

AN AUTISM GUIDE

FOR PARENTS AND CARERS OF CHILDREN AGES 8 – 11 YEARS OLD

This guide provides parents and carers with information about what Autism may look like in children from 8 - 11 years old and outlines some strategies they can try at home to support their child.

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What is Autism?

Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

Autism is a developmental disability that affects how people process information. It is identified by a 'triad of impairments': difficulties with social interaction, social communication, and imagination, and are often rigid in their thinking.

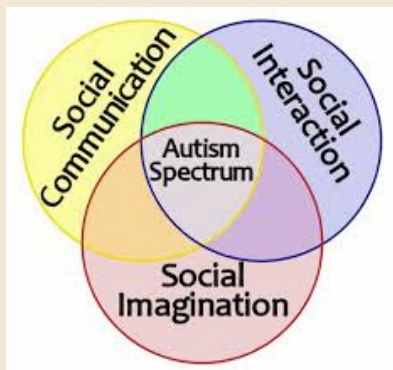
It is not clear why a person has Autism but there are links with abnormal brain developments (genetic factors) as well as possible environmental factors.

The signs of Autism usually start before the age of three and can cause delays or difficulties in many different skills that develop from infancy to adulthood. It affects an estimated 1 in 350 people; with 4 out of 5 being males.

Autistic Spectrum Disorder is like a spectrum of needs, where each person experiences Autism differently depending on where they fall on that spectrum.

A child will often display a combination of actions and traits which in time will lead to a diagnosis.

Triad of Impairments



Signs of Autism 8 – 11 years old

Due to autism being a spectrum disorder, some children who experience mild autistic traits may not be diagnosed until later in childhood. This could be because as a child gets older, some traits can become more apparent as expectations on them increase.

Children with mild autistic traits, are often working around the expected academic level in most subjects, but struggle with social communication, sensory sensitivities, organisation and/or restricted, repetitive interests and behaviours.

It is important to remember that every child is different, and so every child with autism will display slightly different behaviours to another child, although there will be many similarities. Your child does not have to display every trait to have autism.

Ignoring the possibility of an autism diagnosis, especially if your child seems mostly neurotypical, can make it difficult for them to adjust and have their needs met and therefore grow to be successful and happy adults.

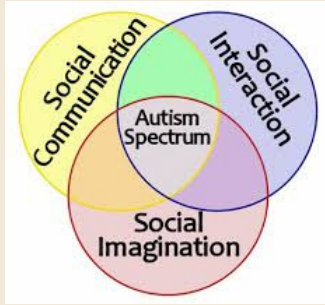
Social Communication

They may:

- Dominate the conversation or have trouble 'taking turns' when talking.
- Talk about particular topics and struggle to talk about things that do not interest them.
- Difficulty answering questions about themselves/give an opinion.
- Use an American accent, or talk in a monotone voice, with little expression.
- Be confused by some types of language, and take things very literally e.g. be confused by the expression, "Pull your socks up."
- May use good eye contact with people they know well, but find it difficult to do so with people they do not know well.



Triad of Impairments



Signs of Autism 5-7 years old

Social communication (cont)

They may also find it difficult to read and understand social cues, which makes it hard for them to cope in different social situations as they are not able to respond appropriately to how other people are thinking and feeling.

Types of social cues

Social cues are messages that other people send us to show how they are feeling. They do this by using their face, voice, body or space to help us understand.

Voice, Tone and Volume
Our tone of voice is how we say the words when we communicate to others. There are many ways that you can say a sentence, depending on the meaning behind it. The volume of our voice can also send a message.

Facial Expression
Different parts of our face move when we are feeling a certain way e.g. we smile when we are happy or raise our eyebrows when we are surprised.

A cartoon illustration of a young boy with brown hair, wearing a yellow and white jacket and blue pants, standing with his hands in his pockets.

Personal Space
This means how close or far away we sit or stand by others. If a person chooses to stand close to us while we are talking, we assume they are interested compared to if they stand away, they are not.

Body Language
Different parts of our body also send messages e.g. if someone's fists are clenched, they might be angry. If their shoulders are slumped, they may be sad.

Friendships

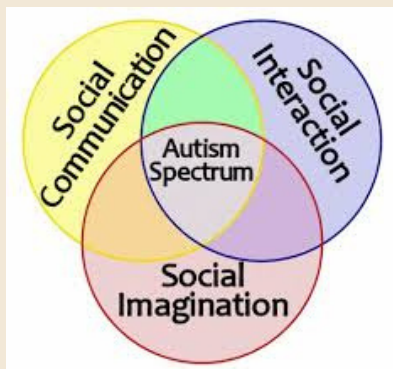
They may also find it difficult to build positive friendships with their peers, or become attached to one particular child and not like them playing with other children.



Other difficulties may include:

- Wanting children to play by their rules
- Prefer to spend time on their own, rather than with their peers
- Have trouble understanding the social rules of friendships

Triad of Impairments



Signs of Autism 8 - 11 years old

Sensory sensitivities

Children and adults with autism often experience sensory sensitivities, which can lead to sudden changes in behaviour. This is because they are not coping in the environment they are in, leading to frustration and sometimes challenging behaviour.

Sensory sensitivities can impact on all your child senses and can include:



Restrictive and repetitive behaviours

They may display certain types of behaviour, which are different to their peers, such as repetitive or restrictive behaviours. These could include:

- Hand flapping
- Pacing back and forth in repeated movements
- Spinning
- Rocking the body
- Echolalia (repeats words, phrases or noises)
- Posturing - e.g. holding hands or fingers out at an angle or arching back whilst sitting)
- Obsessions/fixations on a particular object or movement

Strategies to support your child at home

Communication

If your child is pre-verbal (uses no/minimal spoken language), it is important to find a way for them to communicate with you. The best person to speak to about this is your child's speech and language therapist. If they do not have one, you can ask the school to refer your child to this service.

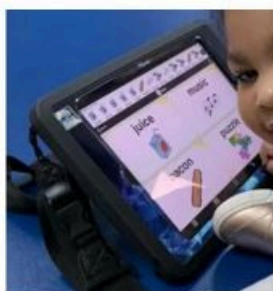
There are many different types of communication methods so you will need to find one that works for your child. These include:

Communication Board



A communication board is a sheet of symbols, pictures or photos that a child will learn to point to, to communicate with those around them to show what they want. You can start with a few pictures, and add more as your child becomes confident to use it.

Communication Apps



There are many apps that can support your child to communicate with you. These apps can be personalised to include photos/objects specifically for your child. Your child points to the object/thing they want and the object they have pressed is said out loud.

Sign Language



Sign Language is a visual means of communicating using gestures, facial expression, and body language. Some use both speech and signs together such as Makaton and Signalong.

<https://leicspart.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Communication-Boards.pdf>

<https://signalong.org.uk/>

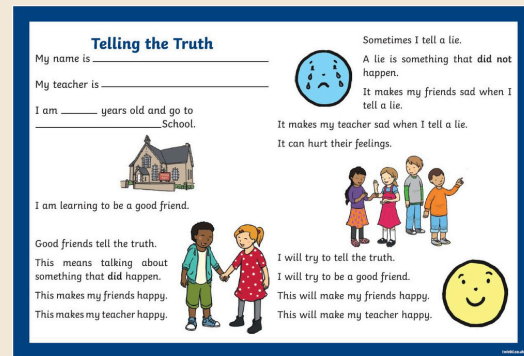
<https://www.goodschoolsguide.co.uk/special-educational-needs/help-and-advice/apps-for-autism>

Strategies to support your child at home

Social Stories

Social stories are short descriptions of a particular situation, event or activity, which includes specific information about what to expect in that situation and why.

Social stories can be used to teach a child about: going to a new place (e.g. school or on holiday), teaching them a self-care skill (e.g. getting dressed), to understand how a person might feel, to manage a behaviour you want to change.



Comic Strip Conversations

Children with autism have trouble interpreting social situations and understanding speech quickly. A Comic Strip Conversation is a conversation between two or more people using simple illustrations in a comic strip format. They show children how to behave in a socially acceptable manner and conform to social standards.



Strategies to support your child at home

Prepare your child for new experiences/changes

To help your child cope with new experiences or changes in their routine, it is important that you prepare them for what is going to happen.

When they are going to move to a new class or start a new club, you can:

- Arrange to meet with your child's new teacher/adult running the club to share information about your child, what they enjoy, what they find difficult, what settles them etc.
- Ask to have photos of the classroom/other areas of the school or where the club is going to be held and photos of the adults who will be supporting them with their names, so that you can make a book to share with your child prior to them going to their new class/club.
- You can also ask for a timetable of the school day/what will happen at the club so that you can talk this through with your child to help prepare them for what is going to happen. This should be shared with them each day/each time they attend the club until they are confident

- Create an 'All About Me' about your child which can be shared with any adult supporting your child in school or club that they are joining

MY THOUGHTS ABOUT ME

DATE: _____
SCHOOL: _____
NAME: _____

Words that describe me

What I do for fun

Things I am good at

Things I want to be better at

My Aspirations

Best ways to support me

Created by PATT SENDIASS in co-operation with Thurrock Council

MY THOUGHTS ABOUT GOOD DAYS AND BAD DAYS

DATE: _____
SCHOOL: _____
NAME: _____

What does a **GOOD DAY** look like? ☀️

What does a **BAD DAY** look like? ☁️

What makes a bad day better?

Created by PATT SENDIASS in co-operation with Thurrock Council

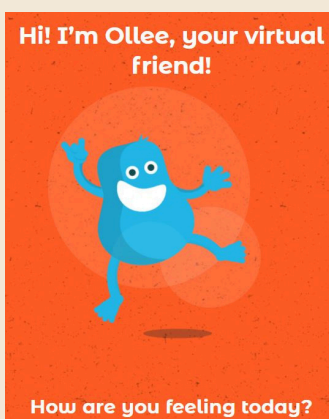
Strategies to support your child at home

Emotions and Feelings

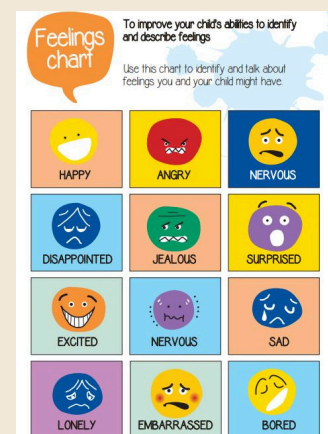
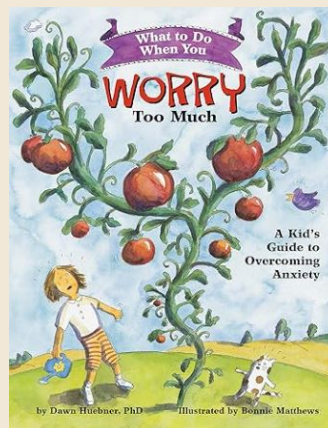
If your child understands why they feel the way they do, it can help them accept and manage their emotions. You can help your child understand why they feel the way they do by explaining what emotions are and how thoughts can lead to feelings.

There are lots of resources and activities you can either buy or access on the internet that you can do with your child to help them learn about emotions including:

- Labelling an emotion in context by telling a child they are for example, “happy”, “sad”, “scared” or “excited” at the time they are obviously feeling that way, will enable them to learn the correct word for the emotion.
- Feelings poster
- Feelings and emotions books
- Feelings and emotions games
- Feelings and emotions apps



<https://app.ollee.org.uk/#/welcome>



<https://www.checklists.co.uk/family/top-10-apps-to-help-your-childs-mental-wellbeing/>

Strategies to support your child at home

Sensory breaks

Children with sensory processing disorder (SPD) and/or autism can experience either an overload of sensory input, or be sensory seeking. Both of these can cause them to become overwhelmed and lead to feelings of anxiety or stress, which is why it's important to involve sensory breaks in their daily schedules.

To help you identify your child's sensory difficulties, you should complete a sensory checklist. You can find these free to access on the internet

SENSORY CHECKLIST

Visual/Sight ✓ Tick where appropriate

| Visual Seeking | Visual Avoiding |
|--|--|
| Asks for bright/flashing lights | Very sensitive to bright lights (may complain or close eyes) |
| Enjoys lining up items in rows or by colour | Easily distracted by bright displays |
| Enjoys playing with toys that spin | Wants 'busy' rooms/challenging |
| Down to play with shiny objects | Seeks out dark spaces |
| Enjoys control top games which involve bumping and crashing different toys | Often rubs eyes when focusing on work |
| Hands too close to interactive whiteboard/screen | Avoids eye contact with others |

How to support:
 Allow the child to play with visually stimulating equipment (such as a torch). Ensure this time is carefully managed and structured.

How to support:
 Schedule regular visual breaks into their day. Use a blackout tent (if possible) or create a be-quiet-low-stimulating area for them to use.

Touch/Tactile

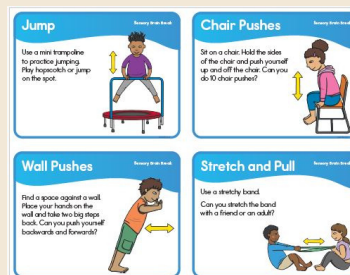
| Tactile Seeking | Tactile Avoiding |
|--|--|
| Enjoys touching everyone/everything | Dislikes being touched unexpectedly |
| May not recognise when they have been touched (unless forcefully) | Avoids having their hair brushed |
| Invasive infant they have dirty hands/runny nose | Dislikes being close to others (sitting up) |
| Seeks messy play | Sensitive to certain items of clothing or labels |
| Repetitively seeks out certain surfaces and textures e.g. rough brick walls, smooth surfaces | Rarely wants to be held/cuddled |
| Repetitively rubs or touches objects on their face | Overly sensitive when they hurt themselves |
| Enjoys grilling messy e.g. will play in puddle with hands | Avoids touching certain fabrics/textures e.g. velvet |
| | Dislikes hands getting messy - may wash hands frequently |
| | Makes no option on new surfaces/textures |

How to support:
 Make a 'fuzzy box' and regularly change the items in the box. Use items with different textures and shapes to keep the box exciting.

How to support:
 Choose fabric/clothing that the child prefers - cut out clothing tags and iron socks inside-out to avoid the seam.

For more free copies of this checklist, visit <https://beaconschoolsupport.co.uk/sensory-checklist>

<https://beaconschoolsupport.co.uk/sensory-checklist.php>



On the internet, there are also a wide range of resources and activities that can be used as a sensory break with your child both at home, when they are at school, and when they are out in the community.

Your aim is to help your child identify activities that help them so that they can independently do these themselves when they need to.



Who to contact for support

If you are concerned that your child maybe displaying signs of Autism, you can seek advice and support from:

- Your child's GP
- Your child's school (ask to speak to the SENCO)

All local authorities should have an area on their website called the 'Local Offer' which outlines the support available to parents of children with additional needs. This should list different organisations, support groups and useful websites.

National Autistic Society: <https://www.autism.org.uk/>
<https://www.facebook.com/NationalAutisticSociety>

Ambitious about Autism: <https://www.ambitiousaboutautism.org.uk/>
<https://www.facebook.com/ambitiousaboutautism/>

Child Autism UK: <https://www.childautism.org.uk/>

Remember, you know your child better than anyone else. Before you go and speak to someone about your child, write down your concerns as this will help you explain what your worries are.

