

CACHE Level 2

Certificate in Understanding Autism

ASPERGER SYNDROME

TRIAD OF IMPAIRMENTS

UNDERSTANDING

AUTISM SPECTRUM CONDITION

PERSON-CENTRED

DIAGNOSIS

SOCIAL INTERACTION

Workbook 1

Section 1: Introduction to autism

In this section, you will learn about social and communication disorders, understanding that autism is a lifelong condition. You will become familiar with theoretical models in identifying autism and learn about the characteristics displayed by different individuals with autism. You will look at the guidelines for diagnosis and why this can be difficult, including why some individuals may be reluctant to seek diagnosis. You will learn about conditions that can co-occur with autism and the difficulties they present. You will consider the difficulties and discrimination that individuals with autism can face due to other people's attitudes and lack of understanding and how the condition is sometimes misrepresented in the media.

Social and communication disorders

Please read the following as it will help you to answer question 1.

Autism is a lifelong disability which affects how an individual communicates with, and relates to, other people. It also affects how they make sense of the world around them. The understanding of autism has improved since the 1940s, when it was first identified, and as more is learned about the condition, more interventions should become available. There is no 'cure' for autism but there are many things that can be done to help individuals with autism.

The signs and symptoms associated with autism spectrum condition include:

In spoken language:

- delay in speech development
- monotonous or flat-sounding speech
- communicating in single words, rather than sentences
- frequently repeating set words and phrases

In responding to others:

- may find it difficult to show and accept affection
- not responding when their name is called, despite being able to hear
- reacting in an unusually negative way when asked to do something

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In interactions with others:

- can appear to have little interest in others; many adults and children are interested in interacting with others but don't show it in typical ways
- being unaware of people's personal space
- being intolerant of others entering their personal space
- not enjoying situations children usually enjoy, like parties
- preferring to play alone
- not making eye contact

In their behaviour:

- repetitive movements, such as rocking backwards and forwards, flapping their hands or flicking their fingers
- insisting on familiar routines and becoming very anxious or upset if this is disrupted or changed
- having a strong dislike of certain foods based on the texture or colour as much as the taste
- playing with toys in a repetitive way, such as lining building blocks up rather than building something with them

In addition to the above signs and symptoms in young children, in older children and teenagers, the following may also develop:

- avoiding the use of spoken language
- using pre-learned phrases rather than making new sentences
- talking 'at' people rather than having a two-way conversation
- taking things literally and being unable to understand sarcasm, jokes, metaphorical speech or figures of speech
- failure to understand or implement social rules
- being unable to adapt tone and content of their speech for different situations
- having few friends and finding it difficult to form friendships
- developing a very specific interest in a particular topic or subject

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Autism spectrum condition

Autism is not a single condition; rather, it is a spectrum of closely related conditions with shared symptoms. The level of disability and the combination of symptoms will vary greatly between individuals. Each individual on the spectrum has some degree of problems with:

- communication
- social skills
- empathy
- flexible behaviour

Asperger syndrome

This is an autism spectrum condition and is characterised by:

- difficulties in social interactions
- a restricted range of interests
- repetitive behaviour
- delayed motor development (this may result in clumsiness or uncoordinated movements)

Unlike other forms of autism spectrum condition, individuals with Asperger syndrome do not have significant delays or difficulties in either language or cognitive development.

There are many symptoms of Asperger syndrome, but it is unlikely that they would all be present in any one individual. The degree at which they are present differs greatly.

Behaviours associated with Asperger syndrome include:

- limited social interactions
- inappropriate social interactions
- repetitive speech
- focusing on or discussing themselves, rather than showing an interest in others
- difficulties with facial expression

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- difficulties with non-verbal communication
- avoidance of eye contact
- one-sided conversation
- awkward movements
- unusual mannerisms
- inability to understand social and emotional issues
- inability to understand non-literal phrases
- an obsession with very specific, unusual topics
- inability to see things from someone else's viewpoint

'High-functioning' autism

High-functioning autism (HFA) is at one end of the autism spectrum. This means that the signs and symptoms are less severe than other individuals with autism. An individual with HFA usually has average or above average intelligence. Usually, an individual with HFA will have early language delays, unlike a child with Asperger syndrome.

One major difference from other individuals with autism is that those with HFA and Asperger syndrome usually want to be involved with other people; they just don't know how to go about it. They may have problems understanding the emotions of others and struggle to understand facial expressions or non-verbal communication. This can lead to them being teased and they can often feel like social outcasts which, in turn, can lead to depression and anxiety.

Typical symptoms include:

- a delay in early language development
- a delay in motor skills
- inability to react with others
- strong reactions to textures, odours, sounds and sights
- difficulties with sarcasm or non-literal use of language

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Did you know?

The word 'autism' has been used for about 100 years and comes from the Greek word 'autos', meaning 'self'. This describes the condition of autism, as the individual is removed from social interaction, and is therefore an isolated self. Eugen Bleuler, a Swiss psychiatrist, was one of the first people to use this term in 1911, initially using it to describe one group of symptoms of schizophrenia.

Autism and schizophrenia were linked by many researchers until the 1960s, when it was realised that autism was a separate condition.

How autism can be considered a spectrum condition

Please read the following as it will help you to answer question 2.

Autism is a spectrum condition. This means that although all individuals with autism will face certain difficulties, the condition will affect them in different ways. It also refers to the differences in severity with which an individual experiences a condition. There are some individuals with autism who can manage to live independent lives, whilst others may have accompanying learning disabilities and may need specialist support throughout their lifetime. Every individual on the autism spectrum has different challenges, abilities and symptoms.



Did you know?

The National Autistic Society is the leading UK charity for people with autism and their families. It aims to ensure that individuals with autism:

- obtain the support, education and training they need
- live with dignity
- live as independently as possible
- feel part of their community/society
- are understood by all the professionals who support them
- are respected for who they are

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Recognising that autism is a lifelong condition

Please read the following as it will help you to answer question 3.

Autism is a lifelong condition and can be mild, moderate or severe. It is not a learning disability, but around half of individuals with autism will have learning disabilities, and this will affect the level of support they will need throughout their lives. Some individuals may have a 'dual diagnosis', meaning that they have two or more conditions – for example, autism and Down's syndrome. Autism spectrum condition sometimes occurs in individuals with medical conditions such as early epilepsy, and learning and psychiatric problems can also coexist.

It is important that parents of children with autism understand that there is no cure, that autism is a lifelong disability and that continuing support will be needed. It is important that parents and those working with adolescents are aware of the difficulties and the need for long-term support as often, at this stage of life, autism becomes particularly testing as they become more aware of their differences. This can trigger depression or behavioural difficulties. For most people with autism, there will be a need for continuing social support, and some will need help from mental health professionals. Most children with autism will also need extra help at school, sometimes at a school that specifically caters for those with autism, or from the Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO) at school, or other educational experts. Individuals who go to college will need continuing support, including transition support to help them make the change from school to college and university, modified examination arrangements, guidance appointments and access to computers and assistive technologies.

It is important to remember that children with autism become adults with autism; it does not disappear. Adults with autism will have continuing needs for support, including help with housing and independent or supported living, support in finding employment and staying employed, and, in some cases, help with day-to-day tasks. For some individuals, 24-hour support may be needed.



AUTISM

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