

STEPPING STONES
creating pathway store covery and resilience

ASD

Autism and Asperger's



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What are Autism and Asperger's syndromes?

Autism is a lifelong developmental disability that affects how people perceive the world and interact with others. Autistic people see, hear and feel the world differently to other people. If you are autistic, you are autistic for life; autism is not an illness or disease and cannot be 'cured'. Often people feel being autistic is a fundamental aspect of their identity.

Autism is a spectrum condition. All autistic people share certain difficulties, but being autistic will affect them in different ways. Some autistic people also have learning disabilities, mental health issues or other conditions, meaning people need different levels of support. All people on the autism spectrum learn and develop. With the right sort of support, all can be helped to live a more fulfilling life of their own choosing..

How is Autism and Asperger's diagnosed?

A diagnosis is the formal identification of autism, usually by a multi-disciplinary diagnostic team, often including a speech and language therapist, paediatrician, psychiatrist and/or psychologist.

These are some symptoms which may be present:

Difficulties with social communication

Autistic people have difficulties with interpreting both verbal and non-verbal language like gestures or tone of voice. Many have a very literal understanding of language, and think people always mean exactly what they say. They may find it difficult to use or understand:

- facial expressions
- tone of voice
- jokes and sarcasm.

Some may not speak, or have fairly limited speech. They will often understand more of what other people say to them than they are able to express, yet may struggle with vagueness or abstract concepts. Some autistic people benefit from using, or prefer to use, alternative means of communication, such as sign language or visual symbols. Some are able to communicate very effectively without speech.

Others have good language skills, but they may still find it hard to understand the expectations of others within conversations, perhaps repeating what the other person has just said (this is called echolalia) or talking at length about their own interests.



It often helps to speak in a clear, consistent way and to give autistic people time to process what has been said to them.

Difficulties with social interaction

Autistic people often have difficulty 'reading' other people - recognising or understanding others' feelings and intentions - and expressing their own emotions. This can make it very hard for them to navigate the social world. They may:

- appear to be insensitive
- seek out time alone when overloaded by other people
- not seek comfort from other people
- appear to behave 'strangely' or in a way thought to be socially inappropriate.

Autistic people may find it hard to form friendships. Some may want to interact with other people and make friends, but may be unsure how to go about it.

Repetitive behaviour and routines

The world can seem a very unpredictable and confusing place to autistic people, who often prefer to have a daily routine so that they know what is going to happen every day. They may want to always travel the same way to and from school or work, or eat exactly the same food for breakfast.

The use of rules can also be important. It may be difficult for an autistic person to take a different approach to something once they have been taught the 'right' way to do it. People on the autism spectrum may not be comfortable with the idea of change, but may be able to cope better if they can prepare for changes in advance.

Highly-focused interests

Many autistic people have intense and highly-focused interests, often from a fairly young age. These can change over time or be lifelong, and can be anything from art or music, to trains or computers. An interest may sometimes be unusual. One autistic person loved collecting rubbish, for example. With encouragement, the person developed an interest in recycling and the environment.

Many channel their interest into studying, paid work, volunteering, or other meaningful occupation. Autistic people often report that the pursuit of such interests is fundamental to their wellbeing and happiness.

Sensory sensitivity

Autistic people may also experience over- or under-sensitivity to sounds, touch, tastes, smells, light, colours, temperatures or pain. For example, they may find certain background sounds, which other people ignore or block out, unbearably loud or distracting. This can cause anxiety or even physical pain. Or they may be fascinated by lights or spinning objects.

Read more about repetitive behaviour and routines and sensory processing.



Does it help to have a diagnosis?

Getting a timely and thorough assessment and diagnosis may be helpful because:

- it helps autistic people (and their families, partners, employers, colleagues, teachers and friends) to understand why they may experience certain difficulties and what they can do about them
- it allows people to access services and support.

If I suspect my child has Autism or Asperger's, what do I do?

The diagnosis of Autism or Asperger's can only be done by a trained professional or team of people, as mentioned earlier. We offer multidisciplinary ASD assessments in Stepping Stones Clinic. You can contact you ourselves for an appointment or your GP can make a referral.



After your child's diagnosis

A diagnosis can help your child to get autism-specific support, but this doesn't happen automatically. Support can include specific support at school or support from social services or financial assistance to you. The National Autistic society is a useful resource with hosts of helpful guidance and advice.

An autism diagnosis can be difficult to come to terms with and it is very important for young people and parents to be supported and to be proved with the right support at this stage. We offer post-diagnostic workshops; family interventions and social skills training and support. We also offer help with sensory integration where that is indicated.

At times children or young people with ASD has additional difficulties such as depression, anxiety, OCD or ADHD which needs treatment in its own right. We also provide those interventions, when indicated.

We also offer individual therapy or group sessions to help young people who have been diagnosed with ASD. We also offer support and help to parents in order to help their children at home.

Stepping Stones clinic: Who we are

Stepping Stones clinic is a mental health clinic for children, young people, young adults and families. We offer a range of assessments and interventions that are all delivered by highly experienced clinicians. We have a multidisciplinary team of child psychiatrists, perinatal psychiatrists, clinical psychologists, family therapists, occupational therapists, speech therapists, child psychotherapists, dieticians as well as community paediatricians.

All our clinicians are registered with their regulatory bodies. All our

interventions are based on the latest evidence. We are regulated by CQC and contracted into all medical insurances. We provide a world-class service. We monitor progress and improvement throughout every treatment delivered to ensure high quality outcomes. We work in partnership with families and their children. Every person gets a tailor-made treatment package and we aim to offer appointments and deliver treatment as soon as they are received at a time that will suit each family.

Useful addresses and telephone numbers

The National Autistic society's website is a very resourceful guide, full of information, resources and advice.

Local support groups

Click on this link for information on local support groups

<http://www.autism.org.uk/directory/browse/cid=79-aid=1.aspx>



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