



Autism Spectrum Condition parent/carer information sheet

Autism is a condition that affects how a child communicates with and relates to other people and how they experience the world. All children diagnosed with autism share certain difficulties but autism will affect them differently. With the right support all children diagnosed with autism can be helped to learn, progress, be happy and feel safe and comfortable in school.

For a diagnosis to be made a child will have been assessed as having had persistent difficulties with 'social communication and social interaction' and 'restricted and repetitive patterns of behaviours, activities or interests'.

Persistent difficulties with social communication and social interaction

Social communication difficulties with:

- Understanding verbal and non-verbal language like gestures or vocal tone.
- Using or understanding facial expressions, tone, jokes and sarcasm.
- Understanding what to do in conversations.

Social interaction difficulties with:

- 'Reading' other people - recognising or understanding others' feelings and intentions.
- Expressing their own emotions.

So they may:

- Appear insensitive or socially inappropriate.
- Seek out time alone or not seek comfort from others.
- Find it hard to make friends even if they want to.

Restricted and repetitive patterns of behaviours, activities or interests

Repetitive behaviour and routines:

- The child can prefer to have a routine and rules so that they know what is going to happen.
- It may be difficult for the child to take a different approach to something once they have been taught one way to do it.
- The child may not be comfortable with change but may cope better if they can prepare for changes in advance.

Highly-focused interests:

- The child may have intense and highly-focused interests, often from a young age.
- These can change over time or be lifelong and can be anything from art to music or trains.
- Children diagnosed with Autism often report that the pursuit of interests is fundamental to their wellbeing and happiness.

Sensory sensitivity can be: Over- or under-sensitivity to sounds, touch, tastes, smells, light, colours, temperatures or pain.

A child diagnosed with autism may not have all of the above difficulties and the difficulties the child has can range from mild to severe (and may change over time and in response to support). A child diagnosed with autism will also have strengths, interests, abilities and skills the same as all children and it is important to keep in mind the child's strengths and difficulties when thinking about what support they might need.

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Strategies for home

These are examples of strategies for children diagnosed with autism that can be used by parents and carers. However, every child is different so parents and carers should carefully consider which strategies to use. The parent or carer can also contact support (information below).

1. Use of visuals in learning:

- a. Find pictures to go with text or verbal information.
- b. Draw pictures or diagrams with the child to support the information they are learning.
- c. Suggest the child records their ideas visually instead of using written text – you can then write their ideas for them under the pictures.

2. Use of visuals in the daily learning routine:

- a. Have a visual timetable available (a picture that represents each activity) or a time cards which add up to the amount of time the child will work for that day (e.g. cards which say 10/20/30 minutes written next to the picture of a clock)
- b. At the beginning of the day ask the child to choose which order the activities will go in for that day or which minute cards will be used for which activity.
- c. When an activity is finished the activity picture / clock picture can be put away.

3. Adult communication:

- a. Simplify your sentence structure
- b. Give a small number of instructions at a time or give instructions one at a time.

4. Keep things predictable: For example:

- a. Keep morning and evening routines and bed time the same.
- b. Keep learning in the same place and separate from areas where the child plays. If this is not possible try to make the space look different, e.g. turn table around.

5. Motivation

- a. Use your child's interests to motivate them in learning.
- b. Give your child regular breaks if needed and include physical exercise.
- c. Listen to your child's emotions about the current situation and reassure them – it is normal and OK to feel as they do. It may help to have emotion visuals available (e.g. emoticons) and use them regularly to communicate how you and your child are feeling.

Places for parents and carers or children to go for additional support

National Autistic Society helpline: 0808 800 4104, 10am-3pm, Monday to Friday	Child Autism UK helpline: 01344 882248.
Local Authority support: https://www.knowsleyinfo.co.uk/categories/covid-19-news-send	Childline (for your child): 08001111 (9am – midnight)
The SENCO at your child's school	111 for health concerns or 999 if an emergency

Information written/ adapted from <https://www.autism.org.uk/about/what-is/asd.aspx> by Dr Francesca Heffernan (educational psychologist). May 2020 for parents and carers during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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