

Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

What is it?

Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

ASD is a relatively new term that recognises there are a number of sub-groups within the spectrum of autism. Pupils with ASD find it difficult to:

- understand and use non-verbal and verbal communication
- understand social behaviour, which affects their ability to interact with children and adults
- think and behave flexibly, which may be shown in restricted, obsessional or repetitive activities.

Pupils with ASD cover the full range of ability and the severity of their impairment varies widely.

Some pupils also have learning disabilities or other difficulties, making diagnosis difficult.

Pupils with Asperger's syndrome should be recorded in this category. These pupils share the same triad of impairments but have higher intellectual abilities and their language development is different from the majority of pupils with autism.

How to identify?

- Poor coordination
- Anxiety and low mood
- Sensory issues
- Attention difficulties
- learning difficulties
- Tics
- Seizures.

Effective strategies to help?

Keep language simple, specific and concrete -

We are usually unaware of the complexity of the language we use. While children can normally make enough sense out of complex sentences, a child with autism may have little understanding

Allow time for your child to respond –

It may appear as though a child has not understood a question or statement, but often it just takes time to process the incoming information, up to 45 seconds in some cases. It can be frustrating and feel very abnormal, but giving your child time to respond will help them learn communication skills faster.

Establish eye contact –

A common feature of autism and Asperger's is a lack of eye contact. It is important to encourage proper eye contact. Other people are more likely to interact with your child, and it is the first step to your child learning to 'read' the facial expressions of others or follow your line of sight if you are indicating an object by looking at it.

Keep the volume and tone of your speech moderate –

While a loud angry tone of voice can be a useful part of discipline with challenging behaviours, it usually only worsens the situation for a child with Autism or Asperger's

Use your child's interests to build motivation –

Autism and Asperger's syndrome often result in a restricted range of interests, whether it be telephones, leaves or running water. Although a parent will not want to encourage an obsessive interest, these do provide a basis for building communication skills.

Avoid negative words that act as triggers –

Words such as 'not now', 'no' and 'stop' can act as triggers for challenging behaviour in autistic children. When this happens, it is necessary to find positive statements that redirect the child's behaviour.

Break instructions or long sentences into steps -

A key to helping a child learn complex skills is to break them into understandable pieces. The same principle works with communication

Useful link

<http://www.autism.org.uk/about-autism> - National Autistic Society

<http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Autistic-spectrum-disorder/Pages/Introduction.aspx> - NHS

<http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Autistic-spectrum-disorder/Pages/Introduction.aspx> - Autism speaks