

- Allow time for the person to respond, some people with Autism may need extra time to process language.
- Some people with Autism have sensory sensitivities sirens and flashing lights may increase their distress. The individual may not be aware that they are hurt / injured. Be sensitive to this.
- If you suspect someone has Autism try not to ask them too many questions.
- Facilitate contact with parent / carer as soon as possible.
- Give the individual time to process information.
- If possible write things down or use visual prompts i.e. simple sketch or line drawing.
- Autism is a hidden disability; there are no obvious physical characteristics.
- Remember it is a person with Autism not an Autistic person.

**For further information please
contact:**

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**Autistic
Spectrum
Disorder
PSNI
Fact Sheet**

First the Facts

- It is estimated that 1 in 86 people will have Autism.
- This means that at least 20,000 people in N Ireland will have Autism.
- This is roughly equivalent to the population of Omagh!
- It is likely that you will have contact with individuals who have Autism.
- Not all people with Autism will have a learning disability, some people are extremely intelligent.

What is Autism?

Autism is a developmental disorder which affects an individual's life in three main ways

- **Social Interaction**

Poor or no eye contact.

Socially isolated.

Socially naive and vulnerable to manipulation.

Poor empathy and understanding of other people.

Seeming to lack consideration for others.

Unable to fully relate to others, unusual social skills.

May not recognise or have an extreme fear of the police / authority.

- **Communication**

Difficulty understanding voice / tone of voice / eye contact / facial expression.

Difficulty understanding verbal communication.

Difficulty in understanding non-verbal communication.

Literal understanding of language.

Talking for long periods about a favoured subject without awareness of the needs of the listener.

Use of unusual language very formal or verbose.

Unemotional stating of the facts even when the consequences are severe.

Some people with Autism are visual thinkers i.e. thinking in pictures.

Individuals in an extreme state of anxiety may lose the ability to communicate verbally.

- **Imagination and Flexibility**

Driven to follow a certain routine or pursue a particular interest.

Becoming extremely upset if routines or rules are broken.

Becoming extremely upset if someone upsets a routine or interferes with an interest or the pursuit of an interest.

Very literal understanding of rules i.e. don't give your name to strangers.

What can you do?

- Be aware that unusual behaviour may be as a result of a person's Autism.
- Be aware that just because an individual has good language does not mean that they are equally good at understanding what is being said to them.
- Use short sentences ask the person if they understand you.