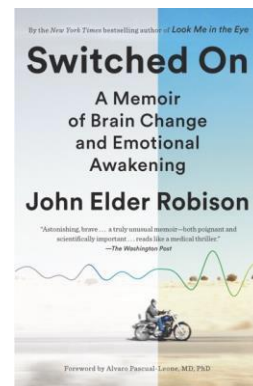


## Discussion Guide

### *Switched On: A Memoir of Brain Change and Emotional Awakening*

By John Elder Robison

1. Robison was diagnosed with Asperger's at age forty. He claims that his "diagnosis was a huge relief and a source of empowerment" What does he mean?
2. In Chapter 6, Robison tells the story of being the first responder at the scene of a car accident. He is not emotionally affected by the situation. "Before TMS, all I knew was that I was a good guy in a crisis because my logical mind took charge." He continues, "Even without feeling the expected emotions, I did the right thing... My sense of right and wrong was quite well developed, and I did the best I could for other people. It's just that my senses and abilities were limited, so I didn't always do what they expected." Did you find this surprising? Have you known people whose facial expressions struck you as odd or overly blank? How did it make you feel, and how did you interpret their behavior?
3. Why did Transcranial Magnetic Stimulation (TMS) appeal to the author? How is the title relevant to the story?
4. In Chapter 14, Robison describes his reaction to his first TMS treatment after leaving the research hospital and driving home in his car listening to music. Describe the significance of this episode.
5. Robison often says that before TMS, he could relate better to machines than to people, yet, he wasn't void of feelings, and he felt socially isolated. Discuss Robison's relationships before and after TMS.
6. Robison is an advocate of autism research and science. Have you ever been involved in a clinical or research trial? What motivated you, or would motivate you, to participate? What concerns did, or would, you have?
7. In Chapter 35, he discusses his many collaborations with academic institutions and government agencies as an informal policy advisor. What or whom does he credit for making "the leap from a car mechanic to a strategic advisor for autism research with HHS?"
8. In reviewing this book, *The Washington Post* described Robison as "deft at explaining difficult concepts and doesn't shy from asking hard questions." If you read Robison's first book, *Look Me in the Eye*, which he wrote before TMS, how would you compare and contrast his writing style?
9. In the last chapter of his book, Robison references "autism researchers are hard at work searching for biomarkers, biological parameters that predict or diagnose autism, especially in infants." What are Robison's concerns about neuroscience technology in early childhood development? Do you think his concerns are valid?



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## Discussion Guide

*Switched On: A Memoir of Brain Change and Emotional Awakening*

By John Elder Robison

### LEARN MORE

For more information about Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development

<https://www.nichd.nih.gov>

National Institute on Mental Health: Autism Spectrum Disorder

<https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/autism-spectrum-disorders-asd/index.shtml>

Interagency Autism Coordinating Committee <https://iacc.hhs.gov>

For more information about Transcranial Magnetic Stimulation (TMS)

[https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/psychiatry/specialty\\_areas/brain\\_stimulation/tms/index.html](https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/psychiatry/specialty_areas/brain_stimulation/tms/index.html)

<https://www.mayoclinic.org/tests-procedures/transcranial-magnetic-stimulation/about/pac-20384625>

### What are clinical trials?

Clinical trials are research studies that look at new ways to prevent, detect, or treat diseases and conditions. The goal of clinical trials is to determine if a new test or treatment works and is safe.

Although individual participants may benefit from being part of a clinical trial, participants should be aware that the primary purpose of a clinical trial is to gain new scientific knowledge so that others may be better helped in the future. To learn more, visit **Clinical Research Trials and You:**

**Questions and Answers** <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/clinical-research-trials-and-you-questions-and-answers/index.shtml>

To view the Tractor YouTube video

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BIZsYGxXHis&feature=youtu.be>