

- Do ask the individual what you can do to help and respect what is said. This may be to leave the person alone.
- Do be patient.
- Do be understanding.

Don't:

- Don't be judgemental. Remember that autism is an invisible disorder.
- Don't rush the person with autism. Give them time and space to think and process what is going on and what is being said.
- Don't use lots of language or talk too much.
- Don't talk over each other.

For more information go to the website of the National Autistic Society. www.autism.org.uk
They also run a telephone helpline on 0909 800 4104.

On YouTube you will find an animation called 'Amazing Things Happen' that explains about autism.



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Information for all

How to understand people with autism compassionately

Autism

There are a variety of different terms that you may have heard of associated with autism. These may be Asperger's, classic autism, autism, autistic spectrum disorder, autistic spectrum condition or pervasive developmental disorder. They all refer to the same condition.

What is it?

Autism is a lifelong, developmental condition that affects all areas of a person's life. It is characterised by:

- Challenges in social communication and social interaction
- Restricted, repetitive patterns of behaviours or interest.
- Unusual sensory responses.
These are present in lots of different contexts.

These challenges faced by a person with autism involve the processing of information. Many people with autism find this information processing takes longer than may be expected.

As it is a spectrum condition, autism will look different from individual to individual. Behaviours will also change as the individual grows up and depend on the strategies that are in place to support the person.

These challenges associated with autism can lead a person to feel isolated and excluded.

What causes autism?

We don't know! Research has yet to determine the cause of autism, although brain scans show that the brain of a person with autism is different to the brain of a person who is typically developed, highlighting differences in brain structure.

Implications of having autism

Having an impairment in social understanding may involve some or all of the following:

- Interpreting language literally can cause misunderstandings.
- Understanding other's motives, opinions, behaviour or thinking.
- Sarcasm and humour may not be interpreted in the way you would expect.
- Some people with autism may have a lot to say, whereas others may not yet speak.

Finding the world to be a chaotic, unpredictable place can lead to challenges with:

- Finishing one activity to do another.
- Generalising what the person has learnt to a new situation.
- Planning what to do now, and what to do next.

Unusual sensory responses may also include:

- Heightened awareness of sounds or sights leading the individual to become easily overwhelmed in shops and other busy environments.

Tolerance to different senses may vary from day to day, and often builds up across the day.

Behaviours that you see may be a reaction to a day filled with little challenges.

Do:

- Do think about the language you are using. Simplify it if necessary.
- Do give instructions 1 at a time.
- Do give the person time and space to think and make a decision.
- Do reduce sensory input if necessary. For example, turn off lights if possible, or offer a quiet place to sit.