

Autistic people aren't always "fun, quirky, and cute." And if you don't respect us when we don't live up to those adjectives, you don't respect us at all.

Neurotypicals sometimes say things like "I would never be mean to an autistic person!" or "I would never judge an autistic person!" Without fully realizing what autism is, and what it means.

Some people have an idealized version of autistic people in their heads, as innocent and pure angels who don't do anything too socially unacceptable or destructive. Rather, in their minds, we exist primarily in a state of adorable bliss that others can appreciate.

But autistic people often do things that are widely deemed socially unacceptable, taboo, immature, and destructive.

Here are some examples of things some autistic people might do that are generally frowned upon by society at large:

- Picking their nose in public, and/or picking at their skin
- Having greasy hair from not bathing regularly
- Biting their nails in public
- Burping loudly around other people
- Having loud, violent meltdowns in public
- Saying taboo thoughts out loud
- Making guttural noises and grunts
- Unintentionally getting into other people's personal space
- Wearing the same clothes every day, even when the clothes start to get dirty
- Stimming obviously, in a way that's seen as bizarre and unusual

Those are all behaviors that usually lead to some degree of social ostracization. And the people who say things like "autistic people are precious and adorable!!" might also be the first people to shun, exclude, bully, and ridicule people who do things on this list.

There are reasons that social norms exist. Some of those reasons are good reasons, and some are bad reasons. It's a mix. I would argue that there are good reasons for bathing regularly, keeping taboo thoughts to yourself, washing & changing your clothes, etc.

But the reasons for not stimming in public, not making noises, and not having meltdowns are just a function of ableism.

Exclusion and other subtle social tactics generally work to change behavior in the person exhibiting the socially undesirable trait. That is, unless the person is autistic, disabled, or otherwise neurodivergent.

It's much harder for autistic people to pick up on when we're doing things that other people find upsetting or uncomfortable. Unless someone tells us directly, we might remain completely unaware of what we're doing. *And even if we know what we're doing "wrong," it can be extremely hard for us to change it.*

There are several main reasons for that:

1. **Our altered sensory processing means we may not even be physically aware that we're doing certain things.** We might have no idea that we're too close to someone, or that we're being too loud. Even if we become aware of those things because someone tells us, it can be difficult to regulate and monitor our position, volume, etc.
2. **We often have sensory needs and impulses that are very difficult to redirect.** An autistic person who's picking their nose might be extremely bothered by the physical sensation of mucus blocking their airway. An autistic person who's yelling or grunting loudly might have an intense need to feel vibrating pressure in their chest. Even if people tell us that doing those things in public is taboo, we might not be able to stop because the sensory needs involved are too powerful to override.
3. **We often have difficulty with executive function, time management, and organization.** We might have greasy hair and unwashed clothes because we haven't been able to gather the executive function required to take a shower or do laundry. It's not that we don't want to take care of ourselves, it's that we're often literally not able to do things on a timescale that's socially acceptable.
4. **We often have difficulty "reading the room" and knowing how something we say will be received.** We might blurt something out without being aware of how it will affect others. The thing we said might have been perfectly logical and reasonable, but there's never a guarantee that our words will always be interpreted that way by others. Most of us have good intentions and actively try to learn better ways to interact with others, but we all slip up from time to time because we don't have the same intuitive grasp on social dynamics that neurotypicals do.

So, bearing all of that in mind:

Most of the time, the reason an autistic person is doing something socially taboo is because they're autistic, not because they're an inherently rude person. And, many things

that are deemed unacceptable are also things that autistic people do because of our altered sensory and social processing- which is something we can't control.

It's not okay for autistic people to be bullied and ridiculed for traits and behaviors that are due to our disability.

The best way to help is for us to be kindly redirected, reminded, and taught how to do things like shower regularly, wash our clothes, brush our hair, burp with our mouths closed, etc. And guess what? **That teaching role is reserved for our parents, caregivers, aides, doctors, therapists, and coaches.**

If you're our friend, feel free to gently let us know if we're doing something that makes you uncomfortable, or that you know might cause other people to judge us harshly. Have a conversation about it. Let us know that you're not judging us, but rather that you're informing us in case we weren't aware of something.

But if you don't know us? If you're just a random person who sees someone doing something on the list I wrote? Mind your own business, and move along. Know that there's a good chance the person in question is neurodivergent, and treat them with respect.

~Eden 🐸