

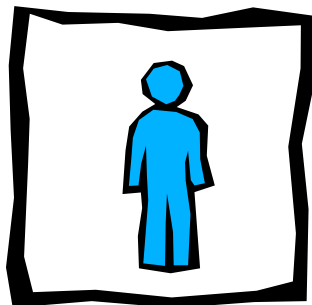
AUTISM

parent programme

Understanding Autistic Spectrum Disorders

What is autism?

- A developmental condition present from birth
NOT caused by bad parenting
- A lifelong condition
- A spectrum ranging from Asperger syndrome at the more able end to Kanner syndrome at the more severe end
- Diagnosed by a triad of impairments:
 - i) impaired social interaction
 - ii) impaired social communication
 - iii) rigidity of thought processes
- Associated with unusual responses to sensory stimuli

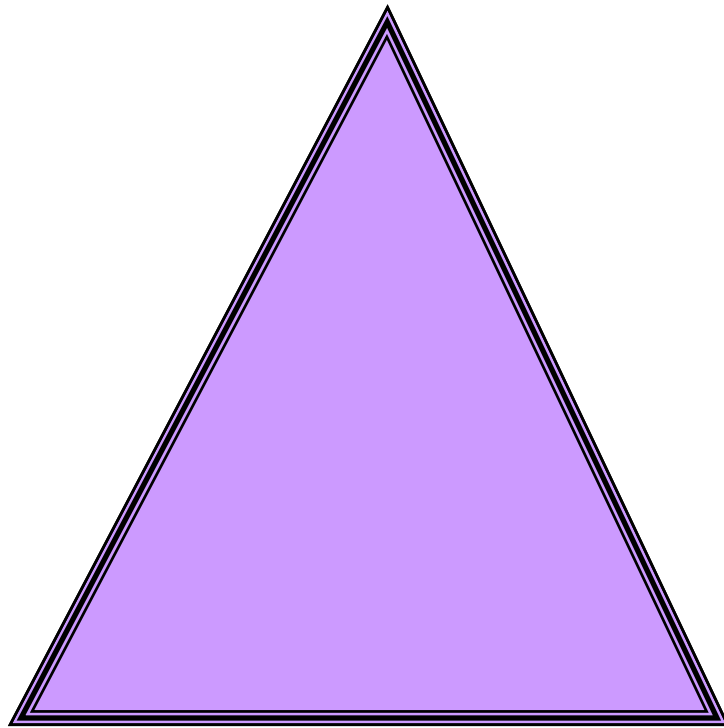




The triad

Difficulty with communication

All means of communication verbal and
non verbal , understanding + expression



Difficulty with social interaction

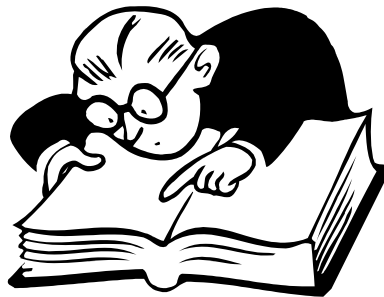
Relating to others, empathising. Seeing
things as others see them.

Rigidity of thought processes

Leading to dependence on routines,
rituals. Tendency to have interests
that appear 'obsessive'. Lack of
spontaneity

History of Autism

- 1943 Leo Kanner published paper entitled 'Early Infantile Autism'
- 1944 Hans Asperger published a paper in German about more able children
- 1962 First voluntary organisation in the world set up in the UK. The National Autistic Society
- 1979 Judith Gould and Lorna Wing developed the notion of a 'Triad of Impairments'



Checklist of descriptions of autistic behaviour

(NB. Children with ASDs won't display all of these, just some from each group)

1. Difficulty with communication:

- ☐ Does not point or follow a point
- ☐ Pulls adult by hand to get desired object or gets it independently
- ☐ Talks in monotonous way
- ☐ Echoes what s/he has heard on t.v.
- ☐ Speaks too loud or too soft
- ☐ Does not initiate interaction
- ☐ Stares hard when talking to others
- ☐ Has poor eye gaze e.g. timing wrong, sideways glance.
- ☐ Demands attention
- ☐ Speech over precise and pedantic
- ☐ Interprets speech literally e.g. 'pull your socks up'
- ☐ Has unusual intonation e.g. foreign accent,
- ☐ Touches inappropriately e.g. pushing to say 'hello'
- ☐ Understands better if given visual clue
- ☐ Repeats same question over & over
- ☐ Has problems with facial expressions (own & others')
- ☐ Makes noises but no words
- ☐ Can name things but doesn't use vocabulary to converse.
- ☐ Only seems to hear part of what is said



2. Difficulty with social relationships:

- ☐ Ignores or seems indifferent to other children
- ☐ Moves away from other people
- ☐ Seems more interested in objects than people
- ☐ Better with adults than own peer group
- ☐ Talks 'at' people
- ☐ Takes no pleasure in 'showing' things
- ☐ Doesn't hide boredom
- ☐ Doesn't like being touched or held
- ☐ Finds it difficult to judge who is a real friend
- ☐ Rarely shows emotions
- ☐ Finds it difficult to break into a group conversation
- ☐ Tends to be absorbed in own activities
- ☐ Shows no interest in another's distress
- ☐ Shows too much interest in another's distress
- ☐ Uninterested in other person's side of conversation
- ☐ Expects others to know own thoughts, experiences
- ☐ Uninterested in competitive games
- ☐ Comes too close to others
- ☐ Unaware of the importance of personal appearance

3. Rigidity and inflexibility of thought processes

- ☐ Obsessional interests e.g. trains, clocks, numbers, videos etc.
- ☐ Fascinated by lights, shiny objects, spinning objects, taps
- ☐ Dislikes routine being changed
- ☐ Has difficulty transferring skills
- ☐ Develops elaborate routines that have to be completed
- ☐ Has exceptional memory for events /facts
- ☐ Repeats conversations, questions
- ☐ Becomes very anxious in new situations
- ☐ Limited imaginative play

4. Other characteristics

- ☐ Has unusual reactions to sounds/ sensations/textures/smells
- ☐ Lacks sensitivity to low levels of pain
- ☐ Has unusual facial grimaces/ tics
- ☐ Has unusual gait e.g. 'bouncy' walk
- ☐ Dislikes noisy crowded places
- ☐ Has poor co-ordination
- ☐ Has odd mannerisms when excited
- ☐ Can spin round without getting dizzy
- ☐ Physically agile
- ☐ Clumsy
- ☐ Has trouble with handwriting
- ☐ Slow learning to ride bike, tie shoelaces
- ☐ Has difficulty focussing on more than one thing at a time
- ☐ Attends to detail rather than the whole picture



Sensory Differences

- Over sensitive or under sensitive
- Variable reactions
- Vulnerable to sensory overload

- o Sight
- o Smell
- o Hearing
- o Touch
- o Taste



- Pain threshold
- Balance
- Attend to detail rather than to whole picture

Strategies to help with sensory problems

- Adapt the environment
- Avoid the source of distress
- Provide an escape route
- Minimise/disguise the source of distress
- Gradual exposure to de-sensitise
- Therapies e.g. sensory integration, massage, aromatherapy, music



Common Questions about Autism



- *What is the difference between autism and Asperger syndrome?*

They are both part of the same spectrum, but people with Asperger syndrome are more able and have better language skills.

- *What is the prevalence of autistic spectrum disorders?*

Figures vary but some research suggests as many as 6 or 7 in every 1000 affected.

- *What is the sex ratio of people with ASD?*

For Kanner's autism, 4 males to 1 female.

For Asperger syndrome 9 males to 1 female

- *Can people with autism develop normal relationships?*

They can form friendships based on common interests but find emotional intimacy difficult.

More Questions about Autism



- *What are the causes of autism?*

Genetic factors are important, but exact causes are still unknown. It is sometimes associated with other conditions such as tuberous sclerosis, ADHD

- *What is the range of intelligence with autism?*

From severe learning disability to gifted.

- *Is autism a mental health problem?*

No, though many people with Asperger syndrome suffer from depression at some time.

- *Can they work?*

Yes, very successfully in some jobs, though they may need support with social aspects of the job.

- *Is autism associated with bowel problems?*

Research has suggested that there is a link.

Useful Books

The Autistic Spectrum by Lorna Wing ISBN 0094751609

Asperger's Syndrome: A Guide for Parents & Professionals by Tony Attwood ISBN 185302577

The Autism Handbook ed. Andrew Nye N.A.S. ISBN 97818992080247

Autism & Asperger Syndrome ed. Uta Frith ISBN 052138608x

A Life Behind Glass by Wendy Lawson ISBN 1875855319

Web Sites



National Autistic Society
www.oneworld.org/autism-uk

SHARE Sheffield Hallam University resource
www.shu.ac.uk/share

DO TO LEARN Helpful strategies for parents plus useful symbols
www.dotolearn.com/

Asperger's Syndrome and promoting a healthy self esteem by Wendy Lawson
www.mugsy.org/wendy/esteem.htm

Tony Atwood. Information for parents and professionals, people with Asperger's Syndrome and their partners
www.tonyatwood.com/