



AUTISM PODCAST NO. 2

Autism and Communication

Date

A discussion from: Ashley Wilson (Head of Service Development & Quality)



HOSPITALITY

COMPASSION

RESPECT

Introduction

As part of a wider plan to increase awareness of autism across the charity and throughout the public sector, we are aiming at reaching several audiences through a range of methods. Through the autism section of our website, we will provide fact sheets, testimonies and good news stories as well as sharing our own good practice. To enhance our abilities of sharing knowledge we will also develop a range of podcasts, videos and webinars that will remain accessible on the website to highlight not only our journey of learning and development but to provide key information to all who view.

The podcast will allow for a further range of communications about SJOGs autism practice and services. It will cover a range of topics in different formats to provide a resource of information for all who visit the website; this will include the people we support, their families and key partnerships. The podcasts will also be shared within SJOG across our Social Media Channels and within training sessions to provide additional understanding to our team members.

Ashley has been working on developing key courses and information around the domains within the SJOG Autism Practice Model, she will answer the following questions in this podcast:

- How important is effective communication in social understanding, wellbeing and developing relationships with others?
- What impact can a lack of communication have on the person with autism?
- How communication is a key catalyst in behaviour that challenges?
- How the SJOG Autism Practice Model aims to meet the communication needs of the people we support to improve their quality of life?

Important Consent Notice: The podcast will be recorded and uploaded onto the staff portal so that colleagues can listen to at any time.

The podcast will also be available to external parties via our website.

PODCAST CONTENT

Communication is a fundamental part of any person's wellbeing, we use communication to greet people, say how we are feeling and to express our wants and needs to those around us. We do this in so many different ways and it is thought that 60-70% of human communication is actually non-verbal meaning our expressions, body language and eye contact are just as important as our verbal language.

Communication difficulties are one of the main characteristics that can define a diagnosis of autism and these difficulties can be expressed and also experienced in a different way by the autistic person.

When we reference expressive communication we are talking about how the individual is able to tell people around them what they need or how they are feeling at that moment in time. Expressive communication also includes the expression and understanding of appropriate emotional responses and how we actively interact and develop meaningful relationships. Some barriers to effective communication can be:

- Lack of verbal language

- Inability to read or write
- Impulsive behaviours
- Diagnosis or physical condition
- Extreme anxieties

If the person is unable to effectively express themselves this is often where the person will experience stress and this can present in the form of challenging behaviour. Challenging behaviour can be an objective term in that the behaviour is a challenge to those around the person. However when we evaluate behaviour holistically it is often the inability to communicate that is leading to this presentation when a more acceptable and effective means of communication is not (yet) available to them.

What we must also consider in our practice is that effective communication includes how the person understands what is being communicated to them. This is what we call receptive communication skills,

Receptive communication not only requires the ability to; listen attentively, process verbal language and interpret pitch and tone it also implies a level of intellect that the individual can understand what is being said to them. They must also then interpret the 'unwritten rules' of social communication by applying context, sequence and thought to a situation and being able to read body language and expressions of others to interpret an appropriate response or reaction to what is being asked of them.

How information is processed and how the autistic person develops and associates an appropriate response can be influenced by lots of factors This can include.

- What is going on around the person and have we considered sensory processing disorders?
- Difficulties with Theory of Mind that can mean the person is unable to interpret a situation or the intent of the communicator.
- How the person is feeling at the time in terms of their physical health but equally considering whether the person is already feeling stressed or their behaviour is escalating.
- Is what is being communicated to the person of tangible interest?

Although communication may appear to be a simple process between ourselves and our colleagues this process is very complex and can be extremely difficult to a person with autism. The person can feel very isolated, anxious and can struggle with day to day activities and routines that will impact on their overall wellbeing and place in the community.

In order to we must adapt our skills and practice to support the autistic person effectively and aim to do this in the context of their Quality of Life.

Through the SJOG Autism Practice Model we assess the person and develop an effective autism profile, this includes an in depth assessment of the persons communication and associated comorbid factors that can impact understanding.

Once we have completed this assessment we can begin to develop communication passports and support planning to reflect proactive strategies around supporting expression and understanding. Within

SJOG we have the expertise and knowledge to review a range of communication methods such as Picture Exchange Communication Systems or (PECS), Talking Mats and the use of technology such as Magic Tables and Ipads.

We consistently review the efficacy of our strategies and in line with the SJOG Positive Behaviour Support practice model we aim to help the autistic person find alternative communication and coping strategies to reduce behaviour that challenges this in turn supports more opportunities for the person and increases quality of life.

As described at the start of this podcast our policy on autism and communication outlines our commitment to good autism practice and through our policy we aim to:

- Support the autistic person to develop acceptable and effective functional communication skills
- Develop our own knowledge and understanding in line with changing research and practice.
- Develop and embed knowledge and understanding of communication strategies across teams supporting autistic people.
- Support autistic people to access a range of communicative aids and develop accessible information to support understanding and learning.

