

The holder of this card has autism (which includes Asperger syndrome)

This card is issued by The National Autistic Society. It tells you what to expect when you meet a person with autism.

Autism is a disability that affects social and communication skills.

People with autism may behave unpredictably because they have difficulty understanding social situations and language.

Please help by showing understanding and tolerance.

A person with autism has difficulty with social interaction, communication and imagination, and will show some of these characteristics:

Social interaction

- Seems isolated or not to care about others.
- Cannot read body language or understand the need for tact.
- Behaves inappropriately or oddly.
- Avoids eye contact when feeling worried or under pressure.
- Dislikes physical contact.

Communication

- May not understand tone of voice, gestures or expressions like frowning or grinning.
- Takes similes and metaphors literally (so thinks 'daft as a brush' and 'throwing the baby out with the bathwater' are about brushes and babies).
- Finds it difficult to hold a conversation.
- May seem argumentative, stubborn, or angry...
- ...or over-compliant, agreeing to anything even if untrue.
- May use formal, stilted or pedantic language.
- May seem inattentive or unresponsive.
- Can be honest to the extent of bluntness or rudeness.

Imagination

- Cannot foresee the consequences of their actions.
- Very worried by changes in routines or unexpected events.
- Likes set rules, and may overreact when people break them.
- Often has special interests that may become obsessions.
- Finds it difficult to see or imagine another person's point of view.

What to do if you think a person may have autism

People with autism may speak clearly and properly but can lack full understanding. Their apparent independence can disguise their isolation and social disability.

When talking to a person with autism:

- first explain what you are going to do and make sure they understand.
- use clear simple language with short sentences.
- ask specific, unambiguous questions.
- avoid irony, sarcasm or metaphors.
- allow the person extra time to think about or act on what you said.
- remember that if he or she is avoiding eye contact, this does not imply shiftiness or disrespectfulness.

Important notes for legal or criminal justice professionals

A person with autism is vulnerable, whether as victim, witness, or suspect. Their difficulty with communication, interaction and imagination puts them at a disadvantage when their actions and behaviour can be misinterpreted. An Appropriate Adult should be called upon to look after their welfare.

Autism and Asperger syndrome are identified as mental and behavioural disorders in the **World Health Organization International Classification of Diseases, ICD10**. Therefore the **Mental Health Act 1983** may apply. If you think your detainee/client/defendant has autism, a report from a specialist psychiatric service dealing with autism or Asperger syndrome may be in their interest and that of justice.

The NAS **Autism Helpline**, 0845 070 4004 (open Monday-Friday 10am-4pm), has a list of specialists who are expert in this area of work. Please also see the criminal justice professionals section of The National Autistic Society website at www.autism.org.uk/cjp

For more information

Contact the **Autism Helpline** on 0845 070 4004 (open Monday-Friday 10am-4pm)

www.autism.org.uk

For more information about this card, including versions of this sheet in other languages, please see www.autism.org.uk/card



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