

Brooke Weston Trust Primary SEND Newsletter—July 2023

This term's SEND newsletter is about Autistic Spectrum (AS) or previously known as Autistic Spectrum Disorder/Condition (ASD/C). Please read through the information and if you feel that your child could possibly be demonstrating some difficulties, characteristics or signs of Autistic Spectrum please arrange a meeting with your child's teacher and/or the SENDCo to seek further advice and guidance- Thank you.

Autistic Spectrum

What is Autism?

Autism is a lifelong developmental disability which affects how people communicate and interact with the world. It is approximated that 1 in 100 people are on the Autistic Spectrum.

Autism is a spectrum condition and affects people in different ways. Like all people, people with Autism have their own strengths and weaknesses. Below is a list of difficulties that people with Autism may share, including the two key difficulties required for a diagnosis:

Social Communication and Social Interaction challenges

Social communication:

Children with AS have difficulties with interpreting both verbal and non-verbal language like gestures or tone of voice. Some Children with AS may be unable to speak or have limited speech while other children with AS have very good language skills but struggle to understand sarcasm or tone of voice. Other challenges include:

- *taking things literally and not understanding abstract concepts*
- *needing extra time to process information or answer questions*
- *repeating what others say to them (this is called echolalia)*

Social interaction:

Some children with AS may often have difficulty 'reading' other people - recognising or understanding others' feelings and intentions - and expressing their own emotions. This can make it very hard to navigate the social world. Children with AS may:

- *appear to be insensitive*
- *seek out time alone when overloaded by other people*
- *not seek comfort from other people*
- *appear to behave 'strangely' or in a way thought to be socially inappropriate*
- *find it hard to form friendships.*



Repetitive and restrictive behaviour

The world and day to day life can seem a very unpredictable and confusing place for children with AS. This is why they often prefer to have routines so that they know what is going to happen. They may want to travel the same way to and from school or work, wear the same clothes or eat exactly the same food for breakfast.

Children with AS may also repeat movements such as hand flapping, rocking or the repetitive use of an object such as twirling a pen or opening and closing a door. Children with AS often engage in these behaviours to help calm themselves when they are stressed or anxious, but some children with AS do it because they find it enjoyable.

Change to routine can also be very distressing for children with AS and make them very anxious. It could be having to adjust to big events like Christmas, Birthdays or changing schools, or facing uncertainty in day to day life.

Over or under sensitivity to light, sound, taste or touch

Children with AS may experience over or under sensitivity to sounds, touch, tastes, smells, light, colours, temperatures or pain. For example, they may find certain background sounds like music in a restaurant, which other people ignore or block out, unbearably loud or distracting. This can cause anxiety or even physical pain. Some children with AS prefer not to hug due to discomfort, which can be misinterpreted as being cold and aloof.

Many autistic people avoid everyday situations because of their sensitivity issues. Schools, workplaces and shopping centres can be particularly overwhelming and cause sensory overload. There are many simple adjustments that can be made to make environments more autism-friendly.


Some children with AS may have intense and highly focused interests, often from a fairly young age. These can change over time or be lifelong. Children with AS can become experts in their special interests and often like to share their knowledge. A stereotypical example is trains but that is one of many. Greta Thunberg's intense interest, for example, is protecting the environment.

Extreme anxiety

It is very important that children with AS learn to recognise their triggers and find coping mechanisms to help reduce their anxiety. However, many children with AS have difficulty recognising and regulating their emotions. Over one third of people with AS have serious mental health issues and too many are being failed by mental health services.

When everything becomes too much for a child with AS, they can go into meltdown or shutdown. These are very intense and exhausting experiences.

A shutdown appears less intense to the outside world but can be equally debilitating. Shutdowns are also a response to being overwhelmed, but may appear more passive - e.g., a person with AS going quiet or 'switching off'.

- The use of ear defenders for those who are hyper-sensitive to noise.
 - The use of social stories and social scripts to support children with social communication and social interaction difficulties.
 - The use of visuals and clear, simplified language to support with processing and retaining information.
 - A low stimulus environment e.g., soft lighting, displays/posters etc., kept minimal.
 - Giving children a sensory diet to support any children who present with significant sensory difficulties; this also may include resources like weighted blankets, sensory circuits, calming sensory resources.
 - Visual timetables and Visual schedules to help children know what is happening in their day.
 - Individual workstations to create a calm, safe working environment.
 - 'To dos' to help children become independent individuals and support with transition.
 - Putting the child at the centre of every decision that is made... and much more!
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- A photograph showing a child's hands and arms. The child is wearing grey long-sleeved clothing and large, dark, padded ear defenders. They are sitting at a desk and writing on a white sheet of paper with a yellow pencil. The background is slightly blurred, showing a wooden desk and a dark chair.

- The National Autistic Society website as a reliable source of information about Autism.
- Other local support organisations are; Pinpoint, Spectrum, ASPIRE.
- The Schools SEND information report can be found at : <https://www.oakleyvaleprimary.org/page/?title=Equalities%2FSEND&pid=49>
- The Local Offer can be found at: <https://www.northamptonshire.gov.uk/councilservices/children-families-education/send/local-offer/Pages/default.aspx>
- If you have any questions, email your SENDCo at: rebecca.annetts@oakleyvaleprimary.org

