

## What to Say Next

Julie Buxbaum

By now you've probably realized I'm different. It usually doesn't take people very long to figure that out. One doctor thought I might have a "borderline case of Asperger's," which is stupid, because you can't have a borderline case of Asperger's. Actually, you can't really have Asperger's at all anymore, because it was written out of the DSM-5 (the fifth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders) in 2013, and instead people with that group of characteristics are considered to have high-functioning autism (or HFA), which is also misleading. The autism spectrum is multidimensional, not linear. The doctor was obviously an idiot.

Yes, I can get myself into trouble in social situations; I like order and routine; when I'm interested in something, I can be hyperfocused to the exclusion of other activities; and, fine, I am clumsy. But when I have to, I can make eye contact. I don't flinch if you touch me. I tend to recognize most idioms, though I keep a running list in my notebook just in case. I like to think I'm empathetic, but I don't know if that's true.

I'm not sure it really matters if I have Asperger's, anyway, especially because it no longer exists. It's just another label. Take the word *jock*. If enough psychiatrists wanted to, they could add that to the DSM and diagnose all the guys on the Mapleview football team. Characteristics would include at least two of the following: (1) athleticism, especially while wearing spandex, (2) unnatural ease with the concept of strapping a hard cup around your private parts, (3) being an asshole. It doesn't matter whether you call me Aspie or a weirdo or even a moron. The fact remains that I very much wish I were more like everyone else. Not the jocks, necessarily. I don't want to be the kind of guy who gives kids like me a hard time. But if I got the chance to make some sort of cosmic upgrade- switch David 1.0 to a 2.0 version who understood what to say in day-to-day conversations- I'd do it in an instant.

Maybe when parents name their children they do it from the perspective of wishful thinking. Like when you go to a restaurant and ask for a rare steak, and even though there is no universally agreed definition of the word *rare*, you hope you get exactly what you want.

My mom and dad ordered a David. They got me instead.