

A HEART-WARMING SERIES FOLLOWING THE STORIES OF YOUNG ADULTS ON THE AUTISM SPECTRUM

LOVE ON THE SPECTRUM



TV | **iview**

Airs 8.30pm Tuesdays from 18 May 2021

Press Kit



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Love on the Spectrum.

Season 2 of *LOVE ON THE SPECTRUM* continues to tell the stories of people on the autism spectrum as they navigate the world of dating and relationships.

With a few familiar faces, and some delightful new ones, Season 2 represents an even wider range of people and personalities, showing just how diverse the autism spectrum really is.

With a warm-hearted and positive tone, the series once again features singles looking for love, and couples who have found their match.

While Season 1 saw participants stepping out on dates for the very first time, this second season sees relationships form and develop. We see first kisses, confessions of love, and our first couple walk down the aisle.

Season 1 of *Love on the Spectrum* was a runaway success for ABC TV, attracting a broad audience with overwhelming critical acclaim. As one of the most loved original documentary series on the ABC, *Love on the Spectrum* solidifies the ABC's reputation as the home of distinct, quality, trustworthy, co-viewing Australian content.

Airs Tuesdays from 18 May 2021

8.30pm on ABC TV + iview

#LOTSAU

In Season 1, Australia fell in love with **Michael** and his search for true love. Alas, Michael is still a single man. Ever determined, he continues his quest, and gets closer to fulfilling his dream. Once again, Michael brings his irreverent and unique perspective to his story.

Jimmy and Sharnae ended Season 1 with a powerful, raw and very real declaration of their love for each other when Jimmy proposed to the love of his life. We catch up with the young couple as they pack their bags for their first trip overseas – they are heading to Las Vegas where Jimmy will compete in a world pool championship event. As his number one fan, Sharnae is by his side cheering him on. But she has other things on her mind...

Mark melted hearts across the nation with his romantic dreams of finding love. Appearing in Season 1 helped Mark build his confidence and he's keen to get back out there to look for his perfect match. If she loved dinosaurs that would definitely be a bonus.

Relationship expert **Jodi Rodgers** continues to provide support and tips in her refreshingly down to earth way. This series she is there to support newcomers **Ronan** and **Teo**, two young singles who are bursting with nerves and excitement at the prospect of starting their dating journeys.

We also meet singles **Kassandra** and **Jayden**, who represent both experienced and first time daters.



This season we see romantic sparks between singles who date both neurodiverse and neurotypical partners. We explore heterosexuality, bisexuality and pansexuality. And we share the blossoming of love between young adults with intellectual disabilities.

The one thing they all have in common: they all wear their hearts on their sleeves.

This year, the finale will be presented on 8 June as a special double episode, culminating in a must-watch TV event.



Episode 1.

Michael returns to continue his pursuit of love. Having not had much luck with online dating over the past year, he decides to attend a speed dating event, ever hopeful that he will meet his future wife. The event is a success, and Michael meets several women he would like to see again. He heads home, eagerly awaiting the news of a possible match.



Ronan leads a happy, busy life. He plays in a band, attends dance class and has a part-time job. But there is something missing... Ronan longs to have a girlfriend, and he hopes to meet someone who shares his love of music and car racing. Ronan seeks help from relationship specialist Jodi Rodgers as he prepares to step out on his first ever date.



Kassandra is a creative and thoughtful 27-year-old. People have told Kassandra she doesn't "look autistic", to which her response is "you can't see my brain, and it's my brain that's different". Kassandra struggled throughout school and often felt like an outsider. Being diagnosed with autism changed her life for the better and gave her the confidence to create a close circle of friends who truly understood her. Although she has dated before, Kassandra admits she often feels overwhelmed in relationships. Having not dated for over a year, she has decided it's time to get back out there and meet people.

Airs Tuesday 18 May
8.30pm on ABC TV + iview
#LOTSAU

Episode 2.

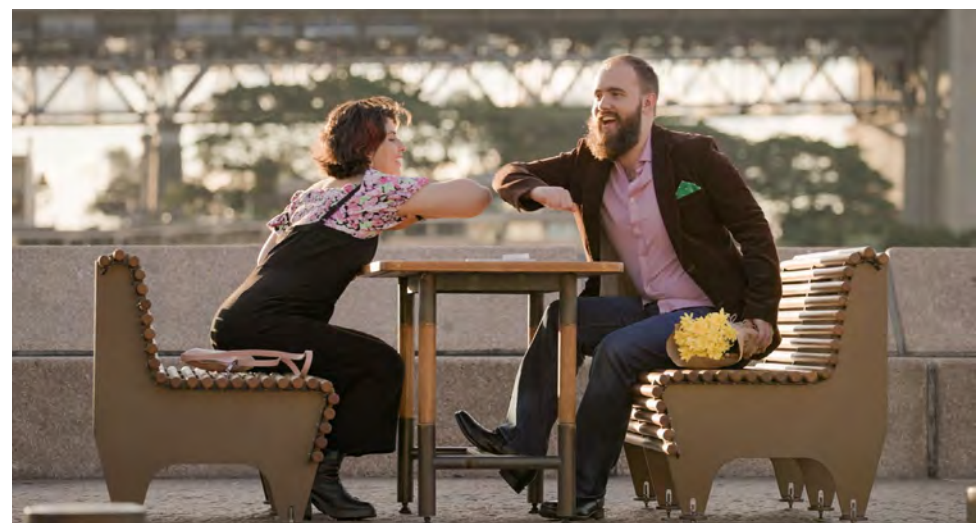
Having found a match at speed dating, **Michael** sets up a formal dinner rendezvous. At home with his family he confesses his hopes for a relationship, and why she may just be the perfect girl for him. Michael treats his date to a romantic evening of dinner and dancing, and by the end of the night it's clear things are going well.

With hopes of finding love, **Ronan** steps out on the very first date of his life. It's not long before his chivalrous charm wins over his date, and they bond over some shared passions and interests.

Teo has a zest for life, but she has never dated before. She doesn't know what it feels like to be in love, but she desperately wants to find someone to share her life with. Seeking the help of relationship specialist Jodi Rodgers, Teo prepares to go on her very first date. Teo doesn't see gender as an issue and is open to meeting anyone with the right personality. Brimming with nerves, she steps out on her first date, but is pleasantly surprised by how well the evening goes.

Mark is back, continuing his search for love. Having turned 30, Mark admits that he can't help feeling a sense of failure. He had hoped to be settled down by now and have a family of his own. He wants to find love more than anything, but still finds the dating world very complex. He catches up with his good friend Ryan as he prepares to get back out on the dating scene.

Airs Tuesday 25 May
8.30pm on ABC TV + iview
#LOTSAU





Episode 3.

After a successful first date, **Ronan** can't believe his luck when he sets up the second date of his life. Boy oh boy! Ronan believes it's his destiny to find someone who truly loves him for who he is, so he decides to share his passion for motor racing by taking his date on a wild ride.

Michael is also stepping out on a second date, with his match from speed dating. Keen to introduce her to his love of spirituality, he takes her to a Buddhist temple. After a successful date, Michael invites her on a third date, this time to meet his family.

Mark is excited as he steps out on his first date in over a year. He tries his best to find a connection and to impress with his knowledge of wildlife.

Having had a successful first date with a guy, **Teo** is keen to see what dating a girl would be like. As she gets ready for her date, she worries about making a good impression. But when things go well, she is faced with a challenging decision.



Airs Tuesday 1 June
8.30pm on ABC TV + iView
#LOTSAU

Episode 4.

After his date at the Botanical Gardens, **Mark** has a tough conversation to face when he decides he can only see friendship in the future. Determined to not give up, he puts himself back out there to meet someone new and is pleasantly surprised.

Jimmy and Sharnae are back for Season 2, as they prepare to jet off to Las Vegas. Jimmy's passion for pool has inspired him to enter the BCA World Championships, and Sharnae has always wanted to visit America. The couple are excited for their first trip overseas.

Michael is anxious as he 'meets the parents' for the first time, but his fears are overcome when he finds common ground through interests in European culture.

Jayden has never dated before and seeks advice from a good friend as he considers what he is looking for in a relationship. Jayden likes things at home to be in perfect order and admits that the outside world can often feel chaotic. Despite the fact that dating is highly unpredictable, he is excited to put himself out there.

After two successful dates, **Ronan** is keen to make his wishes come true, and seeks advice from Jodi Rodgers. On a third date he has a big question to ask, but wants to wait until the time is right.

Airs Tuesday 8 June
8.30pm on ABC TV + iview
#LOTSAU





Episode 5.

Ronan couldn't be happier as his feelings of love are reciprocated. He thinks the time is right to make his dream of kissing a girl come true, but will she feel the same way?

Jayden struggles to read what he calls the 'hidden communication' between people, and often only realises someone's intention in hindsight. As he heads out on his first date, he is delighted with how well it is going, but ultimately discovers she only wants friendship. Determined not to give up, he decides to try again with someone new.

After several weeks of dating, **Michael** starts to question where his relationship is heading. He asks his good friend Brianna for advice before making a big decision.

Mark is emotional as he finds a strong connection on a second date. Feelings are deepening and as Christmas arrives, he shares the family celebration with the girl who has captured his heart.



SPOILER ALERT! With their wedding just around the corner, **Jimmy and Sharnae** begin preparations for the big day. As Jimmy awaits Sharnae's arrival at the altar, he is taken aback by the strength of his emotions. With tears of elation, it's a wedding fitting of all the love and joy experienced across this season of *Love on the Spectrum*.



Producer's Note: We are thrilled Australian audiences will get to share in all the excitement of Sharnae and Jimmy's big day. To keep the wedding a surprise, could you please avoid mentioning whose wedding we will see prior to broadcast!

Airs Tuesday 8 June
9.25pm on ABC TV + iview
#LOTSAU



Michael

“There is nothing more terrifying in this world than a life doomed to loneliness.”

Michael (26) still has three clear goals in life: to buy a house, become wealthy, and meet his future wife.

He is hoping to meet a confident young lady, someone like his mum. If she wears glasses that would be great, because they accentuate a woman’s beauty. Michael would love to meet a girl who enjoys formal dating, ballroom dancing and embraces spirituality.

He refuses to give up until he finds her.



Mark

“The one thing that’s missing is the girl of my dreams and I have been waiting very patiently for her to come along.”

Mark (30) sees beauty and joy in all things and really wants someone to share his life with. He longs to find a girl he can love as much as he loves dinosaurs.

For Mark, having a partner would mean the world, but he worries he might never find the right person.



Teo

“Whether it’s a girl, whether it’s a guy, I don’t really care as long as they love me.”

Teo (22) describes herself as "complicated". She has autism, ADHD and sensory issues from her time in a Romanian orphanage. She was adopted at a young age and taken to live in Texas. She now lives independently in supported accommodation in the Blue Mountains. Teo loves cats, Tina Fey and politics. To put it mildly, she could never date a Trump supporter.

Teo is interested in both guys and girls and despite being a warm and gregarious young woman, she has never been on a date in her life. Until now.



Kassandra

“I've had to learn masking: pretending and hiding the parts of me that don't fit neurotypical society.”

Kassandra (27) lives at home with her parents and teaches dance to young children. She was diagnosed with autism later than many, and represents a growing number of females being diagnosed later in life. She talks about her 'masking', how she grew up mimicking her peers. Girls are thought to be better at this, hence a diagnosis can often come later in life.

Despite her seemingly low support needs, when dealing with social situations Kassandra can become drained by the effort she puts in to making conversation, looking people in the eye, and often crashes with exhaustion when she gets home. As a result, she has social anxiety and has found dating to be challenging.



Ronan

“Wishes do come true after all.”

Ronan (21) is an avid musician who plays both the tuba and piano, but his true passion is motor racing, and he embraces it by working as a volunteer at Sydney Motorsport Park. But there is one thing missing in Ronan’s life, and that’s a girlfriend.

He has never been on a date before, but is excited by the idea, and wants to do the right thing and make a good impression. His ideal date involves dinner and, if given permission by the girl, holding hands.

Ronan’s autism comes with a learning disability, and the way he describes it is that sometimes he needs a little more support. Working with Jodi Rodgers helps Ronan find the confidence to begin his dating journey, and things go well for him.



Jayden

“Love is the most chaotic force in the cosmos.”

Jayden (21) lives in Gympie in regional Queensland, and he admits that he isn't your typical Gympie local. His interests are linguistics, philosophy and history. Jayden speaks eloquently and thoughtfully, and is constantly working to gain a greater knowledge and understanding of the machinations of society.

Jayden has never been on a date before, and has struggled to meet people he can connect with. He hopes that by taking part in *Love on the Spectrum* he might meet someone (a guy or a girl) with whom he can share passions, learn from and with, and ideally fall in love. He is ready to welcome the chaos.



Jimmy, 21 & Sharnae, 21

“We are made for each other.”

Jimmy and Sharnae have been enjoying their life together since their engagement just over a year ago.

Jimmy’s passion for playing pool has only strengthened, taking the happy couple on their first overseas trip together. They head to Las Vegas, where Jimmy will compete in a world pool tournament. Sharnae is excited to visit the US, somewhere she has dreamed of going since she was a child.

Back in Australia, there’s even bigger news for these two, as (SPOILER ALERT!) a wedding is being planned.



Jodi Rodgers

“Knowledge about relationships and sexuality should be accessible to all people, no matter what their age or learning abilities.”

Jodi Rodgers is a Relationship Specialist who works with people on the autism spectrum.

For over 20 years she has worked in Australia and internationally in the fields of education, disability, relationships and sexuality. She started her career as a special education teacher and spent twelve years with ASPECT (Autism Spectrum Australia).

She is a qualified counsellor and holds a Masters degree in Sexual Health.

Production Notes.

LOVE ON THE SPECTRUM is a character-based documentary told in the form of a dating series. Its purpose is to celebrate difference.

Love on the Spectrum introduces audiences to real people with autism, who genuinely want to find love and connection. The premise in itself busts misconceptions about autistic people not wanting to find loving and have meaningful relationships. The series unequivocally shows that relationships and belonging are just as important to autistic individuals as they are to anyone else.

The key creatives are experienced filmmakers with their own experiences of neurodiversity, from personal and family perspectives. We do not impart this information as part of the background to making the series, we leave it to the members of the team to discuss or reveal this information themselves if they feel that they would like to. It should be noted that these personal experiences of the team are factors in their commitment to do their best to ensure the tone and content of the series is representative of lived experiences and the team are always working in collaboration with people who are autistic.

Both personal experience and engagement with the autism community deepened our sense of responsibility and the personal nature of making this much loved, tender series.



Love on the Spectrum crew

Director's Statement.

One of the main reasons for wanting to make the first season of *Love on the Spectrum* was to help audiences understand just how diverse the autism spectrum is. By telling the participants' stories in their own voices, and putting real people front and centre of a series, it was a great opportunity to bust some of the myths and misconceptions about autism.

Often misconceptions come from people anchoring their ideas of autism around a particular character from a fictional film or TV show. That's not to say that films and TV shows shouldn't feature autistic characters, but the more diversity there is in that representation of autism the better.

For me, the most important thing audiences can learn is that you can't make assumptions about who someone is because they are autistic. Some autistic people are incredibly intelligent university professors and CEOs who have very low support needs, and some autistic adults need full-time care. Having the opportunity to make a second series meant we had a chance to further explore the diversity of the spectrum, and to introduce some great new participants to audiences.

As well as meeting new people, we thought it would be nice to continue to follow several of our Season 1 characters who continue their search for love.

Once again, this series was a pleasure to direct. Working with the participants was as enjoyable as you'd imagine it would be. It was great that the first season was so well received, and it's no doubt because of the people on screen. Being a character-led series, the audience has the great pleasure of being able to get to know each of the participants on their own terms, not to mention some of their lovely families. I think it's also a breath of fresh air seeing real people on our TV screens, rather than Instagram chasing wannabe celebrities.

I feel lucky to have had the chance to make a second series and look forward to sharing these stories with audiences.

– CIAN O'CLERY

Season 1 Reviews.

We were all so proud when JJ Abrams called *Love on the Spectrum*, the "**sweetest show ever**", and his top pick for 2020 in *Variety* magazine.

What others have said about *Love on the Spectrum*:

More than anything, Love on the Spectrum exhibits empathy toward the featured players without condescending toward them, and quickly bridges any cultural barriers in a broadly universal manner.

– BRIAN LOWRY, CNN

Unlike "Tiger King" or "The Bachelor," or certain real-life political reality shows that lost touch with the real world a long time ago, "Love on the Spectrum" is about empathy. And about something more interesting than contempt.

– MICHAEL PHILLIPS, CHICAGO TRIBUNE

Love on the Spectrum is an affecting show that paints telling portraits of human connection that are so lovely, so moving, and so wholly satisfying, it's hard to imagine reality dating being done any other way.

– MASHABLE

Consultants.

The *Love on the Spectrum* team continue to seek feedback and consult not only with neurotypical experts (**Jodi Rodgers, Nicole Rogerson, and Beverley Witherington**) but, importantly, with individuals who are experts in the neurodiverse community and are on the spectrum themselves.

Judy Singer is a sociologist, author and international speaker. She is noted for coining the term 'Neurodiversity' in a thesis published at the University of Technology, Sydney, in 1998. Her research was based on her experiences "in the middle of three generations of women on the autistic spectrum" and from membership of early online autistic e-groups.

Judy has a consultant role on the series, providing support, direction and feedback and guiding our approach to the making of the new series. She is also the mother of a teenage daughter with autism.



Making the series.

Love on the Spectrum features a group of people that are largely misunderstood. The latest data on autism prevalence in Australia believes it to be as high as 1 in 70.¹

The most important aspect of making the series was caring for our participants and enabling them to tell their stories in a comfortable and collaborative way.

Our casting processes were extensive. We spoke to hundreds of people who were interested in being part of the series, which confirmed the real need for support. We worked closely with autism and disability organisations to ensure the production was sensitive to the needs of people on the spectrum.

The main participants of the series are all people on the spectrum, however all other casting was inclusive, with the key criteria for the participant's 'dates' being similarities in age, location and interests.

Dates were organised by the production team with strict code of conduct and policies in place. All participants had to acknowledge their intention to be kind and respectful.

Though all participants were over the age of 18 and capable of having the dignity to make decisions for themselves, we felt it was important to communicate our plans with parents and families – most of whom were also included in filming.

On the dates we made sure people knew they could put up their hand to stop filming if they felt overwhelmed, anxious or uncomfortable. It was made clear they should feel in control. Ultimately, there is a responsibility in telling such personal stories and we hope our compassionate, collaborative and ethical approach is imbued throughout the series.

¹ Autism Spectrum Australia (ASPECT), 'What is autism?', <www.autismspectrum.org.au/about-autism>



Background facts on autism.

Autism is a lifelong neurodevelopmental condition. It is characterised by:

- differences in behaviour
- social interaction
- communication
- special interests
- sensory processing

These differences can present people on the autism spectrum with challenges in how they interact with their environment.

Some characteristics of autism are common to a greater or lesser extent among many people on the autism spectrum; other characteristics are typical but not necessarily experienced by all people on the autism spectrum. Thus, the word 'spectrum' is used to reflect the wide scope of differences in how individual people experience autism and their environment.

While some people on the autism spectrum also have an intellectual impairment or disability, many others have average intelligence, while others have above-average intelligence.

Individuals on the autism spectrum often have the same desire for intimacy and companionship as the rest of the population. Given that difficulties in social interaction are a key feature of having autism, finding a partner and making a relationship work are often more difficult for a person on the spectrum. That being said, many examples exist of successful relationships. Assets of a person with autism in terms of a romantic relationship may be loyalty, punctuality, reliability, commitment, and honesty.



EXCERPT FROM AN ARTICLE IN [The Atlantic](#):

Perhaps because so much of their behavior runs counter to mainstream conceptions of how to express affection and love, people with autism are rarely considered in romantic contexts. A constant complaint among the individuals interviewed for this piece is the misconception that people with autism can't express love or care for others. "I think a lot of times someone will go out on a date with someone on the spectrum and think they're a robot," said Alex Plank, founder of WrongPlanet.net, a popular online autism community. "It's hard to read us if we don't explicitly say what we're feeling, but all the feelings are there."

In fact, people with autism may have greater emotional capacities. "Studies have shown that people with autism can have feelings that are stronger and deeper than those without autism," said John Elder Robison, bestselling author of *Look Me in the Eyes* and autism advocate. "Yet those feelings may be invisible to outsiders because we don't show them. Because we don't show them or the expected response, people make the wrong assumption about our depth of feeling about other people."

It's not that individuals on the spectrum do not have the same desire for love; they just may not know how to find it. Dr. Elizabeth Laugeson, an Assistant Clinical Professor at UCLA said, "If you asked a person with autism if they wanted a romantic relationship, they would probably say yes, but they would probably also say they don't know how to."

How to talk about autism.

MAKING SENSE OF LANGUAGE

People with disabilities are not by definition "special", "poor" or "unfortunate". They should be referred to with the same respect we expect people to show everyone.

People do not "suffer from" a disability. Avoid other terms that imply this. For example, "a victim of" or "afflicted by".

People with disability advocate against the use patronising of language, describing people as "brave" or "special" or "inspiring" just because they live with disability.

There are two main approaches to describe someone with a diagnosis:

- **Person-first (person with autism):** The argument for this approach is that it doesn't define someone by their diagnosis. It's not labelling somebody.
- **Identity-first (autistic person):** The argument for describing someone as autistic is that it's an inherent part of their identity and something to be proud of.

The website [Autistic Not Weird](#), asked 11,000 people how they describe a diagnosis:

- Just over half of autistic respondents said they only use "autistic person" while 11% preferred "person with autism". About a quarter of people were happy to use either.
- Almost half of the non-autistic people with no autistic relatives said they only use "person with autism".
- Many people are also comfortable with the descriptions "on the spectrum" or "on the autism spectrum" as middle ground.

Some people still use terms like Asperger's Syndrome or "Aspie" to describe their condition, while some people might use terms like ASD, autism, and Asperger's interchangeably.

The spectrum is not a line with low functioning at one end and high functioning at the other, and importantly how we all communicate and cope with the world changes from day to day and depending on the circumstances.

For more information on autism in Australia, including guidelines on appropriate language:

- www.autismawareness.com.au
- www.autismspectrum.org.au



Northern Pictures.

After almost a decade of production, Northern Pictures has one of the strongest storytelling reputations in Australian factual television. As a company we pride ourselves on documentaries underpinned by journalistic values, unique access and cinematic sensibilities.

The team behind the *Love on the Spectrum* are proven, award-winning collaborators with some of the strongest bones in Australian factual television.

This is the sixth time the creative team of Karina Holden (executive producer), Cian O'Clery (series director and supervising producer) and Jenni Wilks (series producer) have collaborated. They have made two seasons of *Changing Minds*, two seasons of *Employable Me* and this will be a second series of *Love on the Spectrum*. Together, they have had an enduring professional relationship and share a passion for innovative documentary storytelling.

Love on the Spectrum Season 1 has been awarded Best Global Reality program by Realscreen and has been nominated for a Banff Television Rockie Award.

www.northernpictures.com.au

Credits.

Series Producer and Director

CIAN O'CLERY

Supervising Producer

JENNI WILKS

Executive Producer

KARINA HOLDEN

Narrator

BROOKE SATCHWELL

Associate Producers

LAURA GRACE

ALEXANDRA GODWIN

LAURA RITCHIE

Story Producer

NAOMI ELKIN-JONES

Consultant

JUDY SINGER

Producer Attachment

JOSHUA PICKETT

Cinematography

DAVE MAY

CIAN O'CLERY

Sound Recordist

JARED TRANSFIELD

Editors

SIMON CALLOW-WRIGHT

LEANNE COLE

Production Manager

MICHELLE DARGAVILLE

Senior Production Supervisor

KATE BAILEY

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FINANCED WITH THE ASSISTANCE OF

SCREEN NSW



FILMED AND POST-PRODUCED IN
NEW SOUTH WALES, AUSTRALIA

PRINCIPAL PRODUCTION FUNDING FROM



A NORTHERN PICTURES PRODUCTION



PRODUCED IN ASSOCIATION WITH
THE AUSTRALIAN BROADCASTING
CORPORATION



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Images available from abc.net.au/tvpublicity

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