



PARENT LINK- INFORMATION SHEET no. 4

Autism and Asperger Syndrome

(Autistic Spectrum Disorder : ASD)

1. What is it?

Autism is a developmental disorder that affects social and communication skills. It is a lifelong disability that prevents the person relating to others in a meaningful way, and impairs the ability to develop friendships or understand the feelings of others. There may be additional learning difficulties. The cause of Autism is believed to be organic brain damage. Most children affected are boys, with a ratio of boys to girls of 4:1. The three main characteristics of Autism - social interaction, social communication and imagination are known as the triad of impairment, and are accompanied by limited, narrow, repetitive patterns of behaviour or interests. Asperger Syndrome is the term used to describe the more able of those within the autistic spectrum. Autism and Asperger Syndrome are often described as ASD or Autistic Spectrum Disorder.

2. Implications

It is important to be aware of the effects of impairment.

Social impairment

The pupil with autism will -

- *Often appear aloof and indifferent*
- *Passively accept social contact but rarely makes spontaneous approaches*
- *Occasionally approach other people, but often in an odd or inappropriate way.*

Social communication

The pupil with autism will -

- *Not appreciate the social uses and the pleasure of conversation*
- *Talk "at" others, not "with" them.*
- *Not understand the feelings or beliefs of others*

Imagination

The pupil with autism will -

- *Be unable to play imaginatively*
- *Focus on minor or trivial things*

- Miss the point of any activity that involves words

Pupils will usually follow repetitive activities or behaviour, and may display challenging or socially unacceptable behaviour. They may also have clearly defined strengths and weaknesses.

Strengths may include -

- Spatial awareness and problem solving
- Drawing and artwork
- Good rote memory for some facts
- Non-verbal logical reasoning, including Maths and ICT
- Reading and spelling, but not comprehension
- Systems, structures and organisation of facts, such as how things work

Weaknesses may include -

- Basic language structures
- Understanding symbolic language
- Understanding implied meaning, following the literal meaning
- Lack of ability to "mind read" the behaviour of others
- Sequencing and ordering events, such as writing up an experiment
- Understanding the instructions and rules given for the group
- Selective attention (likely to pursue own interests rather than lesson focus)
- Imagination and creativity - all tasks will seem difficult if not incomprehensible
- Motor co-ordination

3. Strategies

*You will need to access specialist advice. (See 4. More Information and Resources.)

There are three basic rules -

1. Understand the nature and implications of autism
2. Provide structure and order to the teaching and learning environment
3. Teach visually as far as possible

To help the pupil with -

- Poor Attention Skills and Distractibility - remove distractions; make a clear workspace; keep tasks short, structured and clear; make a "Work then play" rule, e.g. "Once the work is finished you can use the computer".
- Problems with Recall of Instructions - give one to one instruction if possible; ask the pupil to repeat instructions to check understanding; check access to visual reminders and prompts.
- Difficulty Organising and Sequencing Tasks - provide all equipment needed before beginning the task; ensure that the pupil knows what to do first, next and last; provide a picture sequence to show how to structure the task.
- Difficulty Following Group Instructions - the pupil may not realise that the instruction applies to him; always address the pupil by name; repeat instructions individually and ask the pupil to repeat them back

- Difficulty Asking for Help - use a picture sequence or written prompt, and go over the sequence until this behaviour is secure
- Problems Selecting Relevant Information - keep tasks simple; use a highlighter pen to mark text

Strategies to help overcome behaviour difficulties

- *Provide own workspace in the classroom, always in the same place*
- Ensure that there is sufficient space around the pupil
- Try seating the pupil facing the wall for tasks which require concentration
- Give advance warning of any change in activity or routine
- Make the classroom environment clear
- Give brief individual instructions and monitor frequently
- Make rewards meaningful to the pupil
- Discuss practical strategies with parents regularly

4. More information

The National Autistic Society
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020 7833 2299

www.oneworld.org.uk

autism

*Teaching Pupils with Autism and
Asperger Syndrome*
Guidelines for Schools
East Sussex County Council - Education