

AUTISM – PARENTS GUIDE

WHAT IS AUTISM?

Autism is a lifelong condition that affects how people perceive, communicate and interact with the world. Autism is often referred to as ASD (autism spectrum disorder) or ASC (Autism spectrum condition) - they both refer to a difficulty in some of or all of the following areas: Social communication and interaction, restrictive or repetitive patterns of behaviour and sensory difficulties (sight, smell, touch, noise). There is no “Cure” for Autism and no medication that will “fix” it. Support and guidance is important in helping autistic people. Many people with Autism achieve well and live a full life – they just perceive the world around them differently to others.

Every Autistic child is different and will need different levels of support –some may need support regularly whilst others may only need support at specific times or when facing certain situations. Some autistic people have other conditions that require support alongside their Autism.

SOCIAL INTERACTION DIFFICULTIES

Children may have difficulty with:

- Recognising and/or understanding the feelings of others
- Understanding how they are feeling and how to regulate their emotions
- Struggle to understand social norms and these should be explicitly and consistently taught at home and school
- React in unexpected ways ie a direct demand may trigger anxiety or distress
- They may prefer to be on their own – this could be preference, a reaction to being overloaded by too many people or a lack of understanding of how to interact with others

SOCIAL COMMUNICATION

- Autistic learners often have difficulty interpreting verbal and non verbal gestures, facial expressions and tone of voice. Some will have good communication skills but will need explicit teaching to understand body language and tone of voice.
- Other challenges include: Taking things literally and not understanding abstract concepts, processing information or answering questions at speed, applying language learnt in appropriate contexts
- Some autistic children repeat back learnt phrases without knowledge of the meaning therefore discussing language and meaning is very important

SENSORY DIFFICULTIES:

- People with autism may experience sensory information in a different way to others – they may be over or under stimulated by sound, touch, taste, light, colours, smells, temperatures and pain.
- Some autistic pupils may be able to explain their needs and some may react with negative behaviours. Understanding the cause is vital as this can help those around the child to modify the environment, support and explain situations so that the overstimulation, distress or high levels of anxiety can be reduced.

REPETITIVE BEHAVIOUR

- Repetitive and restricted patterns of behaviour can be response to anxiety and can impact a learner’s ability to manage change and transition. Over stimulation can intensify this type of behaviour.
- Repetitive behaviours can be a way of coping with change and gaining control over situations where the person with Autism feels out of control.

SUPPORT TO TRY

- Understand the triggers for certain behaviours and try to provide as much support as possible when these triggers may have to be faced. Prepare your child so they know what to expect in situations and give them time to ask questions and process the information before they face certain situations
- Be consistent – do not change routines, responses without warning as this can make behaviours worse through increased anxiety. Be consistent with bedtime and meal time routines, rewards and sanctions.
- Provide structure so children know what will happen and in what order –visual timetables and pictures can be good with this as it helps children “see” what will be happening
- Introduce new situations/experiences gradually and in a way that helps reduce anxiety and allows the child to know what will happen if they feel overwhelmed
- Show empathy – a person with autism is not behaving in a way that is “naughty” -they are overwhelmed and cannot control their behaviour. Be patient and stay calm. Validate their feelings and talk about them explicitly – I CAN SEE YOU ARE FEELING..... I KNOW THIS BECAUSE YOU ARE..... -this will help your child begin to understand their emotions and the effect this can have on their body
- Provide a safe space for your child to go to when they feel overwhelmed and need space to calm down

OTHER RESOURCES

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/autism/what-is-autism/>

<https://www.autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/what-is-autism>