



# WELLNESS WORKS....

at Brain Injury Community Re-entry (Niagara) Inc.

A Publication from Brain Injury Community Re-entry Niagara's Wellness Works Committee

October 2011



# AUTISM



## WHAT IS AUTISM:

- ✚ Autism is a complex developmental disability that usually becomes apparent in the first three years of life
- ✚ Autism is part of a family of disorders called Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD's) which includes Autism, Asperger's Syndrome and PDD-NOS (Pervasive Developmental Disorder – Not Otherwise Specified)
- ✚ No two people experience autism in the same way.
- ✚ ALL individuals with autism have some degree of difficulty in these 3 areas:
  1. Verbal & non-verbal **communication**
  2. **Social Interaction**
  3. **Behaviour** (repetitive or restricted interests / activities)

## DID YOU KNOW??

- The current prevalence rate of autism is 1 in 150?
- It is estimated that there are as many as 80,000 individuals in Ontario affected with autism?
- The ration of males to females diagnosed is 4:1?
- Autism is more prevalent than Down Syndrome, childhood cancer, Cystic Fibrosis, or Multiple Sclerosis?

## AUTISM MYTHS!

- **MYTH:** If I've met one person with autism (or seen the movie Rain Man), I have a good idea of what all people with autism are like...
- **FACT:** People affected by autism are as different from one another as you and I.

**If you have met one person with autism,  
You have met one person with autism!**



# WELLNESS WORKS...

at Brain Injury Community Re-entry (Niagara) Inc.

---

## Facts About Autism...

- Current research links autism to biological or neurological differences in the brain
- Research suggests that autism has a highly complex genetic basis
- There is no cure for autism
- Treatment is available which can improve the quality of life for those living with autism

### **COMMUNICATION:**

Individuals with autism may exhibit...

- A delay in, or complete lack of the development of spoken language
- A marked impairment in the ability to initiate or sustain a conversation with others
- Difficulty pointing to objects, using gestures, body language, and facial expressions to help communicate wants and needs
- Unusual and repetitive use of language (immediate and delayed echolalia)
- No or minimal make belief or symbolic play appropriate for developmental level

### **SOCIAL INTERACTION:**

Individuals with autism may...

- Have problems initiating and maintaining interactions
- Have problems with social reciprocity and taking another's perspective
- Not understanding social "rules"
- No or minimal shared attention
- Difficulty with peer relationships
- Difficulty with non-verbal behaviors such as eye contact, facial expression, body posture & gestures

### **BEHAVIOUR:**

Individuals with autism may exhibit...

- Intense preoccupation or interest that is unusual in content or intensity
- Rigid need for non-functional routines and rituals
- Repetitive motor mannerisms
- Interest in parts of objects rather than using them as intended
- Difficulties with emotional regulation
- Impaired fine and/or gross motor coordination (awkward gait, difficulty with printing/using scissors)
- May also appear as aggression



# WELLNESS WORKS...

at Brain Injury Community Re-entry (Niagara) Inc.

---

## **Anxiety...**

May be due to...

- Communication deficits
- Difficulty with judgments
- Restricted range of interests
- Sensory differences

**Challenging behaviour can be a way of  
reducing (or coping with ) anxiety**

## **Potential Strengths...**

- Memorizing – great long-term memory
- Understand and use concrete information and great with rules
- Using visual information
- Learning routines quickly and being motivated by them
- Very dedicated to certain subject areas
- Take in “chunks” of information and retain it well

## **Sensory Issues...**

- The following systems may be affected:
  - Visual
  - Auditory
  - Smell
  - Taste
  - Vestibular (movement and balance), and
  - Proprioceptive (body awareness).

**Individuals can have difficulty processing and  
Utilizing multi-stimulus information = sensory overload**



# WELLNESS WORKS...

at Brain Injury Community Re-entry (Niagara) Inc.

## Individuals with ASD might not...

- Recognize different facial expressions
- Use non-verbal information to guide behaviour (i.e. gestures)
- Use gestures to communicate with others
- Pretend or use imaginative play
- Understand that people actions don't always reflect true feelings
- Understand the distinction between literal and non-literal speech
- Understand "white lies", irony, sarcasm and metaphors

## What can we do to help?

### Modify OUR Behaviour...

- Focus on what TO DO
- Teach appropriate alternatives
- Identify motivators
- Be consistent
- You stay calm and remain objective; don't take behaviors personally!!!

