

Cadets with Autism

We want all our cadets to be able to pursue their passions and interests, to develop their potential and to experience positive friendships and relationships, in an inclusive environment that accepts and values difference.

Understanding autism will help to enable autistic cadets to get the most out of the VPC. It's important to remember that all autistic people are individuals. To make sure that autistic young people can take part in activities you'll need to get to know each person as an individual, find out what will help them to feel happy and confident in your unit, and make any reasonable adjustments they might need; working them out together with their parents/carers, where appropriate.

What is Autism?

Autism is a lifelong developmental disability that affects how people perceive the world and interact with others. If a cadet has Autism then this should be documented on the Health and Permission form as a disability so that cadet leaders can make the appropriate reasonable adjustments.

Autistic people see, hear and feel the world differently to other people. If you are autistic, you are autistic for life; autism isn't an illness or disease and cannot be 'cured'. Often people feel being autistic is a fundamental aspect of their identity.

Autism is a spectrum condition. All autistic people share certain difficulties, but being autistic will affect them in different ways. Some autistic people also have learning-disabilities, mental health issues or other conditions, meaning people need different levels of support. All people on the autism spectrum learn and develop.

In order for a diagnosis to be made, a person will usually be assessed as having had ongoing difficulties with social communication and social interaction, restricted and repetitive patterns of behaviours, activities or interests and sensory differences, since early childhood; to the extent that these "limit and impair everyday functioning".

You can learn more about these areas of difficulty and how you can help support them below.

Talking about Autism

Over the years, different terms have been used for autism. Research from 2015 suggests that there is no *single term that everyone prefers*.

It's important to check with the cadet and their parents/carers about the language that they use to talk about their diagnosis, and to take the lead from them. For example, some members may have been given a diagnosis of Asperger syndrome, and they prefer to use this term when talking about their diagnosis.

Confidentiality

Make sure you know whether the cadet knows about their diagnosis, and whether they're happy to talk about it. It's also important to check how they feel about other people in the unit knowing about their diagnosis too, they may not want anyone else to know, or they may want to tell others about it. This all depends on the individual and their wishes must be respected.

Some people with autism mask their differences. They may copy behaviours from others around them in order to "blend in" and not seem different; this can be exhausting, as it takes constant thought, energy and effort to appear similar to other people.

This more subtle presentation of autism is also a major barrier to professionals recognising autism and understanding the experiences of autistic girls and women who appear to 'blend in' more than boys and men.

Click on the link for [Autism and Mental Health Resources](#)