

# **Unit 21: Awareness of Autistic Spectrum Conditions**

**Unit reference number: H/616/7304**

**Level: 2**

**Unit type: Optional**

**Credit value: 2**

**Guided learning hours: 17**

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## **Unit summary**

This unit introduces you to autistic spectrum conditions. It gives you key areas of knowledge and explores important themes such as individuality, communication, behaviour and person-centred support.

In any care organisation, you may be working with individuals who have autistic spectrum conditions. These lifelong conditions are complex and not fully understood, but with better understanding and the right support the quality of life of those with autistic spectrum conditions can be enormously improved.

This unit will give you an understanding of the concept of autism as a spectrum. You will explore the areas in which individuals with an autistic spectrum condition characteristically have difficulties, such as with communication and social interactions and also learn about the behaviours which could be exhibited by some individuals. This is important because it will enable you to reduce their stress, which will help them to develop social relationships and will promote their learning and development.

The unit will enable you to discover how to contribute to the person-centred support of an individual who has an autistic spectrum condition. This involves looking at the support available and how to create person-centred plans. You will learn how to communicate effectively with individuals on the autistic spectrum by looking at alternative forms of communication and some of the barriers that individuals may face.

## Learning outcomes and assessment criteria

To pass this unit, the learner needs to demonstrate that they can meet all the learning outcomes for the unit. The assessment criteria outline the requirements the learner is expected to meet to achieve the unit.

Learning outcomes	Assessment criteria
<p>1 Understand the concept of autism as a spectrum, and the implications for variation in the capacities and needs of individuals</p>	<p>1.1 Explain why it is important to recognise that each individual on the autistic spectrum has their own individual abilities, needs, strengths, preferences and interests</p> <p>1.2 Describe why autism can be considered as a spectrum, encompassing individuals differing in the expression and severity of their symptoms</p> <p>1.3 Identify other conditions which may be associated with an autistic spectrum condition</p> <p>1.4 Outline the sensory difficulties experienced by many individuals with an autistic spectrum condition</p>
<p>2 Understand the areas in which individuals with an autistic spectrum condition characteristically have difficulties</p>	<p>2.1 Describe the types of difficulty that individuals with an autistic spectrum condition may have with language and other ways of communicating with others</p> <p>2.2 Identify problems that individuals with an autistic spectrum condition may have in social interaction and relationships</p> <p>2.3 Outline the problems of inflexibility and restrictiveness in activities and interests and how these may affect individuals on the autistic spectrum</p>
<p>3 Understand the behaviours exhibited by individuals with an autistic spectrum condition</p>	<p>3.1 Describe behavioural characteristics associated with autistic spectrum conditions</p> <p>3.2 Identify reasons why individuals with an autistic spectrum condition may exhibit such behaviours</p> <p>3.3 Describe what to do if an individual is highly anxious or stressed</p>

Learning outcomes	Assessment criteria
<p>4 Understand how to contribute to the person-centred support of an individual who has an autistic spectrum condition</p>	<p>4.1 Explain why it is important to have in place structures and routines which match the wishes and needs of an individual</p> <p>4.2 Identify formal and informal support networks for an individual with an autistic spectrum condition</p> <p>4.3 Explain why it is important to involve families/parents/carers in a person-centred approach to the support of individuals with an autistic spectrum condition</p> <p>4.4 Describe ways of ensuring that support provided is consistent, both within own approach and with that of others</p> <p>4.5 Describe how to contribute towards the learning of an individual with an autistic spectrum condition</p>
<p>5 Understand how to communicate with individuals on the autistic spectrum</p>	<p>5.1 Explain why it is important to be aware of the impact of own verbal and non-verbal communication on an individual with an autistic spectrum condition</p> <p>5.2 Identify aspects of the environment that affect communication with an individual with an autistic spectrum condition</p> <p>5.3 Describe how to reduce barriers to communication with an individual with an autistic spectrum condition</p> <p>5.4 Outline the use of visual communication systems for individuals who have an autistic spectrum condition</p> <p>5.5 Identify who could provide advice about effective communication with an individual with an autistic spectrum condition</p>

### What needs to be learned

#### **Learning outcome 1: Understand the concept of autism as a spectrum, and the implications for variation in the capacities and needs of individuals**

The terminology chosen to describe the autistic spectrum in this unit is autism spectrum condition (ASC), one of several different usages in this field. In diagnosis and other clinical and research settings, the more usual term is autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Other usages, such as 'autism' as an umbrella term for the spectrum, are also frequently used informally and by organisations such as the National Autistic Society. ASC has been chosen here because it forms a more neutral and less medical phrase than ASD in this context.

#### **Recognition of individual**

- Person centred.
- Someone requiring care or support; it will usually mean the person or people supported by the learner.

#### **Conditions associated with autistic spectrum condition**

- Learning disability.
- Epilepsy.
- Attention deficit/hyperactive disorder (ADHD).
- Attention deficit disorder (ADD).
- Hyperkinetic disorder.
- Dyslexia.
- Dyspraxia (also known as developmental co-ordination disorder).
- Disorder of attention, motor co-ordination and perception (DAMP).
- Tourette syndrome.

#### **Sensory difficulties**

- Over sensitivity.
- Under sensitivity, e.g. smell, touch, taste, hearing, sight, vestibular (balance), proprioception (body awareness).

#### **Learning outcome 2: Understand the areas in which individuals with an autistic spectrum condition characteristically have difficulties**

#### **Difficulties with language and communication skills**

- Delay.
- Repetition.
- Not developing spoken language.
- Not responding.
- Understanding.
- Non-verbal:
  - eye contact
  - facial expressions
  - body posture
  - gestures
  - volume, tone and pitch of the voice
  - mirroring other person's non-verbal responses.

## What needs to be learned

### Others

- May include; colleagues, families or carers, friends, other professionals, members of the public, advocates

### Social interaction and relationships

- Triad of impairment:
  - language and communication
  - social interaction
  - flexibility of thought.
- Avoidance of social situations.
- Not understanding social rules.
- Inability to express themselves.

### Inflexibility and restrictiveness

- Repetitive behaviour.
- Problems with flexible thought:
  - repetitive movements
  - follow own agenda
  - distress in change of routine
  - attachments to unusual objects
  - not understanding danger
  - unable to transfer skills
  - preoccupation with fixed interest
  - need for sameness.

## Learning outcome 3: Understand the behaviours exhibited by individuals with an autistic spectrum condition

### Behaviours

- Active behaviours:
  - screaming
  - tantrums
  - pushing
  - running away.
- Passive behaviours:
  - withdrawal
  - hiding
  - cowering under item or object.

### Reasons for behaviour

- Receive attention.
- Avoid certain situations.
- Escape certain situations.
- Receive desired items.
- Receive self-stimulation.

## What needs to be learned

### Ways to manage if an individual is highly anxious or stressed

- Include routines.
- Warnings of change.
- Create a safe environment.
- Use of visual supports:
  - real objects
  - photos of objects
  - visual symbols
  - picture timetables.

### Learning outcome 4: Understand how to contribute to the person-centred support of an individual who has an autistic spectrum condition

#### Support networks

- Formal:
  - doctors
  - specialists
  - advocates
  - other professionals.
- Informal:
  - family
  - friends
  - support groups
  - colleagues
  - carers
  - members of the public.

#### Person-centred planning

- Five key features:
  - the person is at the centre of the planning
  - family and friends are partners in planning
  - the plan shows what is important to a person now and for the future, and what support they need
  - the plan helps the person be part of a community of their choosing and helps the community to welcome them
  - the plan puts into action what a person wants for their life and keeps on listening
  - the plan remains a working document.

#### Consistent support

- Communication.
- Support routines and structures.
- Expectations of the individual that are realistic and achievable while stretching and supporting them towards their maximum potential.
- Responding to challenging or inappropriate behaviour.

## What needs to be learned

### Learning outcome 5: Understand how to communicate with individuals on the autistic spectrum

#### Forms of communication difficulties

- Verbal:
  - literal understanding of language
  - difficulty in turn taking in conversation
  - repetitive conversations or based around their own special interests without regard to the social context
  - difficulty understanding jokes, sarcasm and inferred meaning
  - competent language but not understanding at the same level
  - difficulty in understanding and using tone, pitch, volume and intonation correctly.
- Non-verbal:
  - reading or interpreting facial expressions and body language
  - using eye contact appropriately.

#### Environmental barriers to communication

- People with autistic spectrum conditions may find the sight, sounds, smell and touch sensations of healthcare environments particularly distressing.

#### Reducing barriers to communication

- Modifications to the environment can help to reduce this distress.
- Finding out what affects a person is important.
- Make simple changes, such as altering lighting and closing doors quietly.
- Some individuals may benefit from deep touch pressure:
  - weighted bed covering.

#### Augmentative and alternative communications (AAC) support

- Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS).
- Sign language.
- Communication boards.
- Communication books.
- Voice output communication aids.

#### Forms of support for communication

- Speech and language therapist.

## Information for tutors

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### Suggested resources

#### Book

Marshall T and Baker L – *Learning Disabilities Care – A Care Worker Handbook*,  
(Hodder, 2012) ISBN 9781444163261

#### Websites

[www.autism.org.uk](http://www.autism.org.uk)

The National Autistic  
Society

[www.skillsforcare.org.uk](http://www.skillsforcare.org.uk)

Skills for Care – information  
on autism.

## **Assessment**

This guidance should be read in conjunction with the associated qualification specification for this unit.

This unit is internally assessed. To pass this unit, the evidence that the learner presents for assessment must demonstrate that they have met the required standard specified in the learning outcomes and assessment criteria, and the requirements of the assessment strategy.

To ensure that the assessment tasks and activities enable learners to produce valid, sufficient, authentic and appropriate evidence that meets the assessment criteria, centres should follow the guidance given in *Section 8 Assessment* of the associated qualification specification and meet the requirements from the assessment strategy given below.

Wherever possible, centres should adopt an holistic approach to assessing the units in the qualification. This gives the assessment process greater rigour and minimises repetition, time and the burden of assessment on all parties involved in the process.

### **Unit assessment requirements**

This unit must be assessed in accordance with the assessment strategy (principles) in *Annexe A* of the associated qualification specification.

Assessment of all learning outcomes (knowledge) may take place in or outside of a real work environment.