

Before addressing a person with autism

People with autism mostly speak clearly and correctly, and look very normal. The problem is that they process information differently. Therefore they sometimes cannot understand or interpret the full meaning of what is said or happens. Their apparently independent personality sometimes hides fear, insecurity, and social incapacity.

Therefore:

- Do not unnecessarily touch a person with autism.
- First explain what you are going to do, and ascertain whether your words have been understood well before proceeding to action.
- Ask simple and straight questions.
- Avoid irony or sarcasm, and do not use transferred meanings or comparisons.
- Allow a person with autism some extra time to absorb your information, or to proceed to action.
- Be aware that the person with autism does not intend to be impolite by not looking at you.

Important to know about this person with autism:

- may behave inadequate or strange.
- may seem inattentive, or not respond at all.
- avoids eye contact in case of stress, or when under pressure.
- may over-react
- may seem tactless.
- may seem cocky, stubborn or cross.
- may be extremely docile.
- mostly dislikes physical contact.
- finds body language hard to understand.
- takes proverbs and metaphors literal.
- may use formal, oldish or stately language.
- prefers fixed habits and rules.
- has a number of specific interests.
- often is unable to empathize.

Important information for police, care providers, and inspectors

A person with autism is vulnerable, whether they are a victim, a witness, or a suspect. Impaired communication, interaction, and imagination capabilities may cause them to get into trouble, or frighten them when their behavior is not understood. Consult an expert to ensure the person with autism receives adequate help. Autism, including the Asperger and PDD-NOS disorders, is classified as a behavioral disorder in the World Health Organization's International Classification of Diseases (ICD10). If you think your client/witness/detainee has autism, please have a psychiatric report be made up for the legal procedure.

For information on autism: www.autisme.nl or www.landelijknetwerkautisme.nl