



# A GUIDE TO ASD

## (AUTISTIC SPECTRUM DISORDER)

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Autism manifests itself during the first three years of life and results from a neurological disorder that affects the functioning of the brain. It is characterized "by impairments in social interaction, problems with verbal and non-verbal communication and restrictive, repetitive behaviour, interests and activities".

People with autism have said that the world, to them, is a mass of people, places and events which they struggle to make sense of, and which can cause them considerable anxiety. In particular, understanding and relating to other people, and taking part in everyday family and social life may be harder for them. Other people appear to know, intuitively, how to communicate and interact with each other, and some people with autism may wonder why they are 'different'.

Source: The National Autistic Society

### Overview of ASD

- Can affect pupils of all abilities including those with learning difficulties, average and above average ability
- Includes both Autism and Asperger Syndrome. People with Asperger Syndrome tend to have average/above average intelligence but still have difficulties with social communication e.g. may talk at length on a topic of interest
- May have over-sensitive (hyper) or under-sensitive (hypo) responses to sensory experiences (e.g. touch, vision, taste, smell, sound as well as balance and body awareness)
- May have difficulty making sense of the world e.g. difficulties with mind blindness (knowing that others think and feel differently from them)
- Tend to focus on detail rather than the overall picture
- May find it hard or even impossible to look others in the eye
- Usually prefers order and routine - this helps them make sense of the world
- Has difficulty understanding and expressing emotions in own self and others
- Often has a 'special interest' that they can spend inordinate amounts of time absorbed in
- May have difficulty establishing and maintaining friendships

### Support Strategies

#### Learn to understand your pupil with ASD

Take time to 'walk in their shoes'. Understand their strengths and weaknesses. Learn about their sensory sensitivities and how they affect them. Provide a classroom environment that respects and supports differences.

#### Keep it structured and visual

Pupils with autism perform best when their daily routine is predictable, with clear expectations. Establish routines using visuals to support understanding, preparing for change and to decrease anxiety. Always use visual clues to support verbal instructions so that they know what they are doing, how long they are doing it for and what to do when they are finished. Use timers to tell how long a task will last and use visual checklists to help keep on track and motivate.

#### Prepare for change

Arrange timetables and activities so that the pupil knows what is going on and when. Prepare the pupil well in advance for any changes in the routine. If something unexpected happens, take time to explain what is going on and why. Sudden changes in normal routine can be very distressing for some e.g. a supply teacher when classroom teacher is away.

#### Keep instructions clear and simple

Give concise instructions 1-2 at a time. Use their name to get their attention and cut down the amount of information given. Make sure that you give them time to process the instruction - some may need a lot of processing time before they are able to follow through.

#### Reduce distractions

Due to sensory sensitivities some pupils will be especially sensitive to their environment. Noise, bright colours, strong smells and strip lighting can cause stress or even physical pain; some children shrink away from physical touch and have a strong desire for privacy and their own space. Learn about those sensitivities and adapt the environment accordingly e.g. Try to create an environment that is not over stimulating - use headphones/ear plugs to block out noise, identify quiet work areas and decrease clutter.

#### Speak straight

Use language that is clear, simple and concise. Be aware of what you are saying and how this might be misunderstood by the pupil. Expect to be taken literally. Figures of speech and irony or sarcasm will only confuse.

## Social skills

Pupils with autism with need to be taught social skills including developing an awareness of self and others. Teach games and activities to help develop social interaction skills e.g. turn taking, sharing and being a good sport. Develop structure within playtimes e.g. clubs and zoned areas in playground. Develop empathy with peers and provide opportunities for positive interactions. Social stories have also been proven to be useful. They are short stories about specific social situations that briefly describe a social situation, how others may respond, and how the pupil should respond.

## Rewards and sanctions

Use a clear, consistent and meaningful rewards and sanctions system. By developing a real understanding of your pupil, you will begin to understand why they may act the way they do e.g. a child may not be understanding what is happening and become anxious and non-compliant. Providing visual supports and understanding may be much more productive in producing appropriate behaviours rather than sanctions.

## Strengths and interests

Many pupils with autism will have particular strengths and interests and these should be taken advantage of in the classroom. For example, if a pupil is interested in cars, the pupil should have as many opportunities to read about cars, write about cars, etc.

## Recommended LDA Resources

LDA offer a selection of resources developed to aid behaviour and learning in children with Autism.

**How to Support and Teach  
Children on the Autism Spectrum**  
ADMT01151  
**£9.99**



**Friendship Formula**  
ADMT11526  
**£19.99**



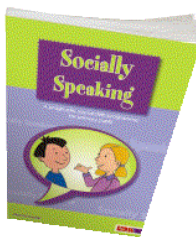
**Social Skills for Primary Pupils 1**  
ADMT10774  
**£19.99 (+VAT)**



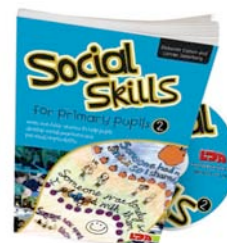
**Pull Your Socks Up!**  
ADMT10005  
**£13.50 (+VAT)**



**Socially Speaking**  
ADMT00416  
**£21.99 (+VAT)**



**Social Skills for Primary Pupils 2**  
ABMT10775  
**£19.99 (+VAT)**



## Useful Contacts

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**The National Autistic Society**  
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London  
EC1V 1NG  
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