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Daniel wrote the following article in response to school assignment to write about discrimination.

My Name is Daniel, Not Autism

Have you ever been wrongly judged by the way you looked or acted because you are different from other people? If so, then you may have experienced a form of discrimination. Nobody should have to feel badly about being different. I should know, because I have been discriminated against all of my life. As an autistic person, I have experienced many types of discrimination.

Everyone with autism lives with the constant fear that they will not be accepted for the smart person they are inside. It is easy for others to only see the odd way of acting and strange behaviors rather than the real person. Many people with autism cannot talk well or at all. So people mistake that for being dumb or rude. It is hard to handle stress if you are autistic, and sometimes you make bad choices to tantrum or be loud. That may frighten people and cause them to think all autistic people are crazy. The truth is that autism is a big disability, but most autistic people want to be friends and make smart choices as much or more than anyone. It is not easy to see past some of the things autism causes people to do, but it is worth it if you try.

I know that being friends with someone with autism can seem like a lot of work, but it takes work for any good thing to get done. If people can learn to live with the differences among them, the world can be a much nicer place for everyone. It is important that each of us fight against discrimination any time or place we see it.

Discrimination is wrong. If we all work together maybe someday we can erase that word from our world. I feel the most important thing any of us can do is to be ourselves and accept others for who they are. I hope that autism is just a thing I have and not who I am. All everyone needs to do is get to know others before making a judgment. Let's all promise to do that from now on so we can have a better world.

Daniel Hecht is 16 years old and participates with an aide in inclusion classes in Rosemont Middle School in Norfolk, VA. Daniel is nonverbal and expresses himself through his writing.