



Email Newsletter

Four Oaks Cluster - Volume 1,
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Focus on Autism

The Four Oaks Cluster of schools have been working together for over 20 years. Together we recognise the importance of serving our collective community and are committed each year to working together to face shared challenges, local and national issues.

In this issue of our newsletter, we are focusing on Autistic Spectrum Conditions. These may also be referred to as autism, ASD or ASC.

In this edition of our newsletter, we look at what is autism, sensory difficulties, autism in girls and women and what you can do to support. We hope you find it useful.

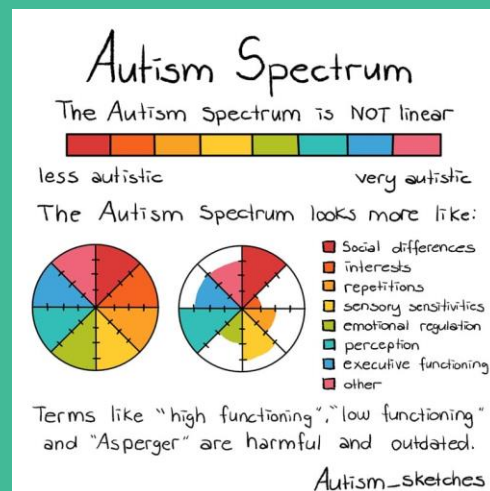
What is Autism?

Autism is a neurological difference that impacts how a person develops. There are three main areas of difference:

- Communication and interaction: differences in understanding and expressing communication and language
- Flexible thinking and information processing: differences in planning and processing information
- Sensory processing: differences in processing sensory information

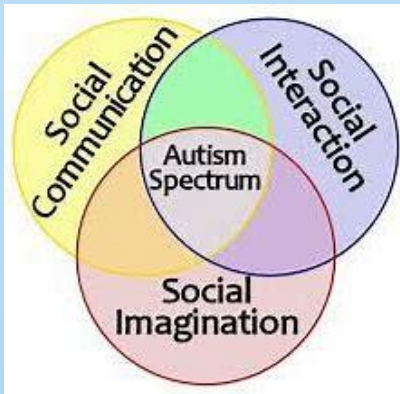
Someone can have differences in one of these areas and not have autism. Professionals who diagnose autism will be looking for differences in all three areas. Characteristics will vary from individual to individual.

There is a saying: if you have met one person with autism, you have met one person with autism! Although it is referred to as a spectrum, it is more like the diagram on the left, where presentation looks different in different areas for different people. Asperger Syndrome was a term used to label 'higher functioning' autism but now just a diagnosis of autism is given.



Autism is a difference not a disorder

Cluster Schools include: Arthur Terry Secondary; Coppice Primary, Four Oaks Primary, Hill West Primary, Mere Green Primary, Langley Special School, Moor Hall Primary, Little Sutton Primary and Whitehouse Common Primary



(image taken from the Positive Psychology Network)

Communication and Interaction

Someone with autism MAY:

- Take things literally
- Need extra processing time
- Repeat what others say to them
- (Echolalia) Have difficulty understanding behaviour, intentions or feelings of others
- Not seek comfort from others or may prefer to be alone
- Demonstrate empathy in a different way

Flexible thinking and information processing

Someone with autism MAY:

- Find role play and using their imagination difficult
- Have difficulty leaving set routines
- Not understand abstract concepts (e.g. "it's raining cats and dogs")

Sensory processing

Someone with autism MAY:

- Not cope with strong smells/noisy environments
- Not respond to pain, hunger, thirst,
- Have difficulty filtering out irrelevant sensory information
- Have reduced body awareness, difficulty coordinating themselves and planning

Autism in girls and women

Currently, more boys are diagnosed with autism than girls. Most of the diagnostic criteria are based on the presentation of autism in boys but keep an eye on the girls too. As girls tend to speak earlier and have greater social understanding, it can be difficult to notice a girl with autism, so it is important that girls on the spectrum are valued and listened to.

Autism West Midlands do a useful fact sheet: [Women and Girls Aug 2020.pdf](#)
(autismwestmidlands.org.uk)

What can I do to support a young person with autism?

Whether you are a parent or work in a school, there's some good news! Strategies which are useful for people with autism are useful for others too! Here are some top tips:

- Keep communication clear. Say what you mean. You could also use visuals (photo, object, picture) to support understanding
- Allow processing time. It can take 30 seconds to process the spoken word. Don't say it again or re-phrase anything - just stop and give space.
- Support attention shifting, for example with countdowns, timers (digital or sand)
- Treat behaviour as an attempt to communicate eg why is the child pushing something away? They don't like it or don't want it?
- **Where to get support:** If you have concerns, speak with your health visitor or GP. There are also some useful websites: www.autismwestmidlands.org.uk, www.autism.org.uk

