

Autism

Autism, or Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), is a neurodevelopmental condition characterized by social communication challenges, repetitive behaviours, and restricted interests. It's typically diagnosed during childhood, but in some cases, it may go undiagnosed until later in life.

If you suspect you might have autism, it's important to consult with a healthcare professional or a specialist, like a psychiatrist or psychologist, who can evaluate you based on your behaviours, experiences, and developmental history. They use a variety of assessment tools, observations, and interviews to reach a diagnosis. EASA provides assessment services, you are welcome to make contact about these options. Other service providers include the CDU Wellness Centre. An estimated 1 in 70 people in Australia is on the autism spectrum.

At least 50% of Autistic adults experience mental health issues like anxiety or depression. Autistic adults experience challenges and are twelve times more likely to be unemployed.

Some common signs and symptoms of autism can include:

1. Impairments in social interaction: Difficulty maintaining eye contact, struggling with understanding or engaging in social cues, challenges with forming and maintaining relationships, and limited interest in sharing emotions or experiences.
2. Communication difficulties: Delayed language development, repetitive or unusual speech patterns, trouble initiating or sustaining conversations, and literal understanding of language.
3. Repetitive behaviors and routines: Engaging in repetitive movements or actions such as hand-flapping, rocking, or lining up objects, being highly resistant to change or disruption in routines, and having specific interests or preoccupations.
4. Sensory sensitivities: Being hypersensitive or hypo-sensitive to sensory stimuli, such as being easily overwhelmed by loud noises, sensitivity to certain textures or smells, or seeking intense sensory input.

Keep in mind that autism is a spectrum disorder, meaning individuals may experience varying degrees and combinations of these characteristics. Only a qualified professional can make an official diagnosis after a comprehensive evaluation.

If you believe you might be on the autism spectrum, it's best to consult with a medical professional who can provide accurate guidance and support.

How can we as Family, Friends, Colleagues be supportive?

Understanding Autism:

1. Autism is a neurological condition that affects social interaction, communication, and behavior. Individuals with autism may possess exceptional abilities in specific areas but might struggle with others.
2. Each person on the autism spectrum is unique, with varying strengths and challenges. It's crucial to respect and appreciate their differences.

Enhancing Communication:

3. Use clear, direct language and simple instructions, avoiding figurative speech or sarcasm. Be specific and explicit when conveying information.

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4. Visual aids, such as pictures, charts, or schedules, can assist individuals with autism in understanding and following routines or tasks.
5. Give them enough time to process information and respond, without rushing them. Patience and attentiveness to nonverbal cues can make communication smoother.

Creating a Structured Environment:

6. Establish consistent routines and structures. Repetition and predictability can provide a sense of stability and reduce anxiety for individuals with autism.
7. Minimize sensory distractions as they may be overwhelming. Provide a calm, quiet space if needed, and be aware of lighting, noise levels, and other sensory triggers.

Building Social Skills:

8. Encourage and facilitate social interaction in a safe and comfortable setting. Match their interests with group activities, clubs, or organizations to help build relationships.
9. Teach and practice appropriate responses to social situations, including greetings, turn-taking, and personal space. Utilize social stories or role-playing activities as learning tools.
10. Foster understanding and acceptance among peers, friends, and family members by providing information about autism and promoting inclusive attitudes.

Promoting Independence:

11. Develop clear and achievable goals based on their individual strengths and interests. Encourage independence while providing any support required for success.
12. Implement strategies to enhance organizational skills, time management, and personal care routines. Visual reminders or checklists can be beneficial.
13. Explore and utilize assistive technology, such as communication apps or visual scheduling tools, to improve independence and self-advocacy.

Supporting Emotional Well-Being:

14. Understand that sensory sensitivities, changes in routine, or challenging social situations may cause distress. Offer support and strategies to manage anxiety or meltdowns.
15. Encourage participation in activities that help regulate emotions, such as engaging in hobbies, physical exercise, or relaxation techniques.
16. Consider seeking assistance from professionals, like therapists or counselors, to address emotional or behavioral challenges and provide coping strategies.

Remember, every person with autism is unique, so it is essential to respect their individual needs and preferences while using these tips as a general guide. Patience, understanding, and empathy are key to supporting individuals with autism in leading fulfilling and rewarding lives.

For additional information visit: www.autismnt.org.au