

The Three Minute Guide to Autism



This handbook is designed to give you key information and advice from professionals working with autistic people.

Please see below just some of the many strengths and abilities that people with Autism may have:

- Excellent memory
- In depth knowledge of specialist subjects
- Determination
- Attention to detail
- Reliable

What is Autism?

Autism is a lifelong developmental condition. Autism affects how you relate and communicate with other people and make sense of the world you live in. Each person is affected by their Autism in a unique way, but underlying are 2 key areas of difficulty which are:

- **Difficulties in your social interaction and social communication**
- **Restricted and repetitive patterns of behaviour**

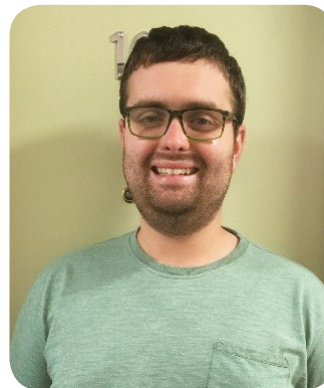
You may also be hyper or hypo sensitive to sound, light, touch or pain etc. You could often live with significant co-morbidities in addition to your diagnosis of Autism such as:

- **Depression**
- **Anxiety**
- **Obsessive Compulsive Disorder**
- **Attention Deficit + Hyperactivity**
- **Epilepsy**
- **Addiction**
- **Eating Disorders**

Autistic Spectrum Conditions (ASC) describes the range of abilities people with Autism have.

What Autism is for me

Joe and Tracey are autistic people supported by accomplish's Cheshire and Cornwall Supported Living Services.



- Changes are difficult for me and I need people to help me when they happen
- I like to be tidy and keep things in order and I don't like it if people move my things
- I can't make some decisions straight away, I need time to think about things. I sometimes feel stuck in the middle



- My Autism means, that I find some things really hard that people without Autism can do, but other things I can do really easily like using a computer
- I can remember loads of interesting facts especially about animals
- I can get upset really easy

Do you live with Autism?



**Dr Olufemi Oluwatayo, Medical Director,
Lakeside**

Autism can affect males and females from all social economic and racial backgrounds.

People with Autism sometimes present with behaviours of concern that causes distress, impair their quality of life and those around them and can lead to contacts with law enforcement agencies. They may require specialist support and may benefit from a low arousal and calm environment, use of consistent structures and boundaries and simple communication, various psychology treatments and occasionally medications for brief periods.

Do you live with the following traits?

- Do you have difficulties making/keeping social relationships?
- Are you unaware of the results of your behaviour - poor understanding of cause and effect?
- Are you naive/vulnerable – out of keeping with your age?
- Do you have rigid routine/rituals – and get upset when you're unable to complete them?
- Are you unable to hold down education/employment?
- Do you have unusual eye contact, body language, vocal communication?
- Are you egocentric, with little empathy/sympathy for others - feelings out of keeping with what others would be expect?
- Do you often have misunderstandings with other people?
- Do you seem to not understand the rules of society?
- Are you a victim of exploitation?

Top Tips when to consider a referral for Diagnostic Assessment

- At family request.
- When the person is demonstrating autistic traits.
- When the person is just not coping with the world around them.
- They are having difficulties at school/college/employment.
- There is significant impact socially/psychologically/medically on themselves and/or others.
- If impending crisis can be averted.
- If medically and socially difficult to manage.
- Extreme vulnerability/naivety which puts them/others at risk.

People with Autism can present with radically different behaviours. This may range from an individual who is agoraphobic, refuses to leave their bedroom and is not able to communicate verbally to another individual who is socially outgoing, but misunderstands social situations resulting in inappropriate behaviour.



How to support me

- I may need you to explain all the stages of what you are about to do and what will happen next.
- It is helpful if you can write down all the information - using pictures if appropriate.
- I may need you to give me time to understand what you are saying.
- Use simple language to describe what you are saying as I may not understand your facial expressions and body language.
- I may take things that you say literally and some humour may be misunderstood (e.g. I will be 1 minute or it's raining cats and dogs).
- I like routine and familiarity - don't suddenly change agreed plans.
- Understand that I may find it hard to build relationships - give me time.
- People with Autism may seem self-obsessed but this might be because I find it hard to understand what other people are thinking.
- I might have difficulty making eye contact or use unusual body language; however this is not on purpose.
- I might talk at inappropriate moments or about inappropriate topics - this is not me being rude.
- I might do repetitive things, it might look odd but it is my way of coping with situations.
- I like my environment to be calm.
- Please ask me if you have any questions.
- I may have acute senses e.g. touch, sight, hearing etc, this might mean that they find loud noises unsettling, have trouble focusing on the important elements or become overwhelmed by too many stimulants.
- As an autistic person I may have special interests and may spend a lot of time on these.
- I need support that is specific to me.



Skills in meeting me

- Give me time to talk, understand information and respond.
- Valuable information can be gained from family/carer/ friend, if permission is given.
- Use clear, closed and simple questions.
- Avoid ambiguity, sarcasm, cynicism and other idioms etc.
- Check on shared understanding of history, assessment and management.
- Don't assume "I understand" means I do.
- Give written information and feedback wherever possible.
- Poor eye contact does not mean I am not listening to you.
- Try to keep meeting rooms tidy, low arousal environment for any sensory issues.
- Don't use lots of body/hand movements when talking. Limit non-verbal communication.
- Give advance warning of what is going to happen.
- Empathise with my point of view. You may not understand it but you should respect it.
- Offer few and simple options.
- Use special interests if known to help communication and motivation.

Useful Resources

- **www.accomplish-group.co.uk** accomplish is a specialist care provider for people with Autism, Mental Health Needs, Learning Disabilities and Acquired Brain Injuries
- **www.autism.org.uk/autismdirectory** List of local services
- **www.researchautism.net** Research Autism
- **www.autism.org.uk** National Autistic Society
- **www.nice.org.uk/CG142** (adults)
- **www.nice.org.uk/CG128** (children)
NICE Guidelines and tools for implementation
- **www.jkp.com** Jessica Kingsley Publishing for books
- **www.networkautism.org.uk**
Community of professionals working with Autism
- **www.autscape.org** Autscape conferences by and for Autistic people



Stopping over-medication of people
with a learning disability, autism or both