



## Autism and Asperger Syndrome (ASC)

### Autism

**Autism is a lifelong developmental condition that affects how a person communicates with, and relates to, other people. It also affects how they make sense of the world around them.** Often people are said to be on the 'autistic spectrum'. 'Spectrum' means range. The autistic spectrum therefore covers the whole range of people with autism, from the person who has the disability in its severest form and never learns to speak, to the person with Asperger syndrome (see below). Being on the autistic spectrum also means that people with the condition will have different characteristics and no two individuals will be alike, 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. 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.

### Asperger Syndrome

Asperger syndrome is a form of autism, which is a lifelong disability that affects how a person makes sense of the world, processes information and relates to other people. Autism is often described as a 'spectrum disorder' because the condition affects people in many different ways and to varying degrees. Asperger syndrome is mostly a 'hidden disability'. This means that you can't tell that someone has the condition from their outward appearance.

While there are similarities with autism, people with Asperger syndrome have fewer problems with speaking and are often of average, or above average, intelligence. With the right support and encouragement, people with Asperger syndrome can lead full and independent lives.

### Characteristics of Autistic Spectrum Condition

#### The Triad of Impairments

The three main characteristics of autism have been described as a 'triad of impairments' (triad of impairments means three areas of difficulty.) They are:-

- **Social interaction** - difficulty with social relationships (e.g. making friends)
- **Social communication** - difficulty with verbal communication (talking) and non-verbal communication (e.g. understanding that you are smiling because you are happy or pleased)
- **Social imagination** - difficulty playing games and imagining (e.g. rather than play a racing game with toy cars, a child with autism may spend many hours simply spinning the wheels of an up-turned car)



In addition to this triad, many people with autism share common behaviours such as an insistence on always going the same way to school or the shops, or obsessions with certain objects or things such as dinosaurs or trains. Following on from this they may experience difficulties with changes in routine such as changes in staffing in schools.

People with autism find it hard to make friends and have difficulty understanding how someone else feels. They also find it difficult to understand the world around them and sometimes get very upset, anxious or angry. They find it difficult to communicate with others in a meaningful way.

## Further information:

The National Autistic Society: <http://www.autism.org.uk>

South Lakes Autism Family Support Project:

Kendal Family Drop in Centre

Stricklandgate House

92 Stricklandgate

Kendal LA9 4PU

Tel: 07795 346632