


Autism in Girls – Detailed Checklist

 <p style="text-align: center;">Possible presentations</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>These may change in intensity depending on environmental/ social/health context. They will not all be present in one individual, but a significant number of ticks could suggest a referral for assessment might be helpful.</i></p>	
<p>Friendships: lacks best friend/has just one or two intense friendships/fixates on one person/controlling or domineering/on the edge of things socially/imaginary friend/teased or bullied by peers /shy/timid/passive/flitting from group to group. May obsess about possibility of a relationship, particularly a love interest or feasible new friendship. Strengths: May be very loyal</p>	
<p>Maturity: different to peers; sometimes immature – may have special object for comfort e.g. teddy bear – may play with younger children or older children. Sense of humour may seem odd, quirky or different from others. Strengths: Sometimes very mature</p>	
<p>Intense interests: may be very specific and restricted [could be similar to most girls e.g. books/animals/dolls/celebrities/fashion but more intense and repetitive and less imaginative], enjoys Manga/Anime. Likes to talk about one particular topic but may be very factual. May have rich fantasy life which might be misinterpreted as psychosis. Strengths: Specialist in-depth knowledge which gives huge pleasure</p>	
<p>School work: difficulty with starting work in lessons or with stopping work that is unfinished – lack of interest in lessons - issues with homework. May struggle with group work. Difficulty with change in schedule or routine and/or transitions. Forgetful – disorganised. Difficulty with gauging passage of time/difficulty with dates and times. Wanting things to be certain. High standards/perfectionist/may spend a long time on work - horror of failure = mental burnout Strengths: May be a model student May produce work of very high calibre</p>	
<p>Misunderstanding social norms: failure to recognise status/authority – rude to teachers; correcting adults and their peers; may not know how to be a ‘child’; struggling to play with other girls, preferring boys. Tendency to be very honest and straightforward. Difficulty lying. May appear naïve. Can be easily fooled and conned. Difficulty understanding manipulative behaviour or disloyalty. Strengths: Different take on what really matters – sometimes refreshing!</p>	
<p>Communication: may have been referred for Speech and Language therapy; struggling with following verbal instructions; poor at chit-chat; difficulty with open questions; overuse of stock phrases; taking things literally; selective mutism; may be exhausted by social interaction; not initiating conversations or monopolising conversations; reluctant to answer questions in class. Difficulties with appropriate facial expressions and responses - may laugh inappropriately – infrequent use of gesture. Confusion around rules of accurate eye contact, tone of voice, proximity of body, stance and posture when having a conversation. May get lost in own thoughts. Finds it hard to identify and express feelings. Strengths: May be able to learn ‘scripts’ successfully Some girls with autism have exceptionally good expressive language</p>	

Autism in Girls – Detailed Checklist

<p>Different behaviour at home to school: e.g. anxious at home but ‘fine’ at school. Find it very difficult to get up in the morning and ‘face the world’; trying hard to fit in at school but this comes at a cost; exhausted and emotional when safely at home.</p>	
<p>High levels of anxiety: may be misdiagnosed with mental illness – but may also develop mental health problems [e.g. depression, self-harm, OCD, demand avoidance]; emotionally upset for apparently trivial reasons; catastrophizing; ‘meltdowns’[shouting, aggressive] or ‘shutdowns’ [silent, head on desk, avoiding interaction, unable to communicate, blank stare, looking into space, withdrawn]. May complain of stomach aches, heart palpitations, headaches and insomnia. Poor attendance.</p>	
<p>Obsessive: organising things endlessly, doing the same thing repeatedly e.g. lining up toys [rather than playing imaginatively with them]. Strengths: Ability to persist with something</p>	
<p>Lack sense of personal identity: e.g. not sure how to describe themselves beyond physical appearance. Feeling of not fitting in, of being ‘an alien’ from a different planet. Adapts self in order to try to fit in and avoid ridicule. Over apologetic – appeasing others. Strengths: Freedom from social constraints</p>	
<p>Gender: may lack certainty about gender; may reject ‘feminine’ clothing preferring comfortable practical clothes; no interest in hair or make-up; tomboy type; desire to present as male. Strengths: Freedom from social constraints</p>	
<p>Sensory processing differences: [noise/touch/light...] e.g. dislike having hair brushed or washed, dislike hand dryers, sensitive to clothes, resistant to hugs and kisses, needing warning that someone is going to touch them. Flicking fingernails, picks skin, rubbing hands, pacing, clearing throat [i.e. forms of stimming] Eating issues: limited diet; eating disorder (approximately 25% of girls diagnosed with anorexia are actually autistic). Poor personal hygiene. Strengths: May find great pleasure in certain sensory experiences</p>	
<p>Intense: may come across as opinionated; strong need to be right. Strengths: Strong sense of justice</p>	
<p>Theory of Mind issues: struggling to realise what others may be thinking; leaving out crucial information when retelling events - difficulty retelling events in a coherent way, often leaving out critical bits of information and often reshuffling the timeline instead of giving an account of events in chronological order.</p>	
<p>Copying others: studying people – watching in playground or on films/videos [repeatedly] and ‘acting out’ what she has seen; practising what she is going to say, play may be about practising rather than having fun; lacking in spontaneity. Observes and copies behaviour. May use repeated script when meeting people, masking the autism. Analytical rather than intuitive. Strengths: Observant and perceptive about human behaviour</p>	
<p>Co-Morbidity: may also have dyslexia, dyspraxia, hypermobility, hypertonia, ADHD, ADD, epilepsy, Tourette’s, anorexia.</p>	

Autism in Girls – Detailed Checklist



Early Years

- Separation anxiety from parent or caregiver
- Seeks and/or prefers the company of adults or educators throughout the day
- Intense emotions often observed - crying but not always able to explain why
- Sense of justice, adherence to rules, telling on others (or herself), described as bossy
- Can make friends but may have difficulty maintaining more than one friendship. It is the quality of the social interactions, as compared to her peers, that is the key indicator
- May be clingy to one peer
- May have an advanced reading ability
- Correcting the teacher or others
- May be observed by herself and/or wandering around alone
- Teachers may view her as the odd one out, “odd” or “different”
- Passive and/or resistant to contributing to class group work/discussion and/or lack of interest in classroom activities
- May be viewed as the “teacher’s pet”

The key social diagnostic characteristics include:

A. PLAY: may not be motivated to play with female peers. May play with boys or alone

B. IMITATION: using copying and mimicking to imitate and attempt to fit into the social world. This helps them cope with their social confusion.

C. INTEREST: a lack of interest in what their female peers are interested in or their typical play. A tendency to role play adult roles. A tendency to spend the majority of the time “setting up” the scene rather than playing with it. The interests are often similar to their peers, but it is the “intensity” of the interest that is the difference. There are differences in the areas of play, friendship and social situation abilities and interests.

.....
This checklist has been developed using information from several sources including:

NAS ‘Women and Girls’ training module 2018 - input from T Attwood, J Gould, S Hendrickx
<https://www.autisonlinetraining.com/course/view.php?id=44>

The Education of Girls with an Autism Spectrum Condition? The hidden curriculum by J Ashton-Smith
<https://www.slideshare.net/NationalAutisticSociety/stream-2-session-2-jacqui-ashton-smith>

Girls and women who have Asperger’s syndrome - ‘Safety Skills for Asperger Women’ by Liane Holliday Willey.
Foreword by T Attwood
<http://www.tonyattwood.com.au/about-aspergers/girls-and-women-who-have-aspergers>

NASEN - Girls and Autism: Flying under the radar by Barry Carpenter and Jo Egerton
<http://www.nasen.org.uk/resources/resources.girls-and-autism-flying-under-the-radar.html>

Siena Castellon – young autistic woman - creator of Quantum Leap Mentoring website
<https://www.qlmentoring.com>

Early Years information taken from Tania Ann Marshall author of Aspien Girl books
<https://taniaannmarshall.wordpress.com/2013/06/22/first-signs-of-asperger-syndrome-in-young-girls-pre-school/>