



SheSignals

A Guidebook for Parents

Supporting Autistic Girls

Autism can present differently in girls compared to boys, making early support in educational settings both crucial and complex. Girls may mask their difficulties, internalize struggles, and appear superficially "socially appropriate," which often delays diagnosis and access to support.

Your role as a parent or a guardian is critical. By understanding subtle signs and creating affirming environments, you can help autistic girls thrive academically, socially, and emotionally.

Recognizing Autism in Girls

Masking Behaviors

- Mimicking peers rather than initiating genuine interaction
- Scripted or rehearsed social conversations
- Concealing stimming or sensory regulation behaviors

Internalized Anxiety and Distress

- Appearing compliant while experiencing significant internal distress
- Withdrawal, shutdowns, or extreme fatigue after group activities
- Reluctance or difficulty asking for help, even when struggling

Special Interests

- Intense focus on narrow, socially "typical" topics
- Use of special interests for emotional regulation

Sensory Sensitivities

- Discomfort with certain fabrics
- Overwhelm in noisy, crowded environments
- Preference for quiet spaces or withdrawal from sensory-overloading situations

Effective Classroom Strategies

1. Create Predictable Structures

- Use consistent routines and clear expectations
- Prepare students in advance for schedule changes when possible

2. Offer Flexible Participation Methods

- Allow for different ways to participate
- Understand that group work may be particularly taxing

3. Provide Sensory Accommodations

- Access to noise-canceling headphones
- Designated quiet spaces
- Flexible clothing guidelines if uniforms cause distress

4. Recognize and Respect Special Interests

- Incorporate special interests into learning when possible
- Allow students to explore passions as rewards and regulation tools

5. Support Emotional Regulation

- Teach emotional identification and self-advocacy
- Normalize regulation strategies like doodling, movement, or brief breaks

Communication Tips

- Be direct and explicit—avoid relying on implied social rules
- Offer instructions both verbally and visually
- Validate feelings even when they are not outwardly expressed
- Be patient with processing time and allow extra time for transitions

Building Authentic Relationships

- Show consistent, genuine respect for differences
- Praise effort and strategies, not just outcomes
- Encourage self-advocacy without forcing disclosure
- Focus on strengths and individuality over "normalization"

Final Thought

Early, affirming support from educational staff changes trajectories for autistic girls. By fostering authentic belonging, respecting neurodivergent needs, and understanding hidden struggles, you empower girls to thrive as their true selves.

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Helping Every Girl Be Seen

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