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Autism Spectrum Condition (ASC) & Asperger's Syndrome (AS)

Autism is often called Autism Spectrum Condition (ASC). It is a developmental disorder and is neurological in origin.

It affects how people perceive the world and interact with others. Autistic people see, hear and feel the world differently to other people.

The associated difficulties are on a continuum of mild to severe and are pervasive in all aspects of life, not just within the classroom. It is not classified as an educational difficulty but it does impact learning and social interaction. On its own, ASC is not a specific learning difficulty, but it can co-occur with other conditions such as **dyslexia**, **dyspraxia** and **AD(H)D**.

The DSM-V (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders) contains the revised criteria for a diagnosis of ASC. Previous diagnostic categories including Autism, Asperger's Syndrome, Atypical Autism and PDD-NOS (Pervasive Developmental Disorder Not Otherwise Specified) have been replaced by the singular term – Autism Spectrum Condition.

ASC is a heterogeneous condition which means that the presentation varies considerably. Full and comprehensive assessment of strengths and weaknesses is therefore very helpful when it comes to supporting children with ASC.

Intellectual ability may vary from severely learning disabled to very high functioning. Some individuals have associated behavioural problems whilst others are highly compliant. Some display low social competence whilst others can effectively mask these problems in every-day situations.

Many people prefer to use the term Asperger's Syndrome as they feel this more accurately describes their difficulties. Asperger's is often referred to as mild autism because the behaviours are less obvious than those shown by individuals with core autism.



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The term “mild” can, however, be extremely misleading as the impact on the individual can be very significant. A person with high levels of social anxiety may experience considerable stress affecting multiple areas of life. The ADI-R contains a severity rating which refers to the level of anticipated support that the individual will need. (Information adapted with kind permission from Autism Routemap).

Typical strengths *may* include:

- » Solving complex logical problems
- » Enhanced perceptual abilities
- » Enhanced visual processing and object recognition
- » Talent for music, maths, art or language
- » Good working memory – the ability to manipulate information in short-term memory

Typical difficulties *may* include:

- » Sensory sensitivity to noise, touch, taste, smell and visual stimuli
- » Anxiety: the world can feel like an overwhelming place
- » Communication: speech may be limited, or if fluent, difficulty may occur with judging or understanding the reaction of others, particularly facial expressions and nuances
- » Social interaction: children may find it hard to mix in a group and feel isolated
- » Rigidity of thinking: many ASC children are of above intelligence but struggle with creativity and imagination. They can be literal thinkers and quick to learn facts and figures but have difficulty with abstract thinking.

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the world differently to other people



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Tips for supporting ASC learners:

Recognise and appreciate an individual's strengths and be 'autism-aware'

Working through a book with a student such as 'My Autism Book' by Gloria Dura-Via and Tamar Levi enables you and the student to understand their condition better.

Use clear, literal, unambiguous language

Use the student's name so they know you are addressing them.

Metaphors and flowery language can be confusing and even distressing. Stick to the facts using a clear, precise approach using pauses for thinking time.

Use simple gestures to accompany what you are saying.

Use symbols and pictures

Students may have enhanced visual processing and object recognition skills, so using pictures, symbols and real objects where possible to explain concepts can be helpful.

Keep background noise to a minimum

Create picture timetables

For use in school and with home routines. Maintain a regular routine where possible and give plenty of warning if the routine is going to change or an unusual event or change will occur to avoid confusion or distress.

Make use of the **Social Story approach by Carol Grey**

Social stories that are useful for parents and teachers to accurately describe a context, skill, achievement or concept. They use plain language and picture format and can cover a relatively advanced or abstract concept.

Be encouraging and patient in your approach

Explain if behaviour or language appears rude or inappropriate, allowing for the opportunity to discuss appropriate behaviour in a supportive and non-threatening environment.



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The teaching of my autistic student over the last two years has focused almost entirely on the writing of poetry, with some guidelines on punctuation and a five-word spelling test each week. As a result, he has grown enormously in self-confidence. His social skills, in addition to his handwriting and his spelling, have greatly improved. But more importantly, reflecting his tremendous sensitivity, the practice of poetry has given him an opportunity to express his feelings, his deep affections as well as his fears, and he now, quite rightly, considers himself to be a poet.

I structure lessons clearly and consistently with the same routine each time, which works well. The lessons start with me reading back to my student his work from the previous week, asking him how he feels about it and telling him what I particularly liked about it. I am never negative, but I do stress what I like about the better pieces he writes.

There are days when the symptoms of his autism appear to recede as he becomes engrossed in a task that he enjoys, and equally there are days when he is upset for some reason or overtired and he is more unsettled. I do know that he looks forward to the classes, and his social skills have greatly improved over the time I have been teaching him.

”
John, English, French and Spanish tutor

Useful websites:

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National Autistic Society - Useful information on the website includes the following:

“**EarlyBird (under 5 years) and EarlyBird Plus (ages 4-8)** are support programmes for parents and carers, offering advice and guidance on strategies and approaches for dealing with young autistic children.

Both programmes work on understanding autism, building confidence to encourage interaction and communication and analysing and managing behaviour.



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The EarlyBird Healthy Minds programme is a six-session parent support programme to help promote good mental health in autistic children.

The National Autistic Society EarlyBird Centre is based in South Yorkshire with local authority staff running licensed programmes in many areas of the UK and overseas."

Social Stories are a social learning tool that supports the safe and meaningful exchange of information between parents, professionals and people with autism of all ages.

NHS

Spectrum News

Archie's Way

Centre for ADHD & Autism Support

Autism Parenting Magazine

Further reading for parents:

- » *The Parents' Guide to Specific Learning Difficulties: Information, Advice and Practical Tips*, by Veronica Bidwell
- » *The Asperkid's – Secret – Book of Social Rules*, by Jennifer Cook O'Toole
- » *Ten Things Every Child with Autism Wishes You Knew*, by Ellen Notbohm
- » *1001 Great Ideas for Teaching & Raising Children with Autism or Asperger's: Expanded 2nd Edition*, by Ellen Notbohm and Veronica Zysk
- » *The Child with Autism at Home & in the Community: Over 600 Must-Have Tips for Making Home Life and Outings Easier for Everyone*, By Kathy Labosh and Lanita Miller
- » *Thinking Person's Guide to Autism*, Edited by Shannon Des Roches Rosa, Jennifer Byde Myers, Liz Ditz, Emily Willingham and Carol Greenburg
- » *OMG! I've got Asperger's*, by Sarah Pashley

Further reading for students with ASC:

- » *My Autism Book*, by Tamar Levis and Gloria Dura-Vila
- » *A Friend like Simon*, by Kate Gaynor
- » *Ian's Walk: A story about Autism*, by Laurie Lears
- » *The Spectrum Girl's Survival Guide. How to Grow up Awesome and Autistic*, by Siena Castellon

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