

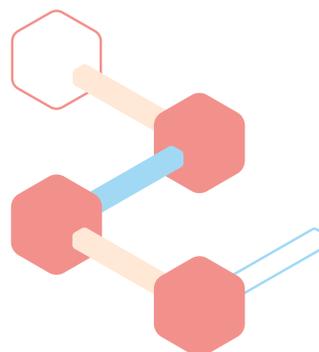
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community connection fact sheet

OTARC | La Trobe University

Being identified as autistic is a **life-changing experience** for many individuals and their supporters. Whether recognition comes through self-identification or a formal diagnosis from a healthcare professional, promoting **meaningful opportunities for self-understanding** can be particularly helpful for people identified later in life, and those identified in childhood who may have already received a lot of unhelpful messages about what it means to be autistic.

Importantly, there is no standard or “ideal” response when a person learns they are autistic. This process can bring **clarity, relief, and self-compassion**, while also prompting reflection on past experiences, relationships, and unmet support needs. What is clear is that few people receive structured support or guidance to **help them make sense** of what this information means for their everyday lives.



The Importance of Community & Connection

Autistic people consistently describe community connection as a central part of developing self-understanding, identity, and wellbeing. Opportunities to learn from and connect with other autistic people can be particularly important for those who feel isolated or who have struggled to build a positive sense of self.

Here, autistic leaders from peer-led and community organisations share key insights about the benefits of community connection for autistic people:

Connection

Autistic people, like everyone else, benefit from connection, belonging and understanding. Being part of a community helps autistic people feel safe, accepted and valued for who they are, without pressure to change or fit in. Because many autistic people have often felt rejected or excluded, this sense of acceptance is especially important.

Reducing Isolation

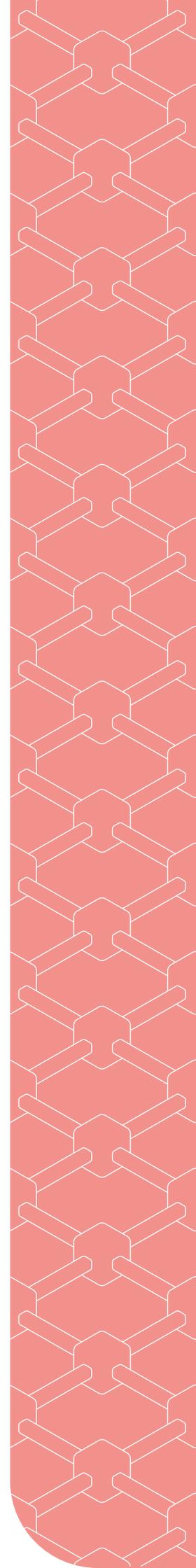
Many autistic people feel isolated because social spaces are not always inclusive or understanding of their sensory or communication needs. However, finding a community that is flexible, welcoming and understanding can reduce loneliness and make it easier to connect with others.

Shared Lived Experience

Spending time with people who have had similar experiences creates trust and understanding. Peer-led communities allow autistic people and carers to share knowledge, support each other and feel less alone. Knowing that others have had experiences similar to yours can feel very validating and help reduce shame and stigma.

Supporting Wellbeing

Feeling connected to others supports mental health and emotional wellbeing, as autistic peers may better understand the additional and often complex challenges autistic people may face, such as experiencing co-occurring conditions and mental health concerns. Safe autistic community spaces can help reduce the need to mask/



camouflage, which can reduce stress, anxiety, and autistic burnout, especially during times of change or uncertainty.

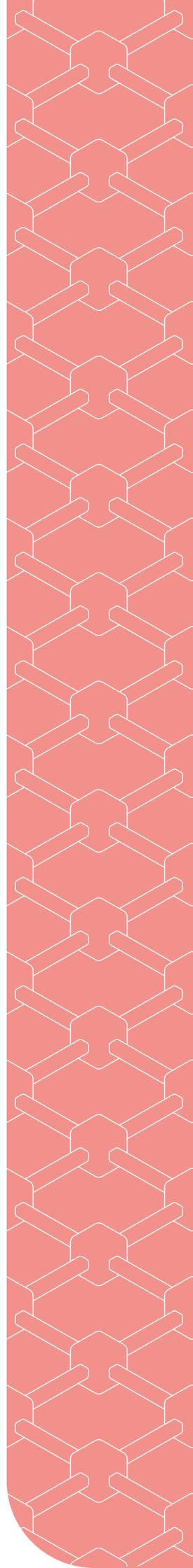
Empowerment

Being part of a supportive community helps autistic people build confidence, communication skills, and self-advocacy. This should happen in ways that feel comfortable and respectful of each individual's needs.

Learn what it means to be autistic

There are aspects of being autistic that are not well understood in society. However, when people enter autistic spaces and spend time with other autistic people, they can learn about these experiences and their impact on mental health.

Additionally, when people learn about autistic culture, autistic communication styles, why autistic people behave in the ways they do and understand the underlying nature of being autistic, it can help them to strengthen their autistic identity. They are unlikely to be shamed for their authentic autistic behaviours. They can begin to unlearn neuronormativity standards, embrace their autistic self and reject shame for being who they are. This can all have significant positive impacts on their wellbeing.



Guidance for Healthcare Professionals

Through learning what has worked well for other autistic people, they may feel increasingly confident to move beyond traditional mental health information and strategies and align themselves with more suitable and autism-friendly mental health strategies. Sharing information, including what works well and what does not, is very helpful for people learning to navigate their lives after diagnosis.

How Can You Encourage Community Connection?

When working with individuals who may be masking or who have experienced delayed autism identification, it is important to:

- Keep a record of local autistic peer support groups and encourage attendance
- Keep a list of trusted sources on the internet to refer people to. For example, this may be autistic content creators on social media or autistic-led autism organisations
- Keep a list of books written by autistic authors for people of different ages, backgrounds, and identity groups
- Refer to autistic healthcare professionals where available

What Should You be Aware of Regarding Community Connections?

Medical framing is not always helpful - developing a positive autistic identity requires a neuro-affirming perspective that recognises the strengths, challenges, and individuality of all people who just happen to share the same diagnosis.

Self-exploration is important - you may develop a good list of resources, but people will always find those they connect more strongly with. Be open to continuously updating your resource list and ask autistic people what has been most helpful for them.

Connection looks different for everyone - community does not have to mean large groups or constant socialising. For some people, connection may mean small gatherings, shared interests, online spaces, or one-to-one support. Choice and safety are what matter most.

Connecting to Autism and Autistic Communities in Australia

Lived experience led organisations

Autistic Self Advocacy Network
AUNZ

<https://www.asan-aunz.org/>

Different Journeys

<https://www.differentjourneysautism.com/>

Reframing Autism

<https://reframingautism.org.au/>

Yellow Ladybugs

<https://www.yellowladybugs.com.au/>

Peak organisations

Amaze (Vic)

<https://www.amaze.org.au/>

Aspect Australia

<https://www.aspect.org.au/>

Autism NT (NT)

<https://www.autismnt.org.au/>

Autism Queensland (Qld)

<https://autismqld.com.au/>

Autism SA (SA)

<https://autismsa.org.au/>

Autism Tasmania (Tas)

<https://www.autismtas.org.au/>

Autism WA (WA)

<https://autism.org.au/>

