

# **Module 11 : Encouraging Autism Acceptance**

- Learning about Autism Acceptance Days and Months
- Acceptance or Awareness?
- Why everyone should have a better understanding of autism
- Information on autism organisations around the world.

**In this last module, we will investigate what can be done to educate people about autism. This includes:**

- Learning about Autism Acceptance Days, Weeks and Months
- Acceptance or Awareness?
- Why everyone should have a better understanding of autism
- Information on autism organisations around the world.

## **11.1 Autism Acceptance**

## **Better acceptance of autism has many benefits for society.**

The more that people are aware of the characteristics of autism, the more understanding they will have if they meet an autistic person while out in the community.

Improved understanding increases the number of resources and services that can be made available for autistic individuals, to provide support in the community, at home, at school, and in the workplace. For adults, it is leading to an increasing number of autistic people joining the workforce in the United Kingdom on a full-time basis.

Acceptance of autism also leads to more quality research being conducted into how the condition is acquired. This helps experts to identify what can be done to support autism in the future, as well as help further dispel myths about autism.

### **Awareness or Acceptance?**

There has been much debate in the UK and around the world regarding the word 'Awareness' when talking about Autism Awareness Days, Months or Years. Many organisations have now changed the name of their events to focus on 'Autism Acceptance'.

Autistic people want to be more accepted by society and feel that 'awareness' doesn't provide the understanding, acknowledgement and support they should be entitled to.

In 2022, the National Autistic Society changed the name of its 'Awareness Week'. They state: "Based on your feedback, we're pleased to announce that we will be changing the name World Autism Acceptance Week (from World Autism Awareness Week). Thank you to everyone who helped with this.

We've come a long way in the past 60 years and today almost everyone has heard of autism. But far

too few people understand what it's actually like to be autistic – both the strengths you can have and how hard life can be at times.

No-one should feel judged for being autistic or have to wait many months or even years for a potentially life changing diagnosis, vital help and support. We need society to change. Autistic children, adults, and their families just want to be understood, supported and accepted in their communities, schools and workplaces.”

## **11.2 World Autism Awareness/Acceptance Day**

**Established by the United Nations General Assembly in 2007, World Autism Awareness Day was created to bring the world's attention to autism so that people understand that it affects millions of people around the world, regardless of faith, culture or nationality.**

It was designed to encourage member states to raise awareness in their own nations and support both early diagnosis and early intervention.

World Autism Awareness Day also highlighted the United Nations' concern about autism seemingly becoming more prevalent, especially the increasingly higher rates of autism diagnoses in children worldwide.

World Autism Awareness Day takes place on 2nd April every year across the globe. It is marked by unique, worldwide fundraising and awareness raising events.

Most organisations have now renamed the day to World Autism Acceptance Day.

Each year the event focuses on a different theme. The UN's theme for 2022 was "Inclusive Education", which addressed one of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) that have been adopted by all United Nations member states. SDG4 focuses on “ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all”.

**These are some of the themes from other years:**

- 2019: "Assistive Technologies, Active Participation"
- 2020: "The Transition to Adulthood"

- 2021: "Inclusion in the Workplace"

There is still much debate about whether more people are being born with autism, or whether the rate of diagnosis is simply increasing. For its part, the UN wants to shine a bright light on autism, giving a voice to the millions who are diagnosed with the condition, those who are as yet undiagnosed, and those who are misunderstood and looking for help.

## **11.3 World Autism Acceptance Week**

**World Autism Acceptance Week takes place at the end of March/beginning of April to coincide with World Autism Acceptance Day on 2nd April.**

The purpose of World Autism Acceptance Week is to encourage future generations to build a world where autistic people are better understood, supported and appreciated. Children learn about autism through fun, imaginative lessons and activities. People also take part in fundraising for autism research and support.

World Autism Acceptance Week does an excellent job of spreading the word about just why it is important to understand and accept autism. By participating in the events, people are more likely to have empathy; as a result, autistic children are increasingly likely to find that mainstream schools can be inclusive, safe environments, and autistic adults can have a better experience in the workplace with colleagues offering compassion and support.

## **11.4 Autism Acceptance Month**



**April is Autism Acceptance Month, the month in which World Autism Acceptance Day falls.**

Autism Acceptance Month focuses on the issues that autistic people can experience within their own communities. It also is the time to educate communities and schools, spreading knowledge and understanding of the condition and promoting inclusion.

Various fundraising events take place during the month to highlight autism acceptance. You can find out more on the [Autism Together website](#).

## **11.5 Why Everyone Should Be Understanding and Accepting of Autism**

**Even with annual events such as Autism Acceptance Day, Week, and Month, there are still many people who aren't familiar with the characteristics of autism and may hold stereotypes about autistic people or hold preconceived notions about what autistic people can and can't do.**

This can lead to everything from misunderstandings at school and discrimination in the workplace, to potentially dangerous situations in the community when people on the autism spectrum interact with those who don't understand or respect their condition.

**There are several reasons why everyone should become more understanding and accepting of autism. A few of these are mentioned below.**

There are now more than 700,000 people on the autism spectrum in the United Kingdom; together with their families, they make up an astounding 2.8 million people across the country that are affected by autism in some way on a daily basis.

Furthermore, as we have covered in previous modules, the number of people who receive an autism diagnosis is increasing year after year in the UK, which makes the need to increase understanding even more imperative.

This involves educating people about the fact that autism isn't a negative label to feel stuck with. Getting diagnosed can mean the difference between growing up feeling isolated and confused, and accessing the services and support systems needed to develop skills and live a rich and rewarding life.

Autism is often an invisible condition. People on the autism spectrum tend to look like their typically developing peers, yet struggle with everyday social interactions, sensory issues, communication, and things that are otherwise not immediately apparent.

Educating people will make them appreciate and accept the nuances and subtleties of the condition.

Increasing understanding about autism is also beneficial for situations in the community, where children may be seen having a tantrum, or adults may be speaking or acting in a distinct manner.

In many of these cases, children get dismissed as naughty and their parents shamed, when, in fact, the tantrum might be the result of a sensory overload or sudden change the child isn't able to cope with or communicate. And that peculiar adult who may be the subject of scorn could be considered intellectually disabled, untrustworthy for not making eye contact, or even under the influence, when, in fact, they might be autistic.

A better understanding of others is essential, as it's impossible to know what each individual is dealing with and what the root cause of their behaviour is. Too often, a lack of understanding of autism leads to negative reactions.

Improving understanding of autism in society will also lead to a greater appreciation of the different challenges that people have to face. The differences in autism are precisely why it's referred to as a spectrum disorder. If you have met one autistic person, you have met one autistic person.

### **For example**

Between 2015 and 2018, the National Autistic Society ran an initiative called "Too Much Information" which encouraged everyone to increase their knowledge of autism. It explained that autistic children are not naughty; they get too much information from the sensory sensitivities and receptive language delays covered in previous modules and cannot help their behaviour. Through this initiative, the National Autistic Society reminded everyone that if all they can see is a naughty child, then they are the ones who don't possess enough information.

This initiative also provided four videos showing autistic people in everyday situations. These can be found here: [autism.org.uk](https://www.autism.org.uk).

The society also holds Spectrum Night Walks for autism. In 2022, walkers raised tens of thousands of pounds for the care and support of autistic individuals and their families.

## **11.6 Autism Organisations and Support Around the World**

### **Scottish Autism**

This is an organisation "dedicated to enabling autistic people to lead happy, healthy and fulfilling

lives”. They provide a range of services and support to autistic people, their families and carers across Scotland. They also work to raise understanding of autism and to challenge negative perceptions of the condition.

Every autistic person has unique strengths and talents that can be harnessed to help them lead fulfilling and rewarding lives, and Scottish Autism are committed to working with autistic people to help them realise their potential and reach their goals.

Scottish Autism holds a variety of fundraising events each year, including walks, runs, skydiving, and overseas treks.

They also provide a toolkit that enables educators to come up with exciting ways to include students in fundraising walks for Scottish Autism. The pack contains advice on how to involve the entire school in walking for autism as well as an introduction to Scottish Autism.

If you would like to find out more, visit the [Scottish Autism website](#).

### **Autism NI**

This is Northern Ireland’s autism charity. They run campaigns to grow knowledge and understanding of autism throughout the country.

Autism NI is a partnership-led organisation that was established to address the need for appropriate services and foster positive collaboration between parents, professionals and autistic individuals.

They arrange numerous fundraising activities and events, including skydiving, family walks and coffee mornings.

In 2021, Autism NI successfully lobbied for the Autism (Amendment) Bill to bring the Autism Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 up to date. The new Autism (Amendment) Act (Northern Ireland) 2022 was approved in April 2022.

### **Autism NI state: “The main points of the new Autism (Amendment) Bill are:**

- Regional autism training strategy
- Regional autism information service
- Regional intervention service
- Regional adult support services

- Measurable targets and outcomes
- An independent scrutiny body to oversee implementation

To find out more, visit the [Autism NI website](#).

### **Autism Together**

This is an organisation in the UK that provides specialist support to autistic individuals and their families. This includes residential and day services, and community support. Their autism strategies “help people develop skills by taking into account their communication needs, thinking patterns, social understanding and sensory differences.”

Autism Together also offers advice, guidance and workshops for autistic people and their families, as well as providing opportunities for people on the autism spectrum to develop work experience and valuable life skills.

They have organised many fundraising events to support their services and facilities, including their respite centre in the North West of England.

To find out more, visit the [Autism Together website](#)

Outside the United Kingdom, there are many autism organisations in United Nations member states such as Canada, the United States of America and Australia.

### **The Autism Society of America**

This is an organisation that seeks to increase general awareness, action, inclusion, acceptance, and appreciation for autistic people. Their goal is to “influence meaningful change in support of the Autism community.”

The Autism Society encourages more people to partner in their movement towards both acceptance and appreciation of autism and ensures that actions taken through services and programmes will support all autistic individuals. Through their efforts, the Autism Society is drawing more attention to those who are being diagnosed each year.



Their 'Celebrate Differences' campaign for Autism Acceptance Month aims to promote inclusion and ensure autistic people are connected to the support they need, to empower them to live full lives.

### **The National Autism Association**

This is another well-known American organisation that promotes understanding of autism. This organisation provides autistic people, their families, health professionals and caregivers with various tools and programmes to provide a better understanding of the challenges faced by individuals and families.

### **Autism Canada**

Autism Canada are committed to improving the lives of individuals on the autism spectrum and their families.

They provide many programmes, resources and training materials, including information on how to prevent and respond to an emergency situation.

Their Facebook page is a great forum for autistic adults to ask questions, get advice and share information.

### **Autism Awareness Australia**

This organisation holds various campaigns and provides information that focuses on education, inclusion and awareness to improve the lives of Australians on the autism spectrum and empower their families.

They carry out many fundraising events, including City2Surf, in which participants run or walk from Sydney's business district to Bondi Beach.

### **Autism Spectrum Australia (Aspect)**

This is another organisation providing services to autistic people across Australia. They "support autistic people of all ages and their families, by delivering evidence-informed solutions that are person-centred, family-focused and customer driven."

On 2nd April, they celebrate World Autism Understanding Day as they have also moved away from the word 'awareness' and want to promote understanding and acceptance of autism and autistic people.

With so many organisations and fundraising events taking place around the world to help autistic people, it means that they can receive the valuable services and support needed to make a difference in their lives.

The funds also help with autism-related research so that experts can gain a better understanding of what causes autism and how autistic people can be supported in the future.

## **11.7 What We've Learned**

We discussed autism understanding and acceptance and why the word 'awareness' is generally being replaced by organisations around the world.

We looked at the various global events that take place to fall in line with World Autism Acceptance Day/Month in April, and the organisations that are striving to help increase understanding and fundraising for better support, facilities and scientific developments for people on the autism spectrum.

### **Take a Quick Recap Test**

[viralQuiz id=99]

### **Summary**

After completing this module, you should be aware of the many organisations and events that take place to raise acceptance of autism on both a national and an international level.

You should also now understand the importance of increasing understanding of autism and what the benefits are of doing so; for society, for autistic individuals, and for their families and friends.

You also understand why the 'Awareness' events taking place around the world have now become 'Acceptance' or 'Understanding' events.

We hope that you have enjoyed this course on Understanding Autism. As discussed throughout the course, it is important to remember that each person is unique, and everyone has their own needs and challenges. To understand autism, you need to take time to understand the individual. Autistic people must have the same opportunities as everyone else in society and we must all do our part to ensure this happens.

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