

What is autism?

Autism is a lifelong developmental disability that affects how a person communicates with, and relates to, other people. It also affects how they make sense of the world around them. It is a spectrum condition, which means that, while all people with autism share certain difficulties, their condition will affect them in different ways. People with autism may also experience over- or under-sensitivity to sounds, touch, tastes, smells, light or colours.

Visit www.autism.org.uk for more information.

How can people with autism see the world?

People with autism have said that the world, to them, is a mass of people, places and events which they struggle to make sense of, and which can cause them considerable anxiety. In particular, understanding and relating to other people, and taking part in everyday family and social life may be harder for them.

The three main areas of difficulty which all people with autism share are sometimes known as the 'triad of impairments'. They are:

- Difficulty with social communication
- Difficulty with social interaction
- Difficulty with social imagination

Key difficulties faced by the autistic learner

Autism is, like any other learning disability or difficulty, complex. General difficulties include:

- Poor organisational skills
- An inability to feel rewarded by social interaction
- A need for expectations to be spelled out very clearly
- A lack of awareness when it comes to predicting how long an activity will last and therefore unable to know when to start and finish an activity
- Feeling uncomfortable with uncertainty and unable to concentrate on work to the best of their ability

Strategies to support the autistic learner

- ✓ It is very important that a pupil with autism is given an achievable workload and has some control over the work. For example, give the pupil some area of choice.
- ✓ There should also be a definite end to the work – clearly defined by such clear coursework deadlines.
- ✓ Work tasks should be ordered using a schedule (pupils could be given one or encouraged to produce their own). Alternatively you can have a start and finish box or pile so a pupil can see what they have achieved and what is still to do.
- ✓ Ensure there is one familiar aspect and tap into an area of interest or a pupil's strengths in order to reduce stress.
- ✓ Present the same concept in many different ways. Long-term exposure to the same task can create rigidity, boredom and difficulty with generalisation.
- ✓ Use a pupil's interests and/or fixations to introduce a new or difficult task. This creates a calming effect in a demanding situation.
- ✓ Make tasks functional and relevant wherever possible. Pupils will resist tasks that have minimal meaning or relevance to them or have an unclear start and finish point.
- ✓ Use visual schedules.
- ✓ Demonstrate rather than explain. Remember to use visuals whenever possible

