



Guide for Frontline Healthcare staff on supporting autistic patients.

Dear Healthcare Professional,

When treating autistic children or adults, please take note of the following points;

Illness and pain can be experienced and displayed differently.

Autistic individuals may not experience or process pain in the same way as another patient. This is due to differences in Sensory Processing and Interoception (understanding and feeling what is going on inside your body). Some people on the autism spectrum may show no signs of illness or appear well even when they are not. Do not judge level of illness based on presentation.

Listen to parents or carers.

Children and adults with complex support needs will be accompanied to appointments by a parent or carer. This person will most likely be very familiar with the patient and what is or is not normal for them. It is important to listen to the parent or carer's concerns and trust their judgement. Equally it is important to remember that if a patient is accompanied by an employed carer, it may be someone who is not as familiar with the individual and further consultation with their service provider may be required.

Make reasonable accommodations.

Under the Disability Act 2005, an individual is entitled to have reasonable adjustments put in place in order to have their needs met. The purpose of reasonable accommodations is to remove barriers that exist in an environment to enable this person to have their needs met in the same manner as other individuals. For autistic individuals, reasonable accommodations can include any of the following (this is not an exhaustive list); A quiet space, appointments service, alternative communication methods, priority queueing, social stories and visual guides. The best way to ascertain the reasonable accommodations required by a person is through consultation with them or with a parent or carer.

Respect and acknowledge Healthcare Passports.

The HSE has developed a Healthcare passport for individuals with intellectual disabilities to be filled out in consultation with their parents or carers before a visit. ASIAm has also developed one for autistic individuals available at www.asiam.ie/asiam-and-covid19. While it may seem time consuming to look through this passport and read the details provided, it will reduce the time spent trying to meet the needs of a patient in a manner that may potentially stress them or cause them to become more anxious. Individuals, parents or carers have spent time filling the passport out with information that they feel will be beneficial to a healthcare worker supporting this patient, and may not be able to communicate the same responses in person during a time when they feel stressed and anxious.

Appreciate that this situation may cause extreme anxiety for a person.

During COVID-19, most people have felt the effects of a loss of routine and structure, and have been impacted by the unpredictability of when 'normality' will return. Autistic people rely heavily on structure, routine and knowing what to expect, and therefore may be finding everyday life more stressful than most. While many individuals will know what to expect at the moment when visiting a hospital or clinic, autistic people may find the increased measures and PPE scary and may make them anxious. In terms of communication, many people on the spectrum also find it difficult to process what is being said to them when they cannot see a person's mouth speaking the words. This will be the case when wearing a face mask. Please be patient and kind when communicating with someone who may process language differently. ASIAm has developed a template that you can print and display on the front of your PPE showing what you look like. This may help alleviate anxiety for an autistic patient. This can also be found at www.asiam.ie/asiam-and-covid19