

## Stop infantilizing autistic people

At this point, I've lost count of how many times my parents have told someone I'm autistic, and their demeanor towards me *instantly* changes. They go from treating me like a young adult, to treating me like a child.

The biggest & most recent example that stands out is when I arrived at the airport to fly to Ireland (without my family). My mom and I wanted to make sure that I knew where to go/ that I wouldn't get lost when I went past security (because I have trouble navigating large and unfamiliar places with lots of stimuli).

When we went up to the desk to get my passport checked, *after I spoke to the lady working there*, my mom told her that I'm autistic, and asked if she (my mom) could escort me to my gate. **The woman did a double take**, looked me over, then turned back to my mom and told her that I had to go by myself, unless there were other people on my flight that I could walk through with. **Instead of asking me, she turned to my mom** and said, "Does she have any friends on the same flight that could help her?"

And the answer was yes, because there were two other people my age who were doing the same study abroad trip & were on the same flight. **But she didn't ask me that**. Eventually, once my mom and the lady stopped having their conversation about me like I wasn't there, the lady handed me my plane ticket. She said, "Here's your ticket, **sweetie**." Then she pointed at all of the numbers and details on the ticket, explaining them to me, and pointed over at the two people on my trip. "They're going to walk through the gate with you."

**As if I wasn't there for the entire conversation. As if I didn't hear or understand anything they had talked about. As if I was a child, who needed to be called "sweetie," despite being a seventeen year old as tall as my mother.**

And yes, I understand that she was being helpful. I understand that she had no precise way of knowing exactly how much I understood or didn't understand. But I wish she had at least *tried* to talk to me, especially considering the fact that, before my mom told her I'm autistic, we had spoken about my passport in an exchange that wasn't remotely patronizing.

Nothing had changed. I hadn't changed. But the woman's *perception* of me changed, because she learned that I'm autistic and I needed help navigating the airport.

**Just because I have trouble orienting myself in overwhelming and unfamiliar spaces, doesn't mean I'm not intelligent or that I can't understand what's happening between**

**the people around me. Me needing help with the specific task of navigating through space, did not warrant her speaking about me instead of to me, nor did it warrant her calling me, a then-17 year old, “sweetie.”**

Autistic people often need help with certain things. That’s true. But just because we need more help than neurotypicals do, doesn’t make us children. If a 40 year old man needed help lifting a heavy suitcase, I assure you that woman would not have called him “buddy” or “sweetie.”

**Stop infantilizing autistic people. It’s demeaning and humiliating.**

~Eden 🐸