



## WHY SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS ARE IMPORTANT FOR ALL ADULTS

A core component of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is difficulty with social relationships and social functioning. These difficulties exist across the autism spectrum; higher IQs and language ability don't necessarily translate into greater social success as might be expected. Additionally, these social difficulties do not go away as children age into adulthood. Many times, they actually get more challenging with age as social demands increase.

Research has shown that few autistic adults report having friendships or romantic relationships. One study showed that more than half of autistic young adults had not gotten together with friends in the past year, and 64% had not talked on the phone with a friend. This is important because lack of friends and loneliness are associated with an increased risk of depression and anxiety and less life satisfaction and lower self-esteem. Indeed, as autistic individuals age, their risk of depression increases.

Oftentimes parents and others mistakenly assume that individuals on the autism spectrum prefer to spend time alone. Certainly in the population of autistic individuals – just like in the general population as a whole – there is a range in the amount of time an individual prefers to spend with others. All individuals need some time on their own, just as all need time to be social; how much of each is a personal preference.

Rather than preferring social isolation, many autistic individuals resign themselves to it due to inability to initiate social interactions, confusion over how to develop a friendship or how to interpret social behaviors, lack of relationship success in the past, or other communication or behavioral problems. Another reason for the lack of friendships and social engagement in adulthood is the lack of organized activity. The majority of autistic adults is unemployed and not in school. When high school ends, many autistic individuals are left without a place to go where they can connect with peers.

Social coaching can be helpful in developing skills to increase social awareness, competence, and confidence. Though many children receive some form of social skills instruction in school, often these skills are not mastered or are not designed to help the individual develop and sustain adult relationships. Additionally, thoughtful planning is needed to ensure autistic adults have regularly scheduled social opportunities. These may be with peers with disabilities or typical peers who share similar interests. Regardless, the individual on the autism spectrum should be a part of the planning so that the activities and new circle of acquaintances/potential friends are of interest and serve as a motivator for the individual to expand beyond his or her comfort zone to attend.

#### Related Articles:

- [Romance 101: Dating for Adults with ASD](#)
- [Being Social as an Adult with ASD](#)
- [Depression](#)

#### Additional Resources:

- [Loneliness, Friendship, and Well-Being in Adults with Autism Spectrum Disorders](#)
- [Social Participation](#)

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