

Autism basics:

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) includes:

1. Impairments in social interaction
2. Communication difficulties
3. Restricted/ repetitive interests and a range of other difficulties

It is important to find qualities about the young people you are working with, that you like and can relate to. You have a critical role in supporting these young people to see a good vision for the future, and the ability to cope with the life's difficulties.



Social interaction

Young people with ASD might show: “out of place” social behaviour. They might struggle taking turns, matching the focus of conversation, reading and interpreting others behaviour. They may not understand or think about other people’s perceptions. They will have difficulty understanding some types of humour and general social behaviour.

Communication

People with ASD can show language delays and speech abnormalities. They may talk about a few areas of focus and might not be spontaneous in their conversations. Their communication style may be unusual, with certain phrases or repetitive use of words, and anomalies in pitch, speed and rhythm of their speech.

Restricted/ repetitive interests & other difficulties

Individuals with ASD may struggle with how they interact with their environment, and may be quite focussed on repetitive interests, actions and activities. They can have unusual sensitivities or tolerance to sensory information like pain, temperature, touch, smell, sounds and visual information. They may show very specific preferences for the sensation of certain textures, or may show specific food preferences. They can struggle with change and academic learning.

You can help young people with ASD by: understanding their learning needs, preferences, ways to help them enjoy themselves, feel like a valued and respected individual, and feel included as part of a community. Help them by supporting their self-esteem and creating a vision so they can go beyond their current abilities.



Best practice summary:

- Find an individualised way to work with the person.
- Have a pre-planned range of goals which relate to ASD and having a good life.
- Use structure, and positive behaviour support.
- Have coordinated involvement of all important people in the young person's life.
- Check with your manager about additional learning about ASD.
- Remember you do not need to be the expert. Learning about the individual who has ASD and developing a unique relationship with them is a continual process.
- See and shape for the person a vision of a great life!

Strategies to help someone with ASD

Find an individualised way to work with the person: Know their interests, preferences and their routine. Find common interests to share with them. Build their strengths, praise their efforts. Negotiate how you will work together (both of your needs). Teach them how to develop their skills. Find underlying meaning in their behaviour. Imagine how it would feel if you needed support from others. Share meaningful information about yourself.

Use positive behaviour support. Positive behaviour support is non-aversive (no punishment focus). It teaches the person what to do, rather than focussing on the unwanted behaviour. As much preventative/ proactive, environmental support, teaching and skill development as possible, is required to positively shape behaviour. When behaviour escalates to a high level, reactive strategies need to be put in place to quickly reduce risk and de-escalate the situation. Sometimes these strategies might feel like you are 'giving in' to create safety. However, this is not the case as learning later occur when the person is calm and ready for learning (just not at the time of the escalation).

Use structure: Explain most interactions with reminders about the beginning, middle and end. Calmly demonstrate you understand their perspective and their frustrations but also describe the perspective of others, or the wider context. Role model coping and what the person needs to do in the situation.

Have a pre-planned range of goals which relate to ASD and having a good life. Create achievable goals, focused on social skills, communication and social behaviours as well as how to help the person understand the wider social and community context. Try and find ways to help the person stretch their current abilities. Involve relevant health professionals when needed in the planning process. Involve the person in their planning. Reflect on the progress of their goals and how new skills are adding positively to their lives.

Involvement of important people in the young person's life: Regularly review goals within the persons care plan at intervals (e.g. every 3 months). Involve all stakeholders in progress, to enable shared, holistic and "wrap-around" support in general life. Coordinated Input from significant people in the person's life is key.

Whenever you see problematic behaviour, ask yourself the following: What behaviour am I seeing? What might the person really be saying? What purpose do I think the behaviour serves? How could I respond in a way that helps?

TOP TIP!

- Identify an individualised safety plan for you and the young person when you are on shift.
- This can begin with a general assessment of the situation, what to do when behaviour escalates (perhaps an agreed upon plan) and how to rapidly introduce safety in case there is a behaviour escalation. This may include removing certain stimuli, people, getting the young person out of the situation or ceasing an activity.
- Have an emergency plan in place (in line with HYPAR guidelines, where there is clear awareness of how to maintain your safety and when to contact emergency services).