

The benefits of deep pressure for people with autism



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Never underestimate the power of a hug. For autistic children, in particular, a reassuring touch from a parent or guardian can be powerful enough to pull them out of a potential meltdown.

'Deep pressure' is a form of therapy used to help autistic people in distress. But what exactly is deep pressure? How is it applied? And why does it have such a positive effect?

What is deep pressure?

Deep pressure is a form of therapy for people with a sensory sensitivity – applying pressure via touch to help soothe them when they're feeling anxious or overloaded.

For some people this type of pressure has a significant calming effect by allowing them to balance their proprioceptive sense (their sense of where they are within a space).

Scenarios where deep pressure can be effective include when an autistic individual is:

- Suffering from sensory overload*
- Feeling anxious about an upcoming event*
- Feeling isolated*

How can deep pressure be applied?

The most common way to apply deep pressure is by hugging the person. This doesn't have to be excessive – just a little more pressure than usual ought to be enough. If they prefer not to be hugged but don't mind general touch, even just placing your hands on their shoulders can help.

Massage techniques can also be used to apply deep pressure, but these of course aren't as simple or readily available as a hug. Tools like massage rollers can also be quite expensive.



Applying deep pressure hands-free

Some autistic individuals don't like to be touched at all, but that doesn't mean they can't benefit from deep pressure. Weighted clothing (such as vests and jackets) is a good alternative option, as are compression vests, which apply a small amount of pressure when worn.

Weighted blankets are also available, which the autistic person can wrap themselves in whenever they feel like they need support. Much like massage rollers, however, these are usually on the pricey side.



After application

Just because the effects of deep pressure don't appear straight away, it doesn't mean it hasn't worked. It all depends on the person and their level of distress, but it can sometimes take minutes – even hours – for them to start feeling calmer.

It's also a learning experience. Knowing how much pressure to apply, how to apply it and for how long, can take some time to figure out. Once you have it down, however, it's a simple but effective solution, and even just knowing you're nearby to apply pressure when necessary can help the autistic person in your life feel more in control of their own.

