

AUTISM

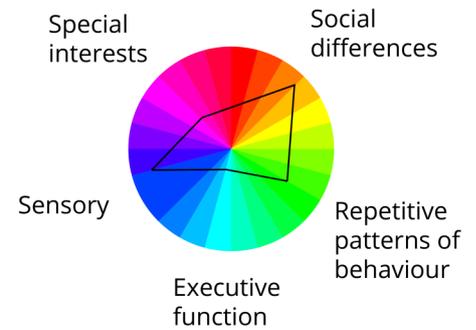
This fact sheet has been written by parent carers for parent carers



What is autism?

Autism is a lifelong developmental condition that can affect how a person communicates and interacts and makes sense of the world around them.

Autism is a spectrum condition, which means that although all autistic people experience differences from their non-autistic peers, they may be affected to varying degrees in different areas. For example, one autistic person may have significant sensory differences, but not special interests. Another may experience difficulties with certain mental processes like planning or paying attention (often called executive function), but their sensory perception is similar to a non-autistic person.



The autistic spectrum is not a line between 'autistic' and 'not autistic', but a more complex space. Each person's place on the spectrum is unique, depending on their specific differences.

A person's position on the autism spectrum can change over time, and their needs may change as a result. Together, different ways of being autistic are known as autistic spectrum conditions (ASCs).

Around 1 in 100 people in the UK are known to be autistic, with many more boys diagnosed than girls. Until quite recently, it was thought that autism was more common in males, but research is now confirming an autism gender gap: women and girls often go undiagnosed, or get diagnosed later, because of failures to recognise the different ways autism can present in girls or the role played by social expectations of the different genders.

Autistic characteristics

Autistic children and young people may differ from their non-autistic peers in the following ways:

- social communication
- social interaction, including reading emotions and facial expressions
- social imagination
- sensory sensitivities
- having special interests
- showing repetitive patterns of behaviour
- executive function skills

Some things that non-autistic people can handle relatively easily, for example a busy, loud train, can be very distressing for an autistic person and cause behaviours that might challenge those around them.

Autistic people may also have varying degrees of learning difficulties or disabilities. Or they may have other conditions such as: attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD); dyspraxia, which affects co-ordinating thoughts and movements; hypermobility syndrome; epilepsy or Tourette syndrome. Having one neurodevelopmental condition increases the likelihood of having another.

It's important to remember that, though we are listing common characteristics of autism here, every autistic person is unique and has their own specific strengths and challenges.





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

Autism is a lifelong condition, but there are a number of different therapies that may help your young person learn about themselves and the world they live in as they grow up

- **Social Stories** – short stories that teach autistic children and adults 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 autistic people.
- There are a number of ‘alternative’ therapies available to treat autistic children and adults, 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

Across Sussex

- **Amaze - ND Family Support Service** supports families with the challenges they may face when their child or young person is on the neurodevelopmental pathway for conditions like autism, ADHD, tics/Tourette syndrome and foetal alcohol spectrum disorder. Your child does not need a diagnosis to get support and life does not have to be difficult. Email NDP@amazesussex.org.uk or refer yourself to the service here <https://amazesussex.org.uk/nd-family-support>
- **Amaze - SENDIASS (Special Educational Needs and Disability Information, Advice and Support Service)** offers impartial, confidential advice on anything to do with SEND for 0 to 25 year olds. Parents, carers, children and young people under 25 with SEND living or going to school in Brighton & Hove or East Sussex can use the service. Email sendiass@amazesussex.org.uk, call 01273 772289 or visit <https://amazesussex.org.uk>
- **Amaze - Parent groups & befriending** – one to one befriending and regular support groups for parent carers across Brighton & Hove and East Sussex, including groups with a focus on neurodevelopmental differences like autism and ADHD. For details of all our groups, visit <https://amazesussex.org.uk/parent-groups-and-befriending>, call: 07484 051755 or email: marie@amazesussex.org.uk
- **Child Development Teams** - consultant paediatricians, specialist nurses and therapists 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. In Brighton & Hove this service is based at the **Seaside View** Child Development Centre. In East Sussex, it is based at **Community Paediatrics Parkview** in Bexhill, Kipling Outpatient Dept in Hastings and satellite clinics.
- **Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS)** – diagnose, assess and support young people with ASC aged 11 -18. Referrals to CAMHS are usually made by a professional such as





your GP or the school nurse, but you can also self-refer by contacting the Brighton & Hove Wellbeing Service (www.brightonandhovewellbeing.org) or East Sussex Single Point of Advice (sussexpartnership.nhs.uk/east-sussex-spoa).

- **mASCot** – parent-led support group for Sussex families with a child or young person with an autism spectrum condition. It has a private online forum and holds regular meet-ups. Email: info@asc-mascot.com or go to: www.asc-mascot.com.
- **National Autistic Society** - extensive advice and guidance plus helplines for education issues and parent to parent emotional support <https://www.autism.org.uk/what-we-do/help-and-support>

Brighton & Hove only

- **BHISS Autism Support Team** – Brighton & Hove Inclusion Support Service offers supports autistic children aged 4-16, and their teachers, in their educational setting. They also deliver autism workshops and training for parent carers, usually in school. Call **01273 293481** or email BHISS@brighton-hove.gov.uk

East Sussex only

- **CLASS+** - support for families with autistic children including advice line, coffee mornings, workshops and short term personalised guidance about home-based issues. Part of the 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 <https://www.facebook.com/SENDEastSussex>
- **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 autistic children and young people. Tel: **01424 845562** Email info@autismtrain.co.uk or visit www.autismtrain.co.uk.
- **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

Further reading and useful links

- **Ambitious About Autism** – national charity for autistic children and young people. www.ambitiousaboutautism.org.uk.
- **Autistica** - autism research and campaigning charity <https://www.autistica.org.uk>
- **Autistic women and girls** - more on the gender diagnosis gap and stories from autistic women <https://www.autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/what-is-autism/autistic-women-and-girls>.
- **Autism Education Trust** - resources and training around education for children and young people on the autistic spectrum.- www.autismeducationtrust.org.uk/for-parents
- **Books about autism:** there are many excellent books about autism, written by autistic people, their families or professionals. Look out for Temple Grandin, Steve Silberman, Naoki Higashida or Tony Attwood.
- **The Challenging Behaviour Foundation** – information, advice and support around distressed behaviour. www.challengingbehaviour.org.uk.



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- **Local Offer** – the local authority's online listing of all the services and support for families with children with SEND in the area. East Sussex Local Offer <https://localoffer.eastsussex.gov.uk/> Brighton & Hove Local Offer <https://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/special-educational-needs-and-disabilities>.
- **National Autistic Society** – Extensive resources about all aspects of autism. Visit their website at <https://www.autism.org.uk> or call their helpline on: 0808 800 4104.
- **Sensory differences** - info about sensory sensitivities and differences in autistic people <https://www.autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/topics/sensory-differences/sensory-differences/all-audiences>
- **Youtube:** watching videos by autistic people can be really helpful for you and your child or young person. Well known vloggers include Purple Ella, The Aspie World and Stephanie Bethany. Stephanie produces a handy list of popular autistic YouTubers here: <https://youtu.be/OtNwQ4nCpfE>

