



KATHERINE GOODSELL

Psychological Services

Autism | what is it and how will it affect me?

Autism is a difference in the functioning of the brain. It is not a mental illness but a neurological difference! Everybody with autism spectrum disorder has personal strengths but it can also cause some challenges to be experienced.

If you are an individual with autism or autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) it can affect you in several areas including communication, interaction and behaviour.

If you are an adult caring for a person with autism or ASD, you may feel pressured and challenged particularly if a diagnosis has not yet been achieved.

Autism Spectrum Disorder is a condition that affects how a person communicates with and relates to other people. It also affects how they make sense of and interact with the world around them.

All individuals with ASD are very different but there are some core similarities, including persistent difficulties with social communication and social interaction. For example, individuals may struggle to initiate or continue a conversation, they may not understand social rules such as recognising a need for personal space or not interrupting others who are speaking or they may find it difficult to form and maintain friendships. Often there is a preference for completing tasks on an individual basis and sometimes being placed in a social situation can cause significant anxiety. They may not understand other's facial expressions / body language or the intentions or utterances of others which can be confusing for them and may generate misinterpretations.

Restricted, repetitive patterns of behaviour, interests, or activities. For example, they may develop an intense interest or preoccupation with an object or may require a fixed routine or ritual to be followed. In some cases repetitive body movements may be observed, or they may be hypersensitive to certain sounds or visuals.

Strengths

Many people on the autism spectrum have significant strengths. These may include an exceptional eye for detail or memory of events or facts, a high level of accuracy and consistency, be very dependable and have the ability to prosper in a structured and methodical home and work environment. Some also have extensive artistic and inventive talents!

Many individuals with autism do not consider autism to be a disability; hence autistic spectrum condition is becoming a popular name. As we said earlier it can be considered to simply be a neurological difference!

Sensory Sensitivity

Individuals with autism may be prone to sensory sensitivity including all seven of the following: vision, hearing, smell, taste, touch, proprioception (relative position and movement of neighboring parts of the body and muscle tension) and vestibular (balance).

Hyper-sensitivity – when a reaction to a stimulus is overly intense in relation to the expected reaction, for example, an extreme aversion to certain sounds or smells.

Hypo-sensitivity – when a reaction to a stimulus is lower than what you may expect, for example, a high threshold to pain.

Co-morbid condition

Many individuals with autism may have other conditions such as epilepsy and gastrointestinal problems. They may also have mental health problems such as anxiety and depression.

Causes

Most researchers believe that ASDs have a variety of causes, perhaps all affecting the same brain systems, or impeding development through disruption of different abilities necessary for social and communicative development. Whether environmental factors interact with genetic susceptibility is as yet unclear. Medical Research Council. (2001). MRC review of autism research: Epidemiology and causes. London: MRC.

Four main sub-types of autism used to be recognised within the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, fourth edition, published by the American Psychiatric Association. This included:

- Autistic Disorder, also known as autism, childhood autism, early infantile autism, Kanner's syndrome or infantile psychosis.
- Asperger Syndrome, also known as Asperger's disorder or simply Asperger's.
- Childhood Disintegrative Disorder, also known as CDD, dementia infantalis, disintegrative psychosis or Heller's syndrome.
- Pervasive Developmental Disorder (Not Otherwise Specified), also known as PDD (NOS) or atypical autism.

However the fifth edition of Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, DSM-5, published in May 2013 simply recommends one diagnosis called Autism Spectrum Disorder.

Challenges

Some people may also behave in difficult and challenging ways; however, this isn't generally in a pro-active way but is habitually in response (a reaction) to a perceived challenge or difficulty, for example, being asked to put a particular toy down, eat dinner in a different chair or someone asking for the time whilst your completing your usual routinised walk to the bus stop. Some may also have learning difficulties and speech impairments.

Because of these problems, autistic people often struggle to make friends, have successful relationships, do well at school, or obtain appropriate jobs. However, with the right support which is individualised to the needs of the person many can and will lead relatively independent lives. Others will continue to need assistance, compassion and tolerance throughout their lives.

Children and young people on the autism spectrum as well as their parents and carers face many issues on a day to day basis. However, with the right support and tailored interventions we can assist you with enhancing the wellbeing of your family.



Adults can face equally difficult scenarios, including challenges in managing their daily living skills, relationships, employment and stress related conditions. However, again with the appropriate support simple changes can afford each individual with an improved quality of life, and in many cases, adults with autism can manage to live independently and gain employment and subsist successfully in the community.

Of primary importance is the FACT that each individual with autism is absolutely unique. One size does not fit all! Every person has exclusive needs and abilities.

Autism | diagnosis and expert advice

We specialise in autism diagnostic assessments for both adults and children.

Having being fully trained in both the Autistic Diagnostic Interview – Revised (ADI-R) and the Autistic Diagnostic Observation Schedule (ADOS) and gained extensive experience of working with persons on the autistic spectrum we achieve an accurate assessment and diagnosis of autism and pervasive development disorder across ages, developmental levels and language skills.



Diagnostic Assessments

We offer two levels of diagnostic assessments; we can help you to choose the appropriate level based upon the complexity of the presenting problems.



Standard Assessment

The Standard Assessment - the aim of this assessment is to provide a definitive diagnostic opinion about the presence, or not, of an Autistic Spectrum Condition by completing an ADI-R Clinical Interview with a parent and an ADOS assessment with the child or adult being assessed.

Enhanced Assessment

The Enhanced Assessment is completed over 3 to 4 appointments and includes assessment of Autistic Spectrum Conditions and if required co-morbid psychiatric disorder assessment. Included within this service is a review of intellectual ability (IQ and possible learning difficulties including dyslexia, dyscalculia and dysphasia). Additional tests may also be recommended such as ADHD and executive functioning.

For adults, an assessment of personality may also be required, particularly if one is experiencing significant difficulties in particular domains. A school observation session and home visit is also completed to gain a full understanding of how your child interacts with others in a non-clinical, more natural environment.

After the above assessments have been completed you will receive a comprehensive report detailing the assessment results complete with recommendations on how to support you, your child or other family member with his/her social, behavioural, educational and emotional needs. Two follow up support sessions will also be provided.

Children who have been assessed by us have been offered additional support and help with learning. We have engaged schools and offered face to face meetings to discuss the interventions ensuring we give the best level of service possible.



For families it can improve an understanding of a child's behaviour, giving them the answers to a lot of questions and informs of helpful strategies and interventions and new ways to engage and communicate with your child.

We are registered with the Health and Care Professions Council, British Psychological Society, Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists, British Dyslexia Association and the National Autistic Society.

For an informal chat about our services why not call us on 01908 766543 or send us an email at ask@katherinegoodsell.co.uk

