



Parent Workshop

What does Autism mean to
the family?

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What is Autism?

What do all these different terminologies mean?

- Autism Spectrum Disorders/Conditions
- Asperger Syndrome (Aspie)
- Social Communication Conditions
- Neurodivergence

You may have heard all four of these terms used in relation to a person described as being on the spectrum and wondered how they differ.

An Autism Spectrum Condition features several problems experienced, ranging in severity. This includes severe autism at one end of the scale to high functioning autism spectrum condition at the other end of the scale.

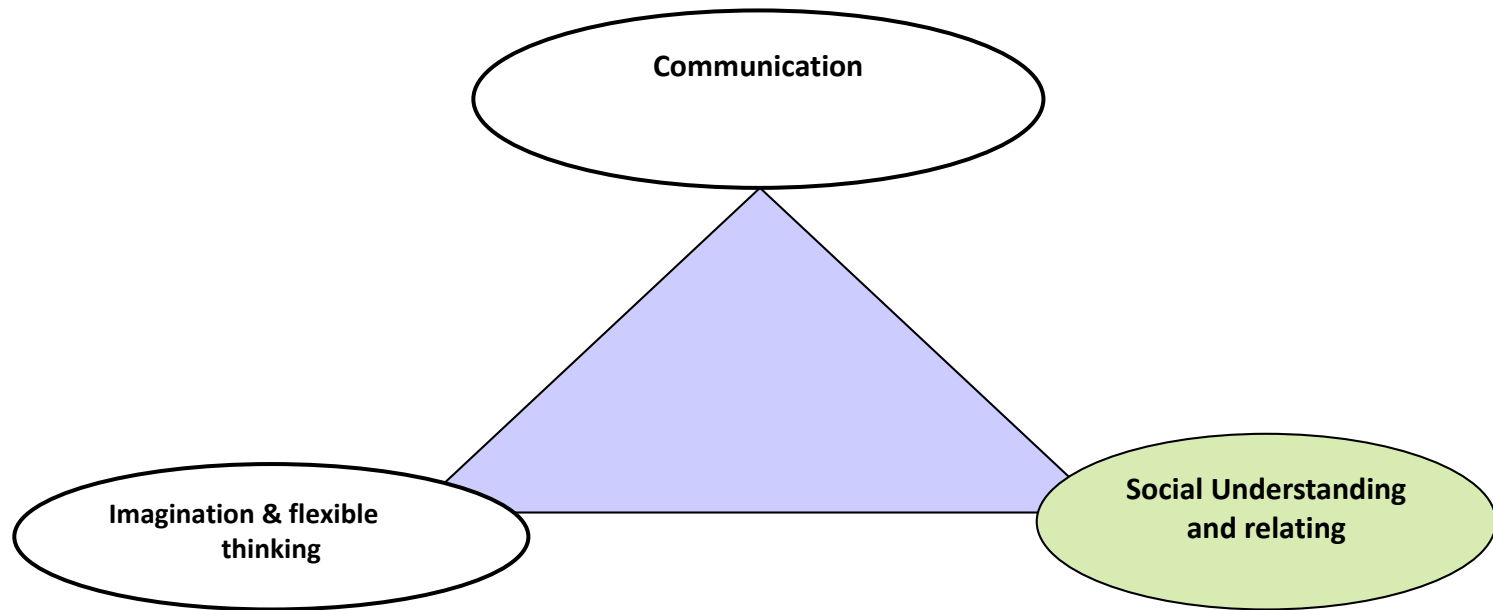
ASC is a lifelong developmental disorder. Most people involved in this field believe that it is caused by a neurobiological dysfunction.

The person described as being on the Autistic Spectrum will range in their levels of ability in 3 main areas.

- Communication
- Imagination and flexible thinking
- Social Understanding and relating

These three main areas of difficulty were previously also known as the “Triad of Impairments”. I prefer to call it the triad of ‘differentness.’ These differences mainly impact on the person’s “social communication skills”- hence the term social communication difficulties.

Sensory Issues (now in DSM V criteria)





Diagnosing in childhood



A Child's Social Communication difficulties may show itself as:

- delay or lack of development of speech
- difficulty with verbal communication
- difficulty with non-verbal communication
- difficulty decoding communicative gesture, body language, facial expression, tone of voice
- literal interpretation of language
- failure to respond to speech of others
- Echolalia

Different style of Social Interaction a child may have difficulty in:

- making social approaches
- responding to different social situations
- making friends due to egocentricity, even when they do want to make friends and be sociable
- understanding emotions
- picking up social signals
- interpreting the intentions of others

(we will play but, on my terms,)

Different style of using their Imagination and Inflexibility.

The child may:

- have difficulty with flexible thinking and behaviour
- be unable to create imaginative activities
- respond to objects in an unusual and repetitive way
- show an intense level of interest in one area
- be reluctant to understand other people's point of view

(Consider what your child's preferred interest may be- how does it dominate their world?)

Social Behaviours



What do you notice about their social behaviours?

- Lead conversations based on their topic of interest
- Cope better in 1:1 situations rather than groups
- Seeks predictability / anxiously awkward
- Friendships- Struggle to share relationships
- Eye Contact- Fleeting or no eye contact
- Emotions (too much-too little)
- Motor Clumsiness



You can probably think of many examples of your child displaying each of the things mentioned above.

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People with ASC and SCD also have strengths that may include:

- Ability to focus on detail
- Ability to concentrate for a long time on activities of interest
- Visual processing (Visual thinkers)
- Technical and mathematical areas
- MASKING!!

Does this sound familiar?

Psychological explanations

- Theory of mind: Imagination, perspective taking ability, empathy
- Egotistical, rigid thinking (*If I like saying it, then you must enjoy hearing it*)
- An inability to take the perspective of others
- Central coherence: detailed thinker but may not see the whole picture- “I can’t see the wood for the trees”
- Poor executive functioning: organisation and planning
- This includes their self monitoring and flexibility of behaviour.



Sensory Issues



The below never use to be on diagnostic list. It is now in the diagnostic list DSM V.

- Hypersensitivity
- Hyposensitivity
- Sensory integration problems

Can you think of a time when your child suddenly had a tantrum for no apparent reason? Lets consider if they had experienced any sensory overloads?



TOO MUCH INFORMATION

Anxiety Disorders SCD and ASD

- Anxiety is an extremely common symptom throughout the Autism spectrum and for people with social communication issues
- Although it is not a primary illness it is the result of environmental factors in this client group and underpins most of their behavioural presentations



Anxiety



- Behaviours which may appear rude, unusual or socially inappropriate may be their only way of expressing their anxiety.
- In a high state of anxiety, you may notice that they move up or down the spectrum (presenting with behaviours that do not match their chronological age)
- It's not uncommon for stemming behaviours to present as a self soothing technique (sometimes used subconsciously)
- You may notice the usual anxiety response of fight, flight, freeze.



Types of anxiety associated with this client group



- Separation anxiety
- Social phobia
- Generalized anxiety



Anxiety disorders



If untreated the person may develop an anxiety disorder such as:

- Phobias
- Panic attacks
- Obsessive Compulsive Disorder

It's not uncommon for undiagnosed adults to remain in mental health services for many years, with multiple mis- diagnoses, which does not respond to treatment

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Activity

With the knowledge of what we have covered today.....

Let us be mindful of things that can cause behaviours that are challenging.



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Iceberg Metaphor

We see the tip of the
Iceberg (Behaviour)

But what is underneath???



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Is it the child or the environment that needs changing

- We need to go through the process of looking at the relationship between behaviour and the environment.
- That is, to understand how the environment in which the individual lives, works or recreates can influence the individual's behaviour. **(Stand in their shoes)**

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Remember

- The problem is not the person
- The problem is understanding and responding to the behaviour
- It is the behaviour that challenges us or the situation the person finds themselves in.
- Challenging behaviour can be caused by a number of different factors.

Remember people with Autism....

Are all different and should be treated as individuals

They should be given the opportunity to succeed by working to their strengths, helping them with their weaknesses and understanding their differences.

Final word on Autism in the Family

- Autism is not due to poor parenting or having a bad child.
- It is a neurodevelopmental condition, that requires a specific style of parenting, teaching and mindful environmental manipulation

Please go ahead and share what you learnt today!!



Resources



You are the expert on your child and know them better than any healthcare professional. With the right resources, you can help them to manage the emotions that come with their diagnosis.

- Young Minds parents helpline on www.youngminds.org.uk
- Parents Action for Children on www.parents.actionforchildren.org.uk
- Mind general parent's mental health support for their child- www.mind.org.uk
- National Autistic society (NAS) www.autism.org.uk – Not just for people with Autism- The website has useful resources on managing anxiety and Neurodiversity
- Ambitious about Autism –parents toolkit www.ambitiousaboutautism.org.uk
- Jessica Kingsley Publishers- Largest UK publishers for books, DVD's and SEN friendly resources

