



Autism Information

Rudston Primary School



Persons with autism may possess the following characteristics in various combinations and in varying degrees of severity.

- Inappropriate laughing/giggling
- No real fear of dangers
- Apparent insensitivity to pain
- May not want cuddling
- May avoid eye contact
- May prefer to be alone
- Difficulty in expressing needs
- Inappropriate attachments to objects
- Insistence of sameness
- Echoes words/phrases
- Spins objects or self

Autism Awareness

What are ASDs?

An autism spectrum disorder (including Asperger syndrome) is a lifelong developmental disability that affects the way a person communicates with, and relates to, other people. It also affects how they make sense of the world around them. It is a spectrum condition which means that, while all people with autism share certain difficulties, their condition will affect them in different ways.

The three main areas of difficulty (sometimes known as the 'triad of impairments') are:

Difficulty with social interaction

This includes recognising and understanding other people's feelings and managing their own.

People with an ASD may:

- not understand the unwritten social rules which most of us pick up without thinking: they may stand too close to another person for example, or start an inappropriate subject of conversation
- appear to be insensitive because they have not recognised how someone else is feeling
- prefer to spend time alone rather than seeking out the company of other people
- not seek comfort from other people
- appear to behave 'strangely' or inappropriately, as it is not always easy for them to express feelings, emotions or needs.

Some may want to interact with other people and make friends, but may be unsure how to go about this. This range of difficulties can lead to problems in the classroom and the playground, with making friends and, in turn, bullying.

Difficulty with social communication

This includes using and understanding verbal and non-verbal language, such as gestures, facial expressions and tone of voice.

Many people with an ASD have a very literal understanding of language, and think people always mean exactly what they say. They can find it difficult to use or understand:

- facial expressions or tone of voice
- jokes and sarcasm
- common phrases, sayings and metaphors; an example might be the phrase 'It's cool', which people

often say when they think that something is good, but strictly speaking, means that it's a bit cold.

Others will have good language skills, but may still find it hard to understand the give-and-take nature of conversations, perhaps repeating what the other person has just said (this is known as echolalia) or talking at length about their own interests.

It helps if other people speak in a clear, consistent way and give people with autism time to process what has been said to them.



Difficulty with Social Interaction

This includes the ability to understand and predict other people's intentions and behaviour and to imagine situations outside their own routine. This can be accompanied by a narrow repetitive range of activities.

People with an ASD find it hard to:

- understand and interpret other people's thoughts, feelings and actions
- predict what will happen next, or what *could* happen next
- understand the concept of danger, for example that running on to a busy road poses a threat to them
- engage in imaginative play and activities: children with autism may enjoy some imaginative play but prefer to act out the same scenes each time
- prepare for change and plan for the future
- cope in new or unfamiliar situations.

Difficulties with social imagination should not be confused with a lack of imagination. People with autism can be very creative and may be, for example, accomplished artists, musicians or writers. Many have very particular special, all-absorbing interests about which they may be very knowledgeable.



Recognising ASDs in children at school

Having an ASD does not affect someone's physical appearance. The signs of whether a child has the syndrome show in a pattern of behaviour which requires careful observation. Children with the condition may, for example, find it difficult to make eye contact with other people and some may tend to walk on tiptoe.



Here are some of the behavioural signs which can indicate an autism spectrum disorder.

- struggle to make and maintain friendships with children of the same age, due to poor social skills, or show little interest in other children?
- find it hard to understand instructions unless very clearly spelt out and have difficulty completing class exercises or homework, despite reasonable intelligence?
- often become a potential or actual target for teasing and bullying because of how they appear and react to other pupils? Act aggressively as a result of bullying?
- find unstructured social time difficult to use appropriately – for example, sit on their own at lunchtime or try to join in games unsuccessfully at playtime?
- show a poor awareness of others and how they may be affected by their behaviour – for example, by contradicting or being non-compliant to teachers and other school staff; not sharing or allowing other children to join in their games; making inappropriate comments in class; talking too loudly, and overreacting to losing?
- find changes to their routine quite difficult to cope with – for example, getting annoyed, in what seems a really disproportionate way, if they have a supply teacher or have to move classroom? Are they quite concerned if things do not happen in a set sequence?
- find group activities difficult – for example, because they have poor social skills or because they want everything to be done his or their way?
- often appear quite anxious in busy, noisy social situations – for example in the dining hall or during PE?
- find certain textures of material difficult to cope with against their skin – to the extent that they feel unable to wear certain items of clothing?
- use body language in a way that makes them stand out – for example, holding themselves awkwardly,
- lacking spontaneity in gestures and displaying limited or unusual facial expressions?
- speak in a tone of voice that is unlike those of their peers and/or communicate using words and phrases that are unlike those of their peers?
- exhibit behaviour or interests that make them stand out from the other children in the class?

How can I help children with an ASD in school?

This section offers guidelines about communicating with pupils who have an ASD and gives an overview of various approaches and strategies that teachers and support staff can use to help support and develop the skills and learning of children with an ASD. They can be selected and adapted according to the age range and ability of your pupils and your school.

Communicating effectively

The following guidelines on communicating with pupils who have an ASD may also prove helpful with a wider range of pupils. The level of language can be adjusted as appropriate to the pupils concerned. Visual aids may also need to be used, especially with children who have little or no speech, but these can also be useful with children whose speech may be more developed.

- **Be as clear in your communication as possible and say exactly what you mean.** Anything merely *implied* will probably not be understood. For example, asking, 'Would you like to get your work out now?' may get the very honest (but unintentionally annoying) answer, 'No!' Similarly, you may ask, 'Can you just sit over there?' or 'Can you pick up that piece of paper and put it in the bin?' and get the answer 'Yes', followed by no action: the answer has been truthful, but the pupil may well not have understood that you were actually asking them to carry out the action.
- **Keep your language direct,** avoiding the use of double meanings, sarcasm, teasing, complex open questions or subtle jokes, unless you are really sure the pupil understands. Make sure that you have his attention before communicating. Use his/her name, but don't necessarily expect to gain full eye contact – this can be difficult for pupils with an ASD.
- You will probably need to **slow down your communication** – allow several seconds for the pupil to process new information and to respond before you give more information, or repeat your request.
- **Check that he/she understands** what he has to do in class or for homework. He/she may not necessarily understand just because he/she can repeat back the instruction you have just given. Processing verbal information tends to be harder for pupils with an ASD. Visual aids can help.
- Make sure that the **pupil knows what is expected of him/her in school,** for example, where he/she should be in the classroom or for each lesson; what homework is expected; where he/she is able to go at break and lunchtime, if being in the playground causes too much stress, or what time the day trip will return to school. Most difficulties occur as a result of insufficient information about what to do in different social situations.
- **Be patient.** A few pupils will seem to be intentionally aloof (avoiding eye contact), rude or disinterested. This is rarely the case. Pupils with an ASD usually do not have the basic social understanding to realise how they appear to others. Occasionally they may say or do things that seem to threaten your authority in school. Try not to take this personally, but deal with it in a calm way.

- Avoid confronting an angry/upset pupil by arguing or raising your voice. Many people with an ASD are very sensitive to noise, some finding loud noise physically painful. A raised voice will not help him/her understand what is wanted. Use a calm, neutral tone of voice – do not shout, or expect him/her to be able to read facial expression and gesture. Instead try to divert and defuse the situation. For example, allow the pupil to ‘exit’, giving a clear alternative choice, a compromise if possible. Sometimes a visual support, such as a card with a photo of the quiet room, will help him/her to understand what you want him /her to do next. If there is no room for compromise, make the request a couple of times, allowing plenty of time to process this information, then calmly, with few words, follow through the consequences of non-compliance if necessary (which should already have been explained very simply and clearly).
- Home/school diaries and/or school planners can help reinforce what is being communicated and keep parents informed.



SPELL

The SPELL framework has been developed by The National Autistic Society's schools and services to understand and respond to the needs of children and adults with autism. It recognises the individual and unique needs of each child and emphasises that all planning and intervention be organised on this basis.

SPELL stands for Structure, Positive, Empathy, Low arousal, Links.

- **Structure** makes the world a more predictable accessible and safer place and can aid personal autonomy and independence.
- **Positive** approaches and expectations seek to establish and reinforce self confidence and self esteem by building on natural strengths, interest and abilities.
- **Empathy** is essential to underpin any approach designed to develop communication and reduce anxiety.
- The approaches and environment need to be **low arousal**: calm and ordered in such a way so as to reduce anxiety and aid concentration.
- Strong **links** between the various components of the person's life or therapeutic programme will promote and sustain essential consistency.





Produced by Wendy Walters, Rudston Primary School

April 2014