A fact sheet about

Telling family you are neurodivergent

UnderstandingZoe

https://understandingzoe.com

Copyright 2026

UnderstandingZoe

Telling family you are neurodivergent

What disclosure is, why family reactions vary, and one way to prepare.



Key points

- Telling someone that you are neurodivergent is called disclosure (definition below). You can do it bit by bit, and with some people and not others.
- You do not need a formal assessment to share how you understand yourself.
- Telling family is not safe or possible for everyone. Being able to tell is a privilege, and not telling is not a failure.
- Writing down what you would want them to know is a first step that may help, whether you share it or keep it for yourself.

What disclosure is

You have read, thought and maybe been assessed, and now you know you are autistic, ADHD or neurodivergent in another way. It explains a lot. But you do not know how a parent or a sibling will take it, or if it is safe to try.

Disclosure means telling someone that you are neurodivergent. It does not have to be one big talk. Many people share a little at a time, with the people they feel safe with, and keep it private with others.

Where you do share, you can decide how much. You might share a need without the word, like "I need the TV off at dinner". You might share the word, or the whole story of how you found out. You can read more about asking your family for what you need here.

You do not need a formal assessment to tell people how you understand yourself. An assessment can be hard to get: it can cost a lot, waitlists can be long, etc. It can also mean phone calls, forms, travel and time off, which take energy not everyone has. So knowing it about yourself is valid too. Some people start talking about it with someone they trust before they are assessed.

People tell family for many reasons: to be understood, to get support, or to stop hiding and be more themselves. In a study about work, telling only some people was the most common choice. Some autistic adults describe doing the same with family and friends, one safe person at a time.

Why telling family can be hard, and why not telling is okay

Each family may react in its own way. Some family members welcome it and say it all makes sense. For some families it takes a long time, even years, to understand.

In a large Australian survey(393 autistic adults), autistic adults hoped that telling people would help others understand them, but they feared being judged. Some got support, and others met people who brushed it off or misunderstood. If you are ADHD or neurodivergent in another way, you may recognise this too. Reactions like these often come from how little people know about it. They do not come from anything you did.

Telling family is not safe or possible for everyone. Being able to tell is a privilege. For some people it may never be safe. This is often true for BBIA or LGBTQIA+ people, who may already face unfair treatment for more than one part of who they are. The same goes for people who rely on family for housing, money or care. Not telling is not a failure. Many people keep it private in some places to keep themselves safe, and that is a fair way to live.

More broadly, research on autism, ADHD and neurodivergence has often left out BBIA (Black, Brown, Indigenous and Asian) people, LGBTQIA+ people and other marginalised groups. Your lived experience is what is most valid.

If you cannot tell anyone right now

Even if you tell no one, you can get to know yourself better. Autistic adults who came to understand themselves better tended to take on less of the unfair ideas about autism. You can read more about why you may be hard on yourself here. And people who felt part of the autistic community felt better overall. You can find neurodivergent people online, without using your name, or in person.

You can also share a need without the word, or tell one person outside your family, like a friend or your GP.

The one thing to try: write it down first, so you can share on your own terms

Before you decide whether to tell anyone, write a short note to yourself in three parts:

- what you want them to know, in one or two lines
- what you are not ready to share yet
- what you would like from them, like "read this, and ask me one question later"

If you decide to share it, choose a way that suits you:

- send it as a message, an email or a letter
- share an article or a video that says it well, with a line like "this is me"
- show the note on your phone, or use AAC
- say it at a quiet time, if speaking suits you
- ask a support person to help you write it, be there with you, or help explain

You can draft the note in your notes in the Understanding Zoe app, by talking or typing. It can stay there until you feel ready, or stay just for you. Give people time: a first reaction is not always the last one. You can read more about what changes in your relationships after you find out here.

This step comes from what neurodivergent adults say has helped them. It also draws on a small early study of a programme that helps them decide who to tell, when and how. It has not been tested in research yet, so it is anchored in lived experience and in what the community shares about it. And lived experience is valid too.

Getting support

This page describes what many adults say about themselves. It is not an assessment, and it cannot tell you what is going on for you.

You can ask for support at any point, whether you are thinking about telling someone or it has already happened. A GP is a good place to start. A GP can talk with you about a Mental Health Treatment Plan, which can lower the cost of sessions. Different health professionals can help you think through who to tell and how. Autistic adults have said it helped to talk it through first, with a health worker or with other autistic people, and your GP can help you work out who is right for you.

You can also book a telehealth session through Understanding Zoe.

If someone in your family frightens you, hurts you or controls you, call 1800RESPECT on 1800 737 732. You can call at any time of the day or night.

Sources

Romualdez, Heasman, Walker, Davies and Remington (2021). "'People might understand me better': diagnostic disclosure experiences of autistic individuals in the workplace." Autism in Adulthood 3(2), 157-167. doi:10.1089/aut.2020.0063

Botha, Dibb and Frost (2022). "'Autism is me': an investigation of how autistic individuals make sense of autism and stigma." Disability and Society 37(3), 427-453. doi:10.1080/09687599.2020.1822782

Huang, Trollor, Foley and Arnold (2023). "'I've spent my whole life striving to be normal': internalised stigma and perceived impact of diagnosis in autistic adults." Autism in Adulthood 5(4), 423-436. doi:10.1089/aut.2022.0066

Cage, Cranney and Botha (2022). "Brief report: does autistic community connectedness moderate the relationship between masking and wellbeing?" Autism in Adulthood 4(3), 247-253. doi:10.1089/aut.2021.0096

Davis, Solomon and Belcher (2022). "Examination of race and autism intersectionality among African American/Black young adults." Autism in Adulthood 4(4), 306-314. doi:10.1089/aut.2021.0091

Young, Adamo, Ásgeirsdóttir and colleagues (2020). "Females with ADHD: an expert consensus statement taking a lifespan approach providing guidance for the identification and treatment of attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder in girls and women." BMC Psychiatry 20(1), 404. doi:10.1186/s12888-020-02707-9

Au-Yeung, Freeth and Thompson (2025). "'Am I gonna regret this?': the experiences of diagnostic disclosure in autistic adults." Autism 29(8), 2181-2192. doi:10.1177/13623613251337504

Huang, Hwang, Arnold, Lawson, Richdale and Trollor (2022). "Autistic adults' experiences of diagnosis disclosure." Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders 52(12), 5301-5307. doi:10.1007/s10803-021-05384-z

Han, Scior, Grace, Heath, Dufresne and Crane (2024). "'Who, When, How to Share': pilot study of a new disclosure decision-making programme for autistic adults." Autism 28(8), 2090-2104. doi:10.1177/13623613231221685

Understanding Zoe is the first neuroaffirming AI-powered app that turns every report, observation and moment into an actionable next step, supporting neurodivergent people and those who care about them to thrive.

for more information, you can contact

hello@understandingzoe.com

Copyright 2026