

# About Autism

## Autism Hampshire, Information Sheet 1



**Autism is a lifelong condition that affects how a person communicates and relates to other people. It also affects how a person makes sense of the world around them.**



There are a number of terms that are used to describe autism, such as Asperger's Syndrome, autism spectrum disorder or autistic spectrum condition. Autism Hampshire uses the term autism. The word "spectrum" is used because individuals can be affected in such different ways.

Asperger's Syndrome is a diagnosis that is given to people with autism who did not have delayed speech development as a child.

Autism is often known as 'the hidden disability' as it may not be immediately apparent. Autism is the only disability that has ever had its own parliamentary act—The Autism Act 2009

### The Person Centred Approach

The characteristics of autism will affect each person in very different ways. It is essential to understand each person's autism individually. A person with autism can have any other condition alongside their autism.

**Characteristics of Autism** (formally known as the triad of impairments)

- **Language and communication:** difficulties in recognising and understanding verbal and non-verbal language, such as gestures, facial expressions and tone of voice.

- **Social Emotion:** difficulties with recognising and understanding other people's feelings and managing their own.
- **Social Imagination:** difficulties with understanding and predicting other people's intentions and behaviour and imagining situations outside of their own routine.
- **Sensory Perception:** Many people with autism experience some form of sensory sensitivity (hyper) or under-sensitivity (hypo). There are 7 senses—auditory, visual, touch, taste, smell, proprioception and vestibular.

### Community Access - Southampton Office

Community Resource Centre, 3 Bassett Avenue, Southampton, SO16 7DP

Tel: 02380 766 162

Email: [communityaccess@autismhampshire.org.uk](mailto:communityaccess@autismhampshire.org.uk)

### Community Access - Portsmouth

Frank Sorrell Centre, Prince Albert Road, Southsea, Hampshire, PO4 9HR

Tel: 02392 814 723

Email: [communityaccess@autismhampshire.org.uk](mailto:communityaccess@autismhampshire.org.uk)

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# Information Sheet 2

## Frequently asked Questions



### What should I do if I think I might have autism?

- If you think that you may have autism contact your GP for an appointment to discuss this.
- When you visit the GP, take along notes of things which make you think you have autism.
- Ask any staff or professionals who work with you (teacher, health visitor, social worker etc.) to put in writing to you any observations they have, so that you can take these with you too.
- If you are referred to another professional, find out what to expect so that you can be prepared.
- Try to take someone with you to the appointments so that you feel supported.
- If you have any questions about any of the above, ask the professionals to explain the process to you.

### Where and how can I get help pre, during and post diagnosis?

Contact your local autism organisation to see what they can offer. Community Access Autism Hampshire offer an information, advice and guidance service, a regular information share, a book library, information sheets and much more. They have a team of officers with extensive local knowledge.

The National Autistic Society (NAS) website offers a wide range of information about autism. They are likely to have a local NAS group – look on their website for more details or call their support line. [www.autism.org.uk](http://www.autism.org.uk) Autism websites have a range of information. In Hampshire we have our own Local Autism Directory. This lists information about local services, groups, consultations and events. It is found on the Autism Hampshire website: [www.autismhampshire.org.uk](http://www.autismhampshire.org.uk)

Online message boards or forums are a good way to make contact with other people who have autism or other parents and carers. Autism Hampshire host an online message board for local people which can be found on

our website: [www.autismhampshire.org.uk](http://www.autismhampshire.org.uk)

You may be eligible to claim Disability Living Allowance. Phone your local benefits office for the forms. If you need help completing the forms, please contact Community Access and we can send you our Guide to Claiming DLA for a child on the Autistic Spectrum.

To apply for the Hampshire Autism Alert Card or App contact Community Access or visit our website for more information.

### Help for parents and carers

If you require advice about education contact your local Parent Partnership Service.

If you feel you need respite contact your local Social Services Department to discuss your family's needs and/or to request a Carer's Assessment. You can also ask to register your child with Social Services to let them know you may need help in the future.

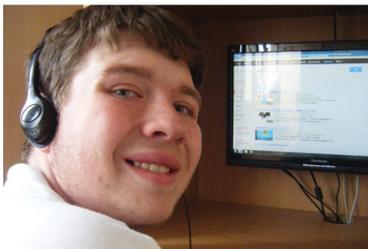
If your child is pre-school age, contact your local Children's Centre.

Local Autism Support Groups are an excellent start to getting more information. There are support groups for adults with autism and for parents and carers. Community Access keep a list of support groups and list them all on the Local Autism Directory.

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College Services



Support



Adult Services



Person Centred Approaches with Autism

Head Office, 1634 Parkway, Solent Business Park, Whiteley, Fareham, Hampshire, PO15 7AH

Telephone: 01489 880881 Fax: 01489 880890 Email: [info@autismhampshire.org.uk](mailto:info@autismhampshire.org.uk) Web: [www.autismhampshire.org.uk](http://www.autismhampshire.org.uk)

Charity Reg No: 288141

# Information Sheet 3

## Communication

**Autism is a social communication disorder and difficulties may affect verbal and non-verbal communication.**



Communication is for sharing information and ideas between people, both using (expressive) and understanding (receptive). For people with autism it may be a means of getting needs and wants met. For effective communication it should have: What (a message), How (a way), Who (somebody else) and Why (a purpose). People with autism may not understand what communication is for.

Some people with autism may have no speech but have good understanding, while some may have very good verbal communication but not be able to understand as well.

Difficulties with using communication (expressive) may include problems with pace, tone, volume, echolalia (repeated echoing of others' speech), incessant talking/questioning or using inappropriate comments/language.

Difficulties with understanding communication (receptive) may include problems with body language, sarcasm/jokes/teasing, following instructions, emotions or a delay in processing.

Difficulties with social use of language may include problems with conversations (starting/turn taking), poor concentration, not knowing if someone is interested in what they're saying or not knowing how to let someone know they wish to communicate.

To improve communication it is important to:

- Gain the person's attention by saying their name first.
- Give instructions in correct order, broken down into small steps.
- Be positive by saying what you want to happen.
- Allow time for processing information.
- Check the person has understood.
- Use visual support (Signing, Symbols, Schedules)

Visual support can help people with autism understand what has been said to them. This can be in the form of signing (e.g. Makaton used whilst speaking), a visual schedule/timetable, symbols to aid organisation and make choices or photos. Visual support aids understanding, reduces anxiety/confusion, helps people focus on relevant information, provides structure and can promote independent learning and living skills.

Many people with autism find communication difficult and need support – both with how WE communicate with them and by teaching THEM how to communicate with others.

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# Information Sheet 4

## Behaviour



All Behaviour is Communication!

Some behaviours shown by people with autism are as a result of anxiety, frustration, sensory overload, fear or not understanding a situation. At times the behaviours can seem strange, inappropriate or challenging.

If someone with autism seems self-centred in a social situation, it is because they do not understand how to behave in these situations. If they appear rude and/or inattentive it may be they've not been given enough time to process what's said to them. If they appear agitated it may be due to anxiety about a change taking place.

People with autism may not understand the impact of their behaviour on others and if they become frustrated because they can't understand what is being said to them, their behaviour can become challenging. There will always be a reason and/or communicative function to the behaviour, so it is necessary to find out the underlying reason. It may be useful to observe changes in mood and/or behaviour and to identify possible sources of anxiety.

Structure and the need for predictability are important to people with autism. Visual supports to aid understanding (i.e. schedules, symbols, signing) can help reduce anxiety and frustration. They can also be used to prepare people with autism for changes, both planned and unexpected.

Consistency of approach is vital when trying to teach new ways of coping with different situations or teaching specific social skills. Stay calm, use positive language and make clear the expectations, boundaries & consequences. Rewarded behaviour increases, unrewarded behaviour decreases. Remember to take one step at a time!

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Southsea, Hampshire, PO4 9HR  
Tel: 02392 814 723  
Email: [communityaccess@autismhampshire.org.uk](mailto:communityaccess@autismhampshire.org.uk)

### Adult Day Services

Anglesey Lodge, Anglesey Road, Alverstoke,  
Gosport, Hampshire, PO12 2DX  
Tel: 02392 524 243  
Email: [adultservices@autismhampshire.org.uk](mailto:adultservices@autismhampshire.org.uk)

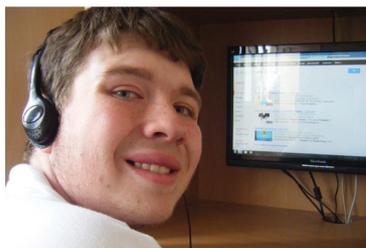
### Training & Development

1634 Parkway, Solent Business Park, Whiteley,  
Fareham, Hampshire, PO15 7AH  
Tel: 01489 880 881  
Email: [training@autismhampshire.org.uk](mailto:training@autismhampshire.org.uk)

### Fundraising

1634 Parkway, Solent Business Park, Whiteley,  
Fareham, Hampshire, PO15 7AH  
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# Information Sheet 5

## Sensory

People with autism often experience sensory difficulties which can have a huge impact on their lives.



Usually people use their senses and brains to help them understand experiences and take action (e.g. wear a coat if it's cold outside). People with autism may not be able to filter sensations and this can lead to sensory overload at times. Individuals are affected differently (i.e. may be under or over sensitive) so it is sometimes hard for others to know what may be causing a difficulty. Some people with autism CRAVE sensory experiences while others AVOID them. Many find it hard to process two senses together (i.e. looking and listening).

The sensory environment and surroundings play a crucial part in how people with autism cope in their daily lives. They may lack awareness of how they're feeling and not have strategies to cope with and manage their physical and emotional feelings.

**Sight** – people with autism may be fascinated by small detail, pattern, colour or effects of light which may completely distract them. Some people may get anxious in busy or brightly coloured surroundings. Sensory rooms can be a very positive experience.

**Hearing** – people with autism may find the pitch of some sounds painful while others may be distracted by very low noises which are unnoticed by others. Even if unable to tolerate noise from other, they may like to make their own noises. Listening to music can be enjoyable for some.

**Smell** – some people with autism may recognise others by the smell of their perfume or shampoo, rather than by what they look like. They may become distressed/anxious if people change products.

**Touch** – some people with autism may not like being touched, others may use touch as a way of communicating with others. Some people find the sensation of clothes/shoes/labels touching them unbearable, and may have difficulty with dressing, teeth cleaning, hair cutting etc. Some people experience heat, cold or pain differently.

**Taste** – some people with autism react not only to the taste of foods, but also to the texture, look and smell. This can lead to difficulties at mealtimes (i.e. not wanting to try new foods, restricted diet or wanting foods served separately). Some people with autism have PICA – a condition which leads to eating inedible substances (i.e. paper, leaves, sand).

Some people with autism experience difficulties with judging depth or distance, with balance or of knowing where their body is in relation to the world around them. Some may appear clumsy, or engage in rocking, jumping, or flapping.

People with autism may need us to help by adapting the environment to reduce sensory overload (i.e. replace fluorescent lighting, use screens or provide quiet corner).

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# Information Sheet 6

## Information and Advice



Say their name first to get their attention.

Keep language short and simple.

Say what you mean and mean what you say – be clear and specific.

Avoid inferred meaning and ambiguity.

Avoid or explain irony, sarcasm, jokes, turns of phrase.

Give instructions in correct order of action and break down into small steps.

Be positive – avoid 'no' and 'don't' and say what you want to happen, not what you don't want.

Provide a clear structure to the day/sessions so s/he knows what to expect and when.

Keep to predictable routines.

Explain any changes in advance, if possible, to minimise anxiety.

Make abstract concepts concrete.

Give more time for processing information.

Provide visual support to make your communication clearer.

Be aware that the ability to talk does not mean the same ability to understand.

Teach specific skills for essential language functions e.g. asking for a break from activity, expressing pain, explaining that s/he doesn't understand.

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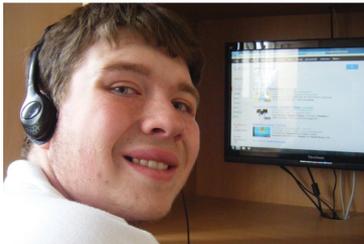
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