

Save the date:



World Autism
Awareness
Week is back!
1 - 7 April



AUTISTIC SPECTRUM DISORDER – DEFINITION:

The Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a developmental disorder of varying severity that is characterised by difficulties in social interaction and communication and by restricted or repetitive patterns of thought and behaviour

The **WORLD AUTISM AWARENESS WEEK** was pioneered by the National Autistic Society (NAS), and it aims to draw attention to the 700,000 people living with autism in the UK – both to educate those unaware of the condition, and to help make the world friendlier to those who are affected by it.

Embracing and promoting work or school-based initiatives, as well as virtual events – including the chance to “run, swim, cycle or walk 7km during the week to raise money for the 700,000” – the NAS is looking for people to step up to the challenge and help them highlight this issue across the UK!

It's a really misunderstood condition and even the experts disagree about exactly what it is or what causes it. As a result, people with autism often have a tough time - and that's not just the ones who are severely affected. There are a plenty of people walking around who you might not think are autistic until they do or say something that you think is odd.

Look at the list of facts below and see which ones you didn't know - and find out how you can support autistic colleagues, family members, friends and support neurodiversity at work

- 1) Autistic people have brains that developed differently. That's why they think and behave differently to most neurotypical people.
- 2) Autism affects 1% of the UK population. Hardly any of them are gifted geniuses - but many are above average intelligence. Only 16% are in full-time employment
- 3) Autism effects everyone differently. Not everyone is on the autistic spectrum, only people with the diagnosed neurological condition. People with 'high functioning' autism used to be diagnosed as having Asperger's
- 4) Autism is not the same as mental health or learning difficulties. Sometimes autistic people can also have these conditions. They often have other, associated problems such as dyslexia, dyspraxia or light and sound sensitivity. Autism is part of a group of

neurological conditions which also includes Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

- 5) Autism can be easier to spot in men than in women. This is probably because women are working harder to try to conform to society's expectations. Consequently fewer women are diagnosed and often later in life.
- 6) Autistic people don't necessarily lack empathy. They're experiencing an overload of input from the world around them. This can lead to sensory overloads, or melt downs, so they need to take regular breaks alone in a quiet place.
- 7) Autistic people can be sociable. But they are often very direct, see things in 'black and white' and don't understand the need for small talk. This can mean they're experienced as rude. Autistic people find it hard to interpret non-verbal signals, pick up on moods or take turns to speak. They find hints and sarcasm unnecessary and confusing.
- 8) Most autistic people find eye contact tiring and uncomfortable and some speak in a monotone voice. People with autism typically prefer routine and to know and plan things in advance
- 9) You can help an autistic person at work by being very clear about what you want, giving clear deadlines and measures of success. Allow them to avoid big meetings, work independently in a quiet area and to take regular sensory breaks. Don't judge them if they don't take part in watercooler conversations and nights out or if they say something that seems odd or insensitive
- 10) You can get the best out of an autistic person at work by giving them intellectually challenging projects to complete and deliver. Value and encourage their unique 'out of the box' thinking. Support them to speak and contribute in group situations. Encourage them in team working and adapting to change. Above all promote an atmosphere of neurodiversity and acceptance.

5 TIPS FOR LIVING WITH SOMEONE WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER

Living with someone who has an autism spectrum disorder has its challenges, and it is a situation that more and more families find themselves facing. If you live with a person who has this disorder, use these five tips to help your family flourish.

1. GET INVOLVED WITH THE AUTISM COMMUNITY.

One of the best things you can do to help your family live life to its fullest is get involved with the autism community. Organisations like the Autism Spectrum Disorder Foundation can offer significant support, including opportunities to interact and socialise with other families touched by autism. Many people find the chance to talk with others, who truly understand what they are dealing with, because they are facing similar circumstances. The autism community also offers educational resources and information about various forms of advocacy.

2. ENCOURAGE ADVOCACY.

What is advocacy? It simply means championing a person or cause. When you live with someone with autism, it's vital that you actively advocate for them by educating the people they encounter and ensuring that your loved one gets the support they deserve to succeed. This might mean seeing that they have a proper Individualised education programme in

school or pursuing a new therapy with their GP / Consultant. It can also involve encouraging your loved one to be their own advocate or supporting efforts on the countywide and/ or national level to improve the quality of care for people with autism.

3. CELEBRATE THE GOOD STUFF.

When a health condition makes someone different, it is easy to focus on what is missed. Milestones that are not reached and tasks that cannot be achieved are depressing and, while it is okay to be sad, angry or disappointed and important to be honest about the situation, there is no need to focus on the negative. Instead of dwelling on the downsides, make a choice to celebrate the good stuff. Acknowledge each new achievement, even a small one, and it will be easier to maintain a positive attitude and appreciate the joys that life brings.

4. TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF.

Too often, caretakers are so busy helping those who count on them they forget to look after themselves. That is a recipe for disaster. Putting yourself first sometimes is not a bad thing; it is a survival skill. If you do not maintain your own health, you will not be able to effectively care for anyone else. Follow a healthy lifestyle, nurture your own relationships and passions, and be kind to yourself. Doing so will set a good example for your entire family and make it easier for you to provide them with the support they need to succeed.

5. REMEMBER AUTISM IS ONLY PART OF THE PICTURE.

Having an autistic spectrum disorder does not define a person; it is only a small facet of who they are. Don't let autism become the centre of your family life or the central feature of your relationships. Make sure that everyone in the family has plenty of opportunities to be both the centre of attention and the supporting cast. Making time to do things both, as a family and one-on-one, will ultimately improve everyone's relationships and social skills and strengthen your family and friends.

