

Social Communication and Autism Spectrum Disorder– Parent/Carer Advice Sheet

What are difficulties with social communication?

Social communication refers to how we understand and respond to different situations and how we interact with others. A child with difficulties in this area may find it harder to:

- Communicate with others
- Establish and maintain friendships
- Develop self-esteem
- Modify the behaviour of themselves and others in different situations
- Difficulties in sharing knowledge and information
- Unresponsiveness, e.g. lack of eye contact, interest in conversation
- Difficulties in understanding humour and implied meaning
- Difficulties reading other people's body language and facial expression
- Difficulties understanding the 'rules' of conversation, e.g. turn-taking, topic appropriateness, listening
- Difficulties placing themselves in other people's shoes, which could be perceived as insensitivity towards the feelings of others

What is Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)?

Autism is a lifelong, developmental disability that affects how a person communicates with and relates to other people, and how they experience the world around them.

People with ASD have persistent difficulties with social communication and social interaction and restricted and repetitive patterns of behaviours, activities or interests (this includes sensory behaviour). These difficulties are present since early childhood, to the extent that they “limit and impair everyday functioning”.

ASD is a medical diagnosis and can only be given after a thorough assessment from a trained health care professional such as a specialist Paediatrician, Psychologist or Speech and Language Therapist.

Useful websites and resources

- National Autistic Society(NAS)
The leading UK charity for people with autism and their families. They provide information, support and pioneering services, and campaign for a better world for people with autism www.nas.org.uk
- Greenwich ASD Outreach 020 8921 3311
<http://familiesinformation.royalgreenwich.gov.uk/kb5/greenwich/fsd/service.page?id=JMjgavHfdtQ>
- NAS Greenwich Branch www.nasgreenwich.org.uk
- NHS Living With Autism Site <http://www.nhs.uk/LiveWell/Autism/Pages/Autismhome.aspx>

Strategies to support your child

Spill the beans

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- 1. Communicate, communicate, communicate!**
If your child is interested in something then use it as a communication opportunity. Look at what they are looking at and play with that.
- 2. An irresistible invitation to attend**
We need to make ourselves and the things we are doing irresistible to each individual child with autism. Be creative and have fun!
- 3. Reduce your language**
Less is more with language. Use key words and exciting intonation to help your child to understand.
- 4. Give time to process**
Remember the 10 second rule: say something and wait 10 seconds before saying anything else, even though it feels like ages!
- 5. Use the child's name to get their attention first**
Always say the child's name, wait for a sign that they have heard you and then give the instruction.
- 6. Give choices**
Help to make life more manageable by reducing the number of choices: "milk or water?"; "Thomas or Percy?".
- 7. Don't zag before your zig**
Give instructions in the order in which you want them to be carried out e.g. "First brush teeth, then bed".
- 8. Tell them what to do, rather than what not to do**
Use positive language to tell the child what you want them to do e.g. say "feet on floor" instead of "stop kicking the seat".
- 9. Show them, don't tell them!**
Use white boards, scraps of paper and post it notes to draw quick pictures to show the child what is expected.
- 10. Allow for the autism**
Remember that your child's world might seem quite different to ours. A bit of detective work and lots of patience make all the difference.

