

Challenging behaviours that may be presented by people with ASD



There are a range of ways in which the behaviour of people with ASD can be seen as challenging. The first thing for us to remember is the complexity of the condition.

Theo Peeters reminds us in his book 'From Theoretical Understanding to Practical Intervention' that ASD is like an iceberg and the behaviour we see and experience when with someone who has an ASD is the tip of the iceberg. In order to gain insight into that behaviour, which can often be quite challenging, we need to look at the size of the iceberg beneath sea level because that is the depth of complexity that the individual is dealing with in their life.

We may be trying to communicate or working with a child who appears to be rude and inattentive but when we understand the nature of the processing problems and stop repeating ourselves that child becomes well behaved and attentive to what we have to say.

In a working environment someone with ASD may have got on well for a number of months in a job role that is clear and perhaps to us repetitive. When given the opportunity to add more variety to the job he becomes agitated and uncooperative. Once again there is the appearance of behaving in one way that actually hides the levels of anxiety about the changes that are taking place.

People with ASD and learning difficulties may appear well settled into a residential care setting but are unable to handle the social occasions that are developed to enhance the life experience of all the residents, for example, becoming aggressive and extremely challenging whenever it is someone's birthday. This kind of behaviour makes them seem very self centred when it is really their complete lack of understanding about how to behave on such social occasions. This in turn can be frightening for them as well as those on the end of the challenging behaviour.

Sensory overload can also be a very real cause behind behaviour we find hard both to understand and deal with.

There is much that can be done to help bring calm and restore a more balanced feeling for people with ASD and it may not be what comes most naturally to those with a neuro-typical brain. This is where learning to think in an autistic way can be extremely helpful.

Be aware and sensitive to changes in the environment that may impact upon the person with ASD. This could be something as simple as the smell of new paint, or the staff member who has altered her hair colour. Structure and the need for predictability are often the secret to successful relationships. It is from a position of calmness that often arises when life is nice and predictable that changes can be prepared for and executed without the need for a crisis.

People with ASD find visual supports to aid understanding both helpful and reassuring. The visual image is more static and can be looked at over and over again, even if it is the written word. Spoken words are very abstract and come and go so quickly that it can be frustrating when trying to follow their meaning. Frustration soon leads to challenging behaviour when the world around is confusing and so often for people with ASD it is very confusing.

