

Guide to Working with Young People with Autism and/or ADHD at MYC

Autism is a neurodevelopmental disability that impacts the way people *communicate* and *interact* with those around them.

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is a neurodevelopmental disorder that impacts a person in similar ways to autism, such as: attention and focus, social interactions and emotional regulation.

Anxiety is usually associated with both of these disorders. Young People with anxiety or other mental illness should have the same access to the Quiet space.

For the sake of this document, **regulate** means to restore your body to a calm and content place.

Below are some tips in assisting a young person with these or other mental disorders:

- Communicate clearly, and at a regular pace (not too fast)
- Do not ask too many questions as they can add *demands* and *stress*. Offer two choices; for eg “Would you like supper or bed?”
- Young people events can be loud and overstimulating. If the young person appears quiet, withdrawn or alone **OR** upset in any way, offer them the Quiet space, a drink and alone time. Should they decline, remind them it may help them to regulate (they might not need to leave the room to do so, so the choice should be theirs)
- Show the young person where to go for an event, do not just verbally describe it. For example “let me show you where the dining room is”
- If a young person has gone to the Quiet space, let them know who will come and check on them- tell them when the person will check on them
- If a young person is distressed in any way, listen and sit beside them should they want to speak. Acknowledge the feelings and offer quiet or food/drink to help them regulate their emotions at their own pace. They may want a blanket/cushion/beanbag/other sensory fidget to help calm themselves
- Social interactions may feel challenging for a young person, so once they have regulated themselves, help talk through their problem, offering the different point of view, but do not tell them they are wrong/irrational/seeing things the wrong way etc. Acknowledge the feelings and how hard they can be

- Activities and events may seem too overwhelming to join. Please offer access to the event, but do not push the young person should they decline to join. They may be content to watch or sit alongside the activity. Social interactions, and an overstimulating environment (ie loud, noisy, laughter, many people talking at once)
- Distraction can be a helpful technique for a young person who becomes “heightened”. This might look like someone who is very loud (either happy or agitated). Get them to join you for a walk should they wish or engage them in a simple task to bring their regulation back in order
- Conference announcements should be clear, spoken at a regular pace, repeated if there are specifics such as times, days etc. Information should be personally repeated to a young person you are aware is autistic or has ADHD so that they do not have mixed messages due to all the information to process.
- Setting up a buddy system will help the young person feel included and welcome. If you see a young person on their own, it may be their choice, however, it is important to check in with them to see if they would like to join in activities
- Offer a choice to the young person if they choose to not join in on an activity. For eg “Would you like to continue colouring in here while your group works on the activity together?”
- A young person must have agency to participate in an environment that feels supportive and inclusive. Refrain from statements such as “but everyone else is doing xyz” or “your friends will be missing you”, as this could potentially isolate the young person further.
- If a young person is in the Quiet space for a length of time, ask them if they’d like to come to an activity or talk with you so they feel like they are welcome to return
- Lastly, thank you for all your care, kindness and support of our young people. What you are doing is invaluable.

