

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 Brighton & Hove 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
- **Integrated Child Development and Disability Services (Seaside View)** – where most primary school-age children with ASC will be diagnosed and where social care, health and education services work together to support your child. Also run courses for parents of children with ASC. Referrals are usually via a health or education professional but you can call Seaside View direct on 01273 265780.
- **Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS)** – diagnose, assess and support secondary school age young people with ASC. Also run ASC 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: 01273 718680.
- **BHISS Autism and Language Team** – local authority service that works with schools and other education settings to support children with ASC. Includes specialist autism and language SEN practitioners and teachers and family support workers. Also runs regular coffee mornings for parent carers. Ask your child's teacher or SENCO for a referral or call BHISS on 01273 293481.
- **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.
- **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 & Hove or West Sussex, or who are looked after by social services in these areas. call Amaze on: 01273 772289.
- **mASCot** – a parent-led support group for Brighton & 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.
- **Face 2 Face club for under 7s with autism** – Meets second Saturday of every month at Turner Children's Centre, Ivory Place, BN2 9QE. Email: amandam@amazesussex.org.uk or call Amanda on: 07983 598711.
- **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.uk or visit: www.assertbh.org.uk

Further reading and useful links

- **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.

