

Moira's Teen Recommendations

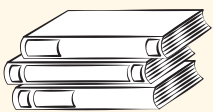
Resource recommendations
from ECHO Ontario Autism Hub
Team Member Moira Robertson
(Autistic Advisor) for teens newly
diagnosed with Autism.



As a young autistic teen hearing the word autism for the first time, I was scared. I was the definition of an angry angsty teen, and I definitely did not want to have another reason I was different and not fitting in with my peers.

To add to it, some adults and friends in my life understood me more with “autism” metaphorically slapped across my chest; others understood me less, insisting I couldn’t be autistic. I struggled to know which side to pick. Was I lazy, weird, unorganized, annoying, sensitive or any of the other hurtful words people described me as? Or did I just have a different brain that I had to learn how to care for? Was I doomed to a life of struggle and pain? Or did I have whatever future I wanted in front of me?

I was lost and I didn’t know what to believe, where to look and who to ask for help in understanding this new part of myself. I’ve now learned what I hope you will learn: I was not alone in this feeling. So here is a list of resources to help the next group of autistic teens to learn to understand themselves and their place in the world a little bit better. But most of all learn that they are not alone in all the complicated feelings they might be feeling.



Books

Different not Less, Chloe Hayden

When I first read this book by Chloe Hayden a few years ago, I am not ashamed to admit I cried a lot. This book is written by a young autistic woman who is unapologetically her whole autistic self and is open about the difficult journey it took to get there. She talks about the slew of diagnoses she was labeled with before professionals recognized that she was autistic. It is very informative about the differences and intersecting pieces of these diagnoses with autism. I would put a trigger warning on this book because it does talk about sensitive topics such as eating disorders and sexual assault. She has very heartwarming (and heartbreaking) stories that make you feel understood. There is a funny story about her navigating her period while traveling on a plane (an already stressful experience) that made me smile with how relatable it all was. There is one section of the book I re-read every time I feel misunderstood by people in my life that gives me a feeling of hope and always makes me feel better. It is a section written by her partner speaking about how much they love her autistic traits and how they work together. They talk explicitly about how much they love those parts of her that I myself have heard a lifetime of hurtful words about. It’s nice to know people will love those parts of me too.

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The Spectrum Girls Survival Guide, Siena Castellon

This book was written by a 16-year-old for other teens. This means it is very relatable and contains information that teens actually want and need to know. This means it has about 6 pages worth of learning how to properly shave your entire body (something that teens often wish to do). It talks about having healthy sex and healthy relationships. I know I would have needed this at 16. There are sections about how to handle sensory needs in places teens like to go (like school). But also, what to do when teachers don't want to help support your needs or actively behave in ways that upset you. It really is an in depth "survival guide" for being an autistic teen girl. I wish I had this book when I was 16.

The Awesome Autistic Go-To Guide

This is a relatively short book but a good one. It was written by autistic people, for autistic people. It is a fill in the blank style book, but even without filling it in, the reading is beneficial. This book looks at accepting yourself and navigating life, school and friendships, while also being autistic.

Funny You Don't Look Autistic, Michael McCreary

I love this book. The author of this book grew up in Orangeville, Ontario and is autistic, along with his brother. This book is very funny and makes autism seem far less scary and full of struggles. It brings light to the honestly downright silly situations that us autistic people can get ourselves into due to our disability. It is nice to read someone make jokes about similar situations that at one point in time would have caused me shame and embarrassment. Also, the chapter titles are great jokes on their own: "Everyone has an anime phase" is just hilarious.

Can't Read, Can't Write, Here Is My Book AND I Belong: Can I Play?, Michael Jacques

In high school I was a part of a Re:Action 4 Inclusion group in my school. As a result, when my grandmother heard the author speak at a Community Living presentation about his new book and learned he was also a part of that group, she bought me his first book (*Can't Read, Can't Write, Here is My Book*). This was the first book I ever read about autism. Michael has a way of writing about his experiences that make them relatable and as a result helped me feel understood for the first time reading his words. Michael is an individual with autism and an intellectual disability and discusses his experiences growing up and his writing process. His stories describe situations that I thought I was alone in feeling and experiencing until I read his book. He grew up in Ontario as well and I have heard him speak a couple times since (and he heard me speak one time!) His second book is a children's book but is still a lovely read for teens. This book is all about inclusion and its importance to those with disabilities.

Ready for it, Chustia Fashion Fever

This book is not about autism specifically and can be graphic at times. However, when talking about teens there will be discussions about all the new experiences that come along with that stage of a persons' life - autistic or not. This means discussions about masturbation, sex, sexuality, consent, changing relationship dynamics and the complications that come with all of these. All teens navigate and struggle with these social and physical developments in their life, but autistic teens will undoubtedly struggle with more due to the changing social demands and understanding associated with it. Yet, they are also the least likely to receive in depth education on these issues. This book is therefore not for those who are in denial that their teenagers need to know how to actually use a condom on something other than a banana, because this book will give step by step instructions. I repeat this is a very graphic book including accurate images.

It includes literal instructions on how to "pleasure" each sex. It also speaks in depth about consent, including how to ask if their partner is enjoying it, and how to handle situations where they are not. While this may

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be alarming to some, it is important to note that autistic teens will seek this information out anyway. One would rather an autistic teen learn this from this book than from their friends, traumatic experiences, social media or porn (none of which are guaranteed to provide accurate and safe information). As adults in teens lives, it is hard to talk about these things and so this book helps alleviate some of the awkwardness while still providing the education. I only heard about this book a few years ago but I desperately wish I could go back in time and tell myself to get off WikiHow and just read this book. Save these teens the embarrassment, *please*.



Groups

Re:Action for Inclusion

Re:Action 4 Inclusion is a youth led movement that aims to connect youth across Ontario who are passionate about disability advocacy for all. What I knew in high school has changed slightly due to the pandemic. This group used to have yearly conferences where youth were able to come together to talk about inclusion within their schools and communities and develop ideas and action plans to incorporate them when they returned with their groups from their schools. Since the pandemic this group has changed to focusing on social media campaigns, speaking to professionals about youth advocacy and inclusion, as well as various workshops for youth aimed at creating that same sense of empowerment I knew in high school. There are new workshops being created every year and various opportunities to engage. The Youth Advisory Council for this group is open from ages 14 to 29. They work to create these opportunities to help change the narrative around disability in Canada and advocate for inclusion. I am a part of this group and while all of the above is great, the best part of this group for me as a teen (and continues to be for me as a young adult) is that it is a space where I am not alone. It is a group with other young people across Ontario with disabilities like (and unlike) my own who experience the same daily struggles created by society that I do. It is nice to be in a space where I can just be angry and annoyed about the systems that we live in and know I am not alone and in a space with people who want to create change. This group is very much a strong influencing factor in what I do now in my education and advocacy work.



Shows

Everything is Going to Be Ok, Hulu

Technically, the first show I watched with a canonically Autistic person was *The Good Doctor*, then *Atypical*. But I just never really saw myself in those characters. There were a few times I did within some episodes, but overall, I felt they didn't quite fit. Then I watched this show. It is just goofy and weird, but I love it. The whole premise of this show is that a 25-year-old becomes the legal guardian to his teen sisters after their dad dies; one of these sisters being autistic. This character is played by an actually autistic person - unlike the two shows listed earlier. I think maybe this was the difference to me feeling understood. It wasn't an act, which always felt to me like I was indirectly being made fun of, but instead it was just who they were. Autism is a piece of this story but it is not the whole story. It just makes you smile to see someone just like you on the screen for the first time.

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Heartbreak High, Netflix

If you have ever watched the show *Sex Education* or *Degrassi*, the best way to describe this show is a mix of those two. It is a weird and silly show. I will caution this show has a lot, and I mean a lot of sex jokes. They are age appropriate for teenagers however, perhaps on the older end of teenagers. This show includes Quinni, an autistic character who is just as involved in all the *Degrassi*-like plot lines and sex jokes as everyone else. She is treated as equal but the show does not shy away from the times she is not, due to a lack of understanding. I watch one episode over and over again for this reason. Even though this is a silly show it discusses some serious issues. In the episode I re-watch, Quinni's partner gets frustrated at her needs and states "you know sometimes it's hard to be around you," and Quinni responds with, "it's hard for me too". This is a scenario that has played out many times my whole life, and to see it so accurately shown in a way I can show to people who care about me and let them know that is how I feel, it's helpful. Even just being understood like that is helpful. I wish I could have watched this as a teen to know I wasn't alone in that horrible feeling you experience every time that conversation plays out. I wish I had this as a teen to see the love and care between Quinni and her best friend. Who shows her unconditional and understanding love regardless of her autistic traits.

A Kind of Spark, CBC Gem/ BBC

I recently watched this show and fell in love with the first season. The second season is great as well but follows a totally different plot and structure. The first season starts with a young autistic teen (Addie) and her two sisters, one of whom is also autistic. She starts at a new school and while learning to navigate the changing friendship dynamics of becoming a teen, learns about the witch trials in her town through a diary. There are then flashbacks to this time period in the town where two sisters are navigating this witch trial period. The one sister in this time period is implied to also be autistic with the various phrases used and the stimming behaviors shown. Addie is attempting to solve a mystery in relation to these two sisters. But there is a large amount of just heartwarming representation of autism throughout different time periods and the magic we can create with our differences - even through the challenges we also have.

The second season has a completely different structure. Addie works on running a bookstore and through that is connected with an old friend of her sisters, who is also autistic. The friend's mother is resistant to allowing her daughter to show autistic traits and it causes significant distress for the friend. Addie helps the friend navigate this understanding about who she is and her relationship with her parents. The mother talks openly about the fears parents can have with situations their autistic kids can experience.



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Social Media / People

Chloe Hayden, Instagram/TikTok/Author/Actor

Chloe Hayden on social media makes content that can be relatable to lots of autistic people. She also creates uplifting content showing the beauty of autism traits alongside the struggles that can exist. She is also an actor and author of items already listed here.

Kayla Cromer, Actor

Kayla Cromer is an autistic actor who is increasingly gaining more roles representing autism in various shows. She had her own character created on *Monster High* and also *The Good Doctor*.

@Autism_Happy_Place, Instagram

If you have ever seen those little penguin drawings on Instagram - this is where they are from. This page just helps explain a lot of concepts related to autism in an easy and accessible way. Along with providing ideas for various ways to support autistic people's needs in various situations.

@Kaelynn_vp, TikTok

This person was on *Love on the Spectrum*, but also works as a professional with other autistic people and is a public speaker. She shares lots of tips and tricks on navigating the world as an autistic person. She explains difficult concepts in easy to understand and accessible ways. She just shares about her life and also helps spread understanding for autistic people with different support needs than herself through her friend who is a frequent feature on her Tiktok.

It is important to note that this is not an exhaustive list. This is just what I myself wish I would have been handed as a resource list when I was that lost angry teenager not that long ago. These are just a start however. While these resources are wonderful, what helped me more than anything else with accepting myself as autistic were the people around me. The people in my life who just saw me as me, as the angry angsty teen I was. They pushed me to do things I would have never done and me being autistic never changed that. They saw the teen who was lost and just needed to know who I was. When you get to teen years as an autistic person, diagnosis or not you know you are different from your peers. The weird looks, hurtful words and lack of understanding of who I was as a person growing up - I knew I was different. But learning why I was different from all of my peers, and worst of all that it was something I could never fix - felt horrible. I felt lost and alone with this word "autism" being metaphorically slapped across my chest. I didn't know where to turn for answers. While I may have had people who weren't ready to accept this part of me, myself included, the people who helped me start to find answers and learn to accept who I was were the adults and friends I had who never saw the word "autism" as the same earth-shattering news I did. They understood me and knew who I was, diagnosis or not. I was autistic. I was me and that was ok - because they taught me it was. These resources would have only amplified what they were already showing me; understanding and love.

Moira