



OAASIS INFORMATION SHEET

Autism

Office for
Advice
Assistance
Support
and
Information
on
Special needs

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OAASIS
A part of
Cambian Education
Services



Children with autism exhibit, to a greater or lesser degree, a **Triad of Impairment**, which is the defining characteristic of autism:

- **Communication:** Language impairment across all modes of communication: speech, intonation, gesture, facial expression and other body language.
- **Imagination:** Rigidity and inflexibility of thought process: resistance to change, obsessional and ritualistic behaviour.
- **Socialisation:** Difficulties with social relationships, poor social timing, lack of social empathy, rejection of normal body contact, inappropriate eye contact. (Dr Lorna Wing)

Language and communication: People with autism have difficulty understanding the meaning of words and the intention of the speaker; they take things literally and are not able to interpret gestures, intonation, facial expressions or body language. Many children will have delayed speech and some may not develop speech at all and will need other communication aids e.g. pictures, photos, gestures etc. Eye contact will be difficult for them.

Inflexibility of thought and imagination: People with autism have difficulty manipulating thoughts in an imaginative way. They may become unduly upset by any changes in their known pattern of life or routine. They may have a tendency towards repetitive actions within a restrictive range, such as body rocking, hand or arm flapping. They do not usually play with toys conventionally; they may watch one part of it or do the same thing to it for long periods. Imaginative play is limited, especially if other children are involved, although some children can imitate something they have seen.

Lack of social skills: People with autism have little or no understanding of normal social interaction. They do not automatically make relationships and have difficulty understanding that other people have feelings, thoughts and intentions. They will have difficulty playing and communicating with others, or taking others' feelings into account.

Sensory perception and responses: Some children will be over-sensitive to certain sounds, smells, sights, lights and textures. They may react to changes in their clothing, food, noise and light levels. Their daily environment should be 'autism friendly' - secure so that they cannot wander into unsafe areas, visually helpful as to what is in or behind cupboards, drawers, doors etc. As well as being hypersensitive to some stimuli, children with autism may have very high pain thresholds, so any playtime or classroom 'accident' should be carefully checked.

What causes autism? To date, there is no clear answer to this question. It is believed to be present from birth (in most cases - though there is debate about whether it can develop later). It appears to have some genetic predisposing factors and is associated with some types of brain damage. Work is being done on the possibility that allergies and dietary intolerances play a part. It is now clear that it is not caused by bad parenting - an idea which, thankfully, has been discredited.

It is unlikely that any single cause is going to be found. It is probable that a number of factors are operating together to give rise to the condition. As yet, there is no proven cure. As work progresses in this area it may be that prevention or improved treatment may be a possibility.

People with autism have a different view of what is important. Their perceptions are different.

People with autism view the world in a different way. Different aspects of the environment interest them.

It is important to note that the word is *different*. It is not necessarily wrong or a lesser way of being.

We should always respect the right of the person with autism to be themselves. However, the world in general does not share their view of life. If children are to have any chance of taking part in our world they must learn to understand it and make sense of it as best they can.

Autism is a very individual disorder. The manifestations are diverse and all of the problems can be found in relation to other disorders. It is the 'Triad of Impairment' that is the common feature to all people with autism.

It is also important to remember that people with autism are not immune to other illnesses or handicaps. It is tempting to attribute every difficulty experienced to the autism but it may be due to deafness, depression or even just the normal behaviour of a boisterous and mischievous child. As with any child, your child will be influenced by their own personality, family characteristics, their own strengths and weaknesses.

Children with autism find listening and giving attention to the spoken word very difficult. Make it easier for them by keeping unnecessary 'chat' to a minimum, speak clearly and calmly, ensure you have their attention before speaking and allow lots of time for them to make sense of what you have said.

OTHER USEFUL CONTACTS:

The National Autistic Society the largest autism charity in the UK can help with local support groups; information on autism for individuals, parents, professionals; befriending; training; assessment centre; links and much more

Website: www.autism.org.uk

Helpline: 0845 070 4004 Parent to Parent Line: 0800 9520 520

Resources for Autism aims to fill the gaps in practical services for those on the spectrum by providing music and art therapy, adult art and social groups, play, youth and holiday scheme provision and home based family support.

Web: www.resourcesforautism.org.uk Email: admin@resourcesforautism.org.uk

Tel: 020 8458 3259

Autism Direct for parents/carers offers professional home-based detailed assessments and advice

Tel: 07754 902686

Web: www.autismdirect.co.uk

Autism Independent UK offers information on their website, a diagnostic & assessment resource centre, helpline, quarterly newsletter, training, library of books and videos.

Web: www.autismuk.com

Email: autism@autismuk.com

Tel: 01536 523274

Tel: 01278 684060

BIBIC (British Institute for Brain Injured Children)

Website: www.bibic.org.uk

Email: info@bibic.org.uk

Centre for Autism and Related Disorders

Web: www.centreforautism.com

Tel: 0870 899 8898

Contact a Family provides support, information and advice to families with disabled children or those with a medical condition.

Web: www.cafamily.org.uk

Helpline: 0808 808 3555

The Disabilities Trust

Web: www.disabilities-trust.org.uk

Tel: 01444 239123

Provides a range of specialist education services, housing and support for children and adults; also has an Autism Awareness website - a meeting point for people concerned with autism.

Web: www.autism-awareness.org.uk

Autism NI (PAPA)

Tel: 028 90 401729

The Northern Ireland Autism Charity

Website: www.autismni.org

The Scottish Society for Autism

Website: www.autism-in-scotland.org.uk

Tel: 01259 720044

Irish Autism Action Web: www.autismireland.ie Email: info@autismireland.ie

Tel: 044 933 1609

Organisation of parents for parents, with first hand knowledge of discovering and coping with autism.

READING: see also **OAASIS information sheet 'Books – where to find them'**

OAASIS publishes **A First Guide to Autism (2nd edition)** in its **First Guide** series (price £6.00 plus p&p).

You can ring or write to OAASIS at the address over the page for a publications list / order form or visit the website.

OAASIS free Information Sheets: including others on aspects of Asperger Syndrome, please contact OAASIS for the full list or download them on the website www.oaasis.co.uk

Information for parents - autistic spectrum disorders a free book with lots of advice and contacts available from DfES Publications, PO Box 5050, Sherwood Park, Annesley, Nottingham NG15 0DJ or Tel: 0845 602 2260

Check these publishers for new books on Asperger Syndrome/autistic spectrum disorders, which come out regularly:

Routledge Education (member of the Taylor Francis Group) Tel: 020 7017 6000

Fax: 020 7017 6699

Website: www.routledgeeducation.com

Jessica Kingsley Publishers: Website: www.jkp.com

Email: post@jkp.com

Tel: 020 7833 2307

The NAS - The NAS books are supplied by Central Books. You can order online or telephone them at

Tel: 0845 458 9911

Website: www.autism.org.uk

Sage Publications: For all professionals working in schools and educational settings (includes Paul Chapman Publishing and Lucky Duck books).

Web: www.sagepub.co.uk

Email: market@sagepub.co.uk

SEN Marketing: Books and software for special educational needs. Website: www.senbooks.co.uk Tel: 01924 871697

The **internet book shop**

www.amazon.co.uk

INTERNET SITES:

www.autism-awareness.org.uk a site run by The Disabilities Trust. It has news, events, a message board and publications.

www.autismdirect.co.uk for parents/carers – offer home-based detailed assessments and advice. (Tel: 07754 902686)

www.autism-help.org a site set up by an Australian social worker/parent of an autistic child. It has a huge amount of information on every aspect you can think of.

www.autismmedical.com the website for the UK charity Allergy Induced Autism.

www.autism.org/contents.html is the US Center for the Study of Autism site. Many links plus sites for siblings.

www.autism-smile.co.uk a home based therapeutic play approach enhances communication skills, language development, imaginative play and helps children interact more effectively.

www.autismuk.com website of Autism Independent UK, clearly laid out with much information.

www.autisticsociety.org a UK site for parents, families, professionals with a wide range of information from news, education, law, therapies, statistics, personal stories, forums and much more.

www.maapservices.org a US site for more advanced individuals with Autism, Aspergers and Pervasive developmental disorder.

www.mugsy.org website of The NAS (Surrey Branch). This is an excellent site with lots of up to date information, news, and resources wherever you are in the country.

www.teachernet.gov.uk/wholeschool/sen/asds/beanasdfriendlyschool/ provides info for schools on how to be ASD friendly.

www.udel.edu/bkirby/asperger/ this is a very informative and full American site, run by OASIS (On-Line Asperger Syndrome Information and Support). It covers autism as well as AS.

www.users.dircon.co.uk/~cns/ is a site for students with autism & AS at college or university.

Cambian Education Services run seven residential special schools and colleges for young people with autistic spectrum disorders, Asperger Syndrome/HFA, severe learning difficulties. Please contact OAASIS for the prospectuses of our schools and college specifically for autism. OAASIS produces 8 chargeable **publications** entitled 'First Guide to...'; **wallet sized cards** explaining 9 learning disabilities and a wide range of **free information sheets**. Please contact OAASIS (see front of sheet for contact details) for the full list, or view them on the website at www.oaasis.co.uk. All the information sheets are checked annually; please ensure you have the current version.