



AUTISM

A short guide

“What is Autism”?

- One person in 100 has Autism.
- Autism is a lifelong developmental condition.
- Autism affects how a person communicates and relates to others.
- Autism affects everyone differently.
- People with Autism can become very anxious in unusual circumstances.
- People with autism are vulnerable under the Mental Health Act 1983.

Some Characteristics of Autistic People

- Appear to be over-compliant.
- Avoids eye contact/over eye contact.
- Behaves unusually.
- Inappropriate behaviour.
- Unpredictable.
- Unusually irritable, agitated and anxious.
- May seem scared of you.
- Struggles to understand you.
- Repeats what you say.
- Honest and blunt.
- Repetitive behaviour.
- Obsessive.
- Vague or inattentive.
- Space intrusion.

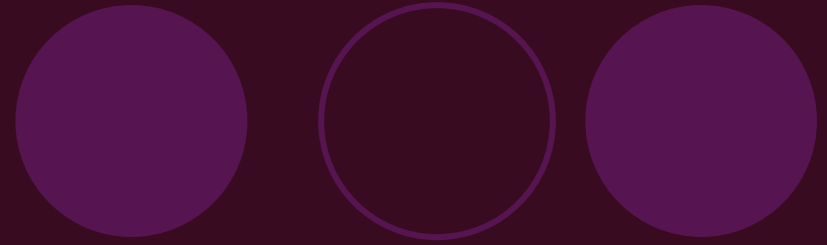
Some Characteristics of Autistic People

- Unable to read body language/voice.
- Lacks empathy.
- Poor concentration.
- Poor listening skills.
- Can appear rude.
- Agree to things that are not true.
- Stubbornness.
- Do not understand the consequences of actions.
- Like set patterns and rules.
- Can be obsessed with interests.
- One sided view.

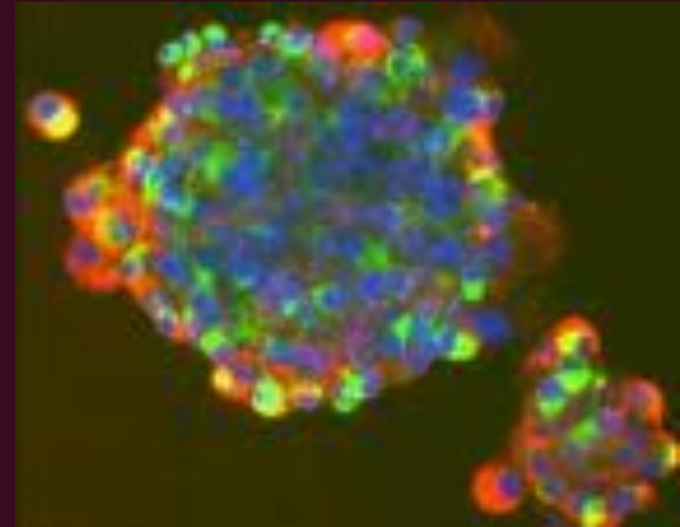
Autism in a Criminal Justice Context

- Warnings and ASBO's may not be appropriate unless support is given to understand the consequences of their actions.





- Autistic people coming into contact with the Criminal Justice System can be Victims, Witnesses, Suspects or Offenders.
- Good strategies are needed to help the individual understand and communicate.
- Making 999 calls or giving statements could be difficult for them.
- Could be coerced to commit offences by others.



Key notes:

- Vulnerable to bullying/harassment and social isolation.
- Unexpected changes lead to unusual behaviour.
- May not understand the consequences of crime/actions.
- May run away if confronted.



Strategies



- Involve parents/carers who know the person well where possible.
- An informed approach, may not understand or recognise a police officer by uniform or vehicle
- Behaviour/speech may change so expect this to happen.
- Do not try to stop them doing what they are doing, e.g. pacing up and down this may calm them down.
- If they have an object they may need that for comfort like a comfort blanket or key or something similar.

Strategies continued:-

- Turn off any unusual things e.g. flashing lights/alarms – sensitive to noise and light.
- Try to avoid touching wherever possible – fearful of crowds.
- Check they have no injuries by observation if possible rather than touching.
- Visual aids work better e.g. photos/writing/videos for evidence.
- Tell them exactly what is happening and what will happen .

Strategies continued:-



think
differently
about
autism

- Don't shout – talk calmly.
- If in custody a Doctor must authorise that the person is fit to be interviewed. Always consider support of a professional such as a Social Worker who has an understanding of their disability.
- Family should be consulted and informed.
- Use short sentences and instructions.
- Allow time for responses and be patient.
- Reinforce things. e.g. when you say yes nod as well.
- Say their name at the beginning of sentences.
- Don't use sayings, or metaphors etc.

Strategies continued:-

- Don't put words in their mouth ask clear questions and wait for answers.
- They may repeat the question back to you, check you asked it clearly.
- They may have a card or something similar they show you to recognise they are autistic.
- You may need to meet several times to gather information – ask the people involved in the family where possible e.g. psychiatrist, parent.
- Consider contacting Social Services to get help from someone with Autism specialism.
- Interview people in surroundings they know.



For Help

- Contact The National Autistic Society

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