



'A brighter tomorrow'

How to support your child with an Autistic Spectrum Condition (ASC)

Autism - a quick guide

A diagnosis of Autism is not a term to cause you distress. It is discussed lots in the press, but lots of the information used is often exaggerated. It means that your child has been identified as having difficulties with certain activities and routines. It is very important to note that Autism is a spectrum – no two children will be the same and no two sets of difficulty will be the same. There is no 'one size fits all' diagnosis or set of advice. It is for you and your family to work out what works for you.

You may find that your child find some things difficult:

- Communicating with other people
- Knowing how to respond in social situations
- Making eye contact
- Knowing how to play with toys or others
- Coping with changes to routine or structure
- Playing with a variety of toys and others
- Understanding people's faces to know how they feel
- Making friends
- Holding a conversation with others
- Using their imagination
- Discussing how they or others are feeling
- Certain fabrics, textures, tastes, sounds or smells

If this is the case, there are many things that you can do to support your child. Working in partnership with the school to establish routines and strategies that work is a first step. In school there will be a number of strategies teachers might try. These may include:

- Instructions on a child's desk to support processing information – e.g. how to get ready for home time
- Work broken into steps to make it less daunting
- A visual timetable of the day's activities
- Fiddle toys to use to help children to settle to work
- Circle time activities to explore feelings and emotions
- A list of activities to build up to completed work
- A specific desk and seat in the classroom to help with routine
- Buddies or partners to support specific activities
- Use of rewards for dealing with challenging situations
- Small group work where the environment is less disturbing
- Support with SEAL (Social, Emotional Aspects of Learning)
- A home/school book to share details of the day

At home:

The principles of SPELL and TEACCH may be useful to follow at home. The following sections explain how you can apply these principles:

SPELL

SPELL stands for Structure, Positive, Empathy, Low arousal and Links. Activities may run smoothly if they are planned with this in mind.

Structure

The main reason for incorporating structure into the daily life of a person with Autism is to help them to predict events and avoid anxiety many people with autism are happier if they know what they are going to do on a given day. Sudden changes to children's daily routine need to be avoided as far as possible: cancelling activities without prior warning, and changes to staffing or teaching methods can all increase anxiety – hence the use of visual timetables.

Positive

A positive approach means encouraging children wherever possible, to develop their skills by giving them opportunities to try new activities in a supportive and caring environment. If they can undertake tasks that can realistically be accomplished, this will help to increase their self-esteem and self-confidence. This may mean structuring their day so that they have time to reflect on their achievements while doing something they enjoy.

Empathy

This is to do with how you as a parent, understand how a person with autism experiences the world, and also how they can be helped to overcome their difficulties. Keep the communication lines open!

Low arousal

Many people with autism can be very sensitive to noise, light, heat or smells. Therefore, it is important that lessons and activities are carried out in a calm environment, free as far as possible from disruption or noise which may make them feel anxious. It's possible that your tone of voice or body language can cause anxiety, too. Speaking calmly and using slower body movements will help.

Links

Links refers to good communication between parents and carers, and teachers and other professionals. This can help to reduce the possibility of misunderstanding or confusion, and to promote learning as everyone involved with the person follows the same, consistent approaches.

TEACCH

TEACCH aims to provide a structured environment in which a person with autism can be more independent in a safe and calm setting. Every activity has a clear start, middle and end and is supported by the use of words, pictures, symbols or visual aids. Some appropriate aspects of the system are:

A structured environment

You can create a not distracting environment by thinking about the physical structure of a particular room or environment. Bookshelves, walls, furniture, soft furnishings and different flooring can all be used to create a calm, structured environment, and to help a person with autism recognise which activities typically take place in a particular room.

For example, a kitchen will usually have fitted cupboards and fixtures as standard, helping to identify it, but all areas of the kitchen could also be labelled with words and/or symbols to assist a child with autism to use the room and the equipment with minimal support. Cupboards which contain food or hazardous materials could be locked when not in use.

Using particular colours that people find calming on the walls, or thick carpeting or double glazing to minimise distracting sounds, are other ways of making an environment more autism-friendly.

Scheduling and routines

A schedule allows people with autism to have ownership of their daily or weekly timetable. You can also make sure that individual tasks and activities have a routine or structure. For example, when a person with autism gets dressed in the mornings their clothes could always be laid out from left to right in the order that they should be put on.

Parent Support

Wolverhampton has a dedicated SEND support team. Wolverhampton Information Advice and Support Service are there to support you in meetings, offer advice or be a friendly ear. Their leaflets are in the entrance hall, or alternatively you can call 01902 556945.

Some useful websites are:

<http://www.autism.org.uk>

<https://wolvesiass.org/>