

# Communication and interaction

## Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and characteristics of ASD

### Child or young person's voice as told to professionals

I'm scared my teacher will be angry if I make a mistake when I don't mean to

If I'm anxious, some people think I'm angry

Most people think I'm weird

People annoy me a lot of the time

I'm usually right – other people just don't understand things

I don't like lunchtime

I don't like being different

Confused about what to do

I need to have time by myself

## Whole school approaches

The school will have adopted or be developing the use of the SPELL Framework across the school. Information on the SPELL Framework can be found at: <https://www.autism.org.uk/what-we-do/professional-development/the-spell-framework>

All staff have received 'Autism awareness' level training, delivered on a cyclical basis (minimum of annually) or as part of the induction programme for all staff.

All staff have received training specifically about how ASD can present in female pupils; staff understand that girls with ASD may present very differently to their male peers with girls often using more strategies to 'mask' their difficulties (whilst understanding that boys can also use similar strategies).

All teaching staff have received training on the impact of Autism on a child or young person's experience of school, on learning and on how to put effective support in place in the classroom.

## What you will see

(The difficulty/barrier, how this presents and the impact on the learner)

### **Young children with ASD or characteristics of ASD may be pre-verbal.**

This can lead to:

- withdrawn behaviours
- appearing to be in a 'world of their own'
- frustration, resulting in challenging behaviours
- poor progress not associated with a learning need.

### **Difficulty understanding or using social communication – the 'unspoken rules'**

- Social isolation and vulnerability.
- Can appear rude or aggressive.
- Makes mistakes in social interactions and lacks the skills to repair.
- Appearing to struggle with boundaries, e.g. open discussion of matters considered private or social taboos.

## What can help

(Provision – strategies, interventions and resources)

- A multisensory approach.
- Makaton.
- Symbol communication such as PECs.
- Visual support.
- Now and Next boards and sequence strips.
- Communication support software such as Communicate in Print or Widgit.
- Introduce language through rhyme and song.
- All attempts to speak are supported.

- Comic strip conversations/story boards.
- Social Autopsy approach.
- Autism-specific social communication programme.
- Explicit teaching of social rules, the reasons and benefits of their use.
- Lego-based interventions.
- Lunch/ break time clubs.
- Modelling and role play.
- Grouping learner with social communication difficulties with socially competent peers.
- Use of prompting to support generalisation of what has been learnt.
- "Now (you are doing this) and Next (you are going to be doing that)" boards.
- Consider, in collaboration with the learner and parents/carers, peer awareness training.

## What you will see

### Difficulties with language and non-verbal communication:

- Not knowing that whole class/group instructions are meant for them – can appear that learners are reluctant or unwilling to follow instructions.
- Interpreting language literally; struggling to understand idioms, some jokes and sarcasm, which can lead to vulnerability and embarrassment.
- Struggling to differentiate or misinterpreting tone of voice.
- Initiating interactions inappropriately – shouting out, touching others to get attention, interrupting.
- Difficulty in understanding body language.
- Difficulty in recognising and interpreting facial expressions.

### Unusual communication:

- Flat, monotonous tone – can lead others to believe that learner is unemotional.
- Immature tone.
- Adoption of the accent of another language – often American.
- Loud voice regardless of time or place – can appear opinionated and rude.
- Lecturing tone – can cause difficulties with peer relationships.
- Unusual eye contact – often avoidant and fleeting but can be overly intense.

## What can help

- Use the learner's name to gain their attention before giving instructions.
- Keep instructions simple.
- Avoid use of sarcasm, idioms and figures of speech.
- Use visual supports, pictures, symbols.
- Be aware of your own use of body language to communicate - this can be missed or misinterpreted.
- Be aware that learners may not be able to read facial expression as a form of communication.
- Awareness of own tone of voice (calm and not too loud).
- Awareness of the impact of language and social communication difficulties on peer relationships and potential vulnerability; careful consideration of grouping and be vigilant to misunderstandings leading to conflict or ridicule.
- Social rules displayed visually and referred to explicitly.
- Consider, in collaboration with the learner and parents/carers, peer awareness training.

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- Social communication groups.
- Modelling.

## What you will see

### **Difficulties with imagination – putting themselves in ‘someone else’s shoes’:**

- Struggle to understand another person’s point of view which can lead to others believing the child or young person lacks emotion and compassion.
- May struggle with some aspects of the curriculum requiring this skill.

### **Sensory needs:**

- May be sensitive to (or afraid of) loud noises or particular sounds, smells or sights, leading to inability to concentrate, increased anxiety and agitation.
- May experience visual, auditory or olfactory overload leading to intense feelings of anxiety, being overwhelmed, ‘fright, fight or flight response.
- May exit intolerable environments without warning or create a situation leading to their removal from the environment.
- May refuse to enter certain environments.

## What can help

- Social Stories™
- Social autopsy approach.
- Social communication and understanding groups or 1:1 work.
- Use of TV programmes to observe and analyse the behaviour of others.
- Awareness of potential difficulties with creative writing or analysis of events, fiction and poetry; provide writing frames, story boards and task boards.

- Avoid ‘visual clutter’ – classrooms are ordered and calm.
- Consider the sensory environment using a sensory audit to consider:
  - Lighting
  - Classroom and corridor displays
  - Use of workstations or re-positioning of individual table or desks
  - Where space allows, set up a sensory room.
  - Sensory tool box.
  - Help/exit cards.
  - Sensory circuits delivered by trained staff.
  - Use sensory profiling.
  - Consider providing ear defenders.
  - Pre-warning of fire drills or announcements where possible.
  - Plan transition times e.g. delayed or early movement between lessons.

## What you will see

### Difficulties in the classroom:

- Planning (executive functioning) – finding it hard to organise ideas, plan projects, organise equipment and resources – can appear disorganised and may become anxious and confused.
- Sequencing or multi-step tasks.
- Maintaining concentration if not understanding ‘the point’ of the task or experiencing sensory overload.
- Reading and comprehension, due to problems with inference and vocabulary.
- Literal understanding.
- Intense focus and ‘getting stuck’ on an aspect of a task.
- Refusal, avoidance or reluctance to complete homework – ‘school-work is for school and home is my refuge’.
- Not understanding what is expected of any task (including homework).
- Struggling with changes to usual school routines - or worrying that there might be a change.
- Difficulty recording work.
- Difficulty demonstrating level of knowledge and understanding in line with assessment criteria, leading to attainment scores not in line with learner’s abilities.

## What can help

- Check back that any verbal input has been understood.
- Visual support.
- Get attention using name.
- Provide checklists and task boards.
- Try to link work to special interests.
- Consider using timers to structure tasks.
- Reward the extra effort it has taken to complete a task.
- Close liaison with home regarding homework – can homework be limited or completed within the school day?
- Consider the use of learning breaks to manage demand and sensory stimulation.
- Pre-teach key vocabulary – small group or individual support.
- Explicit teaching of inference.
- Use of narrative programmes.
- Use scaffolding techniques, e.g. writing frames.
- Provide alternative methods of recording e.g. laptop and or speech-to-text software.
- Teach touch typing.
- For assessment, share and explain marking criteria to support understanding of why work needs to be completed in a particular way, or the extent to which exam questions need to be answered.

## What you will see

### **Difficulties combine, leading to social isolation and difficulties making, maintaining and repairing friendships:**

- Feelings of sadness, loneliness, low self-worth and anxiety.
- Vulnerable to bullying and exploitation.

### **Difficulties combine, leading to escalation in anxiety and deteriorating well-being and mental health. Difficulties combine (sometimes including the impact of the continuous challenge and effort of continually attempting to 'mask' difficulties), leading to:**

- Increased withdrawn behaviours.
- Increase in challenging behaviours.
- Escalation in behaviours in order to be sent home or excluded.
- Difficulties around eating in school or at home.
- Escalating difficulties with emotional regulation at home.
- Increase in demand avoidance.
- Increase in perfectionism/'overworking'.
- Increasingly reporting feeling unwell.
- Refusing to attend school, or parental efforts to ensure attendance are met with increasing resistance.

## What can help

- 'Buddy' systems.
- Circle of Friends approach.
- Allocation of a key person.
- Lunch time clubs/activities.
- Place and time to be away from the demands of social interaction.
- Support during unstructured times to prompt the use of helpful strategies, encourage and model.
- Consider, in collaboration with the learner and parents/carers, peer awareness training.
- Mentoring support.
- Be vigilant for signs of increasing generalised anxiety and deteriorating wellbeing.

- Discussion at the Local Inclusion Forum Team meetings.
- Analysis of aspects of school life that are most difficult.
- Supported transition in to school each day.
- Enhanced communication plan agreed with parents, which may include more regular phone calls, emails, meetings, use of contact.
- Consider increased use of learning breaks.
- Consider curriculum load.
- Consider referral to GP or NELFT.
- Signpost parents to the Local Offer and known community support.
- Discuss referral to Early Help/Social Care with parents.
- Consider needs to other children in the family.