How to develop evidence based practice to support witnesses on the autistic spectrum (ASD) when they give evidence

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Why is it hard for ASD witnesses to remember unfamiliar faces?

What could work?

Memory
- Source monitoring - what has happened and who did it?
- Recency - recently- occurring events
- Serial position - first and last words recalled

Language
- Suggestibility
- Repetitive talking
- Time to process information
- Reporting fewer person details

Studies have shown that individuals with High Functioning Autism can act as reliable witnesses but they may be more reliant on prompts and cues to help accurate recall and identification.

McCrory et al, 2006; Bowler et al, 2004

A framework to help in the design and evaluation of an identification process that takes into account the cognitive profile of witnesses with ASD, hence maximising the quality of description provided and the accuracy of their responses during a video line up.

How?

At the interview stage
- A sketch approach - Ask them to draw (rather than verbally recall) anything they feel would help them remember what/who they saw

At the identification line-up
- Allow them to access their initial sketch to help retrieval and recollection of the face of the suspect

Useful resources

Autism: A Guide for Police Officers and Staff
www.autism.org.uk/.../publication/s/autism-a-guide-for-police.ashx