THE MORE YOU KNOW
AUTISM SERVICES

Why Many Autistic Adults Were Missed

You are allowed to explore your experiences.
You are allowed to seek answers.

There are many reasons autism can go unrecognised into adulthood.

If you've ever thought "surely someone would have noticed by now?" – you're not alone. Here are some of the most common reasons.

1. YOU MAY HAVE MASKED TO FIT IN

Masking is when we hide or suppress our natural traits to avoid judgement, gain acceptance or stay safe.

- You might have learned to copy others
- You might have become very good at "fitting in"
- You might have pushed through discomfort to keep up appearances
- On the outside, you may have seemed "fine" – even if you were struggling inside.

Masking can be exhausting and can make it harder for others to recognise autism.

2. AUTISM CAN LOOK VERY DIFFERENT

Autism isn't always obvious. Many people don't have the stereotypes often expected.

You might:

- Prefer quiet over loud
- Feel things very deeply
- Be highly sensitive
- Have intense interests that others didn't notice
- Be thoughtful, observant and good at routines

There is no one "autistic look" or way of being.

3. YOU MAY HAVE BEEN MISUNDERSTOOD

Autistic traits are often mistaken for other things, especially in girls, women and high-achieving people.

You may have been labelled with:

- Anxiety
- Depression
- Shyness
- Obsessive or perfectionistic traits
- Personality differences
- "Too sensitive" or "dramatic"

These labels can sometimes explain the surface struggles – but not the deeper reasons behind them.

4. SOCIETAL EXPECTATIONS CAN HIDE AUTISM

From an early age, many of us are taught to conform, be polite, not make a fuss and prioritise others.

You might have been:

- A "good" student
- Hardworking and dependable
- Well-behaved
- Independent
- Mature for your age
- Praised for being "so sensible"

Doing all of these things can look like coping – but may have come at a very high internal cost.

5. LACK OF AWARENESS & OUTDATED VIEWPOINTS

Awareness of autism has grown, but many adults went through childhood when understanding was limited.

- Older diagnostic criteria focused on white boys
- Quiet or internalised presentations were rarely recognised
- Girls and women were expected to be socially intuitive
- Autism was often linked to visible learning disabilities – not internal differences

Our understanding is evolving – and that means many people were missed.

GENTLE REMINDERS

- Being missed does not mean you are imagining things.
- There may have been many reasons nobody noticed.
- It is never too late to understand yourself better.
- Exploring your experiences is a brave and valid step.
- You deserve support and understanding.
- You are allowed to take up space.

YOU MIGHT RELATE IF...

You may have been missed if you relate to some of these:

- Feeling different your whole life
- Exhaustion from keeping it all together
- Needing time alone to recover
- Sensory overwhelm
- Struggling with change
- Intense interests
- People-pleasing
- Difficulty knowing who you are without masking

You are not alone. Many autistic adults spend years – sometimes decades – wondering why things feel different. Your experiences are valid, even if they weren't recognised before.

Understanding yourself is a journey, not a race.
You are allowed to take your time.