

Wellbeing of persons with autism in times of COVID-19

The United Nations, in the context of the commemoration of the World Autism Awareness Day -which is celebrated every April 2nd-, seeks to create the necessary basic conditions to ensure a successful transition to adult life for people with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

This call becomes more relevant in the current context of crisis produced by the new coronavirus. The disruption of daily life caused by quarantine and social distancing may adversely impact people with ASD if the right support measures are not guaranteed. Routines allow for the management of stress and anxiety for everyone, specially for people with ASD. The permit Chile has given to people with ASD is in line with the accommodations needed for the community of people with cognitive disabilities.

Chile has followed the example set by Spain by making the confinement conditions a bit more flexible for people with autism, so that they may go out accompanied by their caregiver or companion. It is them who will be responsible to show the Disability Card, Disability Certificate (given by the Civil Registry Service) or medical certificate clearly stating the Autism Spectrum Disorder diagnosis to the respective authority. This permit must be requested in the name of the caregiver or companion, and its duration shall not exceed two hours per day.

Along with this measure, it is necessary that the information is delivered in an easy and clear format facilitating its understanding, maintaining daily routines -as much as possible- and practising stress management skills.

For health professionals, it is recommended that in the case of attending patients with ASD, they do so in a calm environment, at a slow pace, using direct language, respecting their choices and allowing them to be accompanied during the procedures.

The health emergency caused by COVID-19 represents a great challenge for the country, but it can also be transformed into an opportunity to strengthen our capacity to ensure the integrity and autonomy of all.

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