A fact sheet about

Seeing yourself in your child

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Seeing yourself in your child

Why many parents see themselves in their child, and one private step to try.



Key points

- Many adults first see that they may be autistic, ADHD or more broadly neurodivergent while they are learning about their child. It is a common way people come to know themselves later in life.
- If you were not noticed as a child, that says more about what people were looking for back then than about you.
- People describe many feelings at once: relief, grief for their younger self, anger and doubt. All of them make sense.
- You do not need an assessment to take this seriously. One step to try: keep a private note of one thing that makes more sense now.

Why this is a common way to find out more about yourself

You may be sitting in your child's assessment, or reading about how they experience the world. A question about them reads like a question about you, and a story about school sounds like your own. Or your child is grown, and something they share about themselves sounds like your life.

It can be a lot to take in, alongside everything else. This page is about you, and about what you can do with what you have noticed.

Learning about your child can give you a name for things you have felt all your life. In one study (nine adults assessed as autistic in their fifties), three first went looking after their child was assessed. They had seen the same traits in themselves. A review of research on women assessed as ADHD as adults found the same route.

Autism and ADHD are both often shared within families. Large studies of twins and siblings suggest genes play a large part, so it is common for a parent and child to both be autistic, ADHD or both. So seeing yourself in your child is not unusual.

Some neurodivergent parents say it brings a closeness, because they understand what their child is going through.

Self-identification is valid. You do not need an assessment to know you are autistic, ADHD or neurodivergent in another way. An assessment can cost a lot, take a long time and be hard to reach, so it is not open to everyone. Some people choose to have one, for example to get certain support.

Why you may not have been noticed as a child

When you were young, the picture of autism and ADHD may have been narrower. It was mostly based on presentation in boys, and on what people could see from the outside. AFAB, Girls and women were more often missed, or given another label first.

In the Australian study, women and people who spoke a language other than English at home also tended to be assessed later. Many people also learned young to hide how they were, to stay safe or fit in. You can read more about why masking is hard to stop here.

What it can feel like

People who come to this later describe many feelings, often at once. There may be relief that so much makes sense, and that it was not your fault. There may be grief or regret for your younger self, who had no explanation. There may be anger that nobody noticed, and doubt about whether it is real.

Over time, many say they became kinder to themselves, where before they had been harsh. People who felt they understood themselves better also took on less of other people's negative views about autism. Some autistic people say being autistic is simply part of who they are, neither good nor bad, and the hard part may be how others see it.

Most of these accounts are from people who went on to have an assessment. Most of this research is with autistic adults, and one review is with ADHD women. If you are ADHD or neurodivergent in another way, you may recognise this too.

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.

The one thing to try: keep a private note to turn what you notice into what you need

When you have the space for it, write one line about one thing in your own life that makes more sense now. Then add a second line about one small thing you could let yourself have because of it. For example:

- "I always left parties early. I needed quiet." Then: "I can leave when I need to."
- "The noise in shops wore me out." Then: "Earplugs in shops are fine."
- "I lost track of time when I was into something." Then: "I can set a timer instead of telling myself off."

There is no right amount, and you can come back to it in a week or a year. You can create these lines in your notes in the Understanding Zoe app, by talking or typing. Then they are all in one place when you

want to look back.

You do not need to tell anyone, act on it, or decide anything about an assessment. If you would like help writing it down, a support person you trust can help. If one day you want to share it, being able to share is not open to everyone. For some people, often BBIA or LGBTQIA+ people, it may not be safe. You can read more about what can change in relationships here.

This step comes from what adults who found out later in life that they were neurodivergent say has helped them. 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 whether you are autistic, ADHD or neurodivergent in another way.

You can ask for support at any point. 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 make sense of this, whether or not you want an assessment. Your GP can help you work out who is right for you.

You can also book a telehealth session through Understanding Zoe.

An assessment is one option among several. It can cost a lot and take a long time, and many people identify themselves without one. If you are also juggling your own needs and your child's day to day, you can read more about looking after your own regulation here.

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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.

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