

# Autism in Girls

A family group session at  
Glebe School

24.03.36

Paul Cabb



Social Eyes - A Vision for Inclusion



# Agenda



- **What do we know about Autism in girls compared with boys?**
- **Why have girls been missed, late or non-diagnosed**
- **How does Autism in girls often present growing up?**
- **What are the potential barriers?**
- **What are schools doing to support?**
- **What can you do to support your daughter?**

**Supporting  
Autistic Girls**



# Of children diagnosed with ASD



**female**



**male**

Why and what  
does this really  
mean?



Many autistic women and girls receive a diagnosis late in life or are misdiagnosed with conditions other than autism such as:

**Mental health issues**

**OCD**

**Eating disorders**

**Personality disorders**

**Selective mutism**

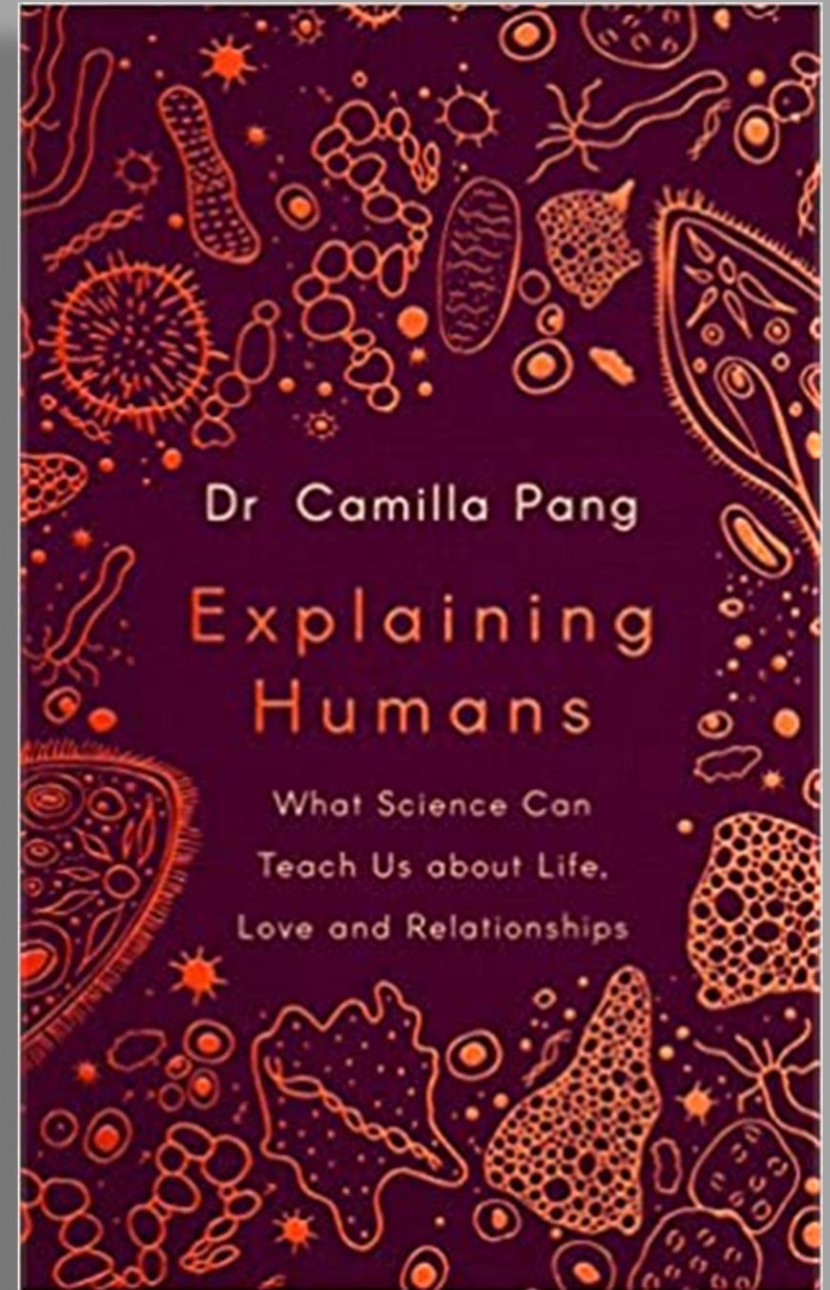
**Anxiety and Depression**





"I feel autistic women are more likely to be described as 'anxious' and an autism diagnosis overlooked, since it can challenge gender stereotypes."

**Dr Camilla Pang**





3 facts about  
**AUTISTIC  
WOMEN & GIRLS**  
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Autistic females often mask their symptoms better than autistic males.

Autistic females aren't "just a little socially anxious". In fact, some are extroverted!



Autism isn't a male disorder. It's just taken the medical community longer to recognise the traits in females.

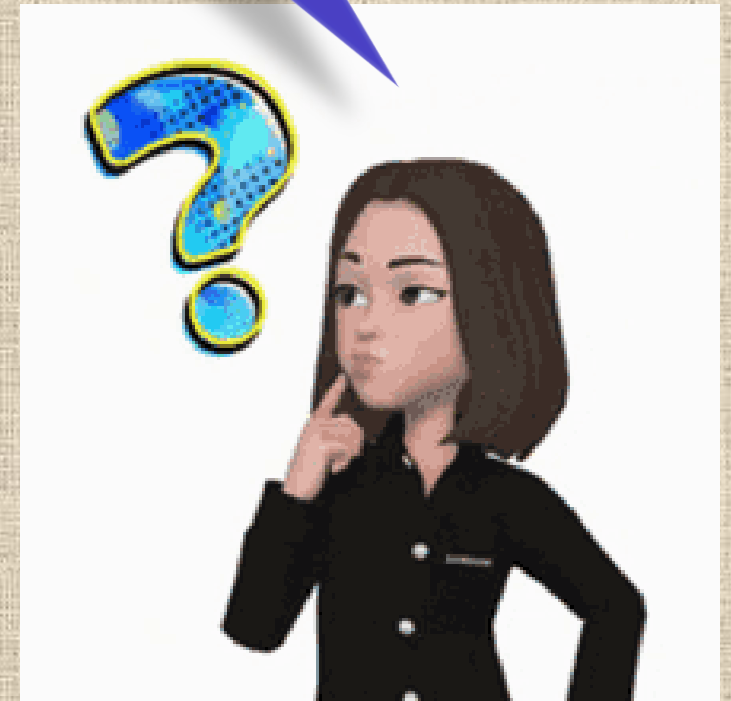
Confronting stereotypes...

# 5 FACTS ABOUT AUTISM IN GIRLS

- 1** Most current Autism assessments were normed by boys. This means tests may not accurately identify girls.
- 2** Girls are often socially motivated and have less clear/ unusual repetitive movements/actions, or special interests.
- 3** Even when girls have the same list of characteristics or presentation as males, they are still not getting diagnosed.
- 4** Girls often first receive one or more incorrect diagnoses (anxiety, depression, ADHD, OCD), and are typically diagnosed much later than boys.
- 5** These girls are excellent at mimicking others- but often don't understand "why" people do or think what they do.

MrsSpeechieP

Why are girls  
less likely to be  
diagnosed?



# What are the common traits?



# How does Autism often present in girls?

## AUTISM IN FEMALES KEY FEATURES OF THE FEMALE PRESENTATION



# 10 Things To Know About Female Autism

## by the girl with the curly hair

1. It's common for autistic women & girls to *mask* their difficulties, leading to their autism being missed

2. Autistic women & girls are commonly described as very "shy", "anxious" and/or "quiet"

3. Autistic women & girls may have a lot of difficulty *maintaining friendships* (even if they are friendly and people like them)

4. Autistic girls may develop fairly typically when they are young, but their difficulties become more severe during the teenage years

5. Autistic women & girls may have 'normal' interests, but to a much greater intensity than other people



6. Autistic women & girls might be more likely to experience depression and anxiety

7. Autistic women & girls may be quite passive and are likely to just go along with things and agree to things

8. Autistic women & girls are likely to be very sensitive and have very strong emotions

9. Some autistic women & girls are very sociable, chatty and loud

10. Not recognising their autism can mean many women & girls not only struggle to manage their problems, but may not fully appreciate their strengths and uniqueness

Always remember that **everyone is different**. These are **general** findings and are not true for everyone  
Find out more about Autism & Females at [www.thegirlwiththecurlyhair.co.uk](http://www.thegirlwiththecurlyhair.co.uk)

Attention

Social Interaction

Communication

Routine and change

Sensory

Learning & Thinking



Attention

Social Interaction

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**ADHD/ASC  
also known  
as AuDHD**

# How does Autism present differently in boys/girls?

## Boys:

- ❖ Social awkwardness
- ❖ Lack of friends
- ❖ Obscure special interests
- ❖ Lack of eye contact
- ❖ Odd speech/communication
- ❖ Motor control difficulties
- ❖ stimming
- ❖ Anger/aggression/outbursts
- ❖ Routine led
- ❖ Extreme logic
- ❖ Lost on own world



## Girls

- ❖ A few close friends – often as protectors
- ❖ Socially appropriate (potentially young) interests
- ❖ Over sensitivity – ‘drama queen’ metaphor
- ❖ May appear shy/withdrawn
- ❖ scripted/copied talk – from friends or TV/movies
- ❖ May sound younger than age
- ❖ Stimming tends to be twirling hair/spinning/thumb sucking
- ❖ Prone to upset rather than aggression – less likely seen at school compared with at home
- ❖ May appear highly organised/reliant on organisation
- ❖ Uses past experiences and behaviours linked to situations

# Five key areas of difference: Girls V Boys ASC:

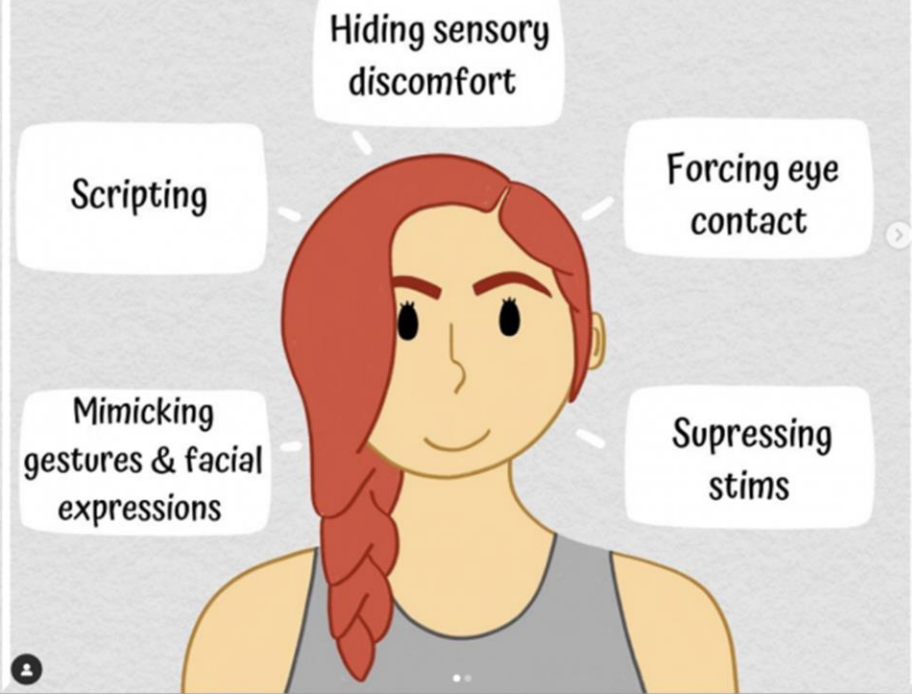
- **Mirroring** – girls are more likely to copy mannerisms/language and personas
- **Social awareness** – girls are more likely to maintain and adjust social behaviours in their relationships and adapt to different situations
- **Hyper-empathy** – may naturally have a greater sense of awareness of the other person's feelings and experience
- **Social withdrawal** - girls can have a more direct communication style and therefore more prone to making blunt comments albeit with good intentions and then withdraw to avoid being misunderstood
- **People pleasing behaviours** – girls are more likely to mask their true selves and mirror what others expect in order to take on a perceived norm



[https://youtu.be/4Xtog\\_zRRJg](https://youtu.be/4Xtog_zRRJg)

# WHAT AUTISTIC MASKING LOOKS LIKE

@theburntbrain x @autisecare



Masking and girls

# Autistic Masking

Can Look Like

Suppressing Stims

Forcing Eye Contact

Intensely Self Monitoring

Rehearsed Scripts

Intensely Adapting To Suit The Social Environment

Exaggerated Facial Expressions

Ignoring Sensory Trauma

Ignoring Spoon Levels

Appearing to know what's happening, but actually are lost



Ignoring Own Social Interactions Capacity

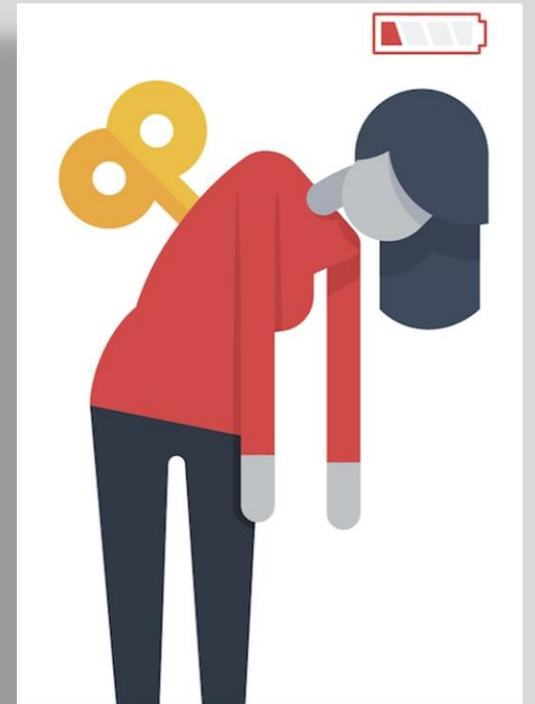
@littlepuddins.ie

Girls are more likely to internalise stress

Girls are more likely to shutdown

Girls are more likely to show burn out

Girls are more likely to self-harm

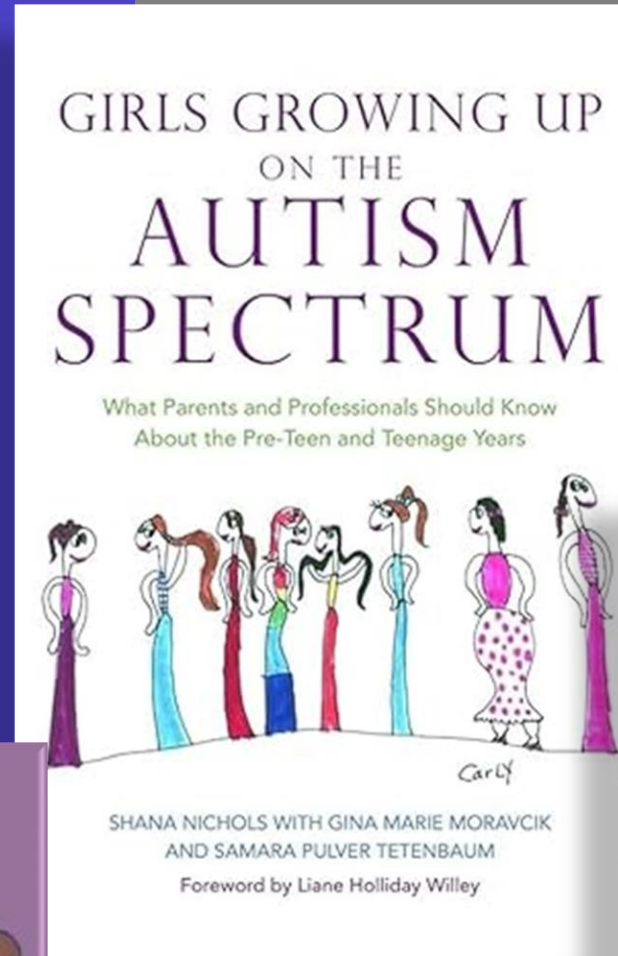


# How can we support ASC girls?

3 facts about  
**AUTISTIC**  
**WOMEN & GIRLS**




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**Parenting  
Girls on the  
Autism Spectrum**

*Overcoming the Challenges  
and Celebrating the Gifts*



Eileen Riley-Hall Foreword by Shana Nichols

**Recognise  
both strengths  
and challenges**

‘Supporting autistic girls begins with listening and observing. It requires recognising both challenges and strengths.

Autistic girls often have exceptional passion, creativity, and depth of knowledge, and these qualities should be celebrated and incorporated into daily life wherever possible’

[www.witherslackgroup.co.uk](http://www.witherslackgroup.co.uk)

# The Authentic You:

Using your strengths

Doing what you love

Being happy with yourself

Happyologist

Focus on what makes you child happy and fulfilled

HOW TO BE YOUR AUTHENTIC SELF



Be yourself.  
**EVERYONE**  
else is  
**TAKEN.**

# What can we do to support girls?

## Autistic Culture

@littlepuddins.ie



Music on repeat



Headphones



Rewatching shows/movies



Stimming



Comfy clothes



Plain foods



Sensory differences



Routines



Special Interests



Stim/Fidget Toys



Info dumping



Safe Place

# 'Mask free' havens

'Creating safe spaces where girls can be themselves without masking is crucial. This may include downtime after social interaction, sensory support, and alternative ways to communicate such as drawing, writing, or using symbols'



## Supporting your daughter to grow into herself:



- Time for your daughter to **process** after social times, space to stim
- Helping your daughter to recognise and enjoy having **breaks**
- A diagnosis can help your daughter to grow into understanding themselves better and more confidently – **giving answers/explanations** for how they see/feel the world around them
- Helping your daughter to recognise their **strengths** and special **interests** and supporting these in their daily life

‘Empowerment comes through understanding. When girls learn that being different is not something to hide or fix, but something to be proud of, their confidence can grow.

Educating others about the subtle differences between autism in girls and boys helps shift outdated narratives and ensures more girls are recognised, supported, and proud of their neurodiversity’

[www.witherslackgroup.co.uk](http://www.witherslackgroup.co.uk)

[Appeer CIC](#)



**APPEER**  
*Connecting autistic girls and women*

# Check Your Battery

How are you currently feeling?

## Feeling great!

Keep meeting your needs and practicing self-care.

## Feeling okay.

How can you make your day a tiny bit better?

## Struggling.

Practice triage. What area of your life is suffering the most right now? Focus on that one area today.

BlessingManifesting



## Feeling good!

How can you maintain the levels you're currently at?

## Meh.

How can you love on your -self today? Be extra kind to yourself.

## I'm empty.

Pinpoint what's draining you and try to create a boundary & then do one thing that fills you up.

Positive reflection

# REMINDERS FOR HARD DAYS

1. A bad day does not equal a bad life. *You are not this struggle.*
2. Not all thoughts are true. *Phew.*
3. Feelings are not facts. *But all your feelings are valid, real, and allowed.*
4. The only way out is through. *DARN IT.*
5. Your worth is not contingent on circumstances. *You are LOVABLE and ENOUGH always.*
6. Nothing stays the same. *Life guarantees this.*
7. You can't be everything to everyone. *But you can be true to yourself.*
8. Be gentle with yourself. And trust your inner voice, strength, and resilience.
9. You're not alone. It's okay to ask for help. *And be vulnerable.*
10. Focus on the things you can control. *Let go of the rest.* *This is easier said than done.*

# HELP YOUR CHILD UNDERSTAND WHAT THEY CAN AND CAN'T CONTROL

✓ Their attitude

✓ How they treat people

✓ The effort they put into things

✓ Their objectives

✓ Asking for help



✗ What has already happened

✗ Feeling sick

✗ What other people think or say

✗ How other people act

✗ Time or weather



**Growing up is about knowing what you can and cannot change**

Help your daughter to recognise what they can and can't change is a key stress reducer over time...

# Key tips for families:

## The Authentic You:

Using your  
strengths

Doing what  
you love

Being happy  
with yourself

- Reinforce routines - create a daily schedule - security and independence
- Keep talking/communicating with your teen know matter what about!!
- Help them to understand their strengths and confront what gets in the way
- Listen, acknowledge and problem solve/teach situations
- Be literal/factual around body change and puberty
- Use affirmations - help them get over obstacles in their own way of doing things
- Celebrate small steps of progress
- Look out for increasing withdrawal/"Burn Out" signs and talk to Glebe



<https://youtu.be/oZhZ0k1lyF8?si=144RmQIU9fvAhmM9>

## Useful resources, links and further reading:

'Girls and Autism': Carpenter, Happe et al, 2019

'The Spectrum Girl's Survival Guide: How to Grow Up Awesome and Autistic': Castellon and Grandin, 2020

NASEN: 'Flying Under the Radar'

<http://www.nasen.org.uk/resources/resources.girls-and-autism-flying-under-the-radar.html>

**The National Autistic Society: -**

<https://www.autism.org.uk/about/what-is/gender/stories.aspx>

**Limpsfield Grange -** <https://limpsfieldgrange.co.uk/>

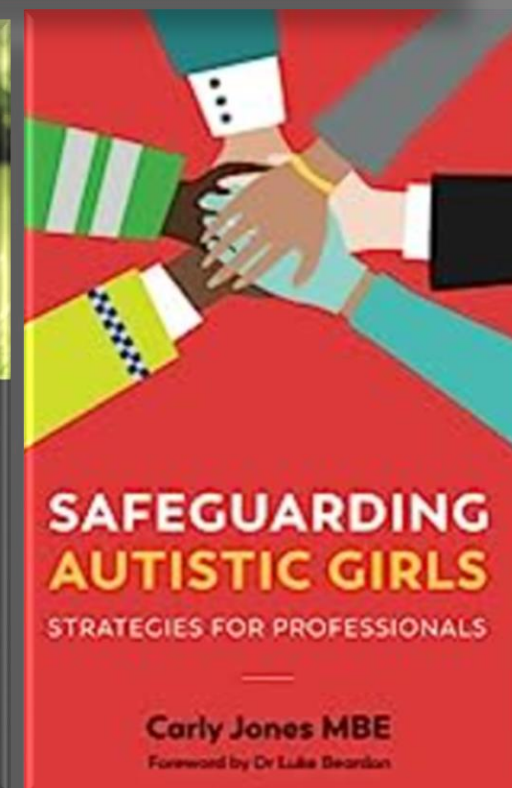
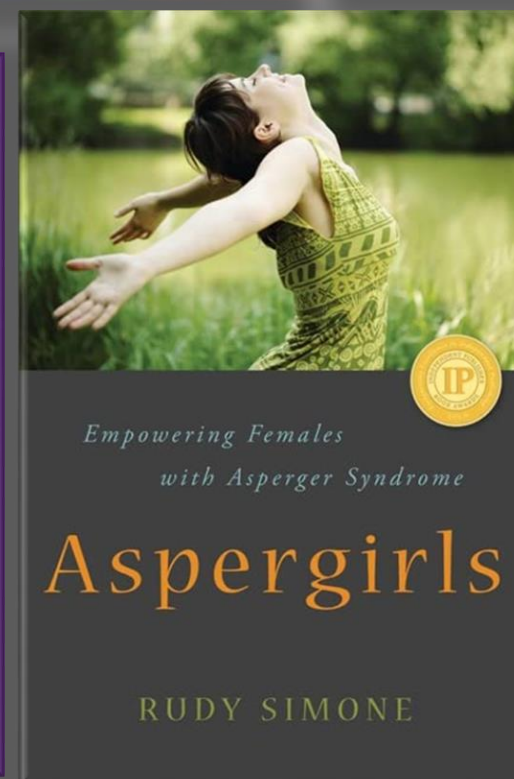
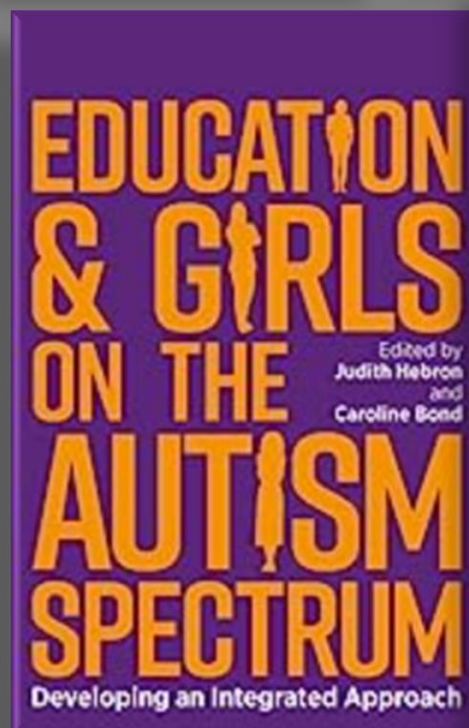
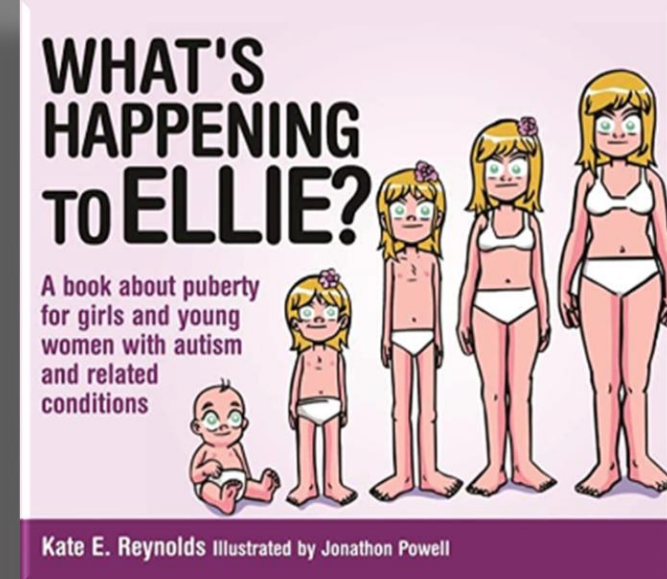
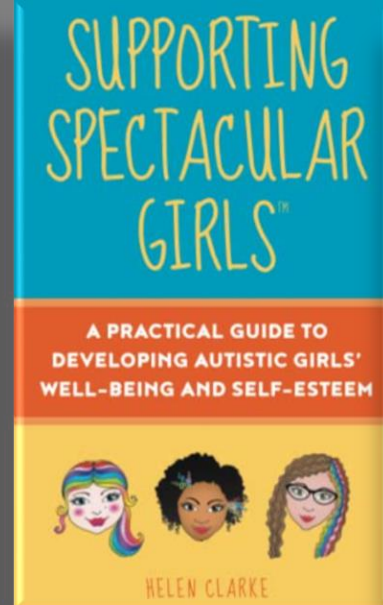
Jacqui Ashton-Smith and Judith Gould: 'The Diagnosis and Education of Girls and Women with Autism'

Tony Attwood and Temple Grandin: 'Asperger's and Girls'.

### Video Clips:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oZhZ0k1lyF8> (The Girls of Limpsfield Grange)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iQ95xIZeHo8> (Rosie King Ted Talk).



**Paul Cabb  
Social Eyes  
and  
Glebe School**



There is so much that autistic women and girls can give to each other, including  
*love. laughter. joy. kind smiles. critical thought. understanding. and true safety.*

*- Jean Winegardner*

**Thank you for joining us**

