

*Embracing  
Autism*



# Understanding Autism

## Autism Post Diagnosis Workshop 1



# Objective of the workshop



To develop a fuller understanding of:

- Autism / Autism Spectrum Disorder / Autism Spectrum Condition (ASD/ ASC)



# Plan

- What is autism?
- Challenges with having autism
- Some of the positives



# What is Autism?



# Autism Spectrum Disorder or Condition



- Both terms are used inter-changeably and mean the same thing.
- An umbrella term referring to lifelong developmental difficulties which affect the way a person:
  - perceives, understands and experiences the world
  - communicates
  - relates to people around them
- Associated with repetitive patterns of behaviour and sensory issues



# Autism Spectrum Condition



National Autistic Society film

<https://www.autism.org.uk/about/what-is/asd.aspx>



# Individual Differences



- **All** people differ from each other – those with autism too
- IQ and language skills are not predictor of challenges/ difficult to manage behaviours
- **This guidance is therefore broad and generalised - should be individualised**
  - only suggestions, all will not apply to all
- However, will highlight issues to consider for each individual with autism



# Autism Spectrum Condition



Extreme ability in some areas	Above average IQ	Average IQ	Mild learning disability	Moderate learning disability	Severe learning disability
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# Diagnosis



The characteristics of autism vary from one person to another, but in order for a diagnosis to be made, a person will usually be assessed as having had persistent difficulties with social communication and social interaction and restricted and repetitive patterns of behaviours, activities or interests since early childhood, to the extent that these "limit and impair everyday functioning".



# Causes of autism

- Still unknown but research suggests
  - May be genetic or hereditary causes
  - Injury or incident before, during or after birth can trigger
  - Development in certain areas of brain does not happen as should at certain time – developmental delay/ difference



# Connections issues in the brain

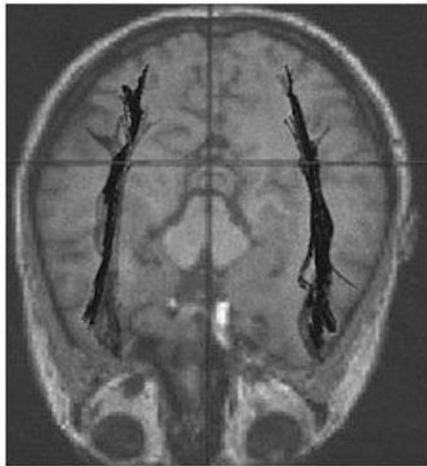


- People are now looking at autism as a developmental disconnection syndrome - there are either too many connections or too few connections between different parts of the brain (Sahin et al, 2010)
- Excess neuron numbers may be one possible cause of early brain overgrowth and produce defects in neural patterning and wiring (Courchesne et al, 2007)



# Temple Grandin

American professor with autism, she is one of the first professionals on the autism spectrum to publicly share insights from her personal experience of autism



I used to think that stupidity was the cause of people not being able to see things that were obvious to me. Today I realize it was not stupidity, it is just a different way of thinking.  
(Temple Grandin)



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# Workshop activity

Working in pairs or small groups

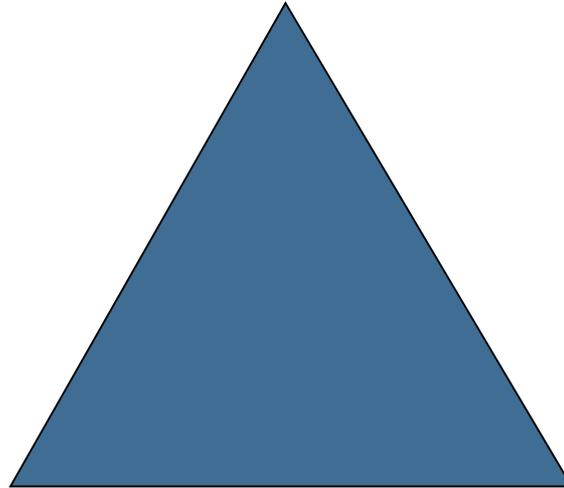
- How does having a diagnosis of autism make you feel?



# 3 main areas of difficulty or difference : Triad of Impairments



**1. Communication**



**3. Rigidity of thought and difficulties with social imagination**

**2. Social interaction**





# Difficulties with Communication



- Difficulties with expressive communication
  - asking for things, initiating, describing what you want , how you feel
- Difficulties with receptive communication
  - understanding others, understanding what is being asked of you, time needed to process information



# Difficulties with Communication

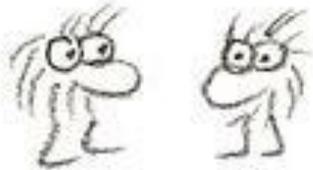


AUTISM AT  
KINGWOOD

- Difficulties with understanding non-verbal communication
  - Facial expression, gesture, body language, pitch and intonation
- Difficulties with understanding non – literal language
  - e.g. the implied meaning of “it’s raining cats and dogs”



# Social Interaction



Company.



A crowd.



Crowd-ed.



Get  
me out  
of here!



# Difficulties with social interaction

- Lack of understanding of social rules
- May approach others in what can be perceived as an 'odd', inappropriate, or repetitive way
- Might say what is in their mind right then
- Relationships with others might be strained
- May not be interested in others



# Difficulties with social interaction



- Not visibly paying attention to others
- Offending others
- Inappropriate behaviour
- Get into 'scrapes' when out in community
- Isolation
- High levels of anxiety

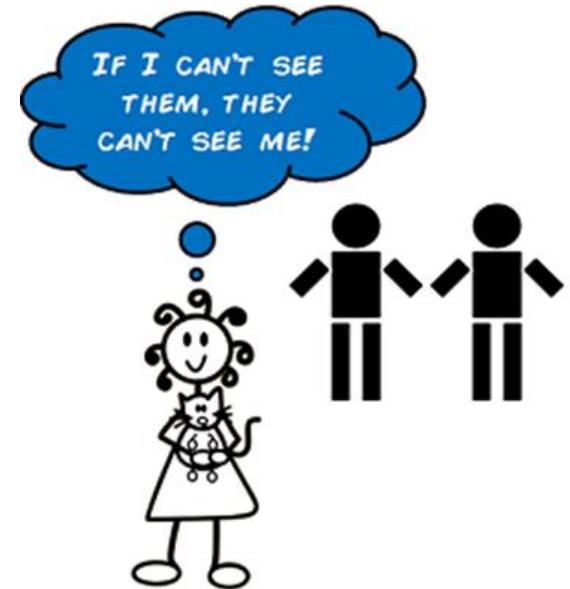


# Rigidity of thought and difficulties with social imagination



# Difficulties with rigidity of thought

- Difficulty understanding how other people think, feel and react
- Difficulty generalising concepts / abstract ideas
- Difficulty with change
- Difficulty with spontaneity
- Difficulty in imagining the future



# Difficulties or differences with social imagination

- **fantasy versus reality**

- Difficulties/ differences imagining things that do not exist like dragons or unicorns

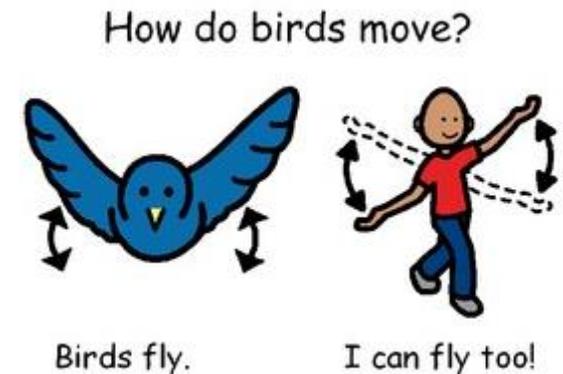
- **daily life versus reality**

- Difficulties/ differences in imagining what will happen next or if others are late or sick



# Difficulties with social imagination and rigidity of thought

- Understanding consequences
- Awareness of danger
- Choice making
- Abstract concepts
- Empathy
- Additional problems due to obsessions, special interests or preoccupations



**Challenges individuals may  
experience with their Autism –  
everyone is individual**



# What might be the cause of any increased anxieties or meltdowns?



- Feeling overwhelmed by information or sensory overload – too much noise, too many people, lights too bright, busy environment
- Feeling frustrated when not being understood or not given time to process and respond
- Feeling unwell, tired or hungry



# What might be the cause of any increased anxieties or meltdowns?



- Feeling exasperated when seeing something they know is 'not right'
- Feeling anxious about new situations or people or a change to a plan or routine
- Feeling unable to express thoughts or feelings



# Increased anxieties and stress may lead to behaviours

- **All behaviour** serves a function for the person
- We need to look at each individual within the context to understand the function of the behaviour
- **WHY** does it happen?
- Not being able to communicate difficulties or frustrations can lead to anxiety and/or anger and behaviour which expresses the distress
- Anxieties and issues related with this will be discussed further in Workshop 4



# Autism – some of the positives



- Attention to detail – thoroughness and accuracy
- Good visual skills
- Methodical approach – spotting patterns, repetition
- Accepting of difference – less likely to judge others
- Integrity – honesty, loyalty, commitment
- Absorb and retain facts – good long term memory
- Tenacity and resilience – determination, challenge opinions
- Creativity – around imagination and expression of ideas



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# Workshop activity

Working in pairs or small groups

- Can you share any positives – things you feel you feel you are good at due to your autism?



# Moving forward with life with autism

- Accepting that your brain processes and responds to information differently to some other (neuro-typical) people
- Accepting your difference and stopping trying to be someone you aren't (masking-which is exhausting)
- Avoiding situations you don't need to go to/do if it is difficult and not really necessary
- Finding coping strategies for situations/events you can't avoid
- Prioritising de-stressing time for yourself
- Making reasonable adjustments where helpful (or asking for them)
- Recognising and using your strengths as much as possible (builds confidence and self-esteem)
- BEING KIND TO YOURSELF



## Acknowledgements and further information

- We appreciate the valued input from Mark Feilden, working as an 'expert by experience' as part of Oxfordshire Adult Autism Diagnostic and Support Service team in producing this workshop.



- Phoebe Caldwell (2005) Creative Conversations (video)
- Carol Gray (1994) Comic Strip Conversations
- Donna Williams (2005) Blah, Blah, Blah (dvd)
- Donna Williams (1996) Autism: An Inside-out Approach
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- Tony Attwood (2006) The Complete Guide to Asperger's Syndrome.
- Wendy Lawson (2001) Understanding and Working with the Spectrum of Autism
- Marie Howley (2005) Revealing the Hidden Social Code: Social Stories for people with ASD.

