

Post-diagnosis Advice for People Diagnosed with Autism

Being diagnosed with autism is an important step in someone's life. People react differently to being diagnosed with autism: feeling relieved and validated, surprised or shocked, resentful for not having been diagnosed earlier, etc.

Immediately after being diagnosed with autism, many people feel alone and unsure of what should happen next.

Our advice in the first place is: Give yourself time to come to terms with the diagnosis.

- Talk to family and friends so they can understand your difficulties and be supportive of you;
- Talk to other people who have a diagnosis of autism; listen to stories of other people with autism (<http://healthtalk.org>);
- Finding out more about autism might help as well. We recommend trusted sites such as: – <http://www.autism.org.uk> – <https://tonyattwood.com.au/>
- Talk to your college/university or workplace;
- Contact local support groups and charities on the National Autistic Society website <http://www.autism.org.uk/what-we-do/branches>;
- Talk to your GP.

Please be aware that:

- Autism is not an illness or disease for which there is a certain treatment or cure, therefore autism itself is not a treatment target.
- Interventions are not necessarily needed in autism, and improvements can be achieved by focusing on maximizing the quality of your life rather than treating ASD.
- The most part, ASD may not be disabling, and ASD-related strengths can be used to enhance the quality of your life and to enable thriving and wellbeing.
- Some environmental and societal challenges are unfortunately unavoidable and cannot be eradicated. Therefore, it is important for autistic individuals to identify and access wellbeing strategies which can strengthen resilience and buffer against life challenges to prevent fatigue and extreme stress building up (e.g., social and sensory fatigue are not totally avoidable; therefore, it is important to know how to recover from them).

- Resilience may be organically sourced in the autism itself as neurodivergence often comes with many strengths and positive qualities. Therefore, therapies may not be required or at least not the only required strategy. Organic sources of resilience may include accessing interests and carrying out routines that regulate and afford a sense of wellbeing.
- For people who have a diagnosis of autism and are either in employment or education, it is important that they seek reasonable adjustments by sharing their diagnosis with, and asking for support from, their employer/education establishment.
- Further assessments may be indicated in some cases:

– A psychosocial needs assessment is designed for those who are severely impaired and cannot function in terms of basic day-to-day social demands and daily living.

– OT sensory assessments for those whose sensory profile is specifically causing severe challenges.

- Psychological therapy should be used for a specific symptom or challenge that is changeable in some way. For example, if someone has had panic attacks at work, a therapy best suited for that specific set of symptoms and challenges should be employed. Therefore, if you have such specific issues, we would encourage you to discuss them with your GP with a view to potential referral to relevant services (e.g., CBT for anxiety, with a therapist familiar with ASD, as one illustrative example).
- Many people who have autism experience co-morbid mental health difficulties. Common co-morbidities include anxiety, depression, ADHD, and sleep disturbances. In these cases, you may want to request a referral by your GP for further assessment of your mental health difficulties. Any potential psychological therapies for those conditions should be delivered by therapists familiar with ASD.
- Resources for job interview preparation and relationship counselling may be beneficial, as these can be challenging areas for individuals with autism.

If you would like further and more specific information on autism please refer to this list:

Sites:

The National Autistic Society – <https://www.autism.org.uk/>

Tony Attwood – <https://tonyattwood.com.au/>

National Institute for Health and Care Excellence – <http://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/cg142>

Videos · What is autism? – <http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/autism/what-is-autism/>

Books

- Exploring Depression and Beating the Blues by Tony Attwood and Michelle Garnett
- Autism Equality in the Workplace. Removing Barriers and Challenging Discrimination by Janine Booth