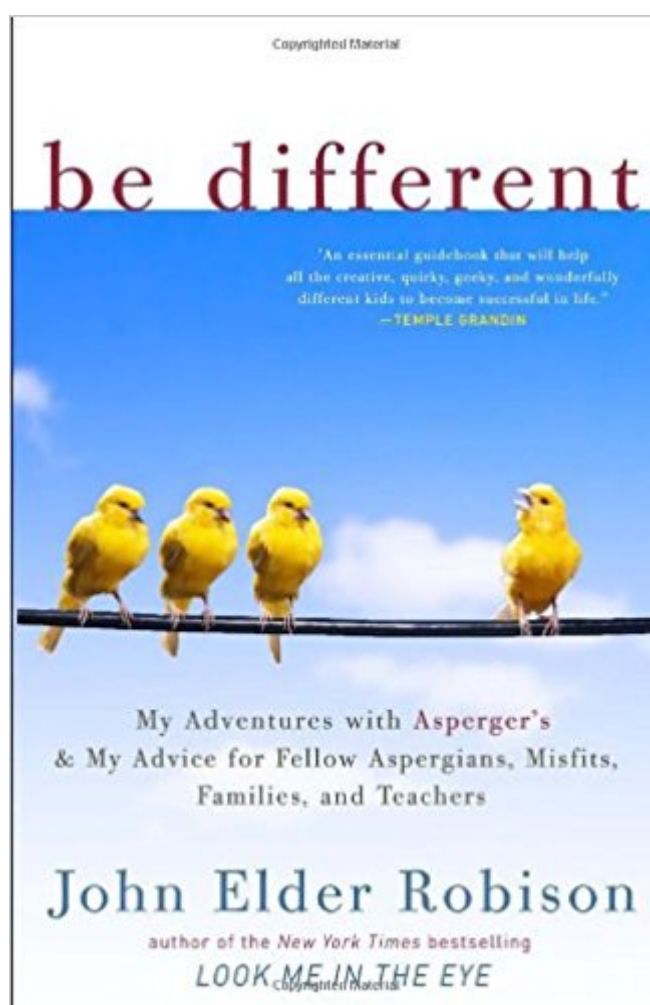


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# Be Different: My Adventures With Asperger's And My Advice For Fellow Aspergians, Misfits, Families, And Teachers



## Synopsis

In *Be Different*, New York Times bestselling author of *Look Me in the Eye* shares a new batch of endearing stories about his childhood, adolescence, and young adult years, giving the reader a rare window into the Autistic mind. In his bestselling memoir, *Look Me in the Eye*, John Elder Robison described growing up with Autism Spectrum Disorder at a time when the diagnosis didn't exist. He was intelligent but socially isolated; his talents won him jobs with toy makers and rock bands but did little to endear him to authority figures and classmates, who were put off by his inclination to blurt out non sequiturs and avoid eye contact. By the time he was diagnosed at age forty, John had already developed a myriad of coping strategies that helped him achieve a seemingly normal, even highly successful, life. In each story, he offers practical advice for anyone who feels "different" on how to improve the weak communication and social skills that keep so many people from taking full advantage of their often remarkable gifts. With his trademark honesty and unapologetic eccentricity, Robison addresses questions like: How to read others and follow their behaviors when in uncertain social situations; Why manners matter; How to harness your powers of concentration to master difficult skills; How to deal with bullies; When to make an effort to fit in, and when to embrace eccentricity; How to identify special gifts and use them to your advantage. Every person has something unique to offer the world, and every person has the capacity to create strong, loving bonds with their friends and family. *Be Different* will help readers and those they love find their path to success.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

• "For anyone who has difficulty fitting in, this book is fantastic." Temple Grandin, author of *Thinking in Pictures*

In a love poem to his wife, Pedro Salinas, the Spanish poet, wrote, "Glory to the differences / between you and me." John Robison teaches us to celebrate differences like Salinas did, but also offers clear insight and valuable advice on how to cope with the challenges that being different can create. This book transcends the specific case of Asperger's syndrome and is a lesson in humanity and the human condition.

Alvaro Pascual-Leone, M.D., Ph.D., Harvard Medical School and Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center

Anyone with Asperger's, if not everyone else, will derive knowledge and pleasure from the wonderful stories told in John Elder Robison's newest book, *Be Different*. Clearly, John is one of our community's leading voices.

Michael John Carley, author of *Asperger's from the Inside Out* and executive director of GRASP and ASTEP

*Be Different* is a fascinating and unique guide for young people who may be struggling with autism and feel out of sync with the world around them. John shares personal insights about growing up, feeling apart from his peers, and learning to modify his socializing skills and harness his gifts to discover his path to a successful life.

Mark Roithmayr, president of Autism Speaks

Robison offers down-to-earth life advice for his Aspie peers and their friends, families, and teachers...recommended reading for anyone seeking to understand Aspergian children and adults.

Kirkus "Provides incredibly helpful advice to families learning to live with these challenges. Robison's clear writing provides substantial insight into the mind of someone whose disorder makes clarity very, very difficult...a valuable read."

Booklist

JOHN ELDER ROBISON is the New York Times bestselling author of *Look Me in the Eye*, *Be Different* and *Raising Cubby*. He lectures widely on autism and neurological differences, and is a member of the Interagency Autism Coordinating Committee of the US Dept. of Health and Human Services. John also serves on committees and review boards for the CDC and the National Institutes of Health. A machinery enthusiast and avid photographer, John lives in Amherst, Massachusetts with his family, animals, and machines.

John Elder Robison has spent his life teaching himself to compensate for his own lack of social skills due to living with Asperger's Syndrome. His first book, *"Look Me in the Eye"* includes stories of hilarity and pain, sometimes at his own expense. The response to these stories has surely far surpassed his expectations, as he quickly becomes looked to as "the guide" to parents' hopes and

teachers' dreams. Seeing the need for more information, Robison offers to others the best understanding he has developed about autistic thinking throughout a life span in his new book, "Be Different". "Be Different" offers deeper explanations of this thinking - at least as Robison has experienced it - as a child and as an adult. He reflects on how much easier his own life might have been if others had been there to guide him rather than punish him for unknown transgressions. In an attempt to enlighten those who are trying to desperately to understand, but who are handicapped by being "nypical" (non-Aspergians), he has answered some of the questions asked of him by the many caregivers and loved ones who now look to him for this guidance plus much more. Robison has a knack for humor as he describes and analyzes events with explanations for his blank stares and misunderstandings due to differences in language interpretation. He refutes the idea that lack of response means lack of feelings, in fact, he states that the truth is quite the opposite. Some of the issues he discusses are as problematic to "nypicals" as they were to him, and his salient points apply to many children who are misunderstood by those who make assumptions instead of making the effort. This book is a "must read" for anyone involved with loving or serving these children and who might recognized a hitherto misunderstood adult. It also might serve to enlighten related persons who need to forgive those who are not responsible for their condition. Robison's kind and wise views give heart from the heart.

The follow-up to his debut work 'Look Me in the Eye' helps by giving a more detailed explanation of how Mr. Robison processes the world as a person with high-functioning autism. As I am also someone who is on the spectrum, there are many of his conditions which also apply to me. I am a 56-year-old gentleman who only became aware of my "odd" qualities while raising a son with Asperger's. Similar to the author, I was only diagnosed in my late 40s. While some of Mr. Robison's characteristics such as a heightened sensitivity to textures, a near total absence of friends in school as well as poor grades, and his unique ability to see sound are not in my repertoire, the rest of the material is familiar to me. Thankfully, the author's objective was to present the challenges and positive aspects of being an Aspie. The book starts off slow and I had a sinking feeling the thing was going to be like those self-help books written as if the reader has the intelligence of a 4th-grader. Fortunately, once Mr. Robison begins regaling the reader about his personal stories and how his high-functioning autism helped or led to misunderstandings, it becomes very enjoyable. I found myself laughing quite a bit, especially because I have done similar social faux pas. The author covers such areas as the difficulties of negotiating school, understanding social cues, dating, expressing emotions, empathy, the arbitrary nature of manners, staying cool in emergencies, being

viewed as egocentric, and sensory issues. The book also explains how he persevered and gives suggestions as well as encouragement to fellow Aspies. 'Be Different' is a quick read and well worth reading for not only people with high-functioning autism but anyone interested in understanding how this influential segment negotiates what normal people consider run-of-mill situations. The chapters are short and the material is presented in a matter-of-fact manner, just like an Aspie. The Appendix is also interesting and includes some helpful descriptions as well as resources. It's the kind of work which entertains while giving you valuable insight and maybe will help you to reflect about someone in your life who you think is a vexing odd bird.

"Aspergian," as Robison uses it, indicates a place, (or point of view) that people with Asperger's come from...it's like I'm Italian, you're a Washingtonian, and he's Aspergian. It's a point of view, an outlook that may be different from mine but still has its validity. I like this approach as opposed to talking about Asperger's as if it's a condition, a diagnosis, etc. Robison is very honest in his biography, showing how difficult it was for him to navigate in a world that didn't have patience enough to see where he was coming from. I have friends diagnosed with Asperger's and I love this book for the insight I believe it gives me into what living from this point of view entails. I'm not "diagnosed" with Asperger's, but then again, when I was growing up, there was very little knowledge about autism, much less Asperger's. I am intrigued to find out what others who are "Aspergian" may think...

Second book I have read by Robison. He has given me insights into the mind of the man I have been married to for 42 years. And he is so right, we give motives of their actions that they do not mean. Sure has given us new ways to interact with each other after all these years of misunderstanding (on part of both of us).

It was nice to have a first hand account of what it is like to live with Asperger's syndrome. I am sure there are thousands out there who don't even realize, or can't admit, that they fall under the autism umbrella. I know one of them myself and it is painful to watch someone feel they are a misfit and not understand why. I hope that many of those affected will stumble on this book and find some comfort in knowing they are not alone.

Enjoyed this book so much ! I can only feel admiration and respect for John and his journey. We can learn so much from him and his challenges and his success in all aspects of life. Cheers !

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