



Understanding Autism – Autism NZ

Definition

Autism is a neurodevelopmental condition that affects cognitive, sensory, and social processing, changing the way people see the world and interact with others.

Autism is currently estimated to be present in 1 in 54 people. It is not a mental illness, but a neurological difference - one of many variations of neurodiversity.

Every autistic person is unique, with a wide range of skills, qualities, interests, and personality styles. As the saying goes, "if you have met one person with autism, you have met one person with autism." The level of support required is also highly individual. This heterogeneity is due to the fact that autism is not a single condition but a cluster of underlying neurological differences that are present in varying combinations in each person. The behaviour and needs related to these differences share common themes but manifest in different ways for each individual.



Autism is considered an invisible disability since challenges and difficulties are often not immediately apparent. There are no visible physical markers. The cognitive differences associated with autism may also contribute to specific skills such as superior visual memory, attention to detail, and pattern recognition.

Traits and characteristics

An autistic person may experience challenges with social communication and interaction, have intense interests and a strong need for routines and predictability, and be hyper or hyporeactive to sensory input.

No two autistic people are alike, but can often experience difficulty with social skills and executive functions, and have sensory needs that are different from those of the neurotypical population.

Within these areas of challenge, autism will be expressed in different ways for each person, e.g. difficulty making small talk or having a balanced conversation, sensitivity to certain sounds or textures, and the need to stick to a daily routine. The traits experienced may change during the lifetime of a person as coping mechanisms or compensation strategies are learned and appropriate support is provided. However, this does not mean that the person has grown out of their autism. It would be more accurate to say that they have 'grown into' their autism, a process that is never finished and requires a phenomenal amount of energy to maintain.

Many of the challenges autistic people face are not self-perceived as 'symptoms' of their autism but as difficulties created by their environment: a society that largely refuses to make accommodations for people with cognitive/invisible disabilities

Reference Autism NZ

<https://www.autismnz.org.nz/what-is-autism/>