

Other behaviors that are not typical of autism, but often co-occur with autism

Extreme anxiety

Anxiety is a real difficulty for many autistic adults, particularly in social situations or when facing change. It can affect a person psychologically and physically and impact quality of life for autistic people and their families.

It is very important that autistic people learn to recognise their triggers and find coping mechanisms to help reduce their anxiety. However, many autistic people have difficulty recognising and regulating their emotions. Over one third of autistic people have serious mental health issues and too many autistic people are being failed by mental health services.

Meltdowns and shutdowns

When everything becomes too much for an autistic person, they can go into meltdown or shutdown. These are very intense and exhausting experiences.

A meltdown happens when someone becomes completely overwhelmed by their current situation and temporarily loses behavioural control. This loss of control can be verbal (eg shouting, screaming, crying) or physical (eg kicking, lashing out, biting) or both. Meltdowns in children are often mistaken for temper tantrums and parents and their autistic children often experience hurtful comments and judgmental stares from less understanding members of the public.

A shutdown appears less intense to the outside world but can be equally debilitating. Shutdowns are also a response to being overwhelmed, but may appear more passive - eg an autistic person going quiet or 'switching off'. One autistic woman described having a shutdown as: 'just as frustrating as a meltdown, because of not being able to figure out how to react how I want to, or not being able to react at all; there isn't any 'figuring out' because the mind feels like it is past a state of being able to interpret.'

Autism and attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)

ADHD affects an estimated 30 to 60 percent of people with autism, versus 6 to 7 percent of the general population.

ADHD involves a persistent pattern of inattention, difficulty remembering things, trouble with managing time, organizational tasks, hyperactivity and/or impulsivity that interferes with learn and daily life.

Symptoms of ADHD can overlap with those of autism. As a result, ADHD can be difficult to distinguish in someone on the spectrum.

Autism and disrupted sleep

Over half of children with autism – and possibly as many as four in five – have one or more chronic sleep problems.

Many adults on the spectrum likewise have difficulty falling asleep and staying asleep through the night. These sleep issues tend to worsen behavioral challenges, interfere with learning and decrease overall quality of life.

Autism and depression

Depression affects an estimated 7 percent of children and 26 percent of adults with autism. By contrast, it affects around 2 percent of children and 7 percent of adults in the general population.

Depression rates for people with autism rise with age and intellectual ability. Autism-related communication challenges can mask depression. Telltale signs can include loss of interest in once-favorite activities, a noticeable worsening in hygiene, chronic feelings of sadness, hopelessness, worthlessness and irritability. At its most serious, depression can include frequent thoughts about death and/or suicide.

Sources:

autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/what-is-autism

autismspeaks.org/medical-conditions-associated-autism#sleep