

# 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.



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### Ask about

- **Amaze** – the **Special Educational Needs and Disability Information, Advice and Support Service (SENDIASS)** offers impartial, confidential advice on anything to do with special educational needs and disabilities for 0 to 25 year olds. Parents, carers, children and young people under 25 with SEND living in Brighton & Hove or East Sussex can use the service. Email [sendiass@amazesussex.org.uk](mailto:sendiass@amazesussex.org.uk), call **01273 772289** or visit our website at <https://amazesussex.org.uk>
- **CAMHS (Child & Adolescent Mental Health Service) Learning Disability Team** – can offer advice and support if your child has behavioural difficulties and a learning disability. this may include one to one advice at home. Call: **01273 718680**.
- **Children's Centres** – if you are worried about your pre-school child, visit your local children's centre and speak to a health visitor.
- **Disability Living Allowance (DLA)** – if your child's care or mobility needs are significantly greater than the needs of their peers you may be able to claim DLA for them. Visit [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk) and search for DLA. Amaze can also give you advice and support with making a claim. Call our helpline: **01273 772289** or visit our website: [amazesussex.org.uk](http://amazesussex.org.uk).
- **Face 2 Face club for under 7s with autism** – Meets second Saturday of every month at Turner Children's Centre, Ivory Place, BN2 9QE. For more information, call Amanda on: **07983 598711** or email: [amandam@amazesussex.org.uk](mailto:amandam@amazesussex.org.uk).
- **mASCot** – parent-led support group for Brighton & Hove families with a child or young person with an autism spectrum condition. It has a private online forum and holds regular meet-ups for a wide range of activities including a regular fortnightly Lego club for children with ASC over five. Email: [info@asc-mascot.com](mailto:info@asc-mascot.com) or go to: [www.asc-mascot.com](http://www.asc-mascot.com).
- **Other parent support groups** – there are various parent led groups for children with disabilities in Brighton & Hove. See a full list of local groups at: [amazesussex.org.uk/parent-carers/info-advice-parent-carers/survival-strategies/parent-support-groups](http://amazesussex.org.uk/parent-carers/info-advice-parent-carers/survival-strategies/parent-support-groups)
- **Seaside View Child Development Centre** – this is where many children are diagnosed and where health professionals such as paediatricians and therapists work together to support and treat your child. Assessments will usually be via a health or education professional but you can contact Seaside View directly on: **01273 265780**.

### Further reading and useful links

- **Amaze's fact sheet on Asperger Syndrome**. Download from our website at <https://amazesussex.org.uk/resources/fact-sheets>
- **Ambitious About Autism** – national charity for children and young people with autism. Visit: [www.ambitiousaboutautism.org.uk](http://www.ambitiousaboutautism.org.uk)
- **The Challenging Behaviour Foundation** – [www.challengingbehaviour.org.uk](http://www.challengingbehaviour.org.uk)
- **Local Offer** – the local authority's online listing of all the services and support that are available to families with children with SEND in the area. Visit [new.brighton-hove.gov.uk/special-educational-needs-and-disabilities](http://new.brighton-hove.gov.uk/special-educational-needs-and-disabilities)
- **National Autistic Society** – [www.autism.org.uk](http://www.autism.org.uk). Helpline tel: **0808 800 4104**.

