

Why revealing an autism diagnosis is advisable when going to university

August 13 2015



New research from our psychologists shows the experience of university for students with asd or autism is better better when they talk about their condition.

Students with autism or Asperger's Syndrome who are preparing to go to university this autumn will be better supported by both professional services and their peers if they reveal their diagnosis, rather than keeping it disclosed, according to new research from psychologists at our University.

For many [young people](#) with these conditions, going to university presents an opportunity to start afresh, meeting new friends in a different setting as well as focusing on a new area of study.

Academics focused on this issue, as well as university support services, have sometimes worried that this may lead students with [autism spectrum disorder](#) (ASD) – encompassing both autism and Asperger's

Syndrome - to not disclose their conditions, perhaps reflecting previous negative experiences they encountered at school or in wider society.

Open and more accepting environments

Yet the latest research from Bath, published in the journal *Autism*, highlights that universities may be more open and accepting than other environments, as well as better set up to support students with ASD when people are aware of a [diagnosis](#).

Drawing on the latest study, in which psychologists assessed the responses of participants to a scenario in which a student demonstrated unusual behaviours both when they were aware of their diagnosis and not, they reveal that peers are much more likely to respond more positively when they were aware of an individual's condition.

Faced with a scenario where a student insisted chairs in a communal area were put back in a very specific way, participants taking part in the study were asked to rate their feelings both when the individual was described as a 'typical student' or a 'student with ASD.' They found responses were significantly more positive (and less negative) when participants were aware of the diagnosis.

Dr Mark Brosnan, the researcher behind the study with Elizabeth Mills, explains: "Deciding how and when to disclose a diagnosis is a very personal decision. Whilst disclosing a diagnosis can enable access to support, students can be uncertain about whether or not to disclose. The research suggests peers may be more positive in interpreting mildly unusual behaviour in the university context."

No discernible differences between different terms

The research also revealed that there is no difference in people's perceptions between the diagnostic labels 'autism', 'Asperger's Syndrome' and 'ASD'. In recent years, the 'catch all term' ASD is being used more frequently than 'Asperger's' owing to confusion in how autism and Asperger's Syndrome differed from each other. The latest paper suggests there are no discernible differences in terms of how individuals respond to the terms.

Mark Brosnan adds: "Some clinical criteria (DSM5) are replacing the diagnostic categories of [autism](#) and Asperger's Syndrome with the single category of ASD. The study found that the different labels did not have an impact upon the more positive responses of peers to the scenarios."

More information: "The effect of diagnostic labels on the affective responses of college students towards peers with 'Asperger's Syndrome' and 'Autism Spectrum Disorder'." *Autism* 1362361315586721, first published on June 4, 2015 [DOI: 10.1177/1362361315586721](https://doi.org/10.1177/1362361315586721)

Provided by University of Bath

Citation: Why revealing an autism diagnosis is advisable when going to university (2015, August 13) retrieved 25 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2015-08-revealing-autism-diagnosis-university.html>

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