

Here is an example of an *individualized* handout explaining autism spectrum disorders. This handout does not describe everyone with autism.

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a neurodevelopmental disorder that affects an individual's social and communicative behaviors. Individuals with ASD have differences in their brains, causing them to think and behave differently than individuals without ASD. ASD is present at a young age, and it is a lifelong disorder. The Centers for Disease Control currently reports that:

- About 1 in 59 children has been identified with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) according to estimates from CDC's Autism and Developmental Disabilities Monitoring (ADDM) Network. [Read article] www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism/data.html

I am one of those people.

There are three main categories that characterize a person with an autism spectrum disorder:

1. Communication differences
2. Social differences
3. Stereotyped behavior, rigidity, or inflexibility in thinking.

Because it is a *spectrum* disorder, the characteristics of ASD can look very different from person to person. The majority of my communication differences are related to my social use of communication. That is, I can communicate my wants and needs very well and I am an intelligent, articulate person. However, in social situations, I struggle to know when to start and end a conversation. I do not know how to enter a group conversation, and when I try, it may come across as awkward. A common misconception about autism is that people with autism do not like to socialize with others. This is certainly not true for me. I really enjoy the company of others, but the social norms and customs that come intuitively to others, do not come naturally to me. I have a hard time figuring out when someone might be bored during a conversation because I miss social cues. I also tend to change the conversation abruptly if the subject matter is not of interest to me, but this is something I am working on improving. I have a very strong interest in cars and transportation vehicles, which is part of my autism. While I am comfortable having a conversation at length about cars, it might not occur to me to ask you about your weekend.

I think it is important to explain my autism so that you can understand me better. I may come across as odd to others, but I am a well-meaning, genuine person. Because most of my differences are in the social domain, my autism should not interfere with my work. Although I like to talk to others, I am good at working when I am supposed to and reserving socializing for break times. I am very focused on my work and am a productive employee. Finally, I am also open to feedback about my performance. If there is something I need to improve upon, I am eager to learn and would like to do as good a job as I can possibly do. I am open to answering any questions you may have about me or autism.