

Understanding autism:

A guide for professionals



Making a difference together: A health toolkit



What we understand by the term autism

Autism is a spectrum condition that affects how a person communicates with, and relates to, other people, and how people make sense of the world around them. There is no cure for autism and the cause remains unknown.

The core idea is that the brain functions differently so people receive and process information in a different way (Forrester-Jones, 2014). Autism manifests in different ways, but everyone is unique with abilities, talents, and symptoms.

In this guide, the term 'Autism' is used to include: Autistic Spectrum Disorder, Autistic Spectrum Condition, Asperger's Syndrome, Autistic Spectrum Difference and Neuro-diversity.

Many people have co-morbidities (more than one health condition at the same time) and people with autism are no different. Conditions could include learning and mental health challenges and dyspraxia.

Support required by each person with autism can vary from constant to occasional. Autism not only affects the person but can affect the lives of their family, friends and carers.

What we know about autism

Autism affects about 700,000 people in the United Kingdom, 1:100 of the population (The National Autistic Society, 2014). The number of children known to have autism has dramatically increased since the 1980s due to changes in diagnostic practice, yet many people still remain undiagnosed and without support.

Estimations suggest at least 4 times more males than females are diagnosed with autism, and a third of people with a learning disability may also have autism.



“ I don't like the word disorder, it puts people down. ”

People with autism have three main areas of difficulty:

- 1. Social Communication:** People have difficulties with verbal and non-verbal communication, facial expressions, body language and tone of voice.
- 2. Social Interaction:** People struggle to understand their own and other people's emotions, struggling also to make friends and forming relationships.
- 3. Social Imagination:** People have difficulties understanding abstract concepts and ideas, actions, consequences and solutions.



What you can do to help someone with autism

- ✓ Use plain language, short sentences, give time to process information
- ✓ Be patient and try to understand a person's anxieties and frustrations
- ✓ Talk to the family and carers to find out about the person
- ✓ Be prepared to explain complex information and repeat it often
- ✓ Support the person and prepare them for changes
- ✓ Remember, routines can help a person to feel safe and secure
- ✓ Accept difference and do not discriminate, everyone is unique

“Just because someone is a professional doesn't mean they fully understand the day to day life of someone with autism.”



For more information visit the following websites:

www.autistica.org.uk
www.nhs.uk
www.bbc.co.uk/science

References:

National Autistic Society 2014, www.autism.org.uk
Forrester-Jones, R. (2014). Loss and people with autism. IN: S. Read (edit) (2014). Supporting people with intellectual disabilities experiencing loss and bereavement: Theory and compassionate practice. London: JKP.