

Understanding Autism

Autistic children and adults all have their different strengths and challenges but here's what they told us when we asked them and their families about the **BIG FIVE** things they want everyone to understand about autism.

1 Autistic people often need extra time to process information, like questions or instructions

Ask one question or give one instruction as simply as you can, and just wait. If you still don't get a response, try rephrasing it or writing it down instead.

2 Autistic people may feel intense anxiety in social situations

Give plenty of notice, and offer to be a buddy at social events - or understand if people don't want to come.

3 Autistic people can feel anxious about unexpected changes, like delays and cancellations

Where it's under your control, try to avoid unexpected changes or, if plans must change, give people as much notice as possible and clear information to help them with the change.

4 Many autistic people find noise, smells and bright lights painful and distressing

Lots of little things can add up to a sensory overload. Try to avoid talking over each other, turn down your music, or offer to dim glaring lights.

5 All of these can lead to someone becoming overwhelmed and having a 'meltdown' or 'shutdown'. This can be physically and emotionally debilitating

If the overload gets too much and they're having a difficult time, be patient and don't judge or react negatively. Calmly ask if people are OK and give them some time and space to recover.



"The greatest discomfort for autistic people can be the social one. For me, I was confused about why people behaved the way they did."

Chris Packham CBE,
National Autistic Society Ambassador
and autistic man