



Working well with individuals with a diagnosis of Autism

From theory to practice

Autism is a very complex condition that require individual thinking of the best way to enable a person to grow and develop, either within their own family home, at school or within their own supported living environment.

Support-Ed believe there are a number of important fundamental factors required to enable individuals the best opportunity to succeed.

Support and Education Mentors (SEM's)

It is imperative that SEM's are matched to the person.

All SEM's have the following training with regard to working with people with a Autistic Diagnosis.

- Basic Autism awareness training
- Looking through an Autistic Lens – how to connect theory to practice
- Sensory Processing and how this impacts on an individual
- Intensive Interaction
- TEACHH
- Ongoing practical coaching

Working with the individual

As an organisation we will work with the individual, their family and other significant people to begin formulating a plan, this plan is created around the individual. From this plan those supporting the individual are coached to meet the individual's needs.

We will look at the current areas of the individual,

- What is going well
- What isn't going well
- What interests do they have and how we can best engage with them?
- What the family and significant others already use and what is working well

We believe it is not just giving a person a good life, but how we can enable them to achieve and sustain this.

Looking through an Autistic Lens: Trying to get an understand of who the individual is and how their Autism impacts on their everyday life and how best can we support them.

Sensory Processing: This is an area that cannot be ignored and must be taken seriously as too often many individuals cannot function due to experiencing Hyper and Hypo Sensory Issues. We continue to strive to support the individual to enable them to manage their surrounding environment as well as finding ways to support them to access their local community. We also recognise that individuals sensory processing changes, this could be due to season changes, internal and environmental changes and that we need to adapt and adjust with the individual.

- Supporting a person with sensory processing issues is no easy task.
- We will try and Learn as much as we can.
- Understanding the signs of sensory processing issues.
- Keep track of the individual's behaviour issues relating to sensory processing.
- Provide safe and appropriate outlets. You can also coach her on ways to "escape" situations before things get out of hand.
- Using the knowledge, we have learnt from the individual to avoid sticky situations. For example, if sudden noises cause individual's anxiety, how we can find ways to support them.

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It is important to allow the person time to 'be autistic' rather than to expect him to comply with normal behavioural patterns at all times.

Intensive Interaction

This is important for those individuals we support with limited communication, to enable them to move from their 'inner' world to their 'outer' world in a way that is meaningful and respectful to them.

- This we use as a way of teaching or simply as a way of being with those we support.
- It enables us to focus on the quality of our everyday interactions.
- Adjust our interpersonal behaviours - perhaps altering our voice or gaze or body language. This is to make us less threatening and more interesting.
- Take the other person's lead - respond to things they do.
- By responding instead of leading we don't make demands on the person that they cannot cope with.
- Instead we communicate that we value them and enjoy being with them.
- We allow them to chance to explore with making things happen and to take the lead.
- The 'topic of conversation' is within their realm of interest.
- Treat the things the person does as if this is communication.
- We read social meaning into actions even when this meaning isn't yet clear.
- In this way we don't just use our intuitive skills as communicators, but we reflect on how we can enhance these and we problem-solve with others, so that interactions don't 'get stuck'. Use timing and rhythm in the interactions.
- This can make them like games - with anticipation and drama to hold the person's attention. Rhythm and repetition help the person with learning disabilities to predict what will happen next and to get more involved.
- We can create the feeling of taking turns.
- Have fun.
- Intensive Interaction sessions should be enjoyable and often playful.

"When you speak to a man in a language he understands, this goes to his head. When you speak to him in his language, that goes to his heart." – Nelson Mandela

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TEACCH

For some individuals we support we use TEACCH to enable them to create and develop the persons inter / independence within their home and in the community. We recognise that this approach needs to be adapted using various techniques including Physical structure, scheduling, work system, routine and visual structure.

Autistic individuals often have difficulty with receptive and expressive language, sequential memory, and handling changes in their environment. The TEACCH method provides those individuals we support with structure and organization. This method relies on five basic principles; a brief description of each is provided below.

Physical Structure

Physical structure refers to the actual layout or surroundings of those we supports environment, such as their home, or work / education environment. The physical boundaries are clearly defined and adapted within the person's home to promote their inter / independence, this can be as simple as changing their kitchen environment, bathroom environment etc. We also will work with their local community regarding having a regular table / place to sit that can be reserved to reduce anxiety.

Scheduling

A schedule or planner is set up which indicates what the person is supposed to do and when it is supposed to happen. This can include their morning and evening routine, preparing or assisting with meals.

Work System

The work system tells the person what is expected of him/her during an activity, how much is supposed to be accomplished, and what happens after the activity is completed. Our goal is to teach the person to work independently. The work system is also organized in such a way that the person has little or no difficulty figuring out what to do. For example, activities within their own home: preparing a drink, getting dressed and preparing meals.

Routine

The most functional skill for autistic individuals is a routine which involves checking one's schedule and following the established routine, we try to incorporate this into everyday living, for example laying out what they need for the day, creating lists, enabling those we support to create their own lists. This is all dependent on the individual's capacity / needs etc and is tailored around the individual.

Visual Structure

Visual structure refers to visually-based cues regarding organization, clarification, and instructions to assist the person in understanding what is expected of him/her. For example, a visual structure may involve using containers to assist the person in putting the right amount of coffee into their cup, planning their day or an event.

The TEACCH method is primarily used to assist the autistic individual in better understanding of his/her environment. The techniques described above are not faded out over time; but rather, they are to be consistently used across a variety of environments. Whilst seeking ways to develop and enhance their independent skills.

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Ongoing practical coaching

Support-Ed recognise that it is not enough to just provide training to our SEM's and expect them to have the skills to undertake the direct support to those we support. Many people within this area are practical learners and learn whilst supporting, it is therefore important that ongoing coaching is maintained. This can be undertaken by their Team Leader or Practice Lead to enable the SEM's to gain knowledge whilst working.

We also review as a team for each person we support to ensure all are working coherently to achieve the best result for those we support.

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