

Autism and Suicide



Suicide is a very serious problem. Recent statistics from Samaritans show that around 14 suicides happen in the UK every day. And sadly, it appears that autistic individuals are much more at risk of taking their own life.

Let's take a closer look at the issue, including why people with autism may be more likely to suffer from mental health issues, and what can be done to help anyone struggling with suicidal thoughts. Because even the smallest gesture can be enough to save a life.

Understanding the link between autism and suicide

It isn't fully understood why people with autism have a higher risk of suicide, but it's generally believed to stem from communication difficulties. When we can't show or tell others how we feel, it can lead to feelings of isolation and hopelessness. Without being able to ask for help, suicide may seem like the only way out.



UK-based autism charity Autistica asked autistic people why they think there are higher rates of suicide in autism. Their answers included:

- Autistic people are more likely to suffer from mental health issues like depression and anxiety
- Many people with autism aren't diagnosed until later in life, and struggle in silence until then
- Autistic people find it difficult to access support
- Autistic people are more likely to have poor physical health
- There is a high rate of unemployment among autistic people

Warning signs of suicide in autistic individuals

Because of their struggles with expression, autistic people who feel suicidal may not show the typical signs and symptoms. It's important to keep a look out for any changes in their mood, habits, or behaviour. They may:

- Start making preparations, like buying medication or giving away their belongings
- Lose weight or stop eating
- Stop taking care of themselves
- Seem distressed and act recklessly

Offering help and support

Naturally, if you suspect that an autistic person may be considering suicide, you'll want to offer them support.

There are a few key ways that you can help to comfort them:

Trying to communicate with them

By expressing how we feel, we're more able to work through a difficult situation. Non-verbal individuals can find this particularly tough, but by utilising tools like flash cards and sign language, you can make them feel heard.

Promoting positive coping strategies

Navigating emotions and stress can be particularly confusing for autistic people, but there are coping strategies that can help. For instance, something as simple as a hobby can be enough to distract them from negative thought patterns. Few things are as invaluable as a support network in maintaining a person's emotional wellbeing, so try to be a calm, non-judgmental presence for them.



Putting them in contact with a professional

Depending on the severity of the case, you might be better seeking the help of a professional. Obviously 999 is the number to call in an emergency, but otherwise your GP should be able to help. They can refer the autistic person to crisis services and therapies, or offer medication like antidepressants if necessary. They may also suggest you contact mental health charities like Papyrus (for people under 35) or Samaritans.

