

Oxfordshire Autism Alert Card

FACT SHEET

In Oxfordshire there are an estimated **6,355** people on the **Autism Spectrum**, based on a ratio of 1:100 (Ratio source: National Autistic Society). Many remain undiagnosed.

Autism is the root cause of their behaviour, which is easy to misinterpret. When anxious, stressed or under pressure, this may present as a panic attack (looks like challenging behaviour) or as a freeze response (looks like refusal to move or speak).

The Card Scheme will:

- Help autistic people in difficult situations find sources of local support
- Help Thames Valley Police, emergency services and Oxfordshire organisations to identify they are dealing with someone who has autism
- Promote better management of issues and situations involving people with Autism
- Help Cardholders feel safer and more confident when out and about
- Provide Autism Awareness Training to Police Officers and PCSOs in Oxfordshire

The cards give some simple advice, the person's name and emergency contact details.

Feedback from the Hampshire Autistic Society and Autism Anglia Schemes:

"Change of attitude by police, tone of voice and use of language changed, became less threatening to me"

"It is a brilliant idea either in custody or at the roadside to help recognise autism behaviour, which could be (in other circumstances) perceived as S5 etc."

"We use the card when we go out on trips; it has improved our confidence as parents to go out and about more frequently"

"If I am going to a crowded place I will take it with me"

"People give more time to answer and I was calmer. I move a lot and wave my hands, I talk too much and this can be a problem to people"

"Yes the policeman helped advise me on how to get home I think he was more helpful because I showed him my card."

For more information, please contact:

Autism Oxford T: 0844 381 4484 (Answer machine outside office hours)

W: www.autismoxford.org.uk E: alertcard@autismoxford.org.uk

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Autistic Spectrum Condition (ASC) – Useful Information

What is an ASC?

Autism is a lifelong developmental disability, caused by differences in the brain, which affects how a person communicates with, and relates to, other people. It also affects how they make sense of the world around them. ASC is a spectrum of conditions. At one end of the autism spectrum people are severely affected and may have a learning disability. At the other end, sometimes called Asperger syndrome or high functioning autism, people are very able in many ways, having normal or above intelligence. It is important to realise that this is not always 'useful intelligence' when it comes to everyday situations. Their difficulties are not visible and are often misunderstood. The life experiences vary considerably from person to person, but the following are common:

- **Social interaction difficulties**
- **Verbal and non verbal communication problems**
- **Repetitive behaviours and focus on special interests**
- **Difficulty in foreseeing the consequences of one's own, or another's, actions**

Missing social information: Do not assume understanding of social situations, even when what is happening seems obvious. A person with ASC may have a completely different, but very logical, perspective. This leads to constant misunderstandings and misinterpretations in everyday life. When the non-autistic person has the autistic view explained, it often makes sense.

Language: More able people with ASC may use precocious language and unusually large vocabularies, but have great difficulty in sustaining a two-way conversation. There are problems in understanding body language, tone of voice or everyday expressions such as 'the drinks are on the house' - such turns of phrase may be taken literally. A sarcastic expression such as 'Oh, that's just great!' might be interpreted as meaning it really is great.

Body Language: Facial expressions, movements and gestures may not match what is said and the tone of voice may fail to reflect a person's feelings. Remorse is often not shown, but may well be felt when the other person's perspective is understood. A high pitched, sing-song or flat, monotone voice is quite common. Subtle social cues – a smile, a wink, a grimace, or a hand signal – may not be noticed and/or may be misinterpreted. Eye contact may be avoided, not through guilt, but possibly sensory overload, or it may be that the person needs to look away from you in order to process what you are saying to them.

Emotions: A person with ASC may lose control when anxious, stressed or frustrated, or in a strange or overwhelming environment. There may be disruptive and challenging behaviours. They may 'freeze' and be unable to move, think or talk. Some may hurt themselves or attack others.

Repetitive behaviour: The individual may need to have regular movement, such as rocking or pacing up and down when anxious – this is often an attempt to keep control of emotions. They may have a fascination for something, eg vacuum cleaners, trains & timetables or buildings. There may be a great interest in numbers, symbols or science topics.

Sensory: Some people with ASC cannot always make sense of what they see, feel or hear. If sensory information is faulty, the person's experiences of the world can be confusing. There may be high sensitivity to sounds, lights, colours, textures, tastes, smells etc. Some may cover their ears and make noises – this is a defence mechanism.

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