



→ I'm really proud of him.

When you're autistic, sometimes learning can be hard as you develop rigid ways of doing things. Once I learn how to do it one way, it's hard to learn a new way. For example, I know that you shouldn't bend your arms too soon but sometimes you go to autopilot and bad habits start coming back in. I still have some bad habits. Having a diagnosis means I can accept that.

Ever since I got my diagnosis, it gave me closure. With social skills, I didn't understand why I couldn't get my head around stuff. I didn't get that things weren't always black and white. Even if people spent ages explaining.

I try to keep reminding myself it's not all about me. But part of me thinks it is! My brain wants me to be selfish, but I don't want to be selfish. I have a lot of internal battles. For many years, people thought I just had anxiety before I got diagnosed. Sometimes I think that's why it's

a bit harder if you are 'more able' because you can see that there's something different which is making your life harder. But that doesn't mean you know how to sort it out.

I've got by in life because I've been clever. I'd always known I was a bit different. It's like everyone else is in a blue shirt, and I'm in a red shirt. But being diagnosed has helped me understand myself. I used to feel like a failure. But I look at the stuff I've achieved and I don't feel like a failure any more. I also have quite a good radar for noticing other people who are like me.

My advice for parents is to encourage your child in what they like to do! They can only deal with what they've got. But if you aim for the top and you only hit the middle, that's still a great achievement. One man's hill is another man's mountain.

I think our story is one of sporting success, despite the obstacles we've faced as a result of being autistic.

ALIS ROWE has Asperger syndrome. She has been doing Olympic weightlifting for four years and wants to promote it as sport for women.

I hated PE when I was at school but I knew exercise was important for health. After leaving school, I took responsibility for my own health and started to exercise regularly. I was fortunate that my parents had a rowing machine, an elliptical machine and a set of dumbbells at home and so I was able to use those. I was (still am) far too shy and too socially anxious to go to a public gym and I don't like travelling either (even going to places that are close to home). All those factors put me off exercise!

But – lucky for me – I had a workaround, because the equipment we had at home was perfect. I read a lot of fitness magazines (mainly *Men's Health* and *Men's Fitness*) and used to cut out pages of workout programme and stick them on the wall, which is how I learned how to use dumbbells. I also joined a couple of fitness/weight training websites and spent all my free time reading about how to weight train. Fitness quickly became my special interest and before long I had turned my garage into a gym that was equipped to meet my complete exercise requirements! As soon as I got a barbell and a power rack, my weight training really took off.

Over time, I'd had a few personal trainers. However one was particularly interested in Olympic weightlifting. At the time, I didn't even know what Olympic weightlifting was. He told me that I had good flexibility, mobility and strength, and that I might really enjoy

Development-level weightlifting focuses on technique, not weight



“What I like about the sport is that you are aiming to compete against yourself. You are your own opponent. Your targets are your own targets.”

— *Martyn Riley*