

Improving the experience of people with Autism Spectrum Disorder in health care settings

Communication Dos and Don'ts for People with Autism Spectrum Disorders	
DO's	DON'TS
Minimise waiting time and facilitate progression through admission etc quickly. If waiting is unavoidable, find a quiet secluded waiting area.	Make the person with an Autism Spectrum Disorder endure prolonged waiting time unless there is no alternative
Explain why and how you need to touch him/her. Use pictures, diagrams and written information to complement verbal	Initiate physical contact without first warning them or explaining what you plan to do
Get all the information you can from the carer who know best the person's needs and the best approach	Make assumptions about the person or the carers' needs, ask for information or clarification
Be aware that expressive language may not match age or behaviour	Forget that It may be frightening if the person either doesn't understand or takes things literally
Try to locate the bed in a quiet part of the ward and inform all staff of this need.	Expect the person and family to cope with a noisy environment e.g. from equipment, phones ringing etc.
Discuss the young person's medical history and diagnosis in plain language that s/he can understand even if they do not appear to be listening.	Assume that because a young person doesn't speak he/she doesn't understand what is being said. The person may understand fully but may not give any indication of this.
Recognise that the person may not make eye contact, may ignore verbal communication and may exhibit unusual behaviours.	Ignore the person or exclude them from conversations with their carer(s)
Recognise that repetitive behaviours may be used to reduce anxiety and distress particularly in unfamiliar environments.	Allow behaviours such as flapping, spinning, or ignoring staff to inhibit communication
Ascertain specific food preferences and if choices are not available ask the family to supply the desired food	Expect the person to eat food that may be different in presentation, kind, colour, shape or texture.
Give clear unambiguous explanations with realistic timescales and support with written information where possible. Predictability = stability!	Spring surprises, adaptation to change is very difficult for persons with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

Bibliography

- Autism Act (2009)
Brooks, R.; Marshallsay, M., Fraser, W (2004) Autism spectrum disorder: how to help children and families *Current Paediatrics* 14 pp 208-213
Charman, T. ; Stone, W. (2006) Social and communication Development in Autism Spectrum Disorders The Guildford Press
Assessment, diagnosis and clinical interventions for children and young people with autism spectrum disorders published: *SIGN guideline* 98; June 2007;
National Autistic Society (2009) Adult Autism Strategy www.nationalautisticsociety.org.uk
National Service Framework for Children, Young People's and Maternity Services (2004) Department of Health
NICE (2011) <http://guidance.nice.org.uk/CG/Wave15/78/Consultation/Latest>
Ozsivadjian, A. Knott, F. (2011) Anxiety problems in young people with autism spectrum disorder