

UNDERSTANDING WHAT A DIAGNOSIS OF ASD MIGHT MEAN FOR YOUR CHILD

ADAPTED FROM NAS WEBSITE

SOCIAL COMMUNICATION

Individuals with ASD have difficulties with interpreting both verbal and non-verbal language like gestures or tone of voice. Many have a very literal understanding of language, and think people always mean exactly what they say. They may find it difficult to use or understand:

- Facial expressions
- Tone of voice
- Jokes and sarcasm

Some may not speak, or have fairly limited speech. They will often understand more of what other people say to them than they are able to express, yet may struggle with vagueness or abstract concepts. Some individuals with autism benefit from using, or prefer to use, alternative means of communication, such as sign language or visual symbols. Some are able to communicate very effectively without speech.

Others have good language skills, but they may still find it hard to understand the expectations of others within conversations, perhaps repeating what the other person has just said (this is called echolalia) or talking at length about their own interests.

It often helps to speak in a clear, consistent way and to give individuals with autism time to process what has been said to them.

SOCIAL INTERACTION

Individuals with ASD people often have difficulty 'reading' other people - recognising or understanding others' feelings and intentions - and expressing their own emotions. This can make it very hard for them to navigate the social world. They may:

- appear to be insensitive

- seek out time alone when overloaded by other people
- not seek comfort from other people
- appear to behave 'strangely' or in a way thought to be socially inappropriate.

Individuals with ASD may find it hard to form friendships. Some may want to interact with other people and make friends, but may be unsure how to go about it.

REPETITIVE BEHAVIOUR AND ROUTINES

The world can seem a very unpredictable and confusing place to individuals with autism, who often prefer to have a daily routine so that they know what is going to happen every day. They may want to always travel the same way to and from school or work, or eat exactly the same food for breakfast.

The use of rules can also be important. It may be difficult for an individual with autism to take a different approach to something once they have been taught the 'right' way to do it. People on the autism spectrum may not be comfortable with the idea of change, but may be able to cope better if they can prepare for changes in advance.

HIGHLY-FOCUSED INTERESTS

Many individuals with autism have intense and highly-focused interests, often from a fairly young age. These can change over time or be lifelong, and can be anything from art or music, to trains or computers. An interest may sometimes be unusual. One individual with autism loved collecting rubbish, for example. With encouragement, the person developed an interest in recycling and the environment.

Many channel their interest into studying, paid work, volunteering, or other meaningful occupation. Individuals with autism often report that the pursuit of such interests is fundamental to their wellbeing and happiness.

SENSORY SENSITIVITY

Individuals with ASD may also experience over or under sensitivity to sounds, touch, tastes, smells, light, colours, temperatures or pain. For example, they may find certain background

sounds, which other people ignore or block out, unbearably loud or distracting. This can cause anxiety or even physical pain. Or they may be fascinated by lights or spinning objects.