

EXERCISE 1: COMPARING CHARACTERISTICS OF PEOPLE WITH AND WITHOUT ASD

Most of the people around you are not on the Autism Spectrum. They can be referred to as neurotypicals (NTs). It is useful to compare how people with ASD and people without ASD interpret and respond to situations.

The table below compares the common characteristics of people with ASD and the common characteristics of an NT person. You will probably identify with most of the common ASD characteristics to some degree. Remember everyone is different and every person with ASD will not have all of the ASD characteristics and not every NT person will have all the NT characteristics.

CHARACTERISTICS	PERSON WITH ASD	PERSON WITHOUT ASD
Literality	Takes the meaning of spoken or written words literally.	Is able to interpret the meaning of figurative speech and sarcasm.
Attention focus	Is only able to focus on one aspect of communication or one interest at a time.	Is usually able to focus on several different aspects or interests at one time.
Gathering information	Persistence and focus on gathering and cataloguing information on a given topic of interest.	Not always committed to gathering information on an interest in an organised manner.
Thinking patterns	Thinks in closed pictures; each event or experience is separate and exclusive. Example: Breakfast food is eaten at a specific time each day.	Thinks in open pictures, links events and experiences together to use learning in new situations. Example: Happy to eat breakfast cereal at any time of the day.
Recall of details	Has exceptional memory and/or recall of details, for example: names, dates, schedules, routines.	Can have difficulties remembering and recalling specific details.
Application of learning	Learning is specific to a given situation.	Can generalise learning to other situations. Is able to build on existing knowledge in new situations.
Time and motion	Has difficulty with distinguishing between past and present events and emotions. Has difficulty imagining self in a future situation.	Is able to distinguish between past and present emotions. Is able to visualise possible selves into the future.

CHARACTERISTICS	PERSON WITH ASD	PERSON WITHOUT ASD
Predicting outcomes	Has difficulty predicting outcomes or consequences of actions.	Is able to predict consequences and outcomes from actions.
Theory of mind	Has difficulty understanding that others have emotions, thoughts and ideas different from own. Has difficulty understanding another's perspective.	Is aware of others' emotions and understands that others' thoughts can be different from own. Is able to experience and express empathy for others.
Regard for others	Able to relate to others at 'face value', free of sexist, 'ageist' or cultural biases.	Often considers others in terms of biases and societal contexts.
Honesty	Gives honest comments or responses at all times.	At times may not give an honest comment or response if it will hurt another person's feelings. At times may give an honest response in language that is diplomatic and gentle.
Social priorities	Is often happy with own company and may have difficulty considering others' wants and needs. Can lack awareness of appropriate dress style and fashion.	Prefers the company of others and takes others' needs and wants into consideration. Is aware of style of dress and fashion.
Social situations	Can feel uncertain and anxious about how to act in social situations, especially if these are new to the person. Has difficulty understanding the context and expectations of a given social situation.	Can generally understand the unwritten rules of social situations. Is able to interpret a given social situation and understand appropriate expectations.
Organisation	Has difficulty managing timelines, and planning and prioritising study or work requirements.	Can generally plan, manage and prioritise study or work requirements.
Non-verbal communication cues	Has difficulty understanding facial expression, voice tones and body language.	Uses and understands facial expression, voice tones and body language as a significant part of communication.
Eye contact	Avoids eye contact with other people, especially when uncertain, nervous or in new situations.	Considers eye contact to be an important part of communication.
Rules and procedures	Adheres to rules and procedures. Can become stressed when these are not followed by self or others.	Is able to break some rules in some circumstances without feeling stressed. Is tolerant of others not adhering to rules in some circumstances.

CHARACTERISTICS	PERSON WITH ASD	PERSON WITHOUT ASD
Routines and unexpected events	Can become stressed and anxious when established routines are not followed.	May not have well-established routines. For those who do have regular routines these can vary without undue stress or anxiety. Is flexible and able to cope with change.
Sensory stimuli	Can be hypersensitive to external stimuli such as background noise, loud noises, bright lights or strong smells. Can be distracted by external stimuli.	Does not necessarily become distracted or is not usually hypersensitive to external stimuli. Is able to filter these, so can concentrate on task at hand.
Stressful situations	Reacts to stressful situations in an effort to stop the stimuli by doing such things as flapping hands, shouting, pacing, or extreme fidgeting.	Can show minimal reaction to stressful situations and stimuli.
Speech	May have difficulty entering, regulating and exiting a conversation.	Is generally adept at engaging in conversations.
Motor skills	May have difficulty with fine and gross motor skills, writing, or co-ordination.	Is flexible with fine and gross motor skills and co-ordination.