

# SMT Open House: Social Care practice with autistic people

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# Part One

## Overview:

- What is autism?
- Autistic experiences

## Aims:

- Reflect on and develop your understanding of autism
- Begin to reflect on the role of the social care worker with autistic people

## Sneak peak of Part Two:

- Learn more about practice with autistic people: communication and reflection

# Identity-first language

LANGUAGE MATTERS!  
WHY DO WE CALL OURSELVES AUTISTIC?

MANY AUTISTIC PEOPLE PREFER  
**IDENTITY FIRST LANGUAGE.**

AUTISM IMPACTS THE WAY WE SEE, EXPERIENCE AND  
NAVIGATE THIS WORLD.  
IT CANNOT BE SEPARATED FROM WHO WE ARE AS PEOPLE.  
CALLING OURSELVES AUTISTIC IS A DECLARATION OF PRIDE!



WHETHER A PERSON WANTS YOU TO REFER TO  
THEM AS AUTISTIC OR A PERSON WITH AUTISM,  
IT'S NOT UP TO YOU, IT'S UP TO THEM!

neurodiversitylibrary.org



**What do you already know about autism?**

**What comes to mind when you hear the word?**



# What is autism?

This film from the National Autistic Society offers an interpretation about what autism is.

Whilst watching, please **reflect** on what you hear.

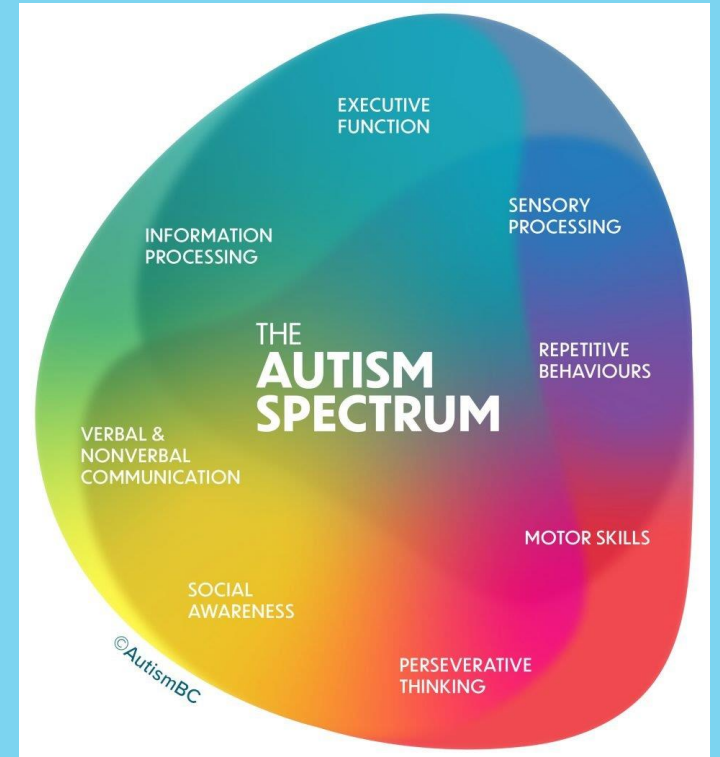
**FILM:** [What is autism](#)



# Briefly, what is autism?

Autism is a lifelong difference in how people **think**, **perceive** the world, and **interact** with others. It is usually thought to be a neurological condition.

An autistic person may **see**, **hear**, **feel** and **experience** the world differently from non-autistic people. If you are autistic, you are autistic for life; autism is not an illness or disease and cannot be 'cured'. Often people feel being autistic is a **fundamental** and **positive** aspect of their identity.



The **National Autistic Society** provides further [information about what autism is.](#)

# How does autism affect people?

Autism is not a single set of ‘symptoms’ or characteristics. Autistic people are very diverse and each autistic person has their own strengths, interests, skills and challenges. This is why autism is called a ‘**spectrum**’. It is often said that ‘**if you’ve met one autistic person... you’ve met one autistic person**’.

Some common challenges others may notice:

- Challenges **communicating** with others
- **Repetitive** behaviour (doing or thinking the same thing repeatedly, to manage stress or for fun!
- Difficulties with **changes**
- **Sensory** overload (noise/smell/touch/taste/vision become overwhelming) – can lead to physical/emotional **shutdown/meltdown**.

# Sensory needs

Individual autistic experience and sensory perception vary enormously, so it can be difficult to generalise.

**Sensory overload** is a common experience for autistic people, but can be difficult for non-autistic people to understand.

This video aims to give an idea about what sensory overload feels like.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K2P4Ed6G3gw>







**What is your response to this video? How did it feel to watch?**



# Conceptualising autism - paradigm shift

## Medical paradigm:

- There is “right way” for the brain to work (normal/typical) – and other ways need to be “fixed”
- Uses the language of **disorder** and **deficit**
- Locates disability in bodies/brains
- In this model, disability is often pitied, or viewed as a tragedy

## Neurodiversity-affirming paradigm:

- Autism as a part of the range of natural variation in human neurological development.
- There are no “right” or “wrong” brains.

## PARADIGM SHIFT – FROM MEDICAL MODEL TO SOCIAL MODEL

- Placing disability within the disabled person to placing it within the environment which does not cater to the person characteristics.
- Disability as something being DONE to people. E.g. struggling in a shop is because the shop doesn't cater to the individual's needs.

“I’m autistic, which means everyone around me has a disorder that makes them say things they don’t mean, not care about structure, fail to hyperfocus on singular important topics, have unreliable memories, drop weird hints and creepily stare into my eyeballs.”

Autisticnotweird.com  
[www.facebook.com/  
autisticnotweird](http://www.facebook.com/autisticnotweird)

“So why do people say YOU’RE the weird one?”

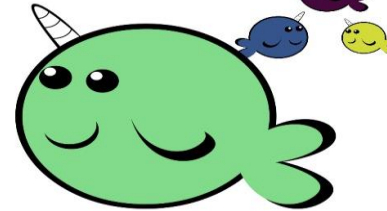
“Because there’s more of them than me.”

# NEURODIVERGENT NARWHAL PRESENTS: **The Signs of Autism**

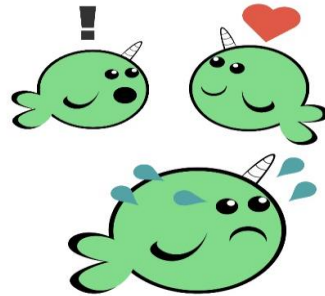


Plays with toys in ingenious & creative ways.

Thriving on routine is okay!  
No need to pathologize.



The need for more downtime does not mean unwillingness or inability to engage with others.



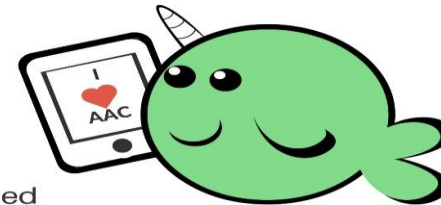
Autistic children express a wide range of emotions, just like everybody else. Your inability to understand behavior as communication is not their fault



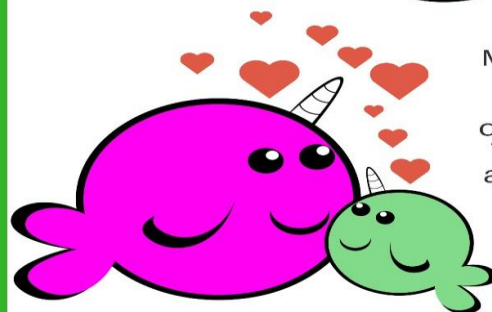
The world can be a loud and overwhelming place for autistic people. Sensory processing differences are not personality defects.

Sees beauty in details that others ignore.

Intense interests bring intense joy!



Communicates in unexpected ways. Listen. Talking is not the only way to "speak".



May sometimes need more support to understand dangerous situations. With love, guidance and teaching skills in respectful ways that promote self advocacy, autistic kids are thriving in their own unique ways!

# The legacy of the medical, deficit model

- On one hand, many autistic people have spent their lives being seen as needing to be “fixed”.
- But also, many have spent years **not being believed or taken seriously**, or being told they are **ineligible for support**.

# Autistic experiences

- The Re•Storying Autism Project (2016-present) found that **100%** of autistic participants in the UK, Canada and New Zealand had experienced **bullying**.

Other key findings from the project were:

- persistent **misunderstanding & stigma**
- exhaustion of **'masking'**
- **barriers to diagnosis & culturally safe supports** (especially for girls, trans people and Black, Indigenous, and people of colour (BIPOC))
- school **exclusions** and **violence** (suspensions, isolations, 'eloping')
- difficulty navigating **systems**

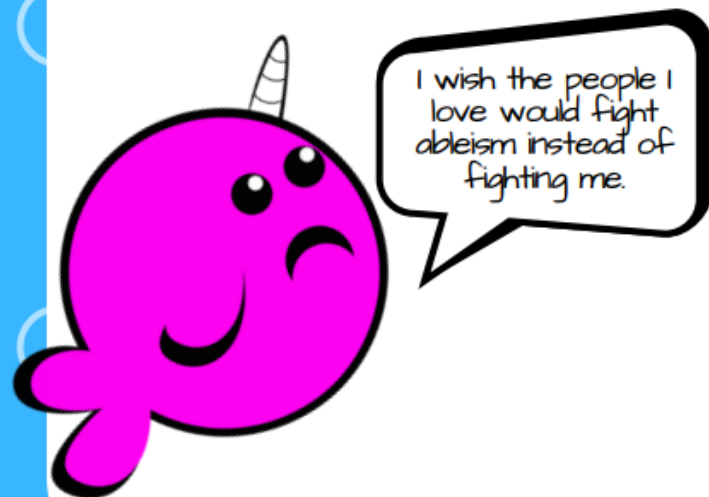
# Autistic experiences

- In the UK, research has indicated that **autistic people are 7x more likely than the general population to die by suicide**, with autistic women being particularly at risk.
- A new report from the Autism Alliance highlights that:
  - **Over 10,000 autistic adults in England are not receiving the social care they need.**
  - **Over three quarters of autistic adults (77%) reach crisis point while waiting for care.**
  - **Autistic adults and their families regularly wait over 2 years for care to be provided, and even where care is in place, almost half (48%) say it does not meet their needs.**
  - **Autistic adults and their families have a poor experience of the care system, with 58% receiving poor support as they try to secure care.**

It's impossible not to learn ableism with so many of these negative and toxic messages about the worth of autistic lives everywhere around us.

But you can unlearn ableism!

And you can learn what autism acceptance really means!



#### Practice Autism Acceptance by:

- Respecting & giving access to all forms of communication, not just verbal speech
- Supporting, honoring & accommodating autistic ways of being
- Looking to autistic people as the true experts on the autistic experience
- Selecting therapies with a critical eye and only choosing those that seek to support, not "fix" and that respect autistic neurology as a natural and valid way to be
- Empowering autistic people by teaching self advocacy skills and learning about autistic culture & autistic pride
- Presuming competence Rejecting dehumanizing "functioning labels"
- Practicing authentic inclusion



**Thank you for your participation!  
Any questions?**

