



Understanding Messages in Behaviour

As a family member, you may be presented with a wide range of behaviours that may be difficult for you and others around you to understand. While we appreciate it can be frustrating, exhausting, and complex to understand at times we need to try and remember that behaviour is usually communication and is often the person's way of telling you something. In some instances, it may be that person's only way.

Respect neurological differences

Autistic people have differences in neurology, which represent different ways of processing information and making sense of the world. The first step to support is acknowledging these neurological differences and respecting them. If you are a non-autistic family member, remember that you will be trying to apply non-autistic logic to an autistic situation. Remember this when looking for causes of behaviour and solutions.

Observe and learn

Step back and take time to observe what they're doing. To you, lining up toy cars over and over again in lines may seem strange but this may be their only way to escape from and bring order to a chaotic and confusing world.

Get rid of misconceptions

There are many misconceptions that exist in relation to autistic people which may mean that we misinterpret behaviour. An example of this may be the misconception that autistic people lack empathy. Apply this misconception to an autistic person who shows little response at a time when everyone else is upset and it would be assumed that they lack empathy, but actually it could be that they're just as upset but they are processing it differently.

Consider the environment

Autistic people often experience sensory information from their environment in a different way and this can not only cause stress and confusion but in some instances cause physical pain. Always consider the environment the person is in and try to break it down sense by sense. Remember that sensory experiences are unique and just because something doesn't affect you don't assume it doesn't have an impact on them.

Communication

Are you communicating in a way that makes sense to the person you're communicating with? Often, we can assume that autistic people are the ones that have the communication problems, but flip this on its head and think about the way you are communicating. Remember language is complex





and things like slang terms, sarcasm and humour can be confusing for everyone.

Understand the importance of decompression time

Think about a typical day and list all the potential stressors. All this stress on the nervous system can be exhausting and it's vital that everyone is given time to relax in a way that is meaningful. For you ripping paper up may seem like a waste of time but for someone else the rhythm, sound, and ability to zone out from everything else in the world during this time may be soothing.

History

Think about the person's history. If someone has been part of a traumatic event in a certain environment, they will usually be less likely to return to that place. Remember trauma can be everywhere for autistic people, and it can sometimes be the things that others view as trivial that could be having the biggest impact.

