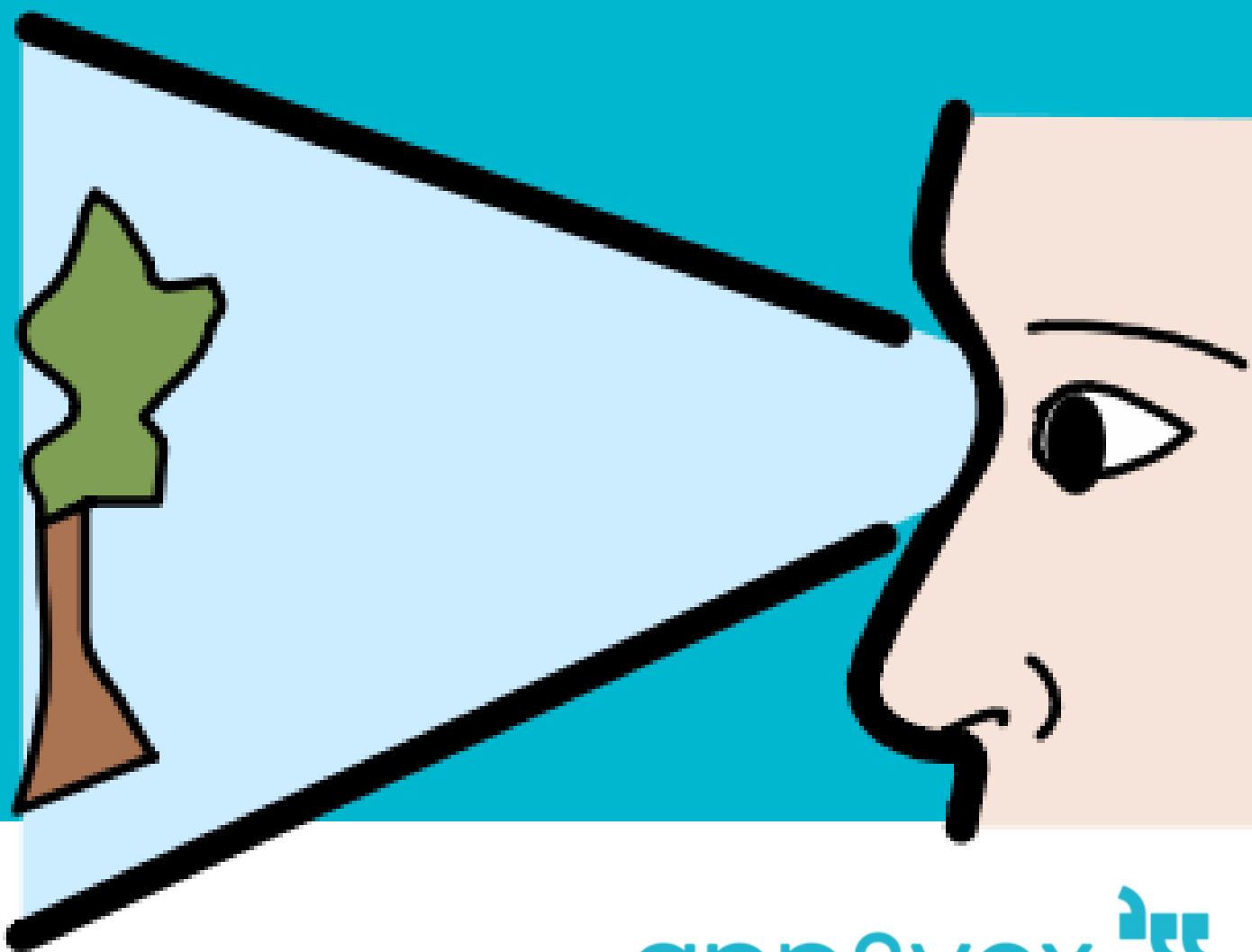


The Seven Senses

Sight (Vision)



Autistic people experience the world differently from others. Sensory issues arising from autism are a well-known aspect of the condition, and in particular hypersensitivity (increased sensitivity) in one or more senses occurs frequently in autistic people. When you sense the world differently to others you inevitably react and behave differently as well.

Autism affects every person differently and in a way which is unique to that individual person. Similarly, the reactions of everyone on the spectrum are personal and should be supported in a manner that benefits the individual in their own unique way.

Let's take a look at 1 of the seven senses - Sight (Vision)

Over responsiveness (avoiders)

Possible issues:

- May struggle when somewhere very brightly lit or where there is a lot to look at, such as a very cluttered space or a busy pattern on a wall or floor.
- May experience a similar painful sensation to that, which others get from staring into a very bright light from looking at a white surface, for example.

- Spaces which are almost entirely white or very light colours can be extremely difficult to cope with and may cause discomfort.
- May have difficulty maintaining eye contact. Keeping eye contact with someone else may cause extreme anxiety, pain or be a huge distraction to an autistic person trying to focus on what is being said.

Potential impacts on life:

- May find certain types of places (e.g. extremely bright spaces) very difficult to stay in for any length of time, and may find it hard to work, study or rest in such surroundings.
- May need to keep looking in a certain direction to avoid seeing things that cause them pain, such as large expanses of bright white space.

Difficulty with eye contact can be seen as rude and unengaged when it is actually required to enable the autistic person to focus on listening and to avoid becoming stressed and suffering pain. This can be a major issue in formal settings such as interviews for employment or education if the interview panel do not understand the issue.

How to help and provide support:

- May prefer lights to be dimmed, large, open bright spaces to be broken up, and to keep away from very crowded areas and other spaces with lots of things to see that could be distracting.
- Lack of eye contact can be explained to others: why someone does not make eye contact and what it does and does not mean.

It is particularly important that this issue is raised in advance of situations such as interviews and other formal settings, and assurances given to the autistic person at the time that others are aware of their condition and that they will not be negatively viewed as a result can be hugely helpful.

Under responsiveness (seekers)

Possible issues:

- May try to find more to look at to boost the input to their eyes.
- May be captivated by small details unnoticed by others, found staring into lights or scattering objects about a room to give them something to look at.
- Individual grains of sand or intricate patterns and colours can enthral them for long periods.

Potential impacts on life:

- May be easily distracted by aspects of their environment and lose focus on a task they are supposed to be completing, in the same way that others may become so engaged in a book or TV program that they lose track of time.

This can be problematic if it is a regular occurrence and prevents progress in other tasks or even basic self-care.

How to help and provide support:

Consider how an environment can be modified to be more comfortable for the person according to their needs - changes required are often very minor.

Sleeping environments can be particularly difficult, and extra lighting or night lights may help seekers to settle and fall asleep.

