# Index

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>INTRODUCTION</strong></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>USING THE MANUAL</strong></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>THE ROLE OF A MENTOR</strong></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Standard of Living</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Personal Health</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Achievements in Life</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Personal Relationships</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Personal Safety</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Community /Connectedness</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Future Security</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Spirituality /Religion</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION

Historically there has been a strong gender bias of more males than females with autism spectrum disorders (ASD). According to the 37 epidemiological studies reviewed by Fombonne (2005) the male/female ratios varied from 1.4 to 1 to 15.7 to 1. (The Lorna Wing Centre, 2014).

According to the NAS Lorna Wing Centre autism presents differently in females when compared to males and it is possible that during diagnosis girls mask symptoms better than boys. As a result, girls are often misdiagnosed and consequently their needs are not well attended to.

One of the aims of Autism in Pink project (a partnership by NAS, UK; FPDA, Portugal; Autismo Burgos, Spain and Edukaciniai Projekta, Lithuania) has been to contribute to improve the lives of women with autism and to improve the knowledge of the people supporting and working with women with autism.

This Manual created from the results of Autism in Pink project uses information gathered in the workshops and from the interviews and questionnaires completed by women participants included in the main target group of the project.

The project defined the main target group as a group of 10–12 women with ASD aged 16–40 years from each participant country. The total group consisted of 46 women participants, whose average age was 26 years old.

There is huge variation among the women with autism in the target group. Some have communication and social competencies that appear to be only slightly impaired, whilst others are much more impaired in these areas, including some who are non-verbal or lack expressive language, and some who lack receptive language. Some are not able to read or write at all.

The Manual is available in downloadable pdf form and has been written to specifically address teachers, carers and families of women with autism (in all autism spectrum conditions including Asperger’s syndrome).

This information is to be used together with the Online Learning Module, the documentary film and the Online Book “Breaking the silence”, which contains life narratives written by the project participants.

On the Online Learning Module the participants in the project made reference to the role of mentors and how they could intervene to help the women with autism with whom they live, teach or work. In this Manual we point out those examples fed exclusively by the information gathered in the project. We also use statements made by mothers, teachers or carers collected from the texts of the interviews and the film.

Age as well as school level differences are also important to consider. At the time data was collected from the younger participants when they were still finishing high school; others were at universities or professional schools while others had higher education qualifications and had a paid employment or were unemployed.

Each person is unique. Every person with autism is unique.
The Manual is complementary to the Learning Module. It has the same structure found in the Learning Module: it is divided in 8 areas, determined by the domains of the Personal Wellbeing Index (PWI-A), an instrument to evaluate Quality of Life. The personal experiences of the women with autism as well as their problems were grouped in these particular areas:

1. Standard of Living  
2. Personal Health  
3. Achievements in Life  
4. Personal relationships  
5. Personal Safety  
6. Community / Connectedness  
7. Future Security  
8. Spirituality / Religion

In each of these domains we picked up examples of issues/obstacles identified by the women participants and we chose the specific strategies proposed in the Learning Module most relevant to the role of a mentor. We tried to point out what the mentor could do as an example.

The role of the mentor in some of the domains of PWI-A is very similar. The strategies are either repeated in the mentioned chapters or the reader is referred to consult the domain containing similar strategies.

The strategies women chose for the Manual are not exclusively applicable to persons with autism. They can be used in many educational situations. We didn’t want to be exhaustive and we are well aware that the strategies pointed out by the women are not original. We have picked up the examples and strategies given by the women participants during the workshops or written in the questionnaires.

The Manual is a point of departure it contains the specific strategies pointed out by the women in this project but readers may remember other situations and propose other kind of strategies. Readers may adjust the strategies to the different roles of mentors and to the different contexts, cultures or backgrounds of the women with autism.

This is a European project and besides women with autism being unique individuals they are all influenced by the different educational contexts and by the different cultures of their countries. However many of the obstacles they find are common as well as the strategies pointed out.
THE ROLE OF A MENTOR

In the case of Pat all the members of the family are mentors. They act like a team. She tells us her family played a fundamental role in her life. In the case of Emy many people in the community played the role of mentors on different occasions.

Luisa is an orphan and lives in a residential home not specifically for people with autism. One of the carers acts as her mentor. She takes Luisa to spend the weekend out of the residential home helps her to choose her clothes or to use make up.

Concept of mentor

*Mentor* in this Manual is the person that can help women with autism. Mentors can be parents, siblings, grand parents, teachers, carers, neighbours and friends. It can be anyone who helps someone with autism. It doesn’t matter if it is an old grandparent that helps the person to read a story or a younger brother that explains how to cross the street.

There are formal mentors provided by authorities. They are persons in charge of the individuals in the residences or schools; their parents or other legal tutors. There are occasional mentors who can be mentors for a certain trip or excursion.

In many situations it is crucial to have someone suitable to support or give advice

Statement from the mother of a participant in the project.

*Since she was a little girl I have been the translator of life to my daughter.*

I helped her to understand the situations around her. I explained the strange behaviour of other people. I taught her how to deal with different persons. She used to speak to everybody in the street. I tried to teach her to distinguish friends from strangers.

Qualities of a mentor

The women in the project told us what they think are the qualities of a mentor:

Mentors must:

• have a good understanding of autism
• know the main characteristics of autism and be aware of myths and prejudices
• understand the uniqueness of each person with autism

*Mentors need to be able to support you in a way that is appropriate to you, and to help you to learn how to do things yourself rather than do them for you, in order to become more independent in the future.*

• they need to be able to build a good understanding of you as an individual
• they need to be able to support you in a way that is appropriate to you
• they must help you to learn how to do things yourself rather than do them for you
• They must teach you to be independent in order to become more independent in the future
1. Standard of Living

Jess wants to find a well paid employment to live independently, Tania wants to learn to take out money from an ATM machine and to make an excel table to control her expenses. Len wants to have a part time job in the laundry and get some pocket money and Katia wants to be an actress.

The women participants in the project have different ways of living and so their goals to improve their own standard of living can be different.

However they encounter common obstacles about dealing with finances, accommodation, keeping control of their possessions or travelling alone.

Strategies concerning problems that can happen:

1.1 MONEY / FINANCES

Money is abstract so can be difficult to understand.

What mentors can do

Help to use some of the strategies pointed out by the women in the Learning module.

Mentors can help women to:

- link money to their personal interests in daily life at home:
  - meals, dresses, books, make-up
- go shopping or to the market picking up the cheaper goods and comparing prices with quantities
- understand the relationship between price / quality
- make a list of the things they want to buy with the prices on
- draw objects or goods they need to buy. Communication may use different tools
- consult catalogues with prices on the internet
- navigate the internet. Go shopping on the internet

It is important that the mentor understands that helping the person is not the same as doing the activities for them.

It is likely that the person will get more and more self confident.

After some practice, let the woman be more and more independent.

Learning by answering questions

The mentor can ask questions

How much money do you need to go to the movies? And how much do you need if you are going to the movies with a friend?

How much does a meal cost? Put the separate prices of food together and add the prices up.

Accompany the woman with autism to the bank to make a deposit or help her to take out money from an ATM machine. Teach her the different steps and then ask her to do them in order. Each step must be learned before going on to the next.
If you are a teacher at school you can ask things linked to the life in school:
If the woman needs a pencil, a pen or a meal tell her to compare process and consult tables.
Propose exercises that deal with monetary values.
Ask the woman to do it herself. Ask her to create tables with prices.

1.2 ACCOMODATION

Sharing can be difficult especially with other adults who may have different expectations about rules and routines.

What mentors can do

If the woman with autism is independent and can live in an apartment of her own

The mentor can help the woman to choose the apartment, and to check the advantages and problems related to the apartment. They can help her to set up the contract with the landlord. Sometimes it is difficult to choose a place to live without company.

If the woman with autism lives at home

The mentor can be a member of the family and can help:

- to put visual cues and labels up so the woman with autism can have a more friendly and structured space
- to create a visual schedule with the routines and tasks
- to ask the teacher to do the same at school
- encourage her to put information at the door like in hotels. For example: Don’t bother me now. I’m listening to music. I want to be quiet. Ask the woman to choose a sign/symbol or draw an image to put on the door
- establish rules with her. She must respect others’ rules. For example meal times, time to take a shower

If accommodation is shared: in a residence or an apartment

It is important to know the rules of the house. The mentor can be the person in charge of the residence.

If the mentor is in charge of the residence, they can explain the rules. They should explain why they exist and be very objective. Remember that persons with autism want to know why.

- help the woman with autism to put up visual cues and create schedules
try to find somewhere like a “corner” so she can have a private place just for her
• respect private possessions and help her not to be deprived of her possessions by others
• if the residence is not specific to people with autism be attentive to others. It is difficult for a person with autism to live with non autistic people
• encourage other colleagues to help the woman with autism and give her presents

1.3 LEISURE ACTIVITIES

*Travel difficulties can be restrictive. ...public transport can be extremely stressful and taxis are expensive.*

Some women with autism may not be able to go anywhere unaccompanied.

**What mentors can do**

• if the woman is not independent, try to get someone to accompany her so she can go out – a friend might want to go to the same places as the woman
• help her to check prices and to find reduced prices
• Encourage her to join a group of people like girl scouts – it is a good thing for women with autism to be part of a group
• help her to enrol in an excursion, for example with the church
• choose Museums or activities with free entrance, walking tours or other activities most people enjoy
• at Christmas many people enjoy window shopping or watching Christmas lights

(See Personal Safety)
2. Personal Health

Everybody has health problems but a little problem sometimes may turn to a very big problem, if you are a woman with autism. You may find it difficult to explain exactly what you feel. You may have sensory problems: sensitivity to noise, smell, bright light, other visual stimulus.

You may be afraid to have pain or to go to the doctors, a hospital or to a dentist. On the other hand many doctors may also have fear of autism. They can sometimes generalise the challenging behaviours, the lack of communication or some co morbidities like epilepsy the women may have. They may be afraid of women having tantrums or a strange reaction to being touched.

Strategies concerning common problems and what mentors can do

2.1 PHYSICAL / MENTAL / FEMININE AND SEXUAL HEALTH

Mentors can be members of her family, a teacher, a friend or a colleague.

- they must learn what to do if the woman has an epileptic seizure. It is helpful to take a first aid course
- they can help a person giving her the medication to prevent a seizure
- they can go with her to the hospital or call an ambulance

Mentors can be teachers or carers or staff. She likes to make tapestry and so the teacher tries to keep her busy so she will not feel depressed.

Mentors can be teachers or carers or staff. Explain to her why routines change and try to make her understand that things may change everyday and she must adjust her life to the changes.

Ask the doctor to give her a diet prescription so she will be more reassured.

Somebody must be attentive to her and give her appropriate medication before she’s in pain.

Teachers help her to cope with her health problems. Her family and teachers taught her how to use medical terms to explain her symptoms.

What mentors can do

The role of a mentor is crucial in different settings:

In the hospital a nurse or a volunteer can try to reduce their anxiety by speaking with the woman, going to the bar for a refreshment or going to the restaurant for a snack...

Doctors must be confident and show the women that they can relax They must not fear tantrums or challenging behaviours.
Mary often goes to the hospital. She is hypersensitive and feels uncomfortable because the lights are very bright, the smells are strong and the waiting rooms are noisy.

Susana is hyposensitive to pain. She has a high pain threshold; sometimes she has a small stone inside her shoes but she’s not conscious of the pain or its cause.

Emily may need to go on a diet but it’s difficult for her to follow one in a systematic way.

Lara plays in the band. She wants to appear slim and pretty. She likes to put on make up and perfume. She loves painting her nails with coloured nail polish.

Emily is not motivated to change her appearance. She thinks it is not worth the effort.

All the people at the hospital are possible mentors
- the nurses
- the administrative staff
- other patients while in the waiting rooms
- doctors
- carers
- psychologists
- therapists

2.2 SENSORY DIFFERENCES

(see Personal Safety)

Nurses can act as mentors. They can be helpful by getting a place where Mary can rest. Other people in the waiting room can talk to Mary and reassure her. They can compare her situation with their situations, for example.

A mentor can be a person who knows the woman with autism and may help to identify the cause of the pain and “translate” it to the doctors or nurses.

2.3 EATING AND KEEPING FIT

Her carer is the person who acts like a mentor. She teaches her how to follow rules, not to eat so much, and to pick up healthy food and fruit. She doesn’t like to practise sports but a colleague or a sibling may interest her in some type of sport they practice and they may propose to her to join the group.

2.4 PERSONAL HYGIENE, GROOMING AND APPEARANCE

She is easily motivated by examples from others. Her mentors are her colleagues and other women who help her to be pretty.

Her colleagues may show her how little things make a difference: just a more sophisticated hair style, for example.

Some helpful strategies mentors can use

If they are in charge of services, they may organise.

- training for professionals
- training for women with autism to help build confidence when communicating with health professionals
- written checklists with small aids
- information about the rights of the women

(see Personal Relationships)
3. Achievements in Life

Tania wants to learn how to live independently and she wants to use Excel tables to control her expenses. She made a huge effort to complete this achievement.

Helena is an artist. She doesn’t speak. She communicates her feelings and her wills through drawings and paintings. She enjoys doing it. She always wants the appraisal of her teacher when the task is completed. She needs people to recognise the effort she’s put in out in to complete the task.

Maria has difficulties with physical co-ordination and hyper mobility. She must not set goals that are too high in relation to physical education or sports. She might be deceived.

Emily wants to live independently but her co-morbidities must be controlled.

Each person is different and so is every woman with autism. Their uniqueness means that there will be differences in what they consider as achievements in their own life. She must set the goals for her achievements. Achievements are related to their own sense of self. They depend on the skills and abilities of each person but also in the perseverance in completing a task.

(see Spirituality/Religion)

Strategies concerning problems that can happen

Her perseverance to complete this task was enormous and well recognised by her teacher acting as a mentor. She helped her to take the breaks and the time she needed. She also aided her to separate the task into small structured tasks and to set a goal for each one.

Achievements can be related to the ability to communicate and interact socially, to progress in their careers, to have a car, or getting on well with their own lives. If the women can paint or draw or play, achievements may be connected with their talents. People around her often think she doesn’t need to make an effort to paint or draw but this is not true. She must organise her work just as anyone else would and it takes time for her to begin and to complete her task.

Her mentor trains her to set goals that she can reach.

Some of the women in the project have managed to find a job and have an independent life while others have co-morbidities that are strong obstacles to them reaching their goals. They must find medical help so they can reach their achievements.

What mentors can do

Help women with autism:
• to define her goals and the achievements of their goals
• not to compare their own achievements to other people’s achievements
• to discover their unique achievements
• to be ambitious
• to set goals according to their own capabilities
• to break tasks into small structured steps
• to relate their achievements to their own motivation
• to develop their own means of expression and communication

Don’t cut their wings but tell them not to fly too high. They can be deceived in their achievements.

(see Personal Health, Personal Relationships, Community / Connectedness and Spirituality / Religion)
Personal relationships are all types of interactions and relationships with other people in all areas including family members, partners, friends, colleagues, members of the public, teachers, health professionals, employers and anyone else who manages to interact with the woman.

This is perhaps the area where the mentor plays the most important role to improve wellbeing. The first mentor and the one who probably will stay near the person for the rest of her life is her mother.

The women are more able to follow social actions by delayed imitation because they observe other children and copy them, masking the symptoms of Asperger syndrome (Atwood, 2007) teachers and carers must be very attentive to the symptoms.

As research pointed out women are sometimes misdiagnosed. Parents may be the first to discover autism, sometimes even before clinicians do as they are observing their children all the time and they can see the hidden characteristics.

Strategies concerning problems that can happen:

What the mentors can do

Parents and family members can be the mentors at home

They may help the woman with autism to develop skills at home, to do home tasks and to develop communication and interaction with siblings and grandparents. Everybody can help. The family is the most important team of mentors. Divide roles of interaction. For example, the younger brother can teach the woman to set the table.

You must treat women with autism as adults – they can be naïve but they are an adult

Teachers, carers, friends and other professionals

- improve 2 way communication
- ask the woman to express her needs
- ask questions about autism
- help the woman to live with autism
- help her to explain her condition
- use peer teaching with her colleagues
- highlight her achievements
One of Berta’s problems was trusting the public and friends in the same way. She used to speak to everyone in the street as if she was friends with all of them.

Luisa can engage in a conversation but she doesn’t know how to initiate one.

Her mother spent much time teaching her the difference between chatting with friends and just being polite to other people.

**Her friends and teachers taught Luisa to learn the signs of a healthy relationship as well as the warning signs of an inappropriate or abusive relationship**

People with autism can have problems developing relationships because they don’t seem to be interested in maintaining friends, or boyfriends. However they are interested in establishing relationship but they seem incapable of doing it.

**What mentors can do**

- explain possible cues and body language to help the woman to show feelings
- help the woman with autism to learn from difficulties and use them to improve her understanding
- increase the understanding of autism among the people around the woman
- ask the woman with autism to take a step back and to try to take a different perspective from her own
- put lies/untruths into a more general perspective and ask the woman the reason why she tells them

**Help the woman to improve communication**

This could involve making lists, writing instructions, creating timetables, using picture cards, symbols, visual aids and written supports.

**In short**

Help the woman to enjoy life, friendships and to have fun and do activities with other people, plan activities and engage in conversation with friends.

(See Communication/Connectedness and Personal Relationships)
5. Personal Safety

Keeping safe, physically, mentally and socially

Women can be particularly naïve and vulnerable socially, which can lead to a range of possible safety issues. Sensory differences can also lead to potentially dangerous situations.

Strategies concerning common problems and what mentors can do

Travel difficulties / using public transports

Women with autism no matter how independent they are may face difficult situations when they go around on public transport. The woman maybe surrounded by a group of hostile people. People may make advances inside buses or trains.

Parents, teachers or friends must tell her to look determined about where she is going. Hesitation may be a vulnerable attitude and it could lead to a possible situation of attack.

She is tall and likes to look at people from above to show she is not afraid.

What mentors can do

• go with the woman without imposing his or her presence. For example: Are you going to school? May you keep me company? I'm going the same way
• to read the cues that are difficult to follow For example: can you help me to understand this sign?
• to include the woman in his/her group For example, a community group
• to ask her if she needs help
• to intervene when he / she sees someone trying to force an unwanted conversation upon the woman

If the woman with autism has additional sensory or mobility problems a friend can offer to go with her to a show or a concert or to some other popular event in the community.

It is good to have a person, who is available to go around with the woman with autism, even for a short distance

A person who understands the situation; a group of persons like a family, for instance or a teacher, a policeman that is around the place.

It is important to avoid dark alleys, and to keep money in a closed purse.

Bullying and exploitation of naivety

Bullying can happen in many places and situations: in the street, at school, in a swimming pool.

Marta wants to go around by herself but she’s afraid she might experience problems in the street. She stops to see the way to go and she hesitates.

Maria is always carrying her belongings in a little bag in tow. She never leaves it even at school.
Pat was frequently bullied in the playground at her school by groups of boys. She was constantly under stress.

Sophie was with a group of friends in a pub. She is an adult and usually behaves quite well in public places. Suddenly she had a terrible reaction. She ran away and people had to go after her and take her home in a taxi.

Women with autism are particularly vulnerable to this. They can be naïve and they are not suspicious of people who speak to them. They believe what people say.

Her parents sent her to do a course of judo and she also engaged herself in practicing sports. Now she is not afraid of the boys. She is very tall and knows judo; she is very confident.

What mentors can do

The best mentors can be families, teachers, people who can act or advice or pay for lessons. For example: martial arts, sports, boxing or other means of defence.

Sensory differences

Sensitivity to many stimuli at the same time may confuse women with autism. The situation can happen in the street or in a public room.

Being exposed to noise, visual stimuli, and loud music at the same time can put women with autism in a dangerous situation.

Her mentor or her companion must be aware of this problem and try to avoid these danger situations.

Unexpected situations or incidents that need to be reported to the authorities, police and/or medical professionals

Sometimes it is difficult for women with autism to explain clearly the situation. They may use just a few words or a confused speech. They may be very stressed from the situation and may not know or have forgotten the rules they had learned.

What mentors can do

A mentor can be someone who is on the street and has seen the accident. They can help to call the police, to report the accident, to fill in the insurance documentation or even to call the ambulance.

(see Standard of Living, Community/connectedness)
6. Community / Connectedness

Joana is very happy living in her small community. Everyone knows her. She has many cousins, friends, colleagues. She goes everyday to her school. People speak to her and she speaks to every person she meets. She really is very lucky.

Mercedes lives in an apartment on the 14th floor of a building in a big city. She doesn't know her neighbours who she eventually meets in the lift. She couldn't find a job and she has not had the opportunity to make friends.

Svetlana goes to the bank but she meets people she knows from school. She might become puzzled because to her they belong to school and not to the bank.

Maria would like to act in the theatre. However she is shy. She joined an amateur theatre group. In the beginning she found problems with being accepted.

There are different experiences living in the community.

These 2 examples show the direct relationship community/connectedness has to the area of personal relationships.

In the first situation there are practically no risks for Joana and she's well protected by her acquaintances. The contrary happens in Mercedes situation. Her mentors have to take precautions to keep her safe and to improve her quality of life. She must get acquainted with the people living in the community and she must get involved in community organizations.

Who can be the mentors

Parents
Families
Neighbours
Friends
People belonging to the organizations in the community

What mentors can do

Living in the community has a direct impact on the area of personal relationships.

• explore the area the woman has skills in so she can get acquainted with people working in those areas. If she cannot apply for a paid job she must try voluntary work as a beginning
• show confidence in her skills
• help her to develop her body language
• help her to develop her self-esteem
• propose leisure activities which she might enjoy and have fun For example: roller skating, surfing, other sports and many other possible activities

Strategies concerning common problems and what mentors can do:

Using local facilities such as banks or shops may bring problems especially if the woman doesn't know anyone. It takes time for a woman with autism to get involved.

The persons she meets may explain to her why they are there. It is a way to establish conversation.

The director acted as her mentor. He showed confidence in her skills; Maria was enthusiastic and finally was accepted by the group.

It's possible she could find an older person to act as a mentor. Older people can accept and protect younger people. The mentor may help with shopping or some other small services.
Rosa likes to communicate on social networks. She wants to know people. However her naiveté means this can be dangerous.

She should therefore find a mentor to supervise her contacts on these social networks.

(See Personal Relationships)
Future Security

Abstracts concepts are difficult for people with autism to deal with.

Thinking about the future is difficult as it is generally abstract.

It is difficult for women with autism to make plans for the future.

The future is a huge gap for many women and is a source of anxiety.

Again women can face problems concerning finances and accommodation for the future.

Strategies concerning common problems:

• most women with autism will not be able to live independently. They depend on their families
• the future will be uncertain. Parents may die and the woman with autism will be alone
• other women are thought to be ineligible for support from social services because they appear able and articulate
• some live in residential homes and don’t have parents

Employment is difficult and only a small percentage of women with autism will get paid jobs in order to live independently.

Support from government is not enough and differs from country to country. Some people’s perspectives are not good. In Portugal, for example, there are not enough small residences for people with autism.

(See Standard of Living.)

What mentors can do

Again they can be friends, neighbours, carers, teachers, people the women have met in services, persons that want to help.

They can help women to fight for formal support in relation to Medical services, social services, NGOs, employment services and other existing services in the different countries where the women live. They can act as friends and formal mentors. NGOs fight for the rights of people with autism but it is a great battle.
However together we can try to:

- increase the circle of support around women with autism and achieve empowerment regarding autonomy in the daily lives of women
- learn about existing community resources for women with autism to seek and obtain help from
- look into turning hobbies and talents into a job
- be creative about creating new kinds of jobs that women with autism might be able to do
- engage women in voluntary jobs as a way of getting them involved in the labour market
- develop a platform for employment engaging enterprises
- find a support help line with contacts
- create a forum or a website with strategies and resources for independent living
- Ensure reasonable adjustments/reasonable accommodation is provided according to UN Convention

(see Standard of Living)
This domain of PWI interweaves closely with other domains; Community; Achievements and Personal relationships.

**Abstract concepts are difficult to understand by people with autism**

The women participants in the project explained:

> ...the more universally relevant aspect of the topic of spirituality is that of sense of self, which many women with autism feel that they struggle with.

If there is a domain that is difficult to deal with it is this one. To some women spirituality interweaves with religion because religion for them can be a concrete matter: going to mass, singing in the choir or joining groups like girl scouts.

In this sense they reach their achievements. They enjoy their activities in the church and it is also a good way to engage in community groups.

**Religions can be different according to the different cultures of people living in European Countries**

Their dogmas and principles are difficult to understand by some of the women participants. There are women who can deal with problems of spirituality. For them spirituality can be related with the norms of the community where they live or the religious principles they have been brought up with.

However they may not conform to those norms and may establish their own.

For example:

> Jenny like many other women with autism has a strong sense of justice she must tell the truth as to her the contrary of the truth is a lie. Her rules must make sense.

This rigid understanding of truth sometimes gets Jenny into trouble. The truth can be negative. Other people can be angry or sad and they certainly don't understand her point of view.

**Sense of personal wellbeing and development**

Some of the women admit they are not really interested in spirituality but they have a sense of personal wellbeing and development. They set their goals in life and their achievements are related to their interests and their sense of self.
What mentors can do

Mentors must be aware of some cues to understand the problems women with autism may encounter:

It is good to work in a team with all the persons involved in the process.

• sense of self must be individual. It must not be compared with the norms or rules of society
• the rules of right or wrong may not be the same to women with autism as the usual rules of society
• help the women to understand the rules of the society and to live well with other people
• explain some important rules that people with autism must absolutely obey. For example, traffic signs and signals
• explain with concrete examples that sometimes telling the truth can hurt a person’s feelings
• understanding what the other person is thinking (theory of mind) is difficult for women with autism – try to explain with drawings or photos
• use drawings or photos to explain the emotions of other people
• help women to appreciate their uniqueness and see their own worth. Never compare them with other people’s values or rules
• help women with autism to explore their talents in music, singing, drawing, painting, sports and martial arts
• if women are going to church encourage them to belong to the choir or to groups like scouts. Two of the women participants in the project sing in the choir and like it very much. It helped to build their confidence and to receive appreciation from others
• encourage them to belong to other groups in the community
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