

### **The holder of this card has autism (which includes Asperger syndrome)**

This card is issued by The National Autistic Society. It tells you what to expect when you meet a person with autism.

Autism is a disability that affects social and communication skills.

People with autism may behave unpredictably because they have difficulty understanding social situations and language.

Please help by showing understanding and tolerance.

### **A person with autism has difficulty with social interaction, communication and imagination, and will show some of these characteristics:**

#### ***Social interaction***

- Seems isolated or not to care about others.
- Cannot read body language or understand the need for tact.
- Behaves inappropriately or oddly.
- Avoids eye contact when feeling worried or under pressure.
- Dislikes physical contact.

#### ***Communication***

- May not understand tone of voice, gestures or expressions like frowning or grinning.
- Takes similes and metaphors literally (so thinks 'daft as a brush' and 'throwing the baby out with the bathwater' are about brushes and babies).
- Finds it difficult to hold a conversation.
- May seem argumentative, stubborn, or angry...
- ...or over-compliant, agreeing to anything even if untrue.
- May use formal, stilted or pedantic language.
- May seem inattentive or unresponsive.
- Can be honest to the extent of bluntness or rudeness.

#### ***Imagination***

- Cannot foresee the consequences of their actions.
- Very worried by changes in routines or unexpected events.
- Likes set rules, and may overreact when people break them.
- Often has special interests that may become obsessions.
- Finds it difficult to see or imagine another person's point of view.

### **What to do if you think a person may have autism**

People with autism may speak clearly and properly but can lack full understanding. Their apparent independence can disguise their isolation and social disability.

### **When talking to a person with autism:**

- first explain what you are going to do and make sure they understand.
- use clear simple language with short sentences.
- ask specific, unambiguous questions.
- avoid irony, sarcasm or metaphors.
- allow the person extra time to think about or act on what you said.
- remember that if he or she is avoiding eye contact, this does not imply shiftiness or disrespectfulness.

### **Important notes for legal or criminal justice professionals**

A person with autism is vulnerable, whether as victim, witness, or suspect. Their difficulty with communication, interaction and imagination puts them at a disadvantage when their actions and behaviour can be misinterpreted. An Appropriate Adult should be called upon to look after their welfare.

**Autism and Asperger syndrome** are identified as mental and behavioural disorders in the **World Health Organization International Classification of Diseases, ICD10**. Therefore the **Mental Health Act 1983** may apply. If you think your detainee/client/defendant has autism, a report from a specialist psychiatric service dealing with autism or Asperger syndrome may be in their interest and that of justice.

The NAS **Autism Helpline**, 0845 070 4004 (open Monday-Friday 10am-4pm), has a list of specialists who are expert in this area of work. Please also see the criminal justice professionals section of The National Autistic Society website at [www.autism.org.uk/cjp](http://www.autism.org.uk/cjp)

### **For more information**

Contact the **Autism Helpline** on 0845 070 4004 (open Monday-Friday 10am-4pm)

[www.autism.org.uk](http://www.autism.org.uk)

For more information about this card, including versions of this sheet in other languages, please see [www.autism.org.uk/card](http://www.autism.org.uk/card)



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