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| **What is Autism?** (AET 2023)Autism is a processing difference that can have an impact on many areas of a person’slife. Autistic people often experience differences in how they process information, theirsensory environment and how they interact with other people. It is estimated that one in100 children, teenagers and adults in the UK are autistic.While autistic people share some similar characteristics, they are also all different fromeach other. This is because autism is considered a spectrum. The autism spectrum is notlinear from high to low but varies in every way that one person might vary from another.There is no ‘typical’ autistic person. Every autistic individual has their own strengths,differences and needs, their own life journey and their own unique story.The AET approaches autism as a different way of being rather than as a ‘deficient’ or‘disordered’ way of being.'Autistic people are not neurotypical people with something missing or something extraadded on. They are different. If we are serious about equality and inclusion within anyarea, then we must first of all understand that difference.’ Christine Breakey, The Autism Spectrum: A Guide to Good Practice |
| ***Outdated/Negative*** | ***Neuro-affirming/Positive***  |
| **Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)** | AutisticAutism Neurodivergent (*Please note- an individual cannot be ‘neurodiverse’. ‘Neurodiverse’ is a term we use to describe a group of people with different neurotypes).*  |
| **Diagnosed autistic** | Identified as autistic  |
| **Co-morbidity**  | Co-occurring conditions  |
| **Special needs** | Individual needs  |
| **Person-first language e.g., ‘CYP with autism’**  | Identity-first language e.g., ‘autistic CYP’  |
| **Non-verbal** | Nonspeaking Pre-verbal (by describing a CYP as pre verbal we do not presume that speech is an end goal for all) |
| **High/low functioning**  | Describe specific strengths and acknowledge support needs are likely to vary (i.e., spiky profile) |
| **Triad of impairment**  | Three areas of difference Core areas of difference |
| **Difficulties**  | Differences, areas of challengeDescribe barriers in the environment & link to areas of difference |
| **‘Struggles to…’** | Requires support with… |
| **Intervention** | Support AccommodationsReasonable adjustments/adaptations Provision |
| **Social skills intervention****‘They need to learn social rules’** **‘They need to develop social skills’** | Opportunities for autistic and non-autistic cyp to learn that there are many different forms of communication and interaction, and that all are valid and valued. |
| **Poor reciprocity****Monologues** **‘Goes off on tangents’**  | Uses longer conversational turns Has a passion for information sharingCharacteristic of autistic communication style for sharing information and connecting with others  |
| **Blunt****Rude****Abrupt** **‘No filter’** | A direct communicator HonestUses language efficiently Assertive |
| **Selective mutism**  | Experiences situational mutism (an involuntary reaction caused by the overwhelming stress of the situation)  |
| **Special interest** **Restricted interest**  | Focused, intense, passionate interestsSpecific interest Areas of interest/expertise  |
| **Flat affect** | Uses neutral facial expressions  |
| **Dramatic****Easily upset** | Expressive, passionate, animated facial expressions to communicate emotions SensitiveHyper-empathetic  |
| **Disorganised****Messy** | Requires support with executive functioning  |
| **Meaningless play** **Stereotypical and repetitive play****Aloof****Disinterested in others****‘In their own world’**  | Preference for parallel play Preference of independent play Differences in levels of social motivation Hyper focused on interests Preference for sameness and routine Intrigued by the objects around them. |
| **Following their own agenda** | Autonomous, Self-directed  |
| **Rigid** **Inflexible**  | Preference for sameness and routineDemonstrates a monotropic thinking style characteristic of neurodivergent individualsCraves predictability and patterns  |
| **Fixated**  | Deeply focused Ability to focus intensely |
| **Impulsive** | Spontaneous, instinctive Hypervigilant |
| **Hyperactive** | EnergeticEnthusiastic Has a need for movement which may relate to sensory differences |
| **Picky/fussy** | Has strong preferences Attention to detailHas strong preferences which may relate to sensory differences |
| **Challenging behaviour** | Communicative of needsDistressed communicationSelf – advocatingDysregulated |
| **Attention seeking** | Seeking connection Seeking a familiar responseCommunicating need |
| **Defiant**  | Anxiety driven demand avoidanceDysregulated Anxious Holds strong beliefsDeterminedAdvocates for a different perspective |
| **Stubborn** | Persistent  |
| **Demanding** | Demonstrates self-advocacy Communicating need |
| **‘They are just choosing to…’** | OverwhelmedUnmet needs Demonstrates a need for autonomy Choosing the more bearable option.They have a different agenda |
| **Needy** **Reliant on adult support** | Seeks reassurance and validation |
| **Bossy** | Natural leaderHas strong opinions |
| **Unfocused**  | Appears to be attending to different stimuli /agendaFinds different stimuli delightfulShow’s focus differently |
| **‘Zones Out’**  | Attention appears to flitter i.e., gazing across the room Attention varies depending on contextProcessing difference  |
| **Chatty****Talkative** | Enjoys communicating Seeks social interaction with others regardless of contextHas differences in impulse control Differences in working memory (if I don’t say this right now, I might not remember) |
| **‘Doesn’t listen’** | Visual learner Processing differences/needsMono-processing May appear not to be listening  |
| **Touches everything** | Kinaesthetic learner Appears to be seeking additional sensory informationUses touch to understand their environmentUses touch as a means of interactionEnjoys exploring their environment through touch. |