

From mountain to sea

Educational Psychology Service

What is Autism?

- Autism is a lifelong neuro-developmental condition which affects how people communicate, interact and process information
- One in 100 people are on the autistic spectrum and there are approximately 700,000 autistic adults and children in the UK (NAS, 2021)
- Autism is a spectrum condition. There are common characteristics but how this affects each individual and the type of support they need varies
- 'Labels' and diagnostic criteria evolve over time, it is important to always check with individuals and their families what language they are most comfortable with

Watch this video from Scottish Autism for a summary:



Autistic children can find the world overwhelming and this can cause considerable anxiety.

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Like all people, autistic children have their own individual profile of strengths and needs. It is important to get to know each person as an individual and to assess changes in their strengths and needs in an ongoing way in order to best support them. There can be common areas where needs arise and these are summarised below.

Common Characteristics (National Autistic Society, 2021)

Social Communication and Social Interaction: Autistic people may have difficulties making sense of both verbal and non-verbal (e.g. gestures, tone of voice, facial expressions) communication. They may interpret language literally and find it difficult to use or understand jokes or sarcasm. Some may not speak and may understand more than they are able to express and require additional supports to ensure they are able to communicate. Others have good language skills but may still find it hard to understand the social rules attached to their interactions. Individuals may have difficulties 'reading' other people and situations. It can be very hard to understand or imagine others' perspectives. As a result, they may appear insensitive, seek out time alone, avoid or not seek comfort in others or appear to behave in ways not thought to be socially appropriate.

Restricted and Repetitive patterns of behaviours, activities and interests. Autistic people often prefer predictable, familiar routines. Their world can seem unpredictable and confusing. As a result, they may not be comfortable with change or new situations and may require more preparation and support at these times.

In addition to this, autistic people may also experience sensory processing issues: over- or under-sensitivity to sounds, touch, tastes, smells, light, colours, temperatures or pain. This can cause anxiety or even physical pain. They might also have intense and highly focused interests. Many report that the pursuit of such interests is fundamental to their wellbeing. Further to this, autistic people may experience extreme anxiety.

Autism and Anxiety

Tyler (2016) suggests that *'given the nature of the condition, young people with Autism have a lot to be anxious about.'* Studies indicate that between 11% and 84% of autistic children experience some degree of impairing anxiety. A developmental and preventative approach to understanding how anxiety develops and how it may interact with the core features of Autism is important. Adapting our approaches and environment in a manner which is understanding and responsive to each individual is a key intervention to prevent, support and reduce anxiety for our young people.

Every Autistic Learner is different

For more information have a look at the [National Autistic Society](#) or [Scottish Autism](#) websites.

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Further Information and Reading

It is important to understand Autism through the eyes of those who live with it on a daily basis. This is a poem written by a former Aberdeenshire Pupil.

The Stepping Star

When I came up to the academy and took my first steps.
I struggled with socialising and my subjects.
I felt lost, a million miles from home with my heart crying out “why am I so alone”.
Why are they so big the other kids and why is there water coming out of my eyelids?
Nobody saw me. Small and quite as a mouse was I.
But the only thing I did was runaway and cry.

But then a woman appeared, dressed in grey. Telling me “You’ll be ok you’ll have a good day.
Don’t be frightened, nervous or depressed, come talk to us to get it off your chest”.

My eyes opened and a feeling accord I didn’t feel so lost and award.
Yes. It took some time for me to adjust, but I learned now these people I could now trust.
I met others who were just like me, who locked themselves away and hid the key.
I build friendships, skills and learned about myself.
I was no longer a dusty forgotten doll sitting on the shelf.
I climbed the mountain that was hard and tough, but I said to myself “no I’ll show them my stuff.”

The years rolled by so fast, but in the end I no longer felt like an outcast.
I found my passion and what I like to do, and now I pass this message on to you.

Don’t hide your feelings away and lock them in a box, or let them crush you like a ton of blocks.
Stand up and be proud of who you are, everyone is their own hero and star.
Make that leap of faith and take the risk that comes along, because before you know it your school
life will be gone.
Thank your teachers for all they have done for helping you out in the long run.

But for me the only words I have to say, are thank you Fraserburgh academy for each day.
There were tears, laughter and moments I’ll never forget, but I leave behind this little present.
It may not be gold, silver or a priceless gem but I plant this seed that will grow into a stem.
On every leaf it will say
“Thank you Fraserburgh academy for leading me the way”.
Your love and kindness I will never forget, and I’ll hold my head up high as I walk into the sunset”



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Further reading for pupils wanting to understand more about their Autism:

[The Gifts of Autism: A to Z](#)

[My Superhero Brain](#)

[My Superhero Heart](#)

[Can you see me?](#)