

# Autistic Spectrum Disorder

## Key Facts Summary

### What is an Autistic Spectrum Disorder?

It affects the way in which people understand and react to the world around them. This causes them to act differently than others in the areas of Communication, Social Interaction and the Imagination. 1 out of every 100 people has autism. Autism like Asperger syndrome can be seen as a Hidden Disability which means you cannot tell someone has it just by looking at them. No-one knows what causes autism, although it can be passed down genetically in a family.

Autism is often referred to as a "spectrum disorder," meaning that the symptoms and characteristics of autism can present themselves in a variety of combinations, ranging from extremely mild to quite severe. They may also have learning disabilities or other difficulties such as dyslexia.

### How does it affect people?

People who have autism may find everyday situations challenging, for example they may experience over- or under-sensitivity to sounds, touch, tastes, smells, light or colours. They may also find it difficult to communicate their needs with others, talk about emotions, or feelings and will often have routines which need to be kept to for them to feel safe and secure in their environment.

Some people who have autism may experience some of the following:

- Little or no speech
- Avoid eye contact
- A dislike of every day touch such as hugging, hand shaking etc.
- Physical behaviours such as flapping hands, spinning, walking on tiptoes – these can be exacerbated when they feel anxious.
- Fixation on particular objects.
- Find it difficult to be flexible or spontaneous or find change in general difficult.
- Repeat certain behaviours, rituals and conversations.
- Take a while to process information or requests in conversations.
- They may find it difficult to use their imagination, think about how others may feel, or think about how things affect others.

Some strengths that people with autism may have are:

- They may be very interested in one thing and know a lot about it.
- They may be good at remembering information.
- They may be very good at something. For example, they may be very good at maths, art or music.
- They may be good at concentrating on one activity.

Colleagues of people with ASDs have described a variety of strengths, which often include:

- Accuracy
- Good eye for detail and reliability
- An excellent memory for facts and figures
- The ability to thrive in a structured, well-organised work environment.



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## **Using the SPELL approach (Structure, Positive, Empathy, Low arousal, Links)**

Over many years, NAS schools and adult services have developed a framework for understanding and responding to the needs of children and adults with an ASD called SPELL. See the link below for more information.

<http://www.autism.org.uk/our-services/employment-support/employers/factsheets-for-employers/employer-factsheet-what-is-an-asd.aspx>

### **Facts**

- Almost 1% of the population is estimated to have an autism spectrum condition, with more men than women affected.
- 60%-70% of people who are on the autistic spectrum condition will also have a learning disability.

### **Where can I go for more information?**

#### **National Autistic Society**

Autism Helpline

Phone: 0808 800 4104

Minicom: 0845 070 4003

[autismhelpline@nas.org.uk](mailto:autismhelpline@nas.org.uk)

[www.autism.org.uk](http://www.autism.org.uk)

Open from 10am until 4pm

Open from Monday until Friday



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