



#CelebrateDifferences #TheConnectionIsYou HOW TO SUPPORT A PERSON WITH AUTISM

- Assume competence, engage individuals at an age appropriate level, with appropriate topics and information.
- Social differences may include lack of eye contact and talking about highly specific subjects that may seem "off topic". You build rapport and trust by engaging with subjects of high interest. Follow the person's lead!
- Ask the person and/or parent, support staff, how you can be helpful.
- Speak simply and with a calm voice using language that is direct and easy to understand. Re-state the question differently if the person doesn't seem to understand.
- Self-stimulatory behavior -- such as rocking, hand-flapping, and pacing -- may be a sign of anxiety and a person's way of coping. Do not attempt to stop.
- Recognize that all behavior is communication and may be the person's only way of expressing pain, confusion, or misunderstanding. Note what happened before the person became upset and determine if the situation is preventable.
- Sometimes, pairing verbal language with written or visual support is helpful. Similarly, sometimes in stressful situations a person with Autism may wish to write responses.
- Address the person by name so they know you are speaking to them. Give them time to respond. Ten seconds of processing time may seem long to you but can be helpful for an individual with Autism.
- Do not touch without asking and explaining what you are about to do, what will happen next, and why.
- Build a routine, which for some individuals with Autism, reduces anxiety and uncertainty.
- Up to 90% of people with Autism are thought to be sensitive to light, sound, smell or touch. Consider the environment and if it is causing anxiety. Help the person identify coping mechanisms such as headphones, fidgets, removing the offending item, or other supports.
- Praise individuals with Autism with specific feedback when all goes well, not just when things go wrong. Similarly, convey directly what to do, not just what not to do, in concrete and easy to understand words.

Remember that each individual with Autism is unique. The Autism spectrum is long and wide and as Dr. Stephen Shore said, "When you've met one person with Autism you've met one person with Autism."

These tips are generalizations and may not be for everyone but are meant to provide some general guidelines to help engage our family, friends and neighbors who live with Autism.