

CROSS TALK

Autistic in a pandemic: Stories from around the world

BY SPECTRUM

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Select any point on the map to learn more about an individual living with autism in that country.

In England, a basket on the porch becomes a purgatory for deliveries deemed perilous. In Spain, families don blue ribbons to silence the ‘balcony police,’ who jeer at passersby they think may be breaking the local ‘stay home’ advisory. In India, a child puts his fears into pictures, drawing a round blob with spikes in a tableau of sickness and recovery. In Dubai, Portugal and elsewhere, teachers and students work out a new form of school, seeing one another only on computer screens.

These snapshots of life during the coronavirus lockdown come from autistic people or their parents, around the world. *Spectrum* journalists interviewed some; others sent us their stories in response to a social-media call. In total, 22 people in 19 countries told us how the initial weeks of the pandemic have challenged and changed them. (Several contributors have withheld their last names to protect their privacy.)

Their stories reveal some common truths: No matter who you are or where you live, routines are an important part of life. The pain of change is real, and in many ways autistic adults have **felt this pain** more intensely than their neurotypical peers. But change can also bring growth. One autistic child is learning to cook, an autistic teenager is penning poetry again, and another boy is just starting to express his emotions on a digital platform his teachers created in early March. Many autistic people, who typically cling to routine, are — like everyone else — learning to live with uncertainty and to let the future flap in the wind.

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