

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

Autism is a condition that affects how a person thinks, feels, interacts with others, and experiences their environment. Every Autistic person is different to every other. This is why autism is described as a 'spectrum'. (Autism Spectrum Australia, 2020)

Some children with ASD:

It is important to convey simple messages when communicating with members living with an intellectual disability, and the following communication tools may be useful:

- Can find it hard to relate and communicate with other people. They might be slower to develop language, have no language at all, or have significant difficulties in understanding or using spoken language
- May also have limited imitation skills – may not be able to replicate a demonstrated activity
- Develop good speech but can still have trouble knowing how to use language to communicate with others. They might communicate mostly to ask for something or protest about something, rather than for social reasons, such as getting to know someone
- Often experience overwhelming anxiety, frustration and confusion which can be reflected in their behaviour
- May also have a degree of intellectual disability, although those with Asperger's syndrome (one form of autism) typically have average to above average intelligence
- Show restricted repetitive patterns of behaviour, interests or activities such as stereotyped or repetitive motor movements, use of objects or speech (such as flapping or echolalia)
- Exhibit insistence on sameness, inflexible adherence to routines, or ritualised patterns of verbal or nonverbal behaviour
- Can have highly restricted, fixated interests that are abnormal in intensity of focus
- Show hyper - or hypo - reactivity to sensory input or unusual interest in sensory aspects of the environment



Supporting someone with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

- Using visual tools can be beneficial as some children with ASD have no imitation skills and/ or find it hard understanding instructions.
- Visual tools can also be beneficial to prepare children for the program/ environment/ routine. It is important to note that children with severe ASD could be highly disturbed by any differences between the pictures and what actually happens on the day.
- Understanding nonverbal communication - These ways of communicating might include:
 - physically manipulating a person or object – for example, taking a person’s hand and gently pushing it towards something the child wants
 - pointing, showing and shifting gaze – for example, looking or pointing to something they want and then shifting their gaze to another person, letting that person know they want the object
 - using objects – for example, handing an object to another person to communicate.
- Try to keep to a routine – the best learning takes place in a predictable environment
- Try to keep continuity in support (having the same buddy every week)
- When giving instruction make eye contact – this may mean getting at, or below eye level
- Making sure they know when they have done well – tell them directly. Thumbs up and clapping can also be effective reinforcers
- Try to be fun and interesting
- Always use pro-actives NEVER punishment
- Generally ignore what we don’t want to see and reinforce what we do want to see – with the exception of extreme behavior where the child or other children’s safety could be compromised.
- Learn about, and be aware of the child’s preferences and triggers and speak to parents/ carers about suitable strategies to avoid, mitigate and/or manage negative behaviours
- Support the child to extend and challenge themselves but don’t push them to hard