



DISABILITY FACT SHEET

Autism & Aspergers

Communication strategies

- When communicating with a person with an Autism Spectrum Disorder it is important to acknowledge that each person is an individual and should be approached as such.
- Verbal communication may be difficult. People with an Autism Spectrum Disorder may take expressions literally (eg raining cats and dogs), so avoid ambiguous or colourful language. They may not understand body language.
- Use words that are flexible such as 'we will usually' or 'we may' rather than 'we will'.
- Provide guidelines such as one person to speak and the other to listen.
- Use simple and short sentence structures, and provide information in a logical order.
- Introduce new ideas gradually. Provide regular breaks and reduce the amount of information to be given at one time.
- Write down the information that needs to be communicated.
- Use diagrams and pictures where appropriate
- Break down tasks into checklists.
- Identify sensitivity to particular colours.

Disability Overview

Autism Spectrum Disorders (commonly referred to as Autism) describes a group of developmental disabilities which includes:

- Autistic disorder (sometimes called infantile autism or childhood autism)
- Asperger's disorder
- Atypical autism

The word 'spectrum' is used to describe the fact that no two people with an Autism Spectrum Disorder behave the same. People with Autism Spectrum Disorders display a range of possible characteristics and behaviours across three main areas of social interaction, communication and behaviour.

The characteristics that can be associated with autistic conditions are:

- engagement in repetitive activities
- stereotyped movements
- resistance to environmental change or change in daily routines. They may also experience sensory sensitivities, i.e. over- or under-sensitivity to sight, touch, taste, smell, sound, temperature or pain.

Autism Spectrum Disorders are lifelong disabilities that usually appear during the first three years of life. The causes of Autism Spectrum Disorders are still unknown, though recent research has indicated that there may be a genetic factor for many people, while for others it may be a result of damage or abnormal development in the brain and parts of the central nervous system before, during or soon after birth.

People with an Autism Spectrum Disorder may have difficulties with social interaction and communication. For some individuals this is the result of not being able to process information or understand the meaning of body language or the spoken/written word.

Implications

A person with an Autism Spectrum Disorder may:

- be frustrated when dealing with everyday challenges and the unknown
- be confused, anxious and vulnerable to depression
- have limited social skills and as a result have difficulty making friends
- have difficulty understanding things with multiple names or labels
- have delayed speech, repetitive or include abnormal patterns
- require assistance when dealing with conflict
- have difficulty with starting or sustaining conversations
- may display restricted and repetitive interests and behaviours
- have excellent skills for rote learning but have difficulty processing the information
- have sensitivities to sound, smell, sight, taste, pain and temperature
- have high level verbal skills but be unable to sign their name
- may display self-injurious behaviour

A person with an Autism Spectrum Disorder may also have limited use and understanding of body language and as a result may not be able to:

- show their own expressions
- maintain eye contact
- interpret other people's feelings and emotions