

ASD - Autistic Spectrum Condition

Introduction

This condition affects a child's ability to socialise and to develop speech and language. The main characteristics are now commonly described as a triad of impairments. These impairments affect:

- communication - language impairment, which may include speech, intonation, gesture, body language and/or facial expression
- social interaction - difficulties such as lack of empathy and perception, inappropriate eye-contact, poor grasp of timing or rejection of physical contact
- imaginative thought - inflexible or over-literal thought processes, which may include obsessional behaviours or repetitive movements and a resistance to change.

Those with autism will experience many of the same difficulties as children with Asperger syndrome . These difficulties may range from mild to severe.

Like Asperger syndrome, this condition requires a multi-disciplinary diagnosis. Children or young adults with ASD or autism will have a different view of the world and of what is important.

Key characteristics

Children with autistic spectrum disorder may:

- find it hard or even impossible to look others in the eye
- prefer to be solitary and have great difficulty dealing with other children invading their personal space
- flap arms or hands, particularly when frustrated or upset
- have delayed speech - up to fifty per cent of autistic children have difficulty with developing spoken language
- have difficulty understanding jokes, idioms or figures of speech - everything is taken literally, making it difficult for them to make friends, understand some oral instructions and follow parts of literacy lessons
- have difficulties with language, such as parroting what others say, repeating one phrase over and over or speaking in a monotone
- fly into a rage for no apparent reason, although this usually turns out to be because someone has moved something or changed a routine
- display repetitive behaviour, such as turning lights on and off, opening and closing doors, or watching the same videos over and over again.

Support strategies

You may need to:

- provide an area in the classroom where the pupil can have his own personal space, with the minimum of distractions
- ensure that the classroom has an element of continuity - not too many changes at one time
- prepare the pupil well in advance for any changes in school routine, if possible, as this can be very distressing for him
- be consistent in the management of behaviour
- use a daily visual timetable for younger children
- use visual task lists for older students
- keep instructions clear and simple, checking that they are understood by repeating the instructions individually, as an autistic or ASD pupil will not understand that general instructions are for him unless his name is used
- use ICT to support learning in a variety of ways
- explain jokes, idioms and figures of speech - what they are, what they mean and how they work, as far as can be understood, and that people often say things that may not seem logical or literal
- teach the pupil how to interpret social signals
- use social stories to support a learner in specific social situations
- teach self-help skills
- use visual and concrete materials to support understanding of conceptual vocabulary
- use games and activities to teach social conventions and interaction, such as turn-taking
- ensure that the pupil understands that school and classroom rules apply to him.

Support agencies

- Autism Independent UK: www.autismuk.com
- Autism Society (USA): www.autism.org
- National Autistic Society: www.nas.org.uk
- Parents for Early Intervention of Autism in Children: www.peach.org.uk
- Scottish Society for Autism: www.autism-in-scotland.org.uk