

# Disability awareness

## Autistic Spectrum Condition

**Autistic Spectrum Condition is a term which covers several conditions including both Autism and Aspergers Syndrome. Whilst all people with an Autistic Spectrum Condition share certain difficulties, they will be affected in different ways and at varying levels – hence the term ‘spectrum’.**

Some autistic people also have a learning disability (or cognitive impairment) which will affect the level of support they need in their life. Others, including those with Aspergers Syndrome, have average or above intelligence which can initially mask some of their difficulties. Other conditions such as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Dyslexia and Dyspraxia are sometimes associated with Autism, and in particular, Aspergers Syndrome.

Autistic Spectrum Conditions affect individuals differently so it is important not to assume someone is affected with all of the potential difficulties below. You will need to take time to find out from them and anyone supporting them how they are affected. These difficulties can be grouped into three main categories:

### Communication

- ⦿ Difficulty with double meanings or similar sounding words
- ⦿ Literal interpretation - misunderstanding sayings, sarcasm or jokes
- ⦿ Speech difficulties or repeating what is said (echolalia)
- ⦿ Struggling with turn-taking in conversation - speaking for too long
- ⦿ Difficulty using and interpreting tone of voice and body language.

### Imagination

- ⦿ Difficulty understanding what other people are thinking or feeling
- ⦿ Struggling with activities outside of normal routine
- ⦿ Difficulty imagining what could happen if...
- ⦿ Finding it hard to prepare for change and plan for the future
- ⦿ Difficulty coping in new or unfamiliar situations.

### Social interaction

- ⦿ Difficulty maintaining appropriate eye contact (avoiding or staring)
- ⦿ Difficulty expressing emotion and empathy
- ⦿ Not picking up on social cues - inappropriate topics of conversation or use of personal space
- ⦿ Not seeking comfort or affection from others
- ⦿ Withdrawal from social situations and difficulty forming relationships.

**Sensory issues** Someone with autism may experience over-sensitivity (Hyper) or under-sensitivity (Hypo) to one or more of the seven senses:

- ⦿ Taste eg. aversion to certain foods
- ⦿ Touch eg. may not be able to wear certain fabrics
- ⦿ Sound eg. loud noises may be physically painful
- ⦿ Vision eg. artificial light or colours may be overwhelming
- ⦿ Smell eg. strong smells may be distracting
- ⦿ Vestibular (balance) eg. bumping into things
- ⦿ Proprioception (awareness of own body) eg. standing too close to others.

Often we focus too much on the difficulties not abilities. Having an Autistic Spectrum Condition can also give the individual valued skills and qualities such as those below:

- ⦿ Close attention to detail
- ⦿ Meticulous about routines, rules and accuracy
- ⦿ Ability to be consistent, accurate and precise
- ⦿ Ability to identify errors and spot patterns
- ⦿ Excellent memory
- ⦿ High level of concentration
- ⦿ Enjoyment of repetitive tasks
- ⦿ Reliability and conscientiousness
- ⦿ Thoroughness and persistence
- ⦿ Technical ability, such as in IT
- ⦿ Detailed factual knowledge
- ⦿ Special interest.

Whether you have a friend, customer, colleague or employee with an Autistic Spectrum Condition there are some simple things you can do to make their life easier:

## Minimise distractions as much as you can

- ⦿ Avoid bright strip lights or close blinds if bright sunlight
- ⦿ Remove unnecessary clutter from desks and remove/cover any posters
- ⦿ Shut windows/doors or turn off air-con to reduce noise
- ⦿ Ask your colleagues not to interrupt or keep the noise down
- ⦿ Try to avoid strong smells eg. perfume and kitchen smells.

## Routine and structure

- ⦿ Be on time and try to keep to the same days/ times for meetings
- ⦿ Set a clear structure for meetings and stick to it
- ⦿ Give plenty of notice and an explanation if things need to change.

## Social skills

- ⦿ Be aware they may find social situations difficult and actively avoid them
- ⦿ Support them to integrate into a new team or group - do they need a specific 'buddy'?
- ⦿ Be prepared to discuss what is appropriate/ expected behaviour in a given situation as they may not instinctively know.

## Contact us:

If you would like further information on how we can help you, please get in touch with us:  
t: 0300 456 8113 e: [training@remploy.co.uk](mailto:training@remploy.co.uk) w: [www.remploy.co.uk/training](http://www.remploy.co.uk/training)

If you require this information in an alternative format, please email [communications@remploy.co.uk](mailto:communications@remploy.co.uk) quoting ref. R88- Nov17

## Organisation/Time management

- ⦿ Be clear about any tasks they have to complete - break it down into small steps
- ⦿ Help with planning and prioritising the work
- ⦿ Write down any important information or appointments – highlight the important bits
- ⦿ If they need reminding about meetings and tasks, encourage the use of diaries/checklists.

## Communication

- ⦿ Provide information visually as well as verbally eg. letters, handouts, diagrams, easy read
- ⦿ Be clear, precise and direct in how you communicate
- ⦿ Use plain, literal English - avoid terms with multiple meanings
- ⦿ Avoid idioms, metaphors, sarcasm and other turns of phrase
- ⦿ Don't rely on body language or tone of voice - say what you mean
- ⦿ Avoid abstract terms and what ifs
- ⦿ Allow plenty of time for them to give answers to questions – avoid repeating the question.

