

AUTISM

This fact sheet has been written by parent carers for parent carers.
Clinical information has been approved by West Sussex practitioners.



What is autism?

Autism is a lifelong developmental disorder that affects how a person communicates and interacts with other people, and makes sense of the world around them. Autism is a spectrum disorder, which means that although all people with autism have difficulties with certain things, the degree to which they are affected varies widely. Together, different types of autism are sometimes known as autistic spectrum conditions (ASCs). Around 1 in 100 people in the UK are known to have autism, with many more boys affected than girls.

Characteristics of autism

People with autism share difficulties in three areas. These are:

- Difficulty with social communication.
- Difficulty with social interaction, including reading emotions and facial expressions.
- Difficulty with social imagination.

Together, these three difficulties are known as the 'triad of impairments'. People with autism may also have sensory issues, with noise sensitivity being very common. Some people with autism also develop unusual and repetitive patterns of behaviour and obsessive interests.

People who are on the autistic spectrum may also have varying degrees of learning disabilities. They may also have other conditions such as: attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD); dyspraxia, which affects co-ordinating thoughts and movements; hypermobility syndrome; epilepsy or Tourette's syndrome.

Causes of autism

At the moment, the causes of autism are still unknown, although many experts believe that it may be the result of a number of different genetic and environmental factors.

Types of therapy

There is no 'cure' for autism but there are a number of therapies that may help your child:

- **Applied Behavioural Analysis (ABA)** – intensive therapy which breaks down skills into small tasks and teaches them in a highly structured way.
- **Social Stories** – short stories that teach children and adults with Autism what to expect in social situations or activities.
- **Speech and Language Therapy (SALT)** – specialist support provided by a therapist to help build language and communications skills.
- **TEACCH** – highly structured system of learning based on using visual prompts, which have found to be beneficial in teaching people with autism.
- **There are a number of 'alternative' therapies** available to treat children and adults with autism, some of which have little scientific proof of their effectiveness. It is advisable to consult your paediatrician or GP before proceeding with any therapy for your child.



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Ask About

- **Aspens** – autism charity in West Sussex. Contact **03454 50060** or **www.aspens.org.uk**. It runs behavioural advice services, parent workshops, coffee mornings, clubs and siblings clubs.
- **Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS)** – doctors and therapists who help children and young people with mental health issues. Referrals must be made by a professional from health, social care or an educational setting.
- **Child Disability Service** – parents and carers can contact the specialist disability social worker within MASH on **01403 229900** or email **MASH@westsussex.gcsx.gov.uk**
- **Compass Card West Sussex** – a free leisure discount card for 0 to 25 year olds with SEND, which is run by Amaze. Find out more at: **compasscard.org.uk**, email: **compass@amazesussex.org.uk** or by calling: **0300 123 9186**.
- **Early Bird** – three-month course for parents and carers of children under 5 with autism designed to help develop their child's communications skills and behaviour. **early Bird+** is available for school-age children. Find out more via the **Portage** team.
- **MASH** – support from health and social care. If your child is under 18, call the MASH, tel: **01403 229888**, email: **MASH@westsussex.gcsx.gov.uk**. For over 18s call the **Adult Social CarePoint**: **01243 642121**, or email: **socialcare@westsussex.gov.uk**.
- **National Autistic Society (Horsham)** – youth club for children and young people aged five to 18 with Autism and Asperger Syndrome. Tel: **01483 521743** or **01483 521744** or email: **SEResourcecentres@nas.org.uk**.
- **Portage** – a home-based educational programme tailored to a child's individual needs. Available to very young children. Chichester, Horsham and Mid-Sussex: **01243 536182**, Crawley: **01293 572480**, Worthing: **01903 242558**.
- **Social Communication Team** – team of qualified specialists with expertise in autism who aim to promote the educational, social and emotional development of children and young people, working with their parents and educational settings. Ask your child's school for further information.
- **Support groups** – Autism by the Sea, Autism Support Crawley, Bognor Regis Autism, Parenting Autism Together in Horsham (PATH), Puzzle Pieces, SEND Support and Sussex Autism Support. All can be found on Facebook.
- **Other resources** – The Ashdown Club, Worthing: **01903 528607**; Kangaroos, Haywards Heath: **01444 459108**; PACSO, Chichester: **01243 533353**; Springboard Project, Horsham: **01403 218888**.

Further reading and useful links

- **Making Sense of it All** and **Making Sense of Adult Life** (14+) – Reaching Families' handbooks for parent carers of children and young people with SEND in West Sussex provide essential information on education, social lives, money matters, social care, health, employment and much more. Go to: **www.reachingfamilies.org.uk**.
- **Ambitious About Autism** – national charity for children and young people with autism. Visit: **www.ambitiousaboutautism.org.uk**.
- **Disability Living Allowance (DLA)** – your child may qualify for DLA, a state benefit that will help with their care. For further information visit: **www.gov.uk/dla-disability-living-allowance-benefit/overview**.
- **National Autistic Society** – **www.autism.org.uk**. helpline tel: **0808 800 4104**.
- **West Sussex Local Offer** – go to **westsussex.local-offer.org** and search for 'Autism'.

