

AUTISM

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



What is autism?

Autism is a lifelong developmental disorder that can affect 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 known to be 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 difficulties or 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.





Ask about

- **SENDIASS** - Amaze provides Information, Advice and Support (IAS) to children and young people with SEND in East Sussex and their parent carers. Our helpline advisers can talk you through any issues relating to a child or young person's special educational needs or disability. Call **01273 772289**, email sendiass@amazesussex.org.uk or visit www.amazesussex.org.uk
- **ISEND CLASS+** - support for families with children with autism including advice, coffee mornings, workshops and short term support at home. Part of the ISEND CLASS service that gives specialist support to schools in East Sussex for 4-16 year olds with autism, communication and learning difficulties. Call **01273 336887** or visit www.facebook.com/CLASSPlusEastSussex
- **Child Development Team** - consultant paediatricians, specialist nurses and therapists (based at the Scott Unit in Eastbourne, Kipling Outpatient Dept in Hastings and satellite clinics) who assess and support children up to 11 who may be on the autistic spectrum. Ask your GP, health visitor, your child's school or another professional working with your child for a referral.
- **Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS)** – diagnose, assess and support young people with ASC aged 11 -18. Also run courses for parent carers. Referrals to CAMHS should be made by a professional such as your GP, health visitor or the school nurse. Call CAMHS on Hailsham: 01323 446070; Lewes: 01273 402510; Uckfield: 01825 745001; Hastings: 01424 758905.
- **Children's Integrated Therapy Service** - deliver physiotherapy, occupational therapy and speech and language therapy for children aged 0 to 16 or 19, depending on school-leaving age. Email kcht.escits@nhs.net or visit www.kentcht.nhs.uk/service/east-sussex-childrens-integrated-therapy-and-equipment-service
- **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: sendiass@amazesussex.org.uk.
- **Aspens** - family support groups and clinics, parent carer courses and workshops and a variety of groups for children and young people with autism across East Sussex. They also run Easter and Summer holiday clubs. Call **0345 450 0060** or visit www.aspens.org.uk
- **Autism Train** - training courses on for parent carers of children and young people with autism in East Sussex. Tel: **01424 845562** Email info@autismtrain.co.uk or visit www.autismtrain.co.uk.
- **Families for Autism** - weekend clubs and activities for children and young people with autism. Tel; **01323 430369** or **07415 137887** or visit www.familiesforautism.com
- **iContact Autism** - Lewes-based autism community group that runs support groups, workshops, events and campaigns. Email info@icontactautism.org or visit www.icontactautism.org or iContact's Facebook page at www.facebook.com/iContactAutism
- **Spectrum Autism Support** – helps young people with autism aged 0 to 19 to join in activities and their community independently. Run skills award course and groups for 10-18 year olds. Call **01424 724700** or email spectrum@eastsussex.gov.uk
- **Other parent-led groups for families of children with SEND** - there are a number of parent led support groups and organisations across Sussex for families of children with any additional need. For details, visit www.escis.org.uk/category/family-information/parentcarer-run-groups





Further reading and useful links

- **East Sussex Local Offer** - for information about local services for children and young people with autism visit www.eastsussex.gov.uk/childrenandfamilies/specialneeds/learning-difficulties/autism
- **Ambitious about autism** – national charity for children and young people with autism. Visit: www.ambitiousaboutautism.org.uk.
- **Autism Education Trust** - resources and training geared towards getting the best education for children and young people on the autistic spectrum.- www.autismeducationtrust.org.uk/for-parents
- **National Autistic Society** – www.autism.org.uk/about/diagnosis.aspx. Helpline tel: 0808 800 4104.

