

How to assess autistic human beings

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Agenda:

1. Introduce myself - what qualifies me?
2. Legislative basis
3. Where do assessments begin?
4. How assess autistic human beings well
5. Questions

Jenn Layton Annable: who the hell am I?



or



UK Legislative Framework

Human Rights Act 1998[1]

Article 2: Right to Life
Article 3: Freedom from torture and inhuman or degrading treatment

Human Rights Act 1998[1]

Article 2: Right to Life
Article 3: Freedom from torture and inhuman or degrading treatment

Equality Act 2010[2, 3]

'People like me don't get support'

Where does the assessment process begin?



How to assess autistic human beings the right way:

Start with the person:







Sensory & Environment:

1. Sensory triggers: Lighting, noise level, proximity of others, smells, busyness of the space, textures and feel
2. Changes in the environment: Christmas decorations, building work or specialist cleaning
3. Any physical interactions you might need to have: taking blood pressure or heart rate
4. Need for people to move to keep themselves regulated, or confine themselves (can be interpreted incorrectly)
5. Be aware of atypical pain responses - under and over sensitivity
6. Autistic humans might not be aware of their sensory differences or able to articulate them at the time
7. Always do your best to adapt the environment/sensory elements as much as you can

Social Interaction

1. Awareness of an individual's ability to behave in socially acceptable ways - as a baseline and contextually as you find them
2. Respect personal space and check before you touch or interact with an autistic person
3. Reflect and understand your own perceptual lens you see people through - unconscious bias is important
4. Understand how autistic people behave, socially, as a regulating/calming process, when they are distressed or calm
5. Appreciate that autistic people can have zero awareness of body language, tone of voice - and that this ability fluctuates

Communication

1. Explore and adapt to different ways of communicating: in writing/by email, sending questions in advance, meeting virtually
2. Avoid ambiguous (NT) communication: open ended questions, sarcasm or humour, jargon, inference
3. Adapt ways of presenting information: in writing, using images
4. The use of 'social formulas' rote answers that are learned rather than actually expressing what they feel/need/want
5. Be aware of alexithymia - an inability to perceive and communicate one's emotions and internal states
6. Supply context in the assessment - this is essential for autistic people to understand and communicate effectively

Minimising Uncertainty

1. Be aware of any commitments or assurances you make, in terms of your ability to deliver them or how they might be interpreted
2. Send information about an appointment or professional in advance wherever possible
3. Consistency is key: familiar people, familiar environments
4. Provide as much information as possible in advance about what will happen (linking to communication and processing time)
5. Provide a written plan or summary of actions or discussion points
6. Be explicit about how much time you have available

Executive Functioning

1. Allow additional time for processing information .
2. Sensory overwhelm can significantly on the ability to hold, understand and process information effectively
3. Sensory distractions can significantly inhibit a person's ability to concentrate and participate effectively
4. Proactively check understanding of what has been discussed and agreed with the person proactively
5. Autistic people can be rigid in thinking or focused on routine

Behaviour and Presentation:

1. Understand what an autistic meltdown is - fight response/ flight response
2. Understand what an autistic shutdown is - fight or flight response
3. Be aware of signs that a person might be beginning to struggle - and interpret/ understand these correctly
4. Make no assumptions about a person's ability to do something again because they did before.

Use of language

1. Think about the language you use: Autism Spectrum Disorder, medicalised and deficit based language

2. Find out how the individual prefers to describe themselves: Autistic, Aspie, Neurodivergent or something else

3. Don’t assume that condition first language, e.g. living with autism is correct.

4. Check gender identity: atypical gender identity is more prevalent in autistic people

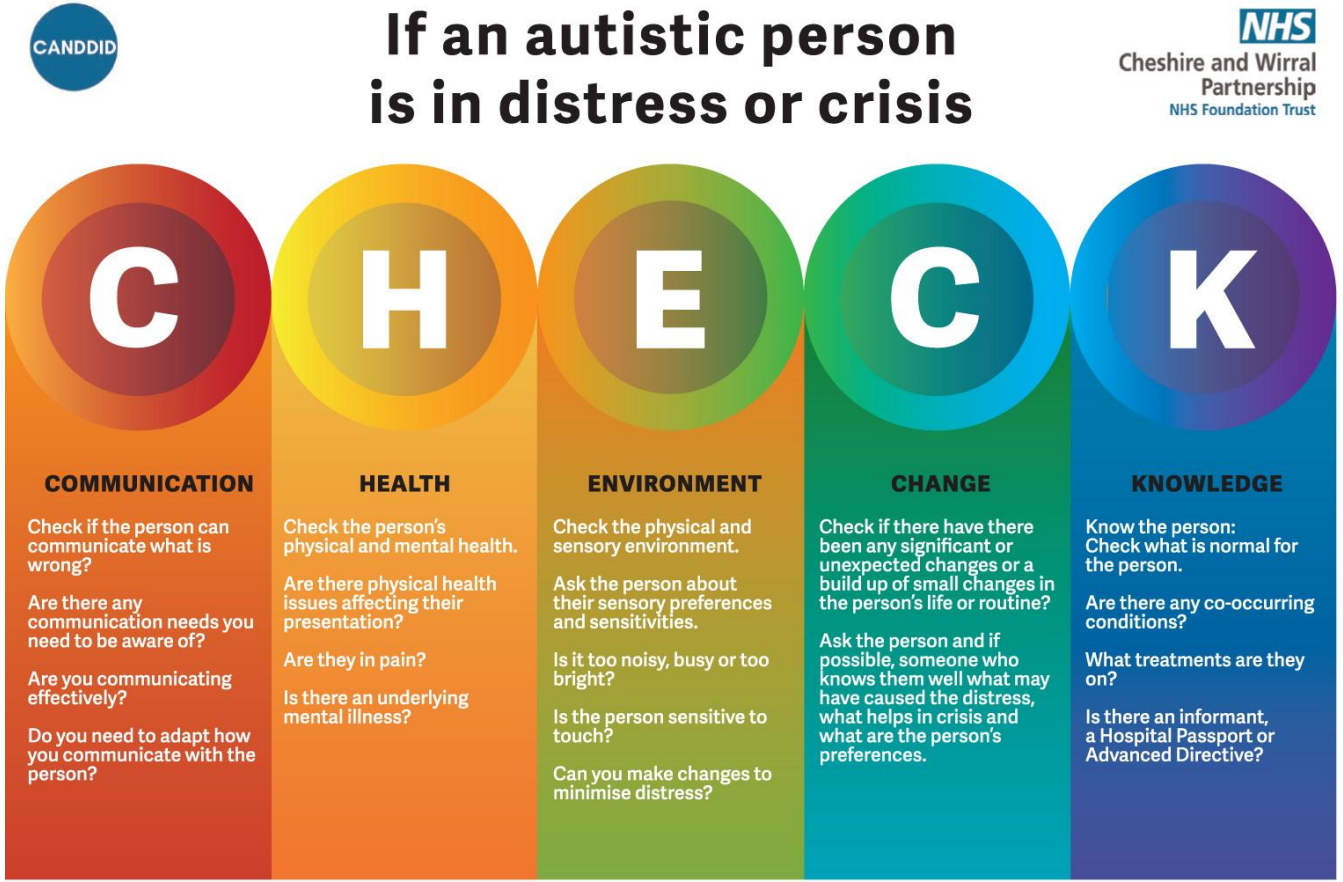
Greasing the Cogs (Future proofing)

1. Complete an Autism Passport for the individual - appropriate for the health care setting they are attending
2. Make use of system alerts, notifications and pop up boxes on healthcare records systems
3. Be acutely aware of what you write in records about a person and about what you communicate about them in any handovers - professional privilege and power in crucial in this

How to assess autistic human beings better:

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How to assess autistic human beings better:



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