

INTERVENTION SHEET #6

AUTISM AND DISTRESS

By Brigitte Harrisson and Lise St-Charles, 2015

SUICIDAL IDEATION

SOURCE: SUICIDE PREVENTION

- ▶ The quality of life for someone with Asperger's depends on the space society is prepared to give them.
- ▶ Many people with Asperger's say they feel like they're extraterrestrials in their social environments (such as family, school, work).
- ▶ People with Asperger's may be more likely to want to work, marry, or have children.
- ▶ They spend most of their time in a state of "none sense", in survival, enduring failure after failure.
- ▶ Their anxiety grows because this condition is misunderstood.
- ▶ Wanting to die, thinking about committing suicide, of hitting or hurting themselves is something they at times consider, at other times act on; this is the everyday reality for someone with Asperger's.
- ▶ Physical spaces have been adapted for the physically disabled, language has been found to communicate with the Deaf, the vision impaired have a better quality of life with tools such as ASL, Braille, white canes, traffic sound signals, and guide dogs.
- ▶ People with Asperger's must explain their condition to their caregivers or specialists, must put up with the fact that few people know what to do for someone with their diagnosis, and endure the "none sense" that interventions provoke. They must manage their autism in isolation, without knowing what to do since they depend on external help. They don't know that they don't know.
- ▶ They are not well but can't talk about it because no one speaks their language.
- ▶ They are very isolated.
- ▶ They are subject to heavy expectations due to their interpretation of their external world. They pay a very high price for their "invisible" disorder.
- ▶ No neurotypical person would survive in this situation.
- ▶ We ask for a lot of services and interventions for autistics with an Asperger's profile but no document to date can claim to outline their real needs.
- ▶ We intervene a great deal without understanding the consequences of our actions (For example: getting them in trouble for their group social skills).

FACTORS THAT WILL INFLUENCE LEVELS OF DISTRESS:

- ▶ Factors relevant to an individual's quality of life.
- ▶ Contributing factors: Their social network.
- ▶ Determining factors: Availability of resources.

PREDISPOSING FACTORS

- ▶ Family history: History of autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and awareness of or knowledge of ASD (support and accompaniment).
- ▶ Surroundings: Isolation, lack of meaningful connections.
- ▶ Individual: Adolescence (more complex socialization; identity—they don't know that they don't know).



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PREDISPOSING FACTORS

- ▶ Self-esteem and confidence: Family / friends / school (Reference: Autism and self-esteem).
- ▶ Asperger's: Elevated anxiety can lead to physical or mental health challenges (depression, anxiety, etc.).
- ▶ Asperger's: Wants to socialize but is not equipped to (Danger of equipping them "by heart" if one does not know understand the Asperger's profile).

CONTRIBUTING FACTORS

- ▶ Increase the level of risk at a specific time (for example, if returning to school, or if there is a change of school, losing their only friend, etc.).
- ▶ Lack of adaptability, lack of resources in the immediate or larger environment, for example:
 - They need to use conceptual language at home or school (they need help but can't see it).
 - Attempt to be "cured" and may become obsessed with the notion.

PRECIPITATING FACTORS

- ▶ Trigger an imbalance, can be the straw that break the camel's back.
- ▶ Failures, rejection from peers (such as romantic partners or friends), challenging recent events, humiliation.
- ▶ According to the literature, often in schools.
- ▶ For adults, the workplace becomes their environment.

PROTECTIVE FACTORS

- ▶ Presence of healthy role models: knowledge and recognition of ASD.
- ▶ Available resources: Having someone to confide in using conceptual visual language (feeling understood).
- ▶ Someone to go to with questions who won't undermine them.
- ▶ Someone who teaches appropriate coping strategies using conceptual language (taught to be generalized) with regards to:
 - ASD
 - Interaction
 - Social skills (rules, roles, contexts)

PROTECTIVE FACTORS

- ▶ Consult the documents of Prévention suicide, Québec.
- ▶ Tell them that there is no reason why someone with Asperger's won't have a successful life.

FOR MORE INFORMATION,
please refer to: Harrison B, St-Charles L.
L'autisme expliqué aux non-autistes.
Quebec City: Trécarré; 2017.