

Living life in colour



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Alex Manners *reveals how Asperger's affects his daily life and is now helping him to shape his future*



I was diagnosed with Asperger's when I was ten years old and I look upon it as a positive – something that I feel lucky to have. I believe it is the reason why I have such a colourful, creative and quirky personality.

My ambition is to be a TV Presenter in sport or children's television (my two main passions) and I am also on a quest to watch a match at all 92 English Football League clubs (I've done 71 so far).

I am 20 years old and have been able to overcome and find strategies to cope with many of the challenges that I have had to face over the years. However, back when I was in school, a lot of the

issues that I have today were a lot worse. During my time at both primary and secondary schools, I used to struggle with wearing the school uniform. It was not that I did not like wearing a blazer and tie but the fact that I had to wear dark colours such as dark blues and greys. If I am wearing dark colours, I feel depressed, as if I am hiding my personality. If I am wearing colourful clothes, I feel as though I can conquer anything. Also if I see others wearing colourful clothes, like my Grandad, then this makes me really happy. Another struggle for me at school was the homework. The school day used to be very long and I always believed that school was for work and home was for play. I could not understand why we had to spend the little free time we had after school doing even more work.

In my primary school the teachers just did not understand my Asperger's and it was not until I was statemented that they started to take any notice. Whilst I was at the school, I was able to have time-outs where I would go to a quiet place and read one of my football programmes. My secondary school was quite different as it had a lot of pupils that had Asperger's and so a lot of help and extra support was given to us. If ever I felt stressed, then I always had somebody who I could go and talk to. If they were not available then I knew that I could always call my dad. However, a lot of the issues and challenges that I had at school could very easily have been resolved.

Strung out

I become stressed quite quickly and it can seem that it is just over a very small incident that most people would probably not even think twice about. For me, this is not the case as a number of small incidents that will have happened over the day or even the week will start to mount up. Then it only takes that one little incident to make that last piece of string inside me snap. One of the ways in which I have learnt to calm myself down in these situations is by putting on a children's TV show, as I have always found these types of programmes relaxing. As soon as they are put on I go straight in to a trance and instantly forget about my stresses. When I was younger, my mum always had to put them on for me, as I was just too stressed to do it myself, but now I have learnt how to do this on my own.

Sometimes, everything around me just becomes too overwhelming and I feel as though I can't complete the task that I am doing. I get flustered and my head becomes so jumbled that, after a while, I just run away to a quiet place (usually my bedroom) crying. When this happens, I am having a meltdown. I have meltdowns over different things but the common one is when I am in a messy environment. If I am in a tidy environment, my head feels clear and free but in messy environments my head is just too cluttered.

Many people with Asperger's struggle to filter out certain sounds and smells and can be over sensitive to a range of sensory issues. For me, it is the feel of certain items such as the seams in socks and the labels in shirts that really irritate me. I have to have all of my labels taken out of my shirts and my grandma even has to re-sew my socks so that I can't feel the seams. Certain noises also affect me, like the ticking of a radiator. It may only be a small reoccurring sound but to me it is like somebody is banging a drum right next to me and at the time that is all I can think about. Other

noises such as the clicking of nails or tapping also really irritate me.

Calm and orderly

I have a love of routine and when I was younger, I used to have to know exactly what we were doing, when and how long for, so I could feel relaxed and not become worried or anxious. Now I am an adult, I still have a love of routine, to the extent that everything in my bedroom has an exact place. I can tell if somebody has moved even the smallest of items such as a pencil or has slightly ruffled my duvet. I can tell you where everything is down to the last paperclip. My wardrobe is arranged in colour order and everything in my drawers is positioned in the same direction.

Most people with Asperger's have a specialist subject, such as trains, motorways or certain television programmes, that they know virtually everything about. I am obsessed with football and I am trying to visit all 92 grounds within the football league to see a match. I am so obsessed with football that I can name every ground name and capacity in the top five tiers of English football. I have around 100 football shirts, 190 football badges and 500 football programmes. My mum always says that she is glad that my specialist subject is something that a lot of people like as many people with Asperger's have quite unusual interests; one of my friends has a specialist interest in bins.

I have, and will always have, struggles and challenges that are a result of my Asperger's but if I did not have it, I would not be the person that I am today.

Further information

Alex Manners is 20, lives in Solihull and has Asperger's syndrome. Alex makes promotional videos for local companies and sports clubs in the West Midlands. He also presents his own TV and radio shows for children, which he is currently pitching to programme commissioners in the media:

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