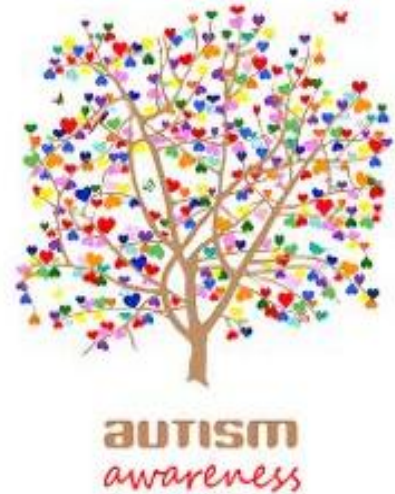


WHAT IS AN AUTISM SPECTRUM CONDITION?

In simple terms, an Autism Spectrum Condition (ASC) is a lifelong disability that affects how someone sees the world, processes information, and relates to other people.

A person with an Autism Spectrum Condition will have some of the following in various degrees

- Difficulties making friends or keeping them
- Lack of empathy
- Says the wrong thing
- May seem very cold hearted - doesn't realise they have hurt your feelings
- Needs lots of reassurance
- Doesn't like change, likes a routine
- Doesn't like team games, struggles to understand rules
- Indifferent to peer pressure, doesn't need the latest game
- Speaks very monotonously
- Doesn't like looking you in the eye
- Has particular topics they are fascinated in
- Any elaborate routines
- Not very good at coordination, catching a ball
- Doesn't feel pain or has a very low pain threshold



If your dependant has most of these attributes they may have an Autism Spectrum Condition.

Classic Autism is generally someone who also has a learning disability. High Functioning Autism (HFA) or Asperger syndrome (AS) is generally someone with average or above average intelligence. ASC people may also have specific learning difficulties, dyslexia, dyspraxia, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) or epilepsy.

Areas of difficulty - Also Known as the Triad of Impairments

Social Communication

People with an ASC have difficulty understanding facial expressions and tone of voice. They don't know when to start or stop a conversation, and find it difficult to choose a topic to talk about. They are very literal in their speech, and may not understand jokes, metaphors or sarcasm.

Social Interaction

People with an ASC want to be social, but find it very difficult to do so. They struggle to make and keep friendships, can behave inappropriately and may appear aloof and/or become withdrawn.

Social Imagination

People with an ASC have a limited range of imaginative activities, and find it difficult to predict what will happen next, or cause and effect. They may find it hard to understanding other people's feelings. They often struggle to play 'let's pretend' games.



As well as these three main areas of difficulty, people with ASC may also have the following:

A love of routines

Many have rules and rituals they have to do; these can be known as obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) depending on the severity.

Special Interest

They can develop intense, obsessive interest in a subject, which can be an advantage, as people who are very knowledgeable about certain topics can be encouraged to study or work using them.

Sensory Issues

Sensory issues can occur with sight, sound, smell, touch or taste. They are either intensified senses or underdeveloped, which can cause anxiety and pain. People with an ASC may not have body awareness and consequently may appear clumsy by bumping into things. They may also have difficulty with fine motor skills.



Diagnosing Autism Spectrum Conditions

Autism Spectrum Conditions vary so much from one person to another, so making a diagnosis can be difficult. It is more common for a diagnosis to be made as children get older, and sometimes difficulties may not be recognised or diagnosed until adulthood.

Some people see a formal diagnosis as a stigma, however for many people it is a relief to find out what you or your child's issues are. It helps professionals to understand their needs and behaviour. Having a formal diagnosis is the key that opens the door to specialised support.

There are diagnostic differences between conditions on the autistic spectrum. You can receive a diagnosis of Autism or Autism Spectrum Condition (ASC), High Functioning Autism (HFA) or Atypical Autism instead of Asperger Syndrome. You may also be given a diagnosis of Pervasive Developmental Disorder - Not Otherwise Specified (PDD-NOS) or Semantic Pragmatic Disorder.

If your dependant has been given one of these diagnoses, they will all have similar difficulties and support needs.