

AUTISM

This fact sheet has been written by parent carers for parent carers.



What is autism?

Autism is a lifelong developmental disorder that affects how a person communicates and interacts with other people, and makes sense of the world around them. Autism is a spectrum disorder, which means that although all people with autism have difficulties with certain things, the degree to which they are affected varies widely. Together, different types of autism are sometimes known as autistic spectrum conditions (ASCs). Around 1 in 100 people in the UK are known to have autism, with many more boys affected than girls.

Characteristics of autism

People with autism share difficulties in three areas. These are:

- Difficulty with social communication.
- Difficulty with social interaction, including reading emotions and facial expressions.
- Difficulty with social imagination.

Together, these three difficulties are known as the 'triad of impairments'. People with autism may also have sensory issues, with noise sensitivity being very common. Some people with autism also develop unusual and repetitive patterns of behaviour and obsessive interests.

People who are on the autistic spectrum may also have varying degrees of learning disabilities. They may also have other conditions such as: attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD); dyspraxia, which affects co-ordinating thoughts and movements; hypermobility syndrome; epilepsy or Tourette's syndrome.

Causes of autism

At the moment, the causes of autism are still unknown, although many experts believe that it may be the result of a number of different genetic and environmental factors.

Types of therapy

There is no 'cure' for autism but there are a number of therapies that may help your child:

- **Applied Behavioural Analysis (ABA)** – intensive therapy which breaks down skills into small tasks and teaches them in a highly structured way.
- **Social Stories** – short stories that teach children and adults with Autism what to expect in social situations or activities.
- **Speech and Language Therapy (SALT)** – specialist support provided by a therapist to help build language and communications skills.
- **TEACCH** – highly structured system of learning based on using visual prompts, which have found to be beneficial in teaching people with autism.
- There are a number of 'alternative' therapies available to treat children and adults with autism, some of which are known to have little scientific proof of their effectiveness. It is advisable to consult your paediatrician or GP before proceeding with any therapy for your child.



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Ask about

- **Information, Advice and Support (IAS)** – Amaze supports families of children and young people with SEN and disabilities in Brighton and Hove. We have a helpline, publications and a website. We also run workshops and courses and can offer one-to-one support with EHC planning and making DLA and PIP claims. Call Amaze on: **01273 772289** or visit: **www.amazebrighton.org.uk**.
- **ASC courses – Seaside View** tel: **01273 265780** and **CAMHS** tel: **01273 718680** both run courses for parent carers of children and young people with an autistic spectrum condition diagnosis.
- **Autism charities for adults – Aspire** supports adults with Asperger's syndrome or Autism. Call: **01273 725994** or visit: **www.bh-impetus.org/projects/aspire**. **Assert** runs a monthly, informal, support group for parents, partners or carers of adults with Asperger syndrome or high-functioning autism. Contact Sarah on: **01273 234850**, email: **assert.bh@assertbh.org**, or visit: **www.assertbh.org.uk**.
- **Autism Sussex** – runs individual advice and support sessions for parent carers and monthly Saturday clubs for children and young people with ASC at Downs View Special School. Call: **0345 450 0060** or email: **familysupport@autismsussex.org.uk**.
- **Autistic Spectrum Condition Support Service (ASCSS)** – works with schools to include pupils with ASC and meet their individual needs. Also runs regular parent coffee mornings. Call: **07578 768 441** or email: **LisaElbourne@downspark.brighton-hove.sch.uk**.
- **Bounce soft play** – for families of pre-school children with an ASC diagnosis or awaiting assessment. Meets on Mondays at Bounce Softplay, City Academy, Whitehawk. Advance booking essential, to do so email: **amanda.mortensen@scope.org.uk** or tel: **07436 810608**.
- **Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS)** – diagnose, assess and support children and young people with mental health issues. Referrals to CAMHS should be made by a professional such as your GP, health visitor or the school nurse. Call CAMHS on: **01273 718680**.
- **Compass Card** – a free leisure discount card administered by Amaze for 0 to 25 year olds registered on The Compass who live or go to school in Brighton and Hove or West Sussex, or who are looked after by social services in these areas. Call Amaze on: **01273 772289**.
- **Independent Support** – Amaze's Independent Supporters provide extra advice and support to young people and parent carers who are going through the process of getting an EHC Plan in Brighton and Hove and Sussex. For Brighton and Hove Independent Support, call: **01273 772289**. For Sussex Independent Support, call: **0300 123 7782**.
- **Integrated Child Development and Disability Centre (Seaside View)** – where most children with ASC will be diagnosed and where social care, health and education services work together to support your child. Referrals are usually via a health or education professional but you can call Seaside View direct on **01273 265780**.
- **Making a claim for DLA** – if your child's care or mobility needs are significantly greater than the needs of their peers you may be able to claim Disability Living Allowance for them. Find out more at: **www.gov.uk**. Amaze can give you advice and practical support with making a claim. Call the helpline on: **01273 772289** or email: **helpline@amazebrighton.org.uk**.
- **mASCot** – a parent-led support group for Brighton and Hove families who have a child or children with ASC. It has a private online forum and holds regular meet-ups for a wide range of activities. Email: **info@asc-mascot.com** or go to: **www.asc-mascot.com**.

Further reading and useful links

- **Ambitious about autism** – national charity for children and young people with autism. Visit: **www.ambitiousaboutautism.org.uk**.
- **National Autistic Society** – **www.autism.org.uk**. Helpline tel: **0808 800 4104**.

