



Aspect Workshops

# Association of Children's Welfare Agencies

Jessica Degrassi – PBS Practitioner/Psychologist

*a different brilliant*  
understanding, engaging & celebrating the strengths, interests & aspirations of people on the autism spectrum

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## Acknowledgement of Country



We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the lands on which we work today and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people participating in this meeting.

We pay respects to Elders past, present and emerging, and recognise and celebrate the diversity of First Nations peoples and their ongoing cultures and connections to the lands and waters we all meet from today.

For more information, please see our website at [www.autismspectrum.org.au](http://www.autismspectrum.org.au)

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## Statement of Inclusion



Everybody is welcome here. We want you to feel it is OK to be authentically yourself. Please let us know if there is anything we can do that helps to include you in the workshop. Everyone is welcome to use their own strategies to help them feel relaxed.



For more information, please see our website at [www.autismspectrum.org.au](http://www.autismspectrum.org.au)

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## A worldwide movement of inclusion

"Inclusion is a concept. However, it encompasses more than just an individual's presence within a particular setting. Rather, it involves how the individual perceives themselves as belonging within the setting, whilst being authentically themselves and not needing to change who they are in order to 'fit in'".



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## A note about terminology

- We are aware there are different terms people use when referring to autism.
- We appreciate some people prefer certain terms over others.
- Aspect has chosen to use "identity first language" for our workshops – that is, autistic person / child / individual.



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## Expectations

What are you hoping to get out of today?



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What is Autism?

What do *you* think of when you think of Autism?

Shout out some things you know. No right or wrong answers here.



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What is Autism?

- Autism is a condition, or a difference in the brain, that impacts on how a person experiences and perceives the world around them.
- It is a *lifelong* disability that a person is born with.
- Autism is a constellation of different characteristics and traits. This is why it may seem like we all have traits from the Autism Spectrum.
- Autism is diagnosed based on the number of traits an individual has, and how those traits impact their interactions with their environment and community.



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What is Autism?

If you've met one Autistic person...

You've met *ONE* Autistic person.



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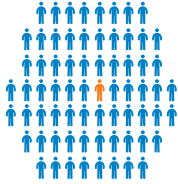
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## What is autism?



**1 in 70**  
people in Australia are on the spectrum

Cause: unknown ... some genetic links

4:1 ratio (male:female) diagnosed




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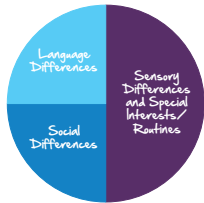
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## Some common traits and characteristics of Autism

- Delayed language
- Echolalia
- Can label pictures but struggles with requesting
- Decreased use of gestures
- Differences in eye contact
- Difficulty interacting with peers
- May prefer solitary play
- Difficulty participating in or following conversations



- May be a 'picky eater'
- May be sensitive to loud noises, crowds, or artificial lighting
- May enjoy crashing into things or squeezing/pulling things
- Hand flapping, jumping
- May prefer doing things or engaging in play in the same way or have difficulty with changes to the schedule or order
- Often have highly preferred topics, toys, or interests (i.e. Special Interests)




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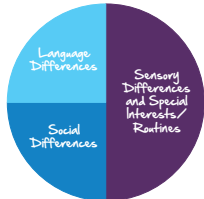
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## Some of the less common traits

- May speak with a high pitched voice, mimic accents, or unusual/exaggerated tone of voice.
- May or may not have a language delay
- May be socially motivated but have a 'mother hen', be on the periphery of friend groups, and/or imitate others
- May appear expressionless or over expressive



- Less obvious sensory differences: loud noises, selective eating, irritation over clothing tags, etc.
- Changes in routine may present as anxiety
- Special interests can be typical for their age/gender and may be less obvious




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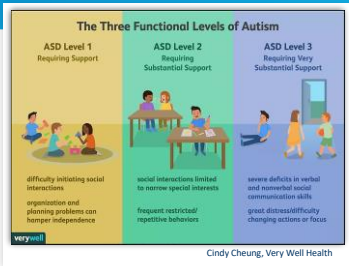
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## What is Autism?



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## What is 'stimming'?

### Stimming Verb

Self-stimulating actions that are repeated in order to stimulate the senses.

Many people think that stimming is a negative and distractive behaviour and that it should be stopped.

Stimming **should not be stopped** unless it is causing harm to the individual or other people.



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## What is 'masking'?

### Masking Verb

The act of copying or mimicking neurotypical social behaviour and hiding 'inappropriate' social behaviour.

Many Autistic people are not diagnosed or mis-diagnosed because they have learnt the self survival act of 'masking'.

**Masking is physically, emotionally, and mentally exhausting.** Any situation that requires masking automatically uses a higher number of daily spoons.



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## Strengths of Autistic people




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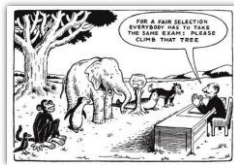
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## Autism, intelligence and language

- Approximately 20-30% of autistic people may have an intellectual disability.
- More than half of all autistic people have average or above average intelligence
- About 20% of autistic people have a skill that is above average.




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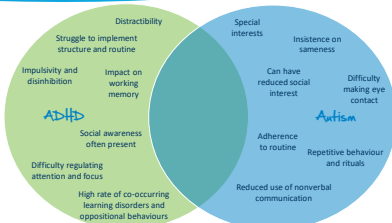
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## The differences between Autism and ADHD




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## Factors impacting mental health in autistic populations

Environments are often not set up to support these differences




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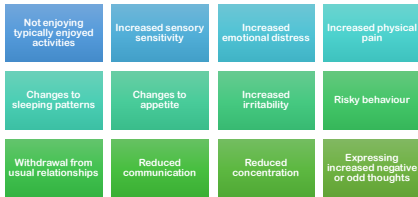
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## Recognising mental health difficulties & how they present in autistic people




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## Mental health & Autism

	Autistic population	General population
Anxiety	20%	3%
Sleep-wake disorders	13%	6%
Depressive disorders	11%	7%
Obsessive compulsive disorder	9%	1.2%
Bipolar disorders	5%	0.9%
Schizophrenia disorders	4%	0.7%




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## Trauma and Autism

For more information, please see our website at [www.autismspectrum.org.au](http://www.autismspectrum.org.au) 

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## Autism & Resilience

- Limited research into how children on the autism spectrum cope with adversity
- Evidence does suggest that Autistic individuals are more vulnerable to abuse than typically developing population



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## Autism & Trauma

- More severe emotional reactions
- Limitations in ability to communicate
- Different coping mechanisms in repetitive behaviours
- Overlap in characteristics of autism and PTSD
- Difference in stressors and triggers



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## Emotional Reactions

- Co-occurring anxiety and depression
- Differences in neurobiology
- Executive functioning



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## Communication Differences

- Differences in communication and being understood
- Delay in response to trauma and abuse
- Visual and memory recall



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## Coping Mechanisms

- Social avoidance
- Restrictive and repetitive behaviours
- Self injurious behaviours



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## Diagnostic Overlap

- Diagnostic overshadowing
- Differences in communication and reporting



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## Stressors & Triggers

- Sensory experiences
- Social experiences
- Change
- Developmental level of understanding
- Behaviour management



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Good practice principles for supporting Autistic individuals

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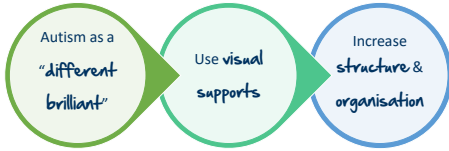
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## Key principles for supporting autistic people



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## Autism as a 'different brilliant'

### Different rather than "deficit" approach

- People on the spectrum can do anything with the right support
- Never aim to change or "fix" a person's autism
- Implement their voice and choice into all planning and supports



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## Get to know the child well

- Ask the person and their support network:
  - What do they love to do, what do people like about them, what are their goals, what makes them smile, what are they good at, what are their routines?
  - How do they like to interact and communicate, are there any messages they find difficult to communicate (how else can we help them do this)?
  - Are there any dislikes or things to avoid that may have resulted in difficulties in the past?



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## Involving the person in determining their supports

**Observe** – what does the person like? What supports do they like?

Use **visuals** to ask and support the person to let you know what goals they have and how they like to be supported.

**Ask** the people who know them best what the person's goals are and how they like to be supported.



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## Discussion

How can we use this principle to support children in your services?



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## Use Visual Supports

### Use Visual Supports

Visual supports are anything you can see!

Visuals help with:

- understanding (*they are simplified*)
- attention, information processing and memory (*they are permanent and information can be processed as needed*)
- supporting independence (*reducing verbal prompts*)



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## Visual Hierarchy

- Real objects
- Remnants
- Miniatures
- Template/silhouette
- Photos
- Line drawings
- Key Word Sign
- Writing



Concrete, **easier**  
to understand

Abstract, **harder**  
to understand



cherry ripe



cherry ripe

cherry ripe

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## Use Visual Supports

"I tried visuals and they don't work!"

- Need to be **motivating**
- Must be **meaningful**
- Use visuals in **non-routine** times
- Should be for **everyone**
- They need to be **taught**

Who used visuals to get here today?

We all rely on visuals as part of our daily life!



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## Discussion

How can we use this principle to support children in your services?



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## Increase structure and organisation



How do I know **what** to do?  
How do I know **where** to do it?  
How do I know **where** to do it?  
How do I know **where** to start?  
How do I know **how** to proceed?  
How do I know when I've finished?  
What happens next?  
When do I get a break or fun activity?  
Is this achievable?



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## 1. Physical structure

Making a coffee



Study corner



Making lunch



Hygiene steps



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## 2. Visual schedules



Routines and visual schedules help improve predictability and reduce anxiety



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### 3. Activity sequences

Help to increase the predictability & organisation of an activity

Morning routine

Writing an essay

Making a milkshake



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### Discussion

How can we use this principle to support children in your services?



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### Tools for understanding the whole person

#### Individual Autism Profile

The autistic person is involved, by sharing their:

- quality of life,
- strengths and interests,
- communication strengths and needs,
- social strengths and needs,
- sensory differences,
- how the person thinks.

Are there any other significant factors causing distress and impacting wellbeing?



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Supporting autistic children

Spend a few minutes in groups discussing  
three take aways  
that you will implement in your work



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McAuley Women's & Children



## Questions

For more information please contact:  
Autism Spectrum Australia  
Tel: 1800 277 328  
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## Resources



Aspect Factsheets: [https://www.autismspectrum.org.au/about\\_autism/fact\\_sheets](https://www.autismspectrum.org.au/about_autism/fact_sheets)  
Autism and neurodivergent language: <https://www.sbs.com.au/health/autism/what-those-autistic-people-want-you-to-call-them/29jane20>  
Individual Autism Profile: <https://www.autismspectrum.org.au/about-autism/what-is-autism/positive-behaviour-support-at-aspect>  
ADHD: <https://www.adhd.org.au/au-ngo/casprad/autism/2019/09/15/ADHD-in-Children-201909-14-web.pdf>  
Raising Children Network: <https://raisingchildren.net.au>  
LibriVox: <https://www.librivox.org/>  
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<https://www.autismspectrum.org.au/about-autism/what-those-autistic-people-want-you-to-call-them/29jane20>  
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For more information, please see our website at [www.autismspectrum.org.au](http://www.autismspectrum.org.au)

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## Feedback



Please spend a few minutes now  
to give us some feedback



For more information, please see our website at [www.autismspectrum.org.au](http://www.autismspectrum.org.au)

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## Thank you



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