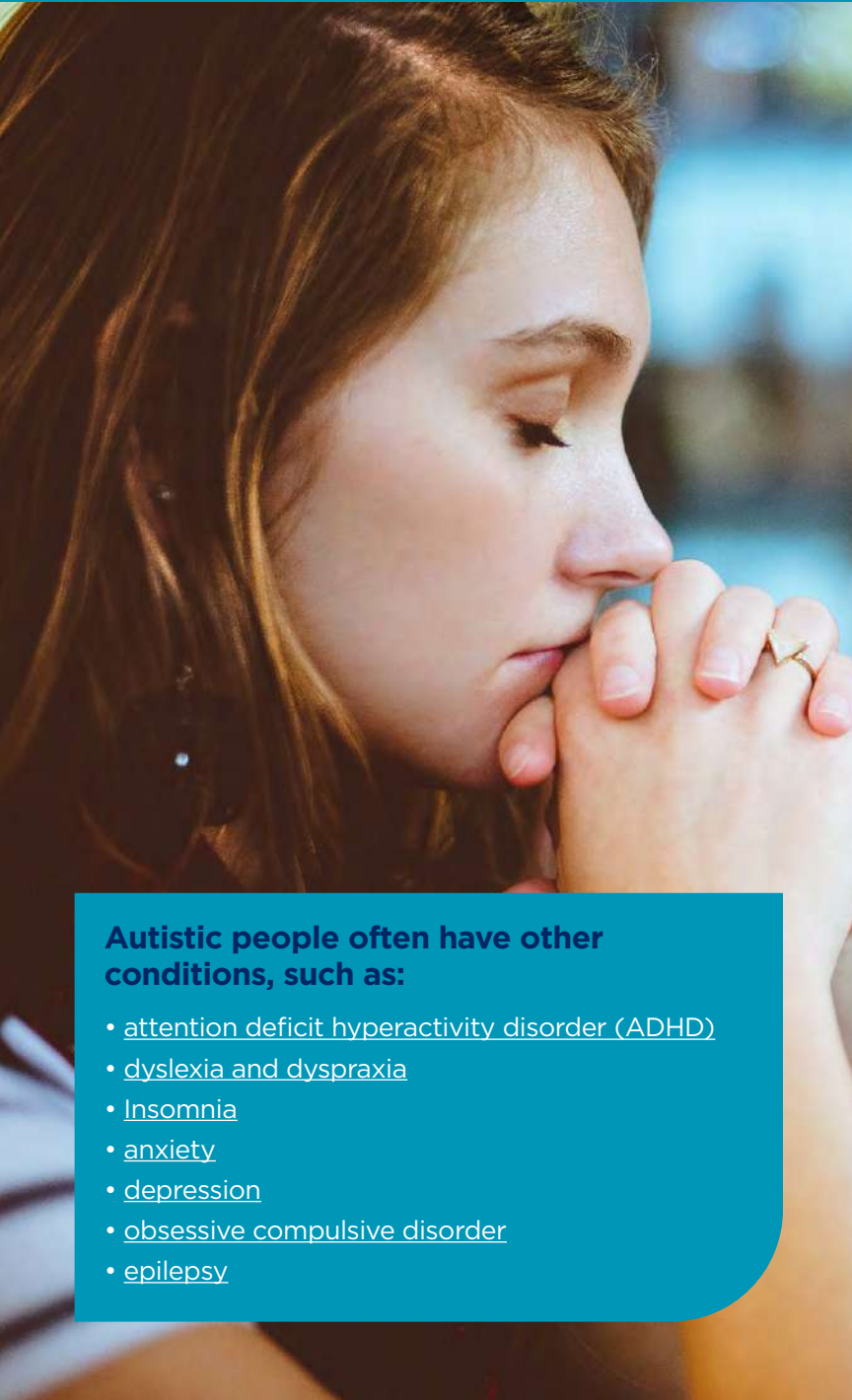


April 2024

Every 2nd April is World Autism Awareness Day. The purpose of this day is to increase understanding of autism across the world and help reduce stigma and discrimination that may occur against those with autism and their carers.



Autistic people often have other conditions, such as:

- [attention deficit hyperactivity disorder \(ADHD\)](#)
- [dyslexia and dyspraxia](#)
- [Insomnia](#)
- [anxiety](#)
- [depression](#)
- [obsessive compulsive disorder](#)
- [epilepsy](#)

Autism is not an illness, it's a lifelong condition. It is something you are born with rather than something you catch or develop over time. It is usually identified in early childhood, but can also be diagnosed later in life too.

There is not a known cause for autism, it is not a disease with a treatment or a 'cure'. Early intervention, therapies and education will help that person lead a full life. Some people will need support to help them with certain things and it's important to get this support from an early age.

Autism is part of who a person is, their brain works in a different way from other people.

Every individual has a unique and meaningful contribution to make to society. According to Beyond Autism there are around 700,000 autistic people in the UK. Autism is 3 times more prevalent in boys than girls. Signs of autism in girls can present themselves differently and as a result can be misdiagnosed or missed, leading to a late diagnosis, this may even be as an adult.

Autism affects how a person communicates and experiences the world. It is complex and can affect a person's sensory processing, relationships, and social and communication skills. It affects each person differently and is therefore often described as a spectrum. Some autistic people need little or no support. Others may need help from a parent or carer every day.

Communication



Communication can be a challenge for some autistic people. They may find it hard to read body language, understand peoples' emotions, and find it difficult to respond to others. Processing time is often affected so it may take an autistic individual longer to react in conversations.

We all use a mix of verbal, gesture, body language and more to communicate. For some people alternative communication methods help them to communicate. Some autistic people will have their own preferred method of communication, just as everyone does, however this can be more important to someone with autism as it can help them to understand and be better understood, making them feel heard. They may communicate vocally, or they may use other systems such as signing or a voice output device. Here are some things you can do to support them:

- Observe how the person chooses to interact and how long it takes them to process what you are saying or doing. You can then adjust your communication.
- Use their name to make sure they know you are talking to them directly.
- Make sure any instructions are short and clear to avoid overloading with information.
- Be mindful of noisy environments as this may affect how a person processes information.
- Avoid using figurative language.
- Talk slowly so they have more time to process.
- Be clear on what you are asking and avoid asking open-ended questions.
- If the person you are talking to finds visuals easier to understand, try to use these where possible.

Autistic people may display different behaviours to try to communicate their needs, wants or feelings. Some of which can be perceived as challenging and may even affect their wellbeing.

It is important to understand why behaviours that challenge happen so that the right support can be given.

ADHD and autism are not the same disorder, but they may be hard to tell apart. In addition, it's very common for one individual to have both diagnoses. Treatment for the two disorders is similar but not identical, so it's important to get the correct diagnosis or diagnoses.

Understanding behaviour

Autistic people may have behaviours which appear unusual to some. There is nearly always a reason behind these behaviours, it could be that the individual is using it in order to communicate or as a coping strategy.

They may also have repetitive movements such as hand flapping or making sounds. These are often calming for the individual when they feel stressed.

They can experience under or over sensitivity to sounds, touch, smells, pain, light or temperature. Over-stimulating may cause stress and under-stimulating may lead to a person increasing their sensory input by turning the volume up or getting closer to smells.

When stress or anxiety builds up it can lead to behaviours that challenge. This may take many forms including screaming, kicking, running away, or ceasing communication.

These behaviours are often the result of an individual being overwhelmed and can occur when a person is finding it difficult to communicate.

Tips to better understand behaviour:

Personalisation - Every person is different. What works for one person may not for another, different approaches may be needed.

Communication - Before trying to change a behaviour analyse the reason. Why are they behaving like this? What might they be trying to communicate?

Self-stimulatory behaviour - All behaviour serves a function for the individual. If behaviour isn't causing harm or creating a barrier to learning, don't try and change it.

Routines - Routines and planning can often ease anxieties. Helping map out bedtime or getting ready for school can often reduce behaviours that perceive to challenge. Use visuals to help make this easier. Changes to routine, big or small, can be hard to process. Where possible, planning ahead can help reduce any confusion or anxiety that the disruption may cause.



Positives



There are many positive features of autism including:

Passionate

Detail orientated - thorough and accurate

Focused - great concentration and less likely to be distracted

Analytical and methodical approach

Unique thought processes

Great observational skills

Creative - distinctive imagination and expression of ideas

Memory - excellent long-term memory and superior recall

Tenacity determination and Resilience - will challenge opinions

Straightforward, direct, and honest

Reliable and committed

Innovative

Accepting of difference - less likely to be judgmental

Expertise - in-depth knowledge & high level of skills

High levels of integrity

Dedicated and loyal

Strong adherence to rules

Not afraid to be themselves

Everyone is different and no one will identify with every one of these positive features.

Don't try to change, try to understand.

People with autism spectrum disorders have specific characteristics, behaviours, tastes, and ways to do things. The key is to understand the way they see the world without trying to make them change.

Available Support:

[Beyond Autism](#)

[National Autistic Society](#)

[The Brain Charity](#)

[NHS](#)



Worrying about money can be extremely stressful and may lead to mental health conditions. Police Mutual are here to help. We want to break down the stigma surrounding debt and get people talking about money.

We've teamed up with **PayPlan***, one of the UK's leading free debt advice providers, who offer free and confidential advice to anyone in serious financial difficulties.

They're able to advise you on a range of debt solutions suited to your individual circumstances, helping to protect you and your family with a sustainable way to manage your debt.

Get free and confidential help to combat your debt, call **PayPlan*** on **0800 197 8433**.

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We're open from 9am - 5pm Mon - Fri

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