

# Asperger's Syndrome



# Autism



**Autism is a lifelong developmental disability affecting how you communicate and interact with other people.**

- In England, it is estimated that 1 in every 100 children has autism
- The condition is more common in boys than girls with boys being three to four times more likely to develop autism than girls
- There is currently no cure for autism. However, a wide range of treatments, including specialist education and behavioral programmes, can help improve symptoms
- **Asperger's Syndrome** is sometimes described as a mild type of **autism**

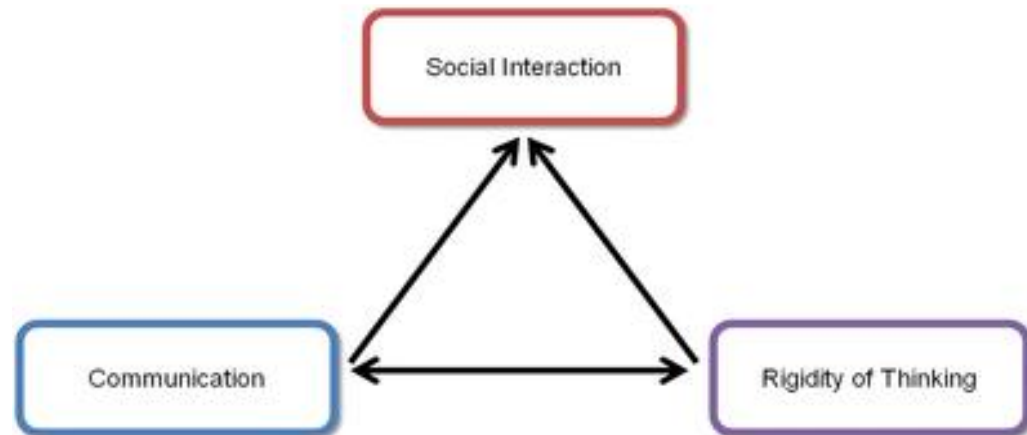


Autism can cause a wide range of symptoms, which are grouped into three categories:

- **Difficulties with social interaction:** This includes a lack of understanding and awareness of other people's emotions and feelings.
- **Impaired language and communication skills:** This includes delayed language development and an inability to start/take part in conversations.
- **Rigidity of thinking:** This includes developing set routines of behaviour which can cause them to become upset if these routines are broken.

This can be described as;

### The Triad of Impairment



# Causes of Autism



The aetiology of autism is unknown. However, it is thought that several complex genetic and environmental factors are involved or, in some cases, an underlying condition that causes symptoms.

Possible causes include:

- **Genetic factors** – certain genetic mutations may make a child more likely to develop autism.
- **Environmental factors** – during pregnancy, a child may be exposed to certain environmental factors that could increase the risk of developing autism.
- **Psychological factors** – people with autism may think in certain ways that contribute towards their symptoms.
- **Neurological factors** – specific problems with the development of the brain and nervous system could contribute to the symptoms of autism.

Some conditions that are known to cause symptoms of autism include:

- Fragile X Syndrome
- Tuberous Sclerosis
- Rett Syndrome

# Autistic Spectrum is a continuum



The term "spectrum" is used because the symptoms of autism/autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) vary from person to person and range from mild to severe.

## Profound Autism

- can be non verbal, non-interactive, and described as “hard to reach”

## High Functioning Autism

- cognitively able, areas of strength and flair, but socially challenged

It is also common for children with ASD to have symptoms or aspects of other conditions such as:

- Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)
- Tourette's syndrome or other tic disorders
- Epilepsy
- Dyspraxia

# Asperger's Syndrome



- **Asperger's Syndrome** is sometimes described as a mild type of Autistic Spectrum Disorder and is a diagnosis often given to people who are intelligent and great thinkers!
- Sometimes it can be hard to see that a person with Asperger's Syndrome has a difficulty, as their **language development is usually not affected**. However, it is more likely to be seen in the person's **social interaction** with other people
- People with Asperger's Syndrome often have problems in **certain areas of language**, such as understanding humour or figures of speech (e.g. "It's raining cats and dogs")
- They usually have intelligence within the normal range but can have particular skills in areas that require **logic**, **memory** and **creativity**, such as maths, computer science and music



## Some common characteristics of Asperger's Syndrome are:

- Poor non verbal communication
- Difficulty in understanding or interpreting facial expressions or tone of voice
- A child may have adult style language/expression
- Difficulty in picking up social cues
- Difficulty in accepting another person's point of view if it differs from theirs
- Strong belief systems and typically follow rules to the letter
- Difficulty working out how far they are standing from someone else
- Strong belief systems and typically follow rules to the letter

# Asperger's Syndrome in Children



Some useful strategies to support a child who has AS include:

## 1. In Communication

- Be aware of the language and wording that you use. Be clear! Check back with the child on whether they have understood your meaning
- Avoid using idioms or too much humour which can be misunderstood
- Break instructions down into small chunks and allow time for the instruction to be processed and acted upon
- Provide opportunities to work on emotional understanding – through drama, talking about stories, talking about a television programme or a well known story
- Use symbols to supplement speech
- Support the child when a communication problem arises





## 2. In Social Interaction

- It is important to teach social behaviour. Children with AS are not likely to automatically pick up how to make friends and how to behave in different social situations. It is important to teach (specifically and with rules!) how to:
  - Start and end a conversation
  - How to know that someone is or isn't interested in what you are saying
  - How to share games or toys
  - How to take turns
- Help the child to understand about unfairness and rule breaking. Social stories can be useful. Raise the child's awareness that there are unspoken rules too. Such as its not ok to comment about the way someone looks if you don't like it
- Be specific to their own experience. Don't be afraid to be quite blunt and straight to the point. This is the kind of communication that does not lead to misunderstanding!



### 3. Helping with Imagination

- Starting a piece of work is often very hard. Talk to the child about the subject and support them in making a plan or structure
- A tick list of what to include in a story can be helpful
- Offer the child choices if they battle to decide
- Tell them where to start
- Remember to prepare the child for changes in routines

**Always: use clear language and say exactly what you mean and mean what you say!**



## 4. Managing Special Interests or Pre-Occupations

- Many children with AS will have special interests. They can be very positive or cause problems. E.g. a detailed interest in computers may lead to a lifelong interest in software and even a career, but a special interest in a cartoon character may be less helpful
- Interests often change over time, so it may be possible to encourage new and constructive interests to be pursued once the child's interest is engaged
- **Actively teach the child the social cues** to know when to stop talking about their interest, when others are becoming bored. Teach them to understand (or just accept) that not everyone finds it so fascinating, and that this is not wrong
- Special interest can be used to **develop self esteem**. Giving a talk to class friends, or giving a related responsibility such as turning the class computer off everyday

Use the special interest as a **reward and motivator** for completing an adult led task or for working well in a group



## 5. Attention and concentration

- **Sensory processing** difficulties may mean that these children are very distractible. It may be useful to have a work station with a **reduced visual field** – less things to watch!
- Help them to **organize** their work stations such as having pencils ready and in specific pencil cases
- It can also be valuable to acknowledge that children with AS may need **calm** time away from social demands
- Its ok for them not to interact with others at break time, as long as they are happy about this! They may just need to be alone for part of their busy day

# Asperger's Syndrome in Adults



- Peoples with AS can grow up without ever being diagnosed (which is sometimes through choice). However, getting a diagnosis can often help people with AS and their families to **understand the condition** more and work out what kind of **support** is available to them
- Adults with AS can be **misunderstood** because of their behaviour, they can seem selfish, egoistic, cold, ridged or uncaring their actions or comments can be considered hurtful or rude to others. This kind of labelling is unfair as people with AS often do not mean to cause upset and will be shocked when this is explained
- Adults with AS are neurologically unable to see things from other persons point of view. This highlights the importance of getting a diagnosis so people around them understand their behaviour better and not to take offence to the things that they say
- There are a range of autism-specific services which are available to adults with AS. They can help them to find advice/support, to get involved in leisure activities or to find somewhere they are happy to live



## Careers

- It can be difficult for people with AS to find a job because, for example, they may find the work environment too noisy, or travelling to work too stressful because of the crowds. This means that often they will need their working environment to be adapted for them
- However, their focus and knowledge on specific topics as well as their good eye for detail can mean that in the right job and with the right support, people with AS can have a lot to offer. It is important to match someone's skills to the right job and ensure ongoing support
- Gaining work if possible is important because being in a working environment can greatly help the individual's personal development and self-esteem

**Adults with Asperger's Syndrome should focus their energy on their strengths rather than on their weaknesses. Do what you are good at!!**



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