

Supporting independence skills in autistic young people

First of all, it is vital to remember that levels of independence are person specific, to some independence may mean choosing their own clothes to others it may be deciding where they go on holiday. We need to remember that there is not a gold standard to being independent, we all need support at certain times of our lives and that is okay, it is unlikely that any person can say they do everything completely independently.

Some ideas to consider:

- Be aware that by focusing too much on making the person as independent as possible you may miss giving the person the right support they need.
- Build on communication skills: If the person struggles with communicating their wants or needs this can be a barrier to building independence. Every person should be equipped with the appropriate tools for them to be able to communicate effectively. Be open minded about this and remember that communication is much more than just speech.
- Use natural opportunities in everyday life to build on independence: Giving the person responsibilities such as a cleaning task or helping to cook a meal can be enjoyable. If the person attends groups, can they get involved in setting up and tidying away.
- Work on self-care skills: Hygiene routines like brushing teeth and washing are important life skills. Where possible always include these things in the person's daily schedule.
- Where appropriate practice money skills: Learning how to use money is an important skill that can help towards independence especially when out and about in the community. For example, support the person to buy something at a shop.
- Teach safety skills early: Safety is undoubtedly a big concern for any parent/carer. As young people grow older, they may be likely to take part in more risk-taking behaviours as they learn about the world around them and their community involvement grows. Teaching safety skills around things such as relationships and travelling independently can be important.

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- Where appropriate give the person more independence with their social life: This may look like allowing them to attend groups alone or meeting friends in the park.
 - Don't assume that the person can't do it themselves: Encourage the person to attempt tasks themselves first before helping them. For example, putting on their shoes, tying their shoelaces.
 - Is there a way you can make tasks more accessible, for example if you are trying to encourage the person to dress themselves could you buy them Velcro shoes or trousers without buttons/zips.
 - Set SMART targets: Specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-based targets. This can help you both stay focused on what you are trying to achieve.
 - Use visuals: Visual supports can be used to break down the steps involved in a task. When a person is given a visual schedule for a task such as brushing their teeth, they are able to use this as a prompt and a reference.