

*Ali Qasim: My Experience As A High Functioning Autistic Kid*  
By Ali Qasim

**Foreword:**

Throughout my life, I had felt somewhat different from other kids in my classes, my community, and beyond from what I can remember about my life up to the present day. I have what is called “Autism Spectrum Disorder”, or ASD for short. ASD is a neurological (related to the brain) and developmental disorder that affects how I interact with others, communicate, learn, and act. I will admit that this has brought up some issues in my life, such as impeding my ability to make friends easily, to complete tasks at the same pace as others (I have been told that I have to put in twice the effort as others to get the same result), and to focus on any task. However, I do not consider this a burden despite what I have just complained about, and if you relate to any of the things mentioned in this book then I believe you shouldn't either. There are positives and you shouldn't feel ashamed if you ever felt you were different from others around you. Now, here is my story about my struggles of being different and how I slowly learned that it is ok (which is what I hope you take away from this book).

**Chapter 1:**

Although I cannot remember my life prior to the age of 4, I have been told that it was apparent I was different from other children due to the things I did. Allegedly, I would walk into wall corners and spaces, staring at nothing endlessly. I also didn't speak until I was three years old, and until then there was a loss of words in my vocabulary, where I would forget words I had started saying previously. I would line up my toys in a systematic way when playing, and I would walk on my toes instead of feet to help feel my body weight (due to my lack of sense of depth). This part of my story is just to show that I have always been different and this is likely the case for you too, and it should hopefully tell you that there are always others who experience the same problems as you and you aren't alone. Hopefully, you are now able to recognize signs of ASD in others and provide support.

The first time where I myself could tell I was different from others was from my senses. I had increased sensitivity to certain sounds and smells that other people did not have.

**Touch Sensitivity:**

The first time I noticed this was where other kids in elementary school would eat certain things that I just wouldn't. It wasn't like a “picky eater” issue, as I eat almost everything and like it. When I say that I wouldn't eat certain things, I mean that I wouldn't drink water (for example) if it was in a certain glass, as the texture and material of the cup affected the taste for me drastically. I could only drink things in certain glasses, something I didn't notice in other kids.

### Smell Sensitivity:

Then in my later years of elementary school, I became extremely sensitive to my mother's perfumes. My dad and brother did notice it but weren't as bothered by it as I was. I was so sensitive to it that I had to go outside because I could not (and still cannot) physically be around my mother when she uses perfumes.

### Sound sensitivity:

Sound sensitivity was also an issue for me. I could not go to a concert or a dance without the loud sounds hurting my ears. These sensory issues aren't directly linked TO ASD but they are a factor in it that I had to experience which most others did not.

### Pain Tolerance:

On the contrary to all this, my pain resistance was abnormal compared to other kids due to the sensitivity issues, which is a positive. I don't feel physical pain on the same levels as others, and I saw this when playing with other kids in my neighborhood at age 8 which made me feel different.

Another way I knew I was different was from my scripting and repetitive behaviors. If I watched a TV Cartoon more than once, I would end up scripting (reciting something out loud) that part of the show which others never did. Also, there were repetitive behaviors I exhibited such as swinging a body part around continuously, spinning, touching certain textures, biting or tapping my pencil, and stimming (flapping your hands rapidly). I noticed other people did not do these things, and I was often asked to stop tapping my items or repeating the same phrases.

Besides repetitive behavior, I also had strange obsessions that differentiated me from others. On certain media, toys, and franchises, I experienced a frequent amount of hyperfixations (where a person becomes extremely focused and preoccupied with something that they ignore everything else around them. An interest or focus can turn into a hyperfixation when the person cannot think of anything else or get out of their state of concentration).

Another obsession I had was making both sides of my body feel the same. This sounds strange, but if one of my ears was hot and the other was cold, I would be heavily bothered. When I touched something cold or smooth, I would do it again with the other hand just so both sides of my body were "even". I'm not sure if you can relate to this part, but it is something I noted down that was strange. Lastly, I would become obsessed with the passion projects I was making, such as my YouTube cartoon which I thought about daily during school, distracting me.

As I got older, something especially prevalent to me were my difficulties with social interactions and especially making friends. There was apparent loneliness. In school, I didn't exactly feel ostracized from the schoolmates around me, but none of those schoolmates were very ecstatic to take the initiative and include me in their games. This doesn't mean I had NO friends, but they were minimal from ages 4 to 10, and I'm sure you can relate to the difficulty of making new ones despite being friendly with everyone in your area. Social anxiety, difficulty with keeping eye contact, obscure interests, and distaste for small talk were all factors to why I felt different from the other kids, and they didn't have most or all of these problems. The friends I did make in my early days were also lonely which is the only reason I was able to gain them, as other kids just wanted to have their friend groups be normal (I assume). There was nothing to really bond over with others as they were all interested in sports, and my interests were more narrow (specific characters, coding, etc). I didn't like to talk much either, as I was more introverted, and paired with my lack of ability to understand tones and body language, initiating and maintaining friendships was a struggle.

The last thing I want to mention is my ability to focus, which also overlaps with ADHD, another disorder. When I worked on assignments or classwork or just general projects, I could only make a little bit of progress before losing focus and staring off into space. I do try to pay attention, but it's a struggle to stay on task and I often have trouble staying on task, which requires me to need more time on work and work during odd schedules. Even while writing this story, it has taken a long time because my slow pace and loss of focus makes it extremely difficult to write quickly and effectively. If you have ever felt like this, just know that you are not alone, as our attention diverts without warning and we just have to deal with it. Now, there are ways to deal with these struggles and I will explain my methods, which I hope you can learn from.

## **Chapter 2:**

So despite all this, how did I manage to cope with my struggles and realize that it was okay to be like this? There were many ways I helped myself, including art, active games, and video games. To deal with the loneliness part, I would draw hundreds of comic books with an ongoing story as a way to help me calm down against my struggles and also be creative and productive at the same time.

Even now, I have created an animation series on YouTube which essentially does the same thing, it's still me drawing characters in an ongoing storyline, and the only difference is that it is now a video instead of on paper. Another method of managing for me was to play video games. They can be relaxing to help alleviate frustration with our lives, but also challenging and stimulating, which is perfect for us to reduce repetition and stalling tendencies as we have something to actually be active on. As for active games, these are just games such as football I would play

with a family member to distract myself from reality, which is something you can do with any relative you have, or even a friend that might be next to you.

Now, I slowly learned that having ASD was not a detriment because of the opportunities it gave me that most others do not have (this will vary based on people with ASD, but I'm sure some of you all with ASD can relate to a few things). ASD has allowed me to succeed in science and math subjects far more than other students because those topics are technical and logical which favors ASD. It has allowed me privileges in school such as extra time, support teachers, and quiet testing rooms, which helps me improve focus and finish my work. It has allowed me to meet friends who are also Autistic and relate to them heavily, giving me some of the best friends you can imagine. I am also able to learn information relatively quickly, which is a skill you should cherish. Good pattern recognition, noticing details, critical thinking, memory, and a high IQ are other skills we have that shouldn't be ignored. With all these privileges and skills, I realized that having autism has given me new opportunities such as being able to pursue a STEM field in college because understanding sciences and math is easier for me than others, who see English and History as easier, and it has allowed me to succeed in my studies which will provide me a better life. This is why you should not see it as a burden, as being different from others simply means you possess skills that they don't, which can help you become someone destined for greatness (a coder, a physicist, an artist, a doctor, an architect, an engineer, and so much more). Having ASD simply means your brain is wired in a different way, and this can provide advantages to your life in order to help you achieve your dreams such as the privileges I get. Thank you for listening to my story.

**THE END**