

Understanding Autism

Handout 2 - Common strengths and passionate interests



Common strengths of autistic people

There are some common strengths autistic people may experience. In the same way that autistic people experience common challenges differently, not every autistic person will show strengths in all these areas.



Knowledge and expertise

Autistic people's interests can lead to developing in-depth knowledge and expertise on topics, which can be valuable in the workplace.

Ability to focus

Some autistic people find they can concentrate on an activity for long periods of time.

Intuitive understanding of logical systems and rules

Some autistic people excel in fields such as science, logistics, engineering and finance.

An eye for detail and accuracy

Many autistic people have a very good eye for detail, and can be very precise and accurate when doing activities like proofreading, art, computer programming, music, and jigsaw puzzles.

Highly developed skills

Some autistic people have an exceptional memory for facts, and may have excellent analytical skills. Some people have intuitive abilities for learning things like music or languages.

Honesty, integrity and reliability

Many autistic people have a very strong sense of right and wrong, and are not inclined to bend or break the rules, or favour certain people over others.

An autistic person is often a very reliable employee.

Valuing neurodiversity

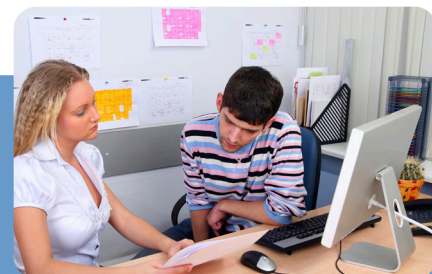
Some autistic people argue that autism should be viewed as an equally valid, and naturally occurring difference in how a person processes information rather than a disorder. Other people argue that this doesn't reflect the realities of autistic people with high support needs.

Certainly many of the barriers autistic people face result from a lack of understanding, and environments not suited to the needs of autistic people.

Other conditions recognised as part of the 'neurodiverse family' include ADHD, Dyslexia, Dyspraxia, Dyscalculia and Tourette Syndrome.

Using your strengths to your advantage

Many autistic people focus on activities, study topics and careers that are suited to their strengths. For example, a person may find they're good at science as it's rule and fact based. A autistic person may need support to identify and to value their strengths.



Passionate interests

Some autistic people have very specific and intense interests which can be absorbing, bring huge pleasure, and be a distraction from an often confusing world. People's interests are often related to factual things. Facts are wonderfully reliable and predictable.

Some people may want to talk about their interests a lot, and not always recognise when other people would like to move on.

Typical and less typical interests

Some people's interests are fairly typical, such as a certain sport, celebrity, or history. Other people may have less typical interests.

Having unusual interests, or interests others their age have moved on from, means people may stand out from their peers.

Many autistic females have fairly typical interests, but may be more passionate and specific about their interests than most other people.

Using your interests

Some people may build their social life around their interests. If you are supporting an autistic person their interests are great start point for engaging with them. A person's interests may inspire their studies or even form the basis of a successful career.

A small range of interests

Some people may have a small range of very specific interests, and others can worry they are missing out on wider experiences.

A person may at times be so focused on their interest that they find it difficult to switch to other tasks.

When thinking about trying to encourage people to widen their interests, it's important to acknowledge the security and pleasure people gain from their passions.



It's important to understand that for some autistic people an ideal life may not be a typical life. Some autistic people may have less need for variety, spontaneity, or even socialising as often as people usually do.

Using our strengths and interests



I work two afternoons a week doing the filing in an office - I'm very accurate and don't make mistakes.



I have a great eye for detail and customers often comment on the quality of my work.



I'm passionate about guitar, and can stay focused for hours when practising a new piece.



I'm massively into Star Wars, and have a huge collection of figures.



I know everything about vintage buses. At rallies people always ask me about the different models and manufacturing year.



I have a great visual memory for routes, which helps with my job as a delivery driver.