

# FACT SHEET

# relate

the relationship people

## CHILDREN WITH ASD

The journey, to receive a diagnosis for a child, to confirm that they are on the Autistic Spectrum can be a long and at times, lonely and stressful one. As children grow up and change it is not always straight forward to identify the underlying causes for challenging or disturbing behaviours and responses. Statistically it is known that there is a likelihood that a parent on the spectrum is more likely to have at least one child who is also on the spectrum. This is perhaps why once a child has received a diagnosis of ASD; it often then leads to recognition of the condition in a parent or grand-parent.... that might have previously been put down to “quirky” or “difficult” behaviours. Therefore, if you already know that a parent or close family member is on the spectrum, it is worth sharing this with professionals, when you are trying to identify possible causes for your child’s behaviour / difficulties.

We all experience change throughout our lives. For people with ASD, key changes can be at times, quite traumatic. This is particularly true for children.

Some of the key things to notice are.....

Taking instruction very literally

Not responding to their name or realising they are being spoken to

Hyper-sensitive to touch e.g. agitated by feeling of clothing labels / seams / stitching

Aversion to certain food textures / colours or combination of these

Upset caused by changes in appearance of key acquaintances / family members

Certain noise pitches can cause distress

Starting playgroup / school etc. may highlight that they are finding social interaction and change challenging e.g. obsessive / possessive about a toy or object

Sudden change in routine may cause distress

If certain “demands” are not met it can result in an extreme reaction / outburst or “shutdown”



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Many reactions to everyday things and circumstances can seem extreme. However to the child with ASD their reaction is often borne out of a belief that they cannot survive the noise / change / stimuli overload etc. Most children can react negatively and “wilfully” at times. The child with ASD is likely to present with a number of the aforementioned reactions to a range of triggers; which may then result in them getting a diagnosis of ASD.

## CHANGES AND COPING STRATEGIES

<b>Starting Play Group / Nursery / Primary School</b>	
<p><b>Some of the challenges</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Anxiety from being separated from parent / care giver.</li> <li>• Wearing different clothes e.g. school uniform to a “dress down day”.</li> <li>• Adapting to new ways of playing with new people and objects.</li> <li>• Lack of interest or understanding in how to engage with imaginative play.</li> <li>• Distress when lesson change is marked by loud school bell or other noise.</li> <li>• Distress caused by close touch e.g. asked to sit or lay close to other pupils at story time.</li> <li>• Literal interpretation of instruction or comment.</li> <li>• Problems showing empathy.</li> <li>• Difficulty giving eye contact.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Coping / Support Strategies</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Gradually introduce child to new situations / staff to build tolerance to change.</li> <li>✓ Ask for forward notice about non uniform days, changes to staffing or routines.</li> <li>✓ Where available request dedicated learning support, to check out what instruction the child has understood.</li> <li>✓ Let staff know about child’s food preferences – just as you would an allergy.</li> <li>✓ To help soothe use music through headphones, during noisy events, assembly etc.</li> <li>✓ Ask staff to respect child’s needs for personal space and to explain the difference to others.</li> </ul>

<b>Starting Secondary School</b>	
<p><b>Some of the challenges</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stimuli overload.</li> <li>• Coping with having to change location for different subjects.</li> <li>• Showing empathy and understanding irony, sarcasm or rhetorical questions.</li> <li>• Engaging with subjects that require imagination or empathy in relation to other cultures / religions / experience.</li> <li>• Managing physical activities that requires co-ordination and/or team playing (some people on the spectrum do also have dyspraxia which affects co-ordination)</li> </ul>	<p><b>Coping / Support Strategies</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Enable meetings with key staff, a select peer group / buddy system within school.</li> <li>✓ Obtain a statement of needs and/or support plan from the school.</li> <li>✓ Make provision for stimuli overload situations e.g. assemblies, field trips, play / break times.</li> <li>✓ (Particularly for younger ages) request early notification of key staff / lesson changes.</li> </ul>

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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Timetable changes and alterations to scheduled room use.</li> <li>• Changes to key staff.</li> <li>• Forming relationships can start to cause distress, isolation and low mood.</li> <li>• Obsession with certain subjects or hobbies, can lead to being ostracised as “geeky”.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Request learning support for understanding instructions. Better still encourage use of plain language throughout the school culture.</li> <li>✓ Ask for assistance in lessons requiring empathy / insight into other’s experiences, culture and faiths i.e. give student an example within their own experience to refer to / draw upon.</li> <li>✓ Select a school that has a sensory room if possible for respite breaks if sensory overload occurs.</li> </ul>
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<b>Starting Further Education / College / University</b>	
<p><b>Some of the challenges</b> Similar to above but also.....</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Move away from home security and loss of support network.</li> <li>• Budgeting, fending for self, sharing living space and socialising.</li> <li>• Planning workload and meeting deadlines.</li> <li>• Increased anxiety, poor confidence and low mood.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Coping / Support Strategies</b> As above but.....</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Essential to have mentoring and / or counselling support.</li> </ul>

\*The National Autistic Society website has helpful information on ASD [www.autism.org.uk](http://www.autism.org.uk)

\*The Relate Derby telephone helpline is open every Tuesday 10.30am – 4.30pm and Thursday 1.30pm – 4.30pm. Call **0808 178 9363** and speak directly with a Relate trained counsellor. Also available is our LiveChat dropin on Wednesday 2pm – 5pm. Visit our website for further information [www.relatederby.org.uk](http://www.relatederby.org.uk)

\* Useful links: [http://www.ninds.nih.gov/disorders/autism/detail\\_autism.htm](http://www.ninds.nih.gov/disorders/autism/detail_autism.htm)

DVD – ADAM <https://www.amazon.co.uk/Adam-DVD-Hugh-Dancy/dp/B002KKBLII>