



**Difference
not Disorder**

Introduction to autism parent pack

What is autism?

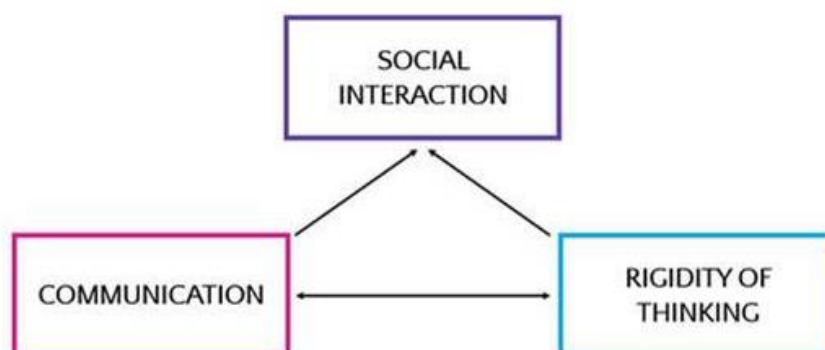
Autism Spectrum Condition (ASC) is a neurodevelopmental condition meaning difficulties are present due to differences in brain development.

Autism is a spectrum condition meaning that although the main areas of difficulties are the same, everyone with autism presents differently and the severity of these difficulties can vary greatly between each individual.

According to the National Autistic Society (2019) ASC affects approximately 700,000 children and adults in the UK.

Everyone with Autism has difficulties in three areas known as the triad of impairments, these being social communication, social interaction and social imagination/rigidity of thought.

Triad of impairments



Social communication – The ability to communicate with others both verbally and non-verbally; including, the ability to express yourself and also to process information from others.

Social interaction – Knowing how to interact with others and build relationships. It includes the unwritten social rules that we have as a society such as giving people personal space when talking to them. Knowing how social rules change in different situations.

Rigidity of thought – The ability to think flexibly, problem solve and know how to deal with unexpected changes.

Social communication

People with autism struggle with social communication; below is a list of possible communication difficulties that people with autism may experience:

- Knowing how to express themselves
- Knowing how to start a conversation or end a conversation
- Knowing when to talk and what to talk about
- Processing information, including instructions
- Understanding non-verbal gestures
- Connecting verbal and non-verbal communication together
- Understanding others point of view (theory of mind)
- Giving people appropriate eye contact
- Knowing how to adjust their language and non-verbal communication when speaking to different people
- Understanding jokes and sarcasm



How to help make social communication easier

- Start with their name
- Use a tangible help card if they cannot verbalise their feelings
- Give one instruction at a time, using a visual prompt alongside it
- Give time to process information
- Practice communication skills
- Role modelling
- Giving your child the opportunities to practice communication skills in a safe environment such as, at home
- Social Stories
- Comic Strip Conversations
- Try to see the world from your child's perspective
- Games which encourage communication skills such as emotion charades or board games
- Use closed questions
- Give your child time to explain things from their perspective
- Use simple, direct language



Social interaction

Below is a list of possible social interaction difficulties that people with autism might struggle with:

- Knowing the difference in social relationships such as, knowing the difference between a friend, acquaintance and a stranger
- Knowing how to behave around different people; e.g. knowing that it's not safe or appropriate to hug a stranger
- Understanding unwritten rules such as personal space and knowing how these can change in different situations
- Turn taking
- Sharing
- Knowing how to react to other people's behaviour and language
- Seeing things from other people's perspectives
- Understanding how others are thinking and feeling
- Making and maintaining friendships



How to help build social interaction skills

- Role Modelling
- Helping to break social interactions down to see what the difficulties are
- Practicing social interactions in a safe environment such as at home
- Choose one goal and break it down into section for child to practice
- Giving children/young people the opportunities to practice social interaction skills
- Comic Strip Conversations
- Social Stories
- Link skills to real situations
- Pick times to practice skills when your child is not highly stressed or distracted
- Board games can help to teach turn taking as they are visual
- Focus on the things that have gone well
- Talk out loud



Rigidity of thought

Below is a list of difficulties that children with autism might face due to struggles with rigidity of thought:

- Predicting what is going to happen
- Accepting other people's opinions
- Having very specific interests
- Repetitive behaviour and speech
- Frequent questioning
- Reassurance seeking
- Difficulty trying new things
- Find changes difficult to manage
- Liking to do the same things daily such as always sitting in the same chair or wanting to eat the same food
- Particular with foods they will eat, for example, not liking foods touching on their plate or only eating certain brands of food
- Transition's such as changing class, school or going on holiday can be very scary
- Knowing how to use generalise one skill in multiple situations such as catching a bus



How to help with rigidity of thought

- Making regular routines at home, including visual aids such as a calendar or daily timetables
- Social stories
- Plan as much as possible
- Stick to what you say you will do
- Plan for possible change e.g. "we might need to pick up another item whilst at the shop"
- Role modelling
- Speak out loud when you are problem solving each time a change happens; e.g. if the road is closed how will you still get to your destination
- Prepare for visiting places by looking online on websites, for example, if going to the zoo have a look at the website and maps or if going on holiday see if the airport has online visual tours
- Get your child involved in planning day trips and holidays if they are able to, it will help to give them a sense of control and knowing what is going to happen



Sensory needs

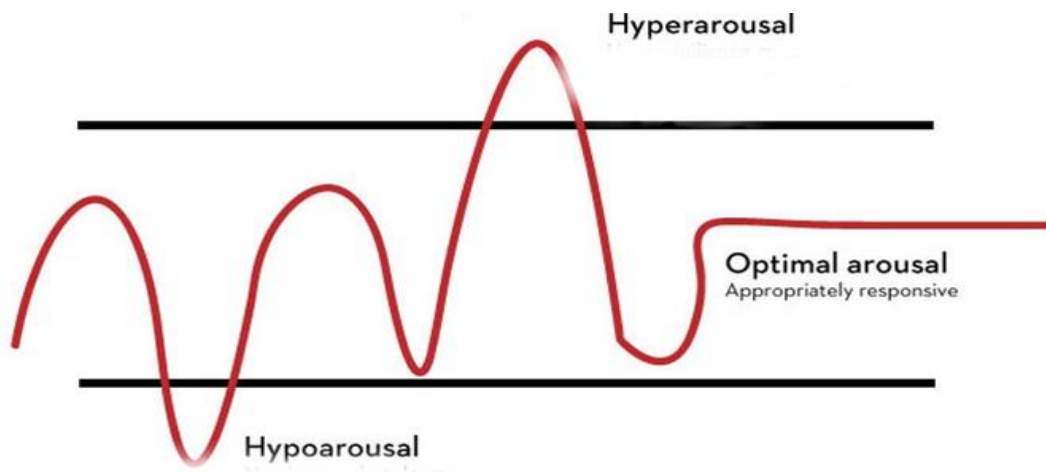
We all have sensory needs; however, for some these sensory needs can cause difficulties in daily life, causing excessive reactions to sensory input or lack of sensory input. Not all people are affected significantly by their senses but for those that are it can be useful to understand some of the sensory difficulties and what we can do about them.

To function properly in daily life we need to control the amount of sensory input we experience. We are always adjusting ourselves and our environments so we can feel comfortable, for example, if you get too hot you take your coat off and open a window or if you need to concentrate you might go to a quiet area to block out excessive noise.



We all have tolerance levels for each of our senses; we call this the window of tolerance. This window can vary depending on our emotional state, illness and stress levels. For example, if you are tired you might be more intolerable to noise.

Window of tolerance



From the table above you can see that for optimal performance we need to have the right balance of sensory input. People with sensory difficulties can be over sensitive (hyperaroused) or under sensitive (hypoaroused) to sensory stimulus. It is important to recognise if your child is under or over sensitive as this will guide you on what strategies can be used to help them cope with the environment.

There are a number of different senses, some suggest that we have near to 100 but there are seven senses which are well known which are – hearing, sight, sound, touch, smell, vestibular and proprioception.

Sensory difficulties and behaviours you might see

- Sudden noises
- Lights
- Misjudging the depth/ width of things
- Appear clumsy
- Using peripheral vision
- Crowds
- Being in busy environments; e.g. supermarkets and schools
- Tolerating certain materials
- Staying still
- Craving risky situations such as climbing high
- Hanging upside down
- Rocking
- Holding things too tight or not tight enough
- Covering ears
- Making noise such as humming
- Having a restricted diet / mixing food on plate
- Concentrating
- Stimming
- Bumping into people
- Showing signs of distress
- Too much sensory stimulation can lead to a meltdown

Strengths

Although there are difficulties that people with autism face, there are also many strengths that people with autism have. These include:

- Good eye for detail
- Honest
- Good time keeping
- Organised
- Good sense of humour
- Able to think logically
- Great memory for facts
- Knowledgeable



Helpful resources and links

Websites

National Autistic Society
www.autism.org.uk

National Autistic Society (Stafford and District Branch)
www.nasstaffordanddistrict.webeden.co.uk

Autism West Midlands
www.autismwestmidlands.org.uk

North Staffs Asperger/Autism Association
<https://nsaaa.org.uk>



Books

[The Asperkid's \(Secret\) Book of Social Rules: The Handbook of Not-So-Obvious Social Guidelines for Tweens and Teens with Asperger Syndrome](#)

[Sisterhood of the Spectrum: An Asperger Chick's Guide to Life](#)

[All Cats Have Asperger Syndrome](#)

[Dude, I'm an Aspie!: Thoughts and Illustrations on Living with Asperger's Syndrome](#)

Other useful references

Purple Ella – an autistic mum with two children whose [YouTube channel](#) features a number of videos explaining autism difficulties

Prof Tony Attwood – a psychologist who specialises in autism; [search on YouTube](#) for useful videos featuring a number of his presentations