

## SPECIAL INTERESTS



If there's one thing everyone agrees on, it's that people on the Autism Spectrum love to focus on special interests. Often it is a topic for discussion, minutely researched. Sometimes these special interests include collections of objects. Or a field of specialized, but very specific field of study. The attention paid to one's special interest, can remain personal, enjoyed in private. But often, the topic becomes a tool for communication and a means of connection. There have been many persons on the spectrum, whose special interest led to breakthroughs in scientific knowledge and discovery, sometimes with world shaking in effect.

Research has revealed that over 90% of people on the spectrum have special interests which consume a large portion of their time and energy, describing them as deeply important to them. We often feel the need to immerse ourselves in the activity or interest in an obsessive way, and find the experience both inspiring and relaxing. A relief and refuge from outside stresses. Sometimes we repeat the activity, or rearrange and organize our collections. We exhaustively research our special interests, becoming experts in narrow realms of knowledge. We are only too happy to share our knowledge of this fascinating topic with everyone we meet. Unfortunately, not everyone can absorb all that we would like to tell or show them. It does give us a good starting point for a conversation though. But we need to learn the signs and be aware when the person we are conversing with loses interest, giving them a chance to talk about something they care about.

Our special interests are very important to us, and are bound up with our moods and stress levels. We need these points of focus and activity. Interests can come and go, but often there are some which are life-long from an early age. Because our minds often make unexpected connections between things, occasionally a special interest comes to us unexpectedly, or arises out of a different interest.

We must be careful however, because it is possible to become too involved or too obsessed in a subject, collection or activity. To neglect caring for ourselves or our home, by spending too much money on it, or by spending too much time alone with our special interest and not enough time interacting with our family or community. It is important to keep a balance. One way to break out of a rigid routine focused on our interest is to find others who share our interest. The internet can assist with this search. Another way is to turn our interest into a career, a volunteer activity, or subject of study in school.

There is nothing wrong with having special interests. It is good to have activities we enjoy them and which keep us busy. It is good to care about and care for things. Most of the activities relating to special interests also give our minds good exercise. The relaxing nature of these activities reduces stress and depression, making us healthier overall. We might even think about the purpose of our having the special interest, perhaps we were meant to discover or contribute something which can made a difference.

*Lubemyr Melnyk, Pianist, Temple Grandin, Animal Scientist, Andy Warhol, Artist, Tom Hanks, Actor, Emily Dickenson, Poet, Bill Gates, Computer Engineer*