

# Implementing good practice principles in clinical care

## Topic 1 – Welcome and Introduction

### Welcome

Narration:

Welcome to the module “Implementing good practice principles in clinical care”.  
The module will take approximately 15 minutes to complete.

### Overview

Narration:

On the screen is a summary of the main points that will be covered in this module.

It’s important to understand the specific healthcare needs of Autistic people and to support them during pregnancy and early parenthood.

In the module “Enhancing understanding of autism in healthcare contexts” you learnt about the core characteristics of autism that impact on an Autistic person’s perinatal experiences.

In this module you will learn how to apply evidence-informed strategies to adapt communication, sensory and environmental considerations to support Autistic people during pregnancy, birth, and early parenthood.

The information is based on research, lived experience and the expertise of Aspect, Autism Spectrum Australia.

### Introduction

Narration:

Many Autistic parents only learn they are Autistic after having children.

There are growing concerns that Autistic females are being overlooked, diagnosed later than males, or misdiagnosed altogether. Barriers to diagnosis, such as cost and long waitlists, affect all Autistic individuals.

This makes it important to deliver individualised health care both to Autistic people with a professional diagnosis and those who may self-identify as Autistic.

## Topic 2 – Strategies to support Autistic people during pregnancy, and early parenthood

### Strategies to support Autistic people during pregnancy, birth and early parenthood

#### **Narration:**

First, let's hear from Cherise sharing her top strategies for working with people with Autism.

#### **Video transcript:**

I think it's really neuroaffirming care in a sense that you have the right language terminology that you are, you know, presenting as an ally and that you understand their difference and not, not approaching in any judgmental way at all. Like, when I see the women I will generally say you've, you know, been referred because of your, you know, you're autistic or you're ADHD or you're neurodivergent. And, you know, we sit and just have a general conversation and I'll ask them about their sensitivities, you know, sensitivities, their sensory sensitivities. And I'll, you know, sit down and we'll go through the list of, you know, do you have any auditory? Do you have any tactile? Do you have any, you know, that, you know, that sort of thing go through and allow the women to describe in their own words what their sensitivities are.

So I find it it's really helpful to put like the heading of like tactile and then them describe, you know, do they, you know, they might like soft fabrics or, you know, whatever. You know, we had one woman who's found it hard for the warm water in the shower to touch her skin and it would take 10 minutes to get under the shower. So I think it's really good to tease out that individual person's sensitivity. Because you're trying to you're trying to develop a plan so that when they come into the hospital, they're admitted into the hospital. We've got we've got all that noted down. And I think that's, that's, that's really helpful for the midwives that or the clinicians at any touch point to have that knowledge in advance. But when I do the childbirth information sessions, I will say to them the time that you're and I and I ask them about overwhelm. What does overwhelm look like for them? Do they stim? Do they use fidget toys?

And I think just when you're asking those questions, they automatically, I feel you automatically get a sense of, oh, you are an ally. You understand it, you know, because you're using the terminology, you're asking about them and on their and their individual need. And that's why we called it the individual needs clinic. So when I do the preparation for birthing, I'll say the time that you're probably going to become overwhelmed is when you're in the birth centre and you're having a baby. So I say to them to do a birth plan. And quite often I will also ask if there's a partner, does, is your partner neuro neurodivergent as well? Because it's not uncommon for pregnant women to have an also a neurodivergent partner.

So I think it's like giving giving the woman, giving the person's information so that they've got strategies for when they've had the baby to maybe be dealing with some of and being prepared for some of the challenges that may happen.

## Strategies to support Autistic people during pregnancy, birth and early parenthood

### **Narration:**

It's important to understand the specific healthcare needs of Autistic people and to develop effective strategies to support them during pregnancy and early parenthood.

In this topic we will go through these evidence-informed strategies to improve patient outcomes for Autistic people.

### Consider sensory needs and accommodations (Part 1)

#### **Narration:**

First, let's consider how you can make a more sensory-friendly environment for Autistic patients. This will help Autistic people feel more comfortable and less anxious during medical visits.

### Consider sensory needs and accommodations (Part 2)

#### **Narration:**

Autistic people process the sensory environment differently. In addition, a lot of Autistic people report heightened sensory experiences during pregnancy. This means the sensory environment of healthcare facilities becomes even more challenging for pregnant Autistic people.

Adapting the healthcare environment and making accommodations to make the experience more sensory-friendly is important to improving the outcomes for Autistic people.

Let's look at some ways you can do this.

### Facilitate appointment attendance and engagement

#### **Narration:**

It may be challenging for Autistic people to attend frequent medical appointments due to increased social and communication demands, and sensory overload. Offering telehealth appointments may be more appropriate.

Some Autistic people find it hard to use the telephone to make an appointment. Offering alternatives like booking online will reduce this stress.

Here are some other strategies you can use.

### Encourage the presence of support people

#### **Narration:**

Having a friend or family member who understands the Autistic person's sensory experience and communication needs can facilitate communication, provide reassurance, and assist with processing information.

A support person can advocate to medical staff on their behalf and help create a space where the Autistic person feels safe. They can also help with practical tasks like reading through paperwork.

## Support predictability and routine

### **Narration:**

A healthcare setting can often be an unpredictable environment with unpredictable outcomes. Wait times can often be unknown and procedures required may be unplanned. This can prove challenging for Autistic people who typically prefer routine and structure. Here are some ideas for how you can help reduce anxiety by supporting Autistic people's need for predictability and routine.

## Improve handover and continuity of care (Part 1)

### **Narration:**

Where possible, provide continuity of care – and when you can't, you can help Autistic people achieve continuity by seeing a trusted GP. You can also talk to them and acknowledge the barriers we know that exist when accessing healthcare workers. Autistic people who did receive continuity of care said that it really changed their experience and meant they could have individualized care, build rapport, and have longer appointments. Here are some strategies to help improve continuity of care.

## Improve handover and continuity of care (Part 2)

### **Narration:**

Allison is an Autistic person who has shared her experience with labour. Read this extract and reflect on what strategies could have been used by healthcare professionals during her pregnancy and labour to help Allison have a different experience.

## Utilise diverse communication strategies (Part 1)

### **Narration:**

Many Autistic people find it difficult to communicate their needs and symptoms to healthcare professionals.

Try this activity to identify some strategies to help communicate with Autistic people.

## Utilise diverse communication strategies (Part 2)

### **Narration:**

There are many strategies you can use to help Autistic people communicate with you and improve their healthcare outcomes.

Review the ones shown on screen.

## Topic 3 Autistic meltdowns and shutdowns

### Autistic meltdowns and shutdowns

**Narration:**

Many Autistic people have shared that a meltdown or shutdown is a common experience during labour.

Phung et al conducted a study into the experiences of Autistic adults which described the lead up to an Autistic meltdown or shutdown.

"During this stage, the Autistic individual experiences fatigue, feelings of being overwhelmed, slowed cognitive processing, and struggles with cognition. It is crucial to support and encourage Autistic individuals to reduce emotional and sensory pressures during this phase in order to prevent meltdowns from occurring."

### Autistic meltdowns and shutdowns

**Narration:**

Being touched without consent, receiving treatment they do not understand, or experiences during birth and labour could all cause a meltdown or shutdown.

If a meltdown or shutdown does occur:

- Give them time and space to recover.
- Limit speaking, especially questions.
- Do not touch the person.

### Autistic meltdowns and shutdowns

**Narration:**

There are various sensory triggers that may cause an Autistic meltdown or shutdown. Try this activity to see how many you can identify.

### Autistic meltdowns and shutdowns

**Narration:**

Pregnancy and early parenthood may heighten the likelihood of meltdowns and shutdowns—not necessarily because sensory sensitivities change, but because the broader context of pregnancy introduces significant additional stressors. Increased anxiety, frequent medical appointments, unfamiliar clinical environments, bodily changes, and the demands of navigating systems that are often not neurodivergent-affirming can all accumulate. In this context, sensory triggers that might usually be manageable may instead lead to overwhelm. It is not the sensory experience alone, but the combination of environmental, emotional, and systemic factors during pregnancy that can reduce a person's capacity to cope.

## Summary

### **Narration:**

Thank you for completing Aspect's module "Implementing good practice principles in clinical care".

We hope you now have a greater understanding of how to apply evidence-informed strategies to support Autistic people during pregnancy, birth, and early parenthood.

We also hope you recognise the importance of adapting communication, sensory, and environmental considerations to improve patient outcomes.

Before you go you may like to download the checklist with all the strategies we covered in this module.

If you'd like to hear from Autistic people sharing their lived experience of pregnancy, birth, and early parenthood we suggest you complete the "Integrating lived experience insights into practice" module next.

You will also find a wealth of practical ideas and suggestions on our website for new parents.