got resource documents on the National Autistic Society's Embrace Autism web page that you can access and be sign posted to various organisations that cover a range of intersectionalities.

Looking at your identity and what to do next, from my own experience, had an element of relearning who I was and also reflecting back on my own life with the new knowledge that I was autistic.

I've found it very helpful to do this with other autistic people.

An example of my own intersectionality is I'm also ADHD.

This means in some spaces that I've gone into, for me as an autistic ADHD person, I might look very different to someone that doesn't have ADHD. Again, that's a whole process of making sure that you meet enough autistic people to, in my case, find other autistic people that are ADHD as well and then you think, "ah...that makes sense, I can see myself there".

When I've met people that aren't ADHD as well as being autistic, there has sometimes been communication difficulties or different learning styles and again that's the importance of finding your tribe.

It's quite often it's within these bits where there's crossovers with other communities that you can really start to feel like you've come home.

An example of an organisation in Scotland that does some great work on intersectionality is SWAN. They support women, girls and non-binary people that are also autistic.

There's lots of spaces out there that are available for people to explore their new autistic identity.

Hopefully, through starting to think about some of the topics covered in these short videos and meeting more autistic people, maybe going to meet ups, maybe starting to immerse yourself more in the world of autism, you'll start to develop a positive sense of self, if you don't have one already.

Part of that is, certainly from my own journey, it's about acceptance, forgiveness, understanding and then love.

I've reached a point now, where if there was a cure for being autistic, which there isn't, but if there was, I would flat refuse it because being autistic is an integral part of who I am.

It's been an integral part of any successes that I've had in my life and it's something that I wouldn't change even if I could.

I hope you will all be able to reach that point too.

Remember, you might still feel like you 'don't fit in' in some autistic spaces. I know I did, and that's ok too.

From my own experience, I can guarantee, if you go and spend enough time you will eventually feel 'normal' in one of these spaces.

That was one of the nicest things in the world for me, to finally be in a space where there's others just like me.

And for the first time in my life, to have been whatever's considered 'normal' within that room was actually really, really, good for my own mental well-being.

Please check out the links to this video where there's more information and signposting you can get signposting to spaces where you can meet other autistic people and find people like you.

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