# Schools need better training to recognise autism in girls, say advocates



In the UK, concerns are growing regarding the preparedness of schools to recognise and support autistic students, particularly girls, whose symptoms may present differently and be less apparent. This issue was highlighted in a recent discussion involving autistic advocates and experts in education and childhood development.

TikTok influencer and body positivity advocate Miah Carter, who was diagnosed with autism at six years old, shared with HuffPost UK her experiences of being misunderstood during her school years. Carter explained, “For me, things like being overstimulated or shutting down were just seen as me being ‘dramatic’ or ‘too sensitive’.” She described how teachers often dismissed her behaviour as shyness or moodiness rather than recognising underlying autism, noting, “I wasn’t being listened to, I was being labelled.” Carter emphasised that many autistic girls, like herself, mask their difficulties well, leading to their struggles being overlooked.

Supporting this view, the National Autistic Society noted that “Autistic women and girls may be better at masking their difficulties in order to fit in with their peers and have a more even profile of social skills in general.” Their guidance points out that autistic girls are typically diagnosed later than boys due to these masking behaviours, which can complicate timely identification within educational settings.

Experts suggest that a lack of comprehensive training in neurodiversity among school staff contributes significantly to these challenges. Dr Erin Lamb, CEO and president of the Gateway School, which caters to students with autism and developmental disabilities, said, “Teachers are often on the front lines of early developmental observation, but most don’t receive extensive training in neurodiversity or how autism can present differently from the traditional (and often male-centred) clinical profile.” She added that children who are highly verbal or academically capable, traits common in many autistic girls, may have their autism missed entirely.

Dr Ray Romanczyk from Binghamton University’s Institute for Childhood Development echoed this sentiment, stating, “You can’t make everyone an expert,” particularly given the wide range of autism presentations. “To expect perfect identification by other than experts is really a hard goal to achieve,” he said, while acknowledging the potential for improvement within educational systems. He also noted the considerable pressure placed on educators to identify developmental conditions early and accurately, especially when symptoms are subtle.

Julie Bjelland, an autistic therapist and founder of The Sensitive Empowerment Community, emphasised that the conversation is “not about blame – it’s about awareness.” Highlighting the current state of schools, she remarked, “Most teachers aren’t trained to see autism outside the classic presentation. And schools are overwhelmed.” Bjelland added that educators and families should be cautious not to assume that quiet behaviour or good academic performance equates to a student’s wellbeing, explaining, “Many autistic students work so hard just to survive the school day. And when they get home, they fall apart from the effort of holding it all in.”

Miah Carter underscored the need for systemic improvements beyond early detection, urging, “We need more training in schools, more patience, and way more understanding of neurodiversity.”

This conversation draws attention to the complexities involved in recognising autism, particularly among girls, and the necessity for enhanced training and awareness in educational environments across the UK to better support neurodiverse pupils.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/topics/education/extra-help-at-school/england> - This link supports the discussion about the need for better recognition and support of autistic students in schools, highlighting the importance of SEND support in educational settings.
* <https://www.autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/professional-practice/preparing-exams> - This article provides insights into supporting autistic students, such as early preparation and recognizing the need for tailored educational approaches, which aligns with the call for more awareness and training in schools.
* <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-strategy-for-autistic-children-young-people-and-adults-2021-to-2026> - This UK government strategy focuses on improving support for autistic people, including children and young adults, aligning with the narrative about enhancing educational support systems.
* <https://repository.uel.ac.uk/download/330b00d391078c0b78136a020764f94cdba85a5a33e69aed41783108cc514353/490746/Edmonds%20C%20%20(2016)%20Emergency%20preparedness%20resources%20for%20children%20with%20autism%20FINAL.pdf> - Although not directly related to masking behaviors in autistic girls, this resource highlights the broader need for tailored educational resources for autistic students, emphasizing gaps in support systems.
* <https://www.noahwire.com> - The source article itself provides a narrative context for these discussions on autism awareness in educational settings.