

## Introduction to Autism

including Asperger syndrome

David and Rachel Carter

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### Autism is...

A...a learning disability

B...a developmental condition

C...a mental health condition



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### Autism is...

...a lifelong developmental disability that affects how a person communicates with, and relates to, other people. It also affects how they make sense of the world around them.

- every autism diagnosis is unique.
- estimated 4 males to every female.
- without the right support, it can have a profound, sometimes devastating, effect on individuals and families.

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## Prevalence



Current prevalence rate is more than 1 in 100

This means that:

- Autism affects over 700,000 people.
- Including their families, autism touches the lives of 2.7 million people every day.
- Each requiring various levels of support and intervention.




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## Some facts



- Probably genetically linked, increased incidence in siblings.
- About 25% of people with autism are non-verbal.
- Between 44%–52% of people with autism may have a learning disability.
- About 40% of people diagnosed with autism are average to above-average intellectually.
- About 40% of people diagnosed with autism have symptoms of at least one anxiety disorder at any time, compared with up to 15% in the general population.




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## Some facts



- Nearly two-thirds of adults with autism in England do not have enough support to meet their needs.
- At least 1 in 3 adults with autism experience severe mental health difficulties due to a lack of support.
- Only 16% of adults with autism in the UK are in full-time paid employment.
- While autism is a lifelong condition, the right support at the right time can make an enormous difference to people's lives.




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## The Characteristics of Autism



Having persistent difficulties with:

- Social communication
- Social interaction
- Repetitive behaviour and routines
- Highly-focused interests
- Sensory sensitivity

to the extent that these 'limit and impair everyday functioning'




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## A 'spectrum' condition




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## Social Communication



- May need time to process information
- Visual supports may help back up what you say
- Need clear and specific language avoiding metaphors & sarcasm
- Ability to communicate may deteriorate under stress
- Speech sometimes absent
- Difficulties understanding non-verbal communication




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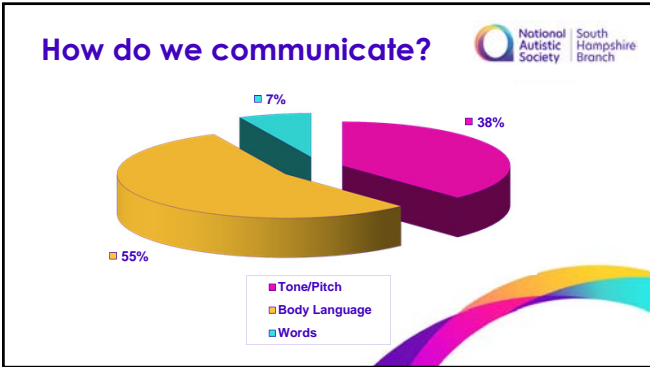
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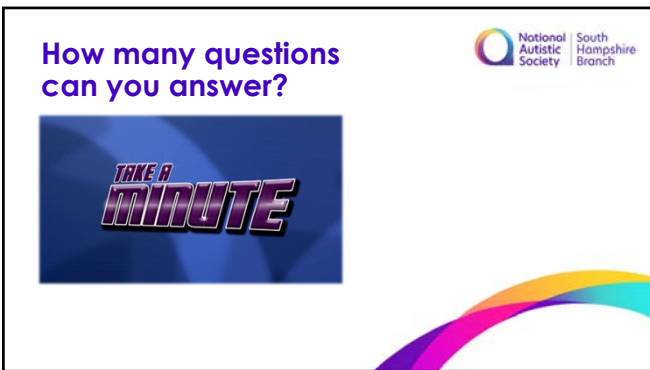
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### Social Interaction

- Aloofness – withdrawn or remote from surroundings
- Passiveness
- Inappropriateness – bizarre. Sometimes approaching strangers or asking personal questions
- May find group work difficult and stressful
- May dominate, or withdraw from, group discussion

One sided interaction      Different response to others

Logos: National Autistic Society, South Hampshire Branch

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### Repetitive behaviour and routines



- Strongly associated with repetitive activities, simple and complex routines and resistance to change
- Difficulty in understanding that other people may see things from a different point of view
- Rigidity in the application of both the written and unwritten rules that govern behaviour
- Literal interpretation of written and verbal instructions




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### Highly-focused interests



- Many autistic people have intense and highly-focused interests, often from a fairly young age.
- These can change over time or be lifelong.
- They provide structure, order and predictability, and help people cope with the uncertainties of daily life.
- They give someone a way to start conversations and feel more self-assured in social situations.
- They help someone to relax and feel happy.




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### Sensory sensitivity



- Hyper- or Hypo- sensitive to sensory stimuli:
  - Auditory – Hearing (may be over-sensitive or become overloaded)
  - Gustatory – Taste (may have very restricted or odd diet)
  - Tactile – Touch (may not allow anyone near them)
  - Visual – Sight (bright lights, fluorescent lights, etc)
  - Olfactory – Smell (may be overwhelmed with certain smells)
  - Proprioception – Body awareness (heat/cold, pain, etc)
  - Vestibular – Balance and movement
- Bombardment by sensory stimuli




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**Sensory sensitivity and processing**






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**WHEN A PERSON WITH AUTISM WALKS INTO A ROOM  
THE FIRST THING THEY SEE IS:**

A pillow with a coffee stain shaped like Africa,  
a train ticket sticking out of a magazine,  
25 floorboards, a remote control,  
a paperclip on the mantelpiece,  
a marble under the chair,  
a crack in the ceiling,  
12 grapes in a bowl,  
a piece of gum,  
a book of stamps  
sticking out from  
behind a silver  
picture  
frame.

So it's not surprising they ignore you completely.

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**Strengths**

- Visual skills
- Highly knowledgeable, especially in areas of particular interest
- Intelligent
- Visual memory, and factual memory
- Very focused
- Independent thinkers – unique perspective
- Precision and accuracy – detail orientated
- Loyal and honest


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*"What would happen if the autism gene was eliminated from the gene pool?"*

*You would have a bunch of people standing around in a cave, chatting and socializing and not getting anything done."*

Temple Grandin (The way I see it, 2008)

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### Things to be aware of

**• Invisible disability**

- All different – all individuals
- May appear to be coping but may be struggling socially
- Expectations may be higher due to their age (for children) but remember this is a developmental delay
- May not have an official diagnosis or know about autism
- Don't underestimate a person's ability

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### Things to be aware of

**• Social isolation**

- Many of these people do very few social activities
- Do not make friends easily
- Can be absorbed in their own world



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**Things to be aware of**



- **Reactions to change**
  - Need advance warning about change
  - May be uncomfortable with uncertainty
  - High dependence on order and predictability
  - Change can cause stress
  - Be patient and support them through change

But...

- They need to be aware that things do sometimes change - life is unpredictable


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**Things to be aware of**



- **Reactions to stress (overloading)** will present differently in each individual but common signs are:
  - Agitation
  - Increased anxiety – maybe asking the same question repeatedly
  - Greater obsession with ‘special interests’
  - Shutdown – no communication
  - Pacing around, hand flapping (can also occur when excited)
  - Anger


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**Things to be aware of**



- **Anger**
  - Important to take the person out of the situation immediately
  - Do not try and resolve when anger levels are high
  - Deal with the situation when they have calmed down
  - Get to know the person so you can spot them starting to wind up before it is too late




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**Things to be aware of**



- **Bullying**
  - 4 times more likely to be bullied than their peers
  - New ways of bullying via internet and mobile phones
  - Vulnerability and lack of empathy can lead to situations
  - Sometimes the person with autism is the bully
  - Can lower already low self-esteem




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**Things to be aware of**



- **Motivation**
  - May lack motivation
  - Must see the point of doing something
  - Must see the benefits to themselves (not others)
  - Need to build confidence in their own ability (low self-esteem)


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**What you need to do**



- Try to understand how their autism affects them
- Reduce anxiety
- Enhance motivation, confidence and self esteem
- Enable concentration / remove distraction
- Play to strengths
- Find what works
- Earn their trust – be proactive not reactive




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### Autism Ambassador scheme



**THINK AUTISM** –  
*the smallest change can make the biggest difference*

- Raising awareness of autism to help people on the autistic spectrum to live as independently as possible in their local communities, access services they require in their lives, receive good customer care and increase opportunities for employment.
- Launched in May 2015.
- Could you be an Ambassador?
- Visit [www.ascambassador.org.uk](http://www.ascambassador.org.uk)




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### Local Autism Directory (LAD)



<https://www.autismhampshire.org.uk/local-autism-directory>

- A one-stop-shop of information across Hampshire and the Isle of Wight.
- Connects the autism community, professionals, employers and service providers, enabling them access autism information in one place.
- Provides information about local issues including support groups, activities, schools, employment, housing, and developments across the region.
- Clear and simply written autism research articles to stay up to date with new approaches and helpful information.




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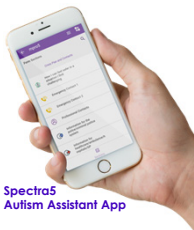
### Autism Alert Programme



Autism Alert Card



Autism Alert Slicker



Spectra5 Autism Assistant App

Available from Autism Hampshire

<https://www.autismhampshire.org.uk/service-development/autism-alert-card>

<https://www.autismhampshire.org.uk/service-development/spectra5-app>

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### Local support groups



Voluntary groups across the county to support children, young people and adults, and their families:

- National Autistic Society branches in South Hampshire and Isle of Wight.
- Independent support groups across the county, including in Andover, Basingstoke, Eastleigh, Fareham, New Forest, Petersfield, Portsmouth, Southampton, Totton, Winchester.
- On-line Facebook groups and forums.




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A voluntary parent-run support group which provides:



- Parent/carers' support groups
- Family youth club
- LEGO club
- Children's social group
- Access to local teenage youth clubs
- Adults' social group
- Partner's group
- Resource library
- Training and social events
- Contact with local support groups
- Advice and information
- Representation on the Hampshire Autism Partnership Board

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*"I know that I will never be neuro-typical. I will always have Asperger's Syndrome. If I am to have a sense of pride and dignity, of high self-esteem, then I need to accept me as being who I am, value my sense of difference and work with my talents, attributes and disposition. I also need others to do the same!"*

Wenn Lawson




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