

Autism

What is Autism?

Autism is a neurodevelopmental condition that affects how an individual makes sense of the world - including how they communicate and relate to other people.

Autism is a spectrum difference - this means that all people with autism will be affected in different ways

The Dyad of Impairments

Autism is characterised by the Dyad of Impairments (previously known as the Triad of Impairments)

DYAD OF IMPAIRMENTS

Restricted, repetitive patterns of behavior, interests, or activities

Persistent deficits in social communication and social interaction

May show differences in sensory processing

What does this mean?

1. Restricted, repetitive patterns of behaviour, interests or activities

- Stereotyped or repetitive movements
- Rigid thinking patterns - such as having to take the same route each day (inflexibility in thinking)
- Fixated/Special interests with high intensity or focus
- Instances of sameness - small changes to environment or routine leads to distress

2a. Difficulties in Social Interaction

- Finding it difficult to "read" people
- Not able to tune into or recognise other people's feelings, or manage their own

What causes Autism?

The exact cause is unknown, but it is thought to be a combination of complex genetic, organic and environmental factors

- Not being able to understand people's underlying intentions
- Social Anxiety
- Difficulty in maintaining and forming relationships and friendships
- Confusion in sexual understanding and intimacy

2b. Difficulties in Social Communication

- Not able to initiate or respond to social communication
- Lack of eye contact and facial expressions
- Will not be able to sense changes in tone of voice, prosody
- Difficulties in reading body language
- Difficulties in understanding open ended questions
- Lack of understanding around jokes, metaphors, idioms and sarcasm (will take these literally)

2c. Difficulties in Social Imagination

- Future imagination and situations outside of their experience
- Delayed processing
- Difficulties in planning and making choices
- Difficulty in being spontaneous, with change and transitions
- Predicting behaviour of others

2d. Differences in Sensory Processing

- Difficulty processing everyday sensory information
- Senses may be over sensitive or under sensitive

This includes:

- | | |
|-----------|------------------------|
| - Touch | And also |
| - Smell | - Vestibular (Balance) |
| - Taste | - Proprioception |
| - Sight | (Awareness of body) |
| - Hearing | |

If someone's vestibular system is **under sensitive** they might:

- Need to get some sensory input, so they may rock/spin/swing

If it is **over sensitive**, someone might:

- Have difficulties quickly stopping an activity (mainly physical activity that require movements)
- May struggle with activities where head is not upright or feet are off the ground.

If someone's proprioception is **under sensitive**, they might:

- Stand too close to others and cannot measure personal space
- Find it hard to navigate rooms and avoid obstructions
- Bump into people or things

Supporting someone on the ASD Spectrum

1. **Giving Options** – People on the spectrum may struggle with imagining themselves outside of their lived experience, and so may not be able to engage in future thinking. Some people also have difficulty in making decisions and planning.
2. **Time to process** – Saying things slowly and taking regular pauses, this gives people time to process what you have said and think of a response. Sometimes visual cues or aids are useful.
3. **Double Checking** – Ask the individual “is that right?” or “Have I got that right?” to double check that there has been no miscommunication.
4. **Asking closed questions** – Questions should be clear and direct using language that is appropriate for the person that you are speaking to. Keep questions short and necessary. For example, avoid saying “How was your morning” and ask “Did you enjoy your breakfast” instead.
5. **Specific Communication** – Being as specific as possible. If you are going to support or carry out an activity with someone on the spectrum, explain in detail what you are going to do, and what each step looks like.
6. **Avoid using sarcasm, idioms, figurative language** – These may have double meanings and be taken literally by someone on the spectrum.
7. **Be time-bound** – if you plan to do something (an activity or session), ensure that a timing is agreed to and adhered to, communicating if there will be any delay.
8. **Consider the environment** – People on the spectrum may be sensitive to light, movement, sounds, sights and smell. Ensure the environment is calm for the person that you are supporting.