

Autism spectrum disorder: how it can help and hinder.

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What is ASD?

ASD or autism spectrum disorder is a condition in which a child may show developmental delay or struggles with social communication. This disorder is more prevalently diagnosed in young boys but has recently seen an uptake in diagnosis in girls due to variance and how the disorder may present due to our societal conditioning. ASD is a neurological disorder in which people think differently, also known as neurodiversity. How autistic people perceive the world and interact within it is intrinsically different from a neurotypical individual and this is not accounted for in modern society therefore causing some issues if you're reading today you may be looking for assistance for yourself or not autistic individual in your life you could also be looking just for to learn more about the condition we'll stop if so you'll suggest some strengths and weaknesses of ASD and some ways in which you can support ASD in daily life.

What are the strengths of ASD?

The many strengths of ASD are often not as discussed as the negative parts for those with the condition, so let us start positively with the common positives of autistic people. Many people with ASD are highly organized; this may seem odd but the love for categorization and how logistical and literal their brains happen to be can typically make them have systems in place of how they would store or sort almost anything in their unique way. This can allow for large-scale disorganized areas to be cleaned up and sorted and then able to be filtered in the future into categories. (An example is how the person who co-wrote this blog organized and reduced emails into five key categories so they could easily search and identify key emails.) This can aid, especially in businesses and school environments, if the person likes these tasks. Enjoying repetitive tasks and being quite logical also allows those with asd to be quite good at consistent tasks such as laundry. Categorisation also falls under this chore as sorting darks and lights is

good for consistency and calming measures. Autistic individuals often have unique perspectives and have higher levels of abstract thinking (ref). This can allow a creative or fresh view of situations such as art, design, and problem-solving. This allows unique changes to our everyday world.



In what ways can someone with ASD need support?

The diagnostic criteria for ASD note areas of difficulty as :

Another resource mentions some struggles ASD people may exhibit in a different light. These issues can range from struggling with coding and prediction in the brain of autistic people to low theory of mind, leading to misinterpretation of assumptions. Rigid thinking and sensory overloads, which then cause potential meltdowns or shutdowns, are also highly common and autistic individuals full stop; this can lead to issues such as higher levels of PTSD and maladaptive daydreaming as coping mechanisms. Autistic people also often can exhibit something known as the reduced effect of display which would also be known as a flat face this is not as though a steamroller has run over an autistic person but more so there are expressions and how they engage or exhibit emotional responses would be kind of neutral or flat making it difficult to read them and causing misinterpretations and social scenarios. Depending on whether or not an autistic individual has comorbid conditions they could also have something named Alexia which is where they would be unable to identify their own body and others' emotions there are other versions of this where it could come into play where they're not able to remember names or faces. Another area where I will just take individuals can find themselves being quite overloaded with is a condition called hyperacusis this condition is in fact where they can hear more frequencies in the average person such as electricity and lights. Children who hear these lights may not understand why it is they are getting so distressed while their peers or

adults in their lives are not as they can hear the buzzing or insistent squeaking of one of the bug things or the light bulbs in the room.

“So, how can I help someone in my life with ASD? All of that sounds stressful.”

It most certainly can be, and you can start by looking at the environment around you. Videos by a young filmmaker named Alex, with help from the Nuggett YouTube channel and the national autism awareness, excellently show how some autistic individuals can perceive the world in comparison to neurotypical folks. Within them are a few aspects that are a good place to start from in terms of addressing support. In Alex's videos, a thing that is noted to be a large issue for him is lights and noise, stopping his focus and stressing him out, as he cannot filter the sensory input the same way. This is due to autistic brains typically taking in 42% more information at a time as compared to non-autistic brains, as found by Velázquez and Galan (2013). How can this be reduced or at least made less intense? Here are some suggestions:

- Hold conversations of importance in a quieter room with less sensory input, even the benefit of typing the conversation on a device for the person as a quick hand summary may help them respond and stick to a plan while overwhelmed.
- Having days with set plans or no set plans allows the person to prepare emotional energy or be better prepared which reduces stress and structuring their routines on unplanned days allows for consistency on smaller scales which can be calming. Similarly offering consistent morning and night habits can also be beneficial.
- Looking into lower or adjustable levels of light, or if the person can hear electricity, favourable frequencies for lights in rooms can also be a huge help.
- Look into sensory aids such as noise-reduction earplugs and sound mufflers. There are loads of resources for these. A personal recommendation would be LOOP earplugs, particularly for younger kids, the brand Sensational Kids, which offers ear defenders to remove noise and reduce overstimulation.
- The use of coloured-lens glasses or sunglasses may reduce light input and allow a person to feel more comfortable in bright environments on bad sensory days for longer.
- Looking into items to allow someone to fidget or stim in a subtle way to reduce intense emotions. Some examples of these could be fidget rings, textured bracelets, chewable necklaces, or objects specifically designed for the purpose such as fidget cubes.
- How things are phrased or communicating key or necessary points differently can also help.
- One such way is helping with transitions (moving from one activity/location/space to another) Giving a heads up such as “We are leaving this place in 5 minutes do you want

to do anything first?” or smaller ones such as having a light-based alarm clock that brightens the room as it goes off.

- Assisting when a person with asd potentially going low/nonverbal can also be helpful as it often occurs during intense situations for the person. Understanding and adaptability can be great skills in this scenario, the use of talk cards/audio reading software on phones or just yes/no answers for all conversations can deeply help. The people who are non-verbal CANNOT talk no matter how much they would like or to so an empathy towards them for the period is appreciated.
- Other areas that understanding and empathy can aid is around food. Food is often a hugely difficult aspect of sensory issues for several people with ASD, textures, and smells, and how variable foods (especially fruits and vegetables) can cause a lot of sensorily sensitive kids to become very upset and distressed.
- A newly studied disorder called AFRID (avoidant food restrictive intake disorder) is noted to be something Autistic individuals may have and may impact many of their eating habits. Those with AFRID can become nauseated or pained at the thought of eating food on days where they have poor sensory regulation, leading to them avoiding foods or only eating very specific “safe” foods. This falls in line sometimes with sensory issues around foods in general and distress being common around mealtimes. Offer the chance to engage with the preparation of food and vary textures where possible as an “experiment” to see which is best. This may allow some specific foods to enter the person's diet that may not have before due to a reframing of the food.

****This work is designed to suggest ways of support, roughly explain the condition of autism spectrum disorder, and offer some insight that some people may not have on the topic. This means that the language is not as extensive or academic as could be found elsewhere. Please research the condition further and how it affects the individuals who have it.***

References used in this blog:

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