

Uncertainty and changes to routine have always been a challenge for people with Autism. With the current situation, there is potential for serious challenges for both the individual and the people supporting them.

Here are five suggestions that might be useful to your staff team

1. Adopt a Professional and Consistent Approach

Some people on the staff team might believe the current situations is a load of nonsense, whilst others might think we are approaching doomsday. Neither of these attitudes will help a person with Autism.

Your approach needs to be positive. Hope is hard for people with Autism as it is not logical or measurable. We need to be that person's hope.

Persistent thoughts can be a big problem for people with Autism. When you speak with your service users, make sure your words reassure rather than confirming their fears.

Where there is uncertainty people naturally worry. Avoid passing this worry on to your service users. Do not discuss personal opinions with or in earshot of any service users.

2. Perspective – Use a long term view

The human race has existed for about 200,000. The current situation creates a lot of challenge, but next to events like the Ice Age, the Bubonic Plague, World Wars 1 and 2, it does not look so bad.

Even if you take the most pessimistic predictions for the effects of Covid 19, it is not going to come close to those events and hundreds of others.

Depression can be a big problem for people with Autism. Help the individual by reminding them that this situation will end and things will go back to normal. Hopefully, within a few months.

Be careful not to put a date on when it will finish though. Use the latest official estimate, but explain it is only a guide.

3. Don't Over Explain – Use Stock Reasons

Too much explaining is unlikely to reassure a person with Autism. It's just 'white noise' and also might mean that you come across as uncertain and unconvincing.

Use short simple explanations, always based on official advice. Also verbal information is often misunderstood or confused. Writing the information down for the person is a better way. The individual can reread it whenever they need reassurance.

"Washing our hands regularly will help keep us safe"

"Things may be different for a few months, but once this over, things will go back to normal"

"We don't have all the answers, but lots of people are working hard to sort out the problem"

"There is plenty of food in the warehouses; it's just taking longer to get it to the shops"

"Your mum may have made a mistake, let's check what she told you on the government website"

"Your manager is checking the government website every day and will tell us if anything changes"

4. Replace rather than Remove

Breaking routines is always a challenge for people with Autism. Yesterday I met an individual who likes to shake hands as part of his daily routine. Being told he could not shake hands was quite upsetting for him. So we suggested he replaces handshakes with 'Thumbs up'. I did thumbs up him and encouraged him to do the same. Then we practiced with the manager and staff members. As we did this, we could see his stress and tension vanish.

Be creative with activities. Try to deliver the same effect for the individual in a different way. Just saying we can't do things, isn't enough for people with Autism, the individual needs to know what to do instead.

5. Talk About Something Else

The more we talk about Covid 19, the more uncertain our service users will become. This could lead to incidents or a deterioration in mental health.

Try to avoid having the news on all day or discussing Covid 19 in front of your service users. Divert the individual into different activities, maybe make a list of things they would like to do when this situation is over.

Summary

Those are my general suggestions; feel free to adapt them for your needs. People with Autism are individuals so specifics may be different for each of the people in your care.

If you would like to discuss an individual case, feel free to drop me an email or give me a ring. I'll be happy to help in any way I can.

"The sun will continue to rise, the tide will go in and out, the stars are shining bright and the scarcity of bread is good for my low-carb diet"

Edward Grassby

Behaviour Specialist