

Autism Awareness.

What is autism?

Autism is a lifelong pattern of differences in how someone communicates and interacts with the world.

Research estimates that over 1 in 100 people are autistic - you probably know someone with autism, even if you don't realise.

What differences might autistic people experience?

Like anyone, autistic people are individuals, who have areas of strength and difference.

Strengths often associated with autism:

- Attention to detail.
- Memorising and learning information.
- Logical thinking.
- Honesty and loyalty.

Differences often associated with autism:

- Communicating (differences in using language, interpreting tone and body language).
- Interacting (being more direct, social situations may take more energy).
- Focused interests (strong and specific passions, and the importance of routines).
- Sensory processing (extra sensitivity to noise, lights, smells and textures, or seeking out sensory experiences such as humming or gestures - this is called 'stimming').

Why is it important to be inclusive and accepting of differences?

Autistic people often 'mask' or hide their differences in order to try and fit the social world that non-autistic people have established. However, masking is related to an increase in anxiety, depression and suicidal behaviour. We must all prioritise making people feel accepted, and safe enough to be themselves.

How can we become autism allies?

Autistic people face discrimination: in healthcare, education, and at work. We need to work together to be more inclusive and support autistic people, at home and at work.

Ask about language preferences and support.

Ask autistic people what language they would prefer you to use - and respect their preferences. Ask them what you can do to support them - they know their needs best.

Communicate clearly and directly.

Say what you mean, and be as direct and literal as possible. This will help with effective communication, for everyone.

Respect and accommodate preferences and differences

Everyone has routines and things that they prefer - it's important to show understanding and respect for these. In order to understand, first we need to learn and educate ourselves - which we can do by reading more about neurodiversity and autism.- and most importantly, asking!

Try to use:

- Identity-first language (autistic person)
- Talk about specific strengths and challenges
- Differences in/difficulties with

Avoid using:

- Person-first language (person with autism)
- High functioning/mild/severe
- Symptoms/inability to/impairment

Keep learning and asking people what you can do to make them feel comfortable and supported.