



**For any Disability related queries
(03) 9916 5821
Your helpline**

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Season's Greetings



The holiday season is nearly upon us. For most of us this means a frantic rush to get everything finished (statistics, reports, funding submissions and so forth) while the rest of the world parties. Nevertheless, we wish you all the best the season brings and a happy New Year.

This edition of the newsletter features autism spectrum disorders (ASD). It looks at some of the myths and facts and includes a tip sheet which we hope will be useful and which you can pass on to others.

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The New Improved Website



The new website is at last up and running. Check it out on www.acedisability.org.au – it's got everything:

- funding options,
- support services,
- classroom downloads and other resources,
- training opportunities and much, much more.

Please feel free to pass this link on to others that may benefit.



KNOXBROOKE INC.

In our last newsletter we inadvertently omitted to include Knoxbrooke Inc. as a member of the Network Coordinating Committee. To make up for this we now present some information about this service.

Knoxbrooke Inc. was established over 40 years ago and offers an extensive range of services to over 200 adults with disabilities. These include:

The training division which provides approved training to both Knoxbrooke clients and the wider disabled community, particularly through ACE / ACFE and the Green Thumbs Horticulture program,

Knoxbrooke Day Programs which provide a variety of programs incorporating art, recreation, music, life skills, workplace preparation and other services to over 100 clients. Many of these programs have been designed to extend our involvement in community based activities in support of the Victorian Government State Disability Plan,

Knoxbrooke Supported and Independent Living Accommodation is also home to 23 people with a disability in Bayswater and Ferntree Gully.

Knoxbrooke also operates two Supported Employment Services providing employment to over 112 employees:

The largest service is in horticulture, with Yarra View wholesale nursery which also incorporates the "Home of Garden Lovers" retail nursery and "Home of Landscaping and Garden Design" a landscaping and garden maintenance service. The other is Knoxbrooke Industries which supplies packaging and material handling services.

.For more information contact: Knoxbrooke Inc. on: **9737 0400**

Autism Spectrum Disorder

Autism Spectrum Disorder (More information Autism Victoria www.autismvictoria.org.au)

The way people think about autism has changed in recent years. It is best described as a group of disorders with a similar pattern of behaviour in three key areas - communication, social interaction and imaginative thought. The currently favoured term is Autism Spectrum Disorder, with the word 'spectrum' used because **no two people with an Autism Spectrum Disorder** are exactly alike.

Autism Spectrum Disorder may also coexist with other conditions or disorders, including intellectual disability, speech and language disorders, anxiety and depression (especially in adolescents and adults), epilepsy, attention disorders, Tourette Syndrome and Down Syndrome.

In **Autism** the impairments in the social and communication areas are severe and sustained and clearly present before the age of three years. The child is often anxious, has poor attention and motivation, responds unusually to many different stimuli and is observed as being 'different' from other children. Speech is delayed, or largely absent. A strong reliance on routine is apparent, and

the child can have a range of ritualistic behaviours such as toe walking, hand flapping and finger gazing. The child/adult with autism may also be intellectually disabled.

In **Asperger Syndrome** there are severe and sustained social impairments, but impairments are not as severe in the language and communication area. Speech usually develops within the normal age range, but the ability to communicate effectively is impaired. The impairments seem more subtle in the very young child, and become more apparent as the child reaches pre-school and school age. A person with Asperger's is usually in the normal intelligence range.

Irrespective of the diagnosis or where they fit on the spectrum, each child or adult diagnosed with an Autism Spectrum Disorder is developmentally delayed, has significant difficulties participating in day-to-day life and requires sensitive understanding and specialist support and intervention.

Myths and Facts about Autism Spectrum Disorder

Myth: Children and adults with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) do not care about others.

Fact: Children and adults with an ASD often care deeply but lack the ability to spontaneously develop empathic and socially connected typical behaviour.

Myth: Children and adults with autism spectrum disorders prefer to self-isolate.

Fact: Children and adults with an ASD often want to socially interact but lack the ability to spontaneously develop effective social interaction skills.

Myth: Autism spectrum disorders are not increasing in incidence. They are just being better diagnosed, and diagnosed earlier so the numbers are increasing.

Fact: Autism spectrum disorders are increasing across the globe at an alarming rate. No one knows the cause or causes for the increase. Better and earlier diagnosis can only account for a fraction of the current increases in numbers.

Myth: People with autism spectrum disorders cannot have successful lives as contributing members of society.

Fact: Many people with autism spectrum disorders are being successful living and working and are contributing to the well being of others in their communities. This is most likely to happen when appropriate services are delivered during the child's early education years.

Myth: All people with an autism spectrum disorder have "savant skills", like Dustin Hoffman's character in "Rain Man".

Fact: Most people with autism spectrum disorders do not have any special savant skills. Some have "splinter skills", or areas of high performance that are not consistent with other skill levels.

Myth: Children and adults with autism spectrum disorders do not interact very much. They do not have good eye contact. They do not speak well. They are not very bright.

Fact: Children and adults with autism spectrum disorders may speak and/or interact with others. They may have good eye contact. They may be verbal or non-verbal. They may be very bright, of average intelligence or have cognitive deficits.

TEACHING PEOPLE WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDERS-TIP SHEET

1. People with ASD need a structured predictable environment. Create schedules and individualised mini schedules timetables and keep to them. Provide “to do” lists and activity check lists. Prepare student for potential change where possible using pictures, schedules and social stories.
2. Some people with ASD have problems with social interactions. Teach rules and cues such as in turn taking in conversation.
3. Some people with ASD have difficulty with complex and multiple meaning. Explain metaphors and words with double meanings.
4. Teaching generalisations may be a problem for people with ASD e.g. they may consider a rule only applies to one specific occasion.
5. Many people with ASD are visual thinkers. Use concrete and visual methods of teaching. Use visual organisers. Use non verbal cues to get attention. Use picture cues on objects and containers.
6. Avoid long strings of verbal instructions. People with ASD may have problems remembering the sequence. Directions of more than three steps should be written down.
7. Use task analysis: breaking tasks into components and teaching each component until mastered.
8. Some people with ASD get fixated on one subject. Use this to motivate learning.
9. Many people with ASD have poor handwriting. To avoid frustration suggest they use a computer. But also note that some people with ASD will learn more easily if the computer key board is placed close to the screen. This enables them to see screen and key board simultaneously.
10. Some people with ASD need to be protected from noises which hurt their ears like PA systems, bells, buzzers or scraping chairs. Try and muffle objects that make these noises.
11. Some people with ASD find fluorescent and flickering lights to be a problem. Try to seat the person concerned near natural light.
12. For non verbal people with ASD, touch is the more reliable sense. Letters can be taught using the feel of plastic or fuzzy felt letters.
13. Many people with ASD have difficulties using a computer mouse. Try a track or roller ball.
14. Some people with visual processing problems find it easier to read if black print is on coloured paper to avoid contrast (but don't use bright yellow – it may hurt the eyes).

For further information:

Teaching Students with Autism: A Resource Guide for Schools, British Columbia, Ministry of Education 2000 www.bced.gov.bc.ca/specialed/docs/autism.pdf

Teaching Tips for Children and Adults with Autism, Temple Grandin 2002 www.autism-mi.org/includes/downloads/teaching.tips.grandin.pdf