

AM I JUST MAKING THIS UP?

Reflection questions for managing self-doubt at any stage of the autistic identity exploration process

1. "ANYONE CAN MAKE THEIR EXPERIENCE FIT THE CRITERIA IF THEY WANT TO."

- What draws me to this framework in the first place?
- Do I feel seen and understood by what I'm learning, or am I forcing a fit?
- Does this lens help me make sense of my life in a way that feels relieving or clarifying?

2. "MY EXPERIENCES MIGHT BE EXPLAINED BY TRAUMA OR SOMETHING ELSE. THERE'S NO WAY TO KNOW FOR SURE."

- What other explanations have I considered, and do they feel like a better fit?
- Am I looking for one "right" answer or am I trying to better understand myself?
- Is it possible that more than one explanation can be true at the same time?

3. "MOST OR ALL OF MY POTENTIALLY AUTISTIC TRAITS AREN'T STEREOTYPICAL."

- Where did my ideas about what autism looks like come from? What do I think about this source?
- Have I learned to hide or downplay traits that might be judged?
- Do I experience differences in sensory, emotional, or social processing, regardless of their match to the stereotype?

4. "I'VE MANAGED FINE MOST OF MY LIFE, SO WOULDN'T I KNOW IF I WERE AUTISTIC?"

- What does "managing fine" really mean for me?
- Have I been masking or over-functioning to meet expectations? If so, what might not having done so have changed?
- What has been the cost of "managing" the way I do?

5. "I DON'T WANT TO TAKE SPACE FROM PEOPLE WHO ARE *REALLY* AUTISTIC."

- Since I know autism is a vast spectrum, what continues to inform the part of me that believes I fall below a threshold for "autistic enough"?
- Is there room for different expressions of autism to be valid?
- Could there be enough room to take space alongside other autistic people?

6. "I'M JUST USING THIS AS AN EXCUSE."

- Have I historically been hard on myself for struggling?
- What would it feel like to be allowed to understand my struggles without needing to justify them?
- Could naming what's true for me actually help me move forward with more ease?

7. "I DIDN'T STRUGGLE MUCH AS A CHILD. WOULDN'T SOMEONE HAVE NOTICED?"

- Did I develop coping strategies early to avoid standing out?
- Was I praised for being "good," "quiet," or "easy" when I was actually masking discomfort?
- How did my environment shape what others noticed (or didn't)?

8. "IF I AM AUTISTIC, IT WOULD CHANGE EVERYTHING, AND THAT'S OVERWHELMING."

- What (besides uncertainty) brings up the most anxiety about this possibility?
- Might this also bring any clarity, relief, or self-compassion? If so, are there any "meta" emotions about those potential experiences?
- Can I give myself permission to explore one step at a time, without rushing to a conclusion?

When you're exploring whether you're autistic, it's common to feel unsure, invalidated, or like you're grasping at something that might not "really" belong to you. Conceptualizing your identity is not about proving anything to anyone. It's about making sense of your own experience and finding language that helps you hold yourself with greater understanding. You are allowed to be curious. You are allowed to take your time.