



AutismInitiativesNorthernIreland

real partnerships, unique solutions, positive outcomes.

Autism Initiatives framework for understanding the person with autism.

The Autism Initiatives approach to understanding and supporting a person with autism can be illustrated by this 5 point star.



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The person

We need to understand the person as a unique individual. We need to know what they like, do not like and why. We need to know what they are good at and what they enjoy doing and acknowledge what they find difficult. We need to know what is important to and for them to remain healthy and to have a sense of well being. We need to know what makes them fearful and anxious and why. We must recognise their aspirations, hopes and dreams.



Autism

Autism affects each person uniquely.

Autism can have an impact on every aspect of the person's life.

People with autism have many strengths. Everyone is good at some things and everyone finds things difficult.

Within Autism Initiatives, we recognise the 'differences' in people's strengths and needs that are associated with autism, in the areas of communication, thinking, social interaction and sensory perception.

We do not focus on 'the triad of impairment', which begins with what people cannot do. Our focus is on what people can do. People with autism are able to use their many strengths to develop and use strategies to support them to do things that they may find difficult. Autism is a lifelong condition. There is no 'cure', it does not 'go away' but people with autism can and do learn with the correct support.

Our support to people with autism

We use a 5 point framework to help us understand the person with autism. The person is always at the centre of this framework.



1. Understanding

We need to know about a person's understanding. This means knowing what a person finds easy to understand as well as what type of language or topics they find difficult to understand. We need to know how to change the way we communicate to maximise a persons understanding. We need to know how the written word, photos, symbols, sign, pictures etc may be used to support understanding.

We need to know what they understand about the impact of their choices, decisions and actions.

We need to know what they understand within the environment, whether they are able to pick up on 'cues' that help them to work out what may happen next.



2. Communication

We need to know how a person communicates best and what they communicate best about and provide opportunity for this. We need to know how to support their communication, for example encouraging them to write what they want to say, to 'show' us or to use symbols or photos to convey what they want to say. We must know how each person is best supported to communicate.



3. Expectation

We need to understand what a person is expecting. We need to ensure that the expectations of the person match what is actually going to happen in a situation. Expectations should be considered within the 'here and now', thinking about what will happen next, or in planning the future. Mismatched expectations are often the source of what is perceived as 'challenging behaviour', anxiety, depression, sense of failure etc.



4. Motivation

We need to consider what may be motivating for a person in a situation. People who do not understand people with autism and their patterns of thinking often assume that people fail to take part in tasks or activities because 'they are not motivated' or 'because they are lazy'. This is not usually the case. We need to understand 'what's in it for them?' when we expect somebody to change a behaviour or take part in a task or activity. We need to understand how somebody thinks and not assume that 'what's in it' for them would be the same as for people without autism.

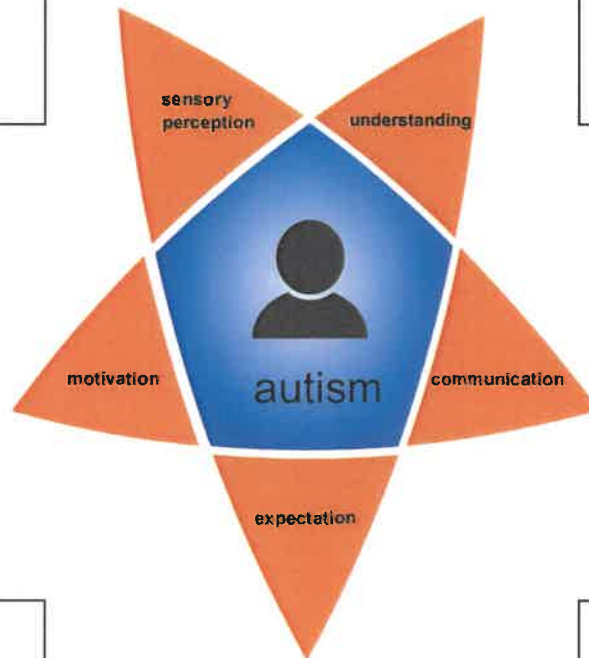


5. Sensory perception

We need to understand the sensory sensitivities the person may have and how this can affect them. It is well recognised that people with autism seek certain sensations and are fearful of others. They may be hypersensitive or hyposensitive to certain sounds, smells, tastes, textures. They may find it difficult to for example 'switch off' from a sound that other people do not hear such as heating system. We need to be aware of sensory differences and support people to manage them.

Is the person particularly sensitive to, or have reduced sensitivity to certain sounds, smells, tastes, textiles?

How can we best support a person to communicate what they want to say?



What is in it for the person?
Is there a good reason that makes sense to the person to do or not to do, a behaviour or activity?

How can we best support a person to understand information given? Do photos / symbols / written word or objects help?

Do the persons expectations match with what is going to happen?

The 5 point framework for understanding the person with autism and the issues that effect them can be used in a variety of ways:

- **Everyday knowledge about the person.** Do you know about the persons strengths and needs in relation to the 5 areas above?
- **Planning.** Have you considered each of the 5 points before beginning the activity/task?
- **Following an incident.** Consider each of the 5 points. Could we have supported the person more effectively in one of the areas?
- **Understanding a behaviour/action/communication.**

