

Understanding Autism

Awareness, Inclusion and Support



Support and solutions
for you and your employees



Aims and Objectives

- Define autism and understand its key characteristics.
- Identify common myths and misunderstandings about Autism
- Understand how autistic people may experience the world differently
- Understand sensory, social and communication differences
- Explore inclusive communication and support strategies.

Define autism and understand its key characteristics.

GETTY IMAGES



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Prevalence

- As of June 2024, a total of 193,203 patients in England had an open referral for suspected autism, meaning they were awaiting assessment or diagnosis through the NHS. [1]
- Autism is more commonly diagnosed in males. In the 2021 England study, boys had a prevalence rate of 2.8%. The same study reported a prevalence rate of 0.65% in girls [2]
- In the past five to ten years, autism diagnoses in the UK have increased significantly, with a 787% rise reported between 1998 and 2018. [3]
- A 2023 study estimated that between 150,000 and 500,000 individuals aged 20 to 49 in England may be autistic but undiagnosed. [4]

The Priory 2025

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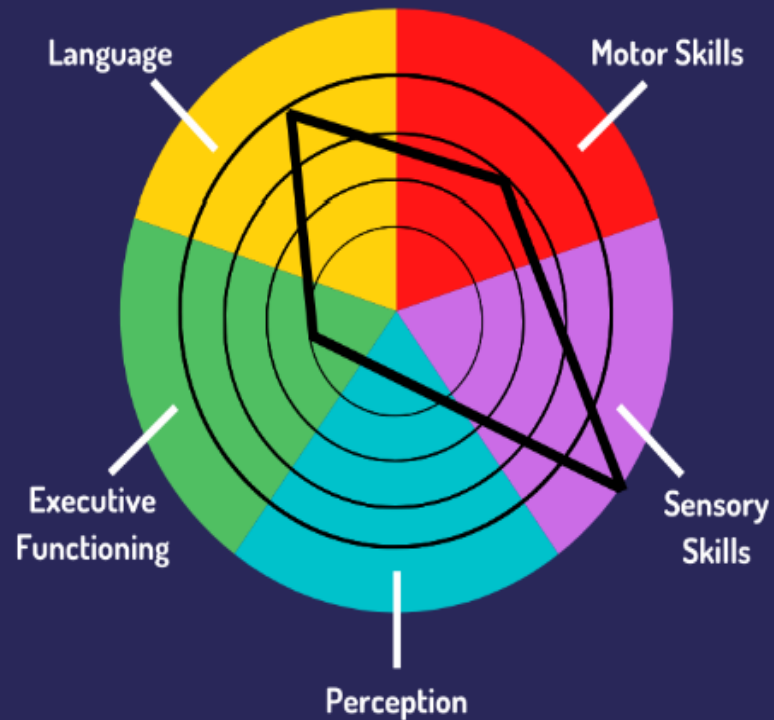
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THE AUTISM SPECTRUM

.....
What people think the autism spectrum looks like:
.....

Less Autistic | More Autistic

.....
What it can actually look like:
.....



“It's important to grasp that the spectrum isn't linear. Each autistic person has their own profile of strengths and difficulties. Just because an autistic person thrived at university and has a professional career, it doesn't mean they don't have support needs in other areas of their life”

Anna, an autistic Psychiatrist
@anna_rebowska

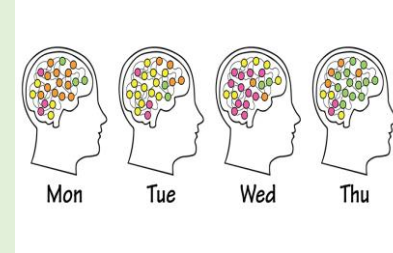
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Defining Autism : Key Characteristics



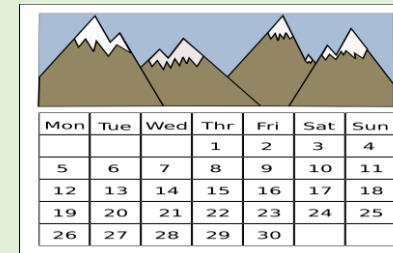
Social Communication – differences in interaction patterns and communication styles may appear early.



Repetitive behaviours, focussed, sometimes intense interests and repeated movements provide comfort.



90% of people will experience differences in how **sensory information** is processed.



Early development – signs typically appear before 3 years of age, with a higher diagnosis in males.

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Identify common myths and misunderstandings about Autism

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Autism Myths

- Autism is caused by vaccines
- Autism is a childhood condition
- Autistic people have a special talent
- Autistic people have learning disabilities
- Autistic people are anti-social
- Autism can be cured
- Only boys are autistic
- Autism is caused by bad parenting
- Why are rates of Autism and other neurodiverse conditions increasing?

The Double Empathy Problem

An autistic person may:

- Struggle to understand non-autistic people's communication style.
- Be distracted or overwhelmed by their sensory experiences.
- Find communicating difficult with non-autistic people.
- May feel pressure to mask their true selves.

Double Empathy.



Autistic and non-autistic people may have difficulties understanding what the other is thinking and feeling.

A non-autistic person may:

- Struggle to understand autistic people's communication style.
- Struggle to understand and be aware of sensory differences.
- Find communicating difficult with autistic people.
- May not recognise that autistic people feel pressure to mask their autistic features.

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Picture - Whittington Health NHS Trust



Georgia

with bright lights
and noises.

Understand how autistic individuals may experience the world differently.

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- Negative attitudes
- Mental health challenges
- Barriers to employment
- Sensory differences
- Alexithymia
- Masking
- Executive function struggles
- Co-occurring conditions

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Autistic Masking – What do others see?

Can engage in conversation

Takes on roles in social settings

Works harder than others

Likes to be the organiser

Often offers to help



Will often take the blame for other people's actions

Quiet

Well behaved

Socially capable

Emotional dysregulation at home

Autistica UK

Overly polite

I sometimes wonder what it would be like to live in a world where I felt safe, where I felt like I could truly be myself; what would it be like to not have to constantly pretend, to have the energy to do things because it's not being spent on masking and managing and pushing through, to feel unashamed to ask for what I need because I know I won't be judged?

Lauren, an autistic adult (Autistica UK)

Overly polite

avoids eye contact

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Why do Autistic People Mask?

- Acceptance in society
- Avoid prejudice, stigma, bullying and discrimination
- Blending in
- Social and societal expectations
- Hide discomfort
- The double empathy compensation
- Improve school / employment opportunities
- Improve relationships
- Routine coping mechanism – becomes subconscious.

The National Autistic
Society

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**Understand
sensory, social and
communication
differences.**

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Experiencing the World Differently: Sensory Processing

Heightened Sensitivity

Sounds, lights, textures and smells may be experienced intense

Processing Differences

94% report unique sensory experiences

Self-Regulation

Stimming behaviours help manage sensory input

Sensory Overload

Can trigger shutdown or meltdown responses



Seeing The World Differently

Photo – *enistle* – creative fabrica.com

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THE PARTY

A VIRTUAL EXPERIENCE OF AUTISM

Sight 	Sound 	Smell 	Taste 	Touch 
Under sensitive – objects appear dark, poor depth perception, central vision blurred but peripheral vision sharp and visa versa	Under sensitive – only hear sounds in one ear, may not acknowledge certain sounds, may enjoy noisy crowded spaces or bang doors or objects.	Under sensitive – no sense of smell or odour (including own) some may lick things to get a better sense of what it is.	Under sensitive - likes very spicy food, may eat or mouth non-edible items such as stones, grass, dirt (known as Pica)	Under sensitive – holds others tightly, high pain threshold. Maybe unable to feel food in mouth, self harm, likes heavy weighted objects, chews things.
Over sensitive – distorted vision, objects and light 'jump around' easier to focus on detail not whole object, sleep difficulty's / light sensitive.	Over sensitive – noise magnified, sounds distorted / muddled. Maybe able to hear conversations in distance, inability to 'cut out' sounds / noise.	Over sensitive – smells can be intense or overpowering, can cause toileting problems. Dislike of distinct perfumes and shampoos on people etc	Over sensitive - some flavours and foods too strong, may lead to restrictive diet. Some textures may cause discomfort – only eat smooth foods – ice cream, mashed potato.	Over sensitive - touch can be painful, dislikes things on hands / feet / body and clothes may need to be certain textures. Head and hair maybe sensitive, food textures uncomfortable.
Support -Reduce florescent lighting, sunglasses, blackout blinds, desk divides to block visual distractions.	Support –visual support to back up verbal information, awareness of others around to aid communication, headphones, quiet space	Support –routine re washing and using strong odours to mask smells or fragrance-free products in the environment.	Support – recognising preferences, encourage dietary variety.	Support –for smearing – offer alternatives, jelly or cornflower and water. Chewing – latex free tubes, straws or hard sweets.

Social and Communication Differences.



**SOCIAL COMMUNICATION
AND INTERACTION**

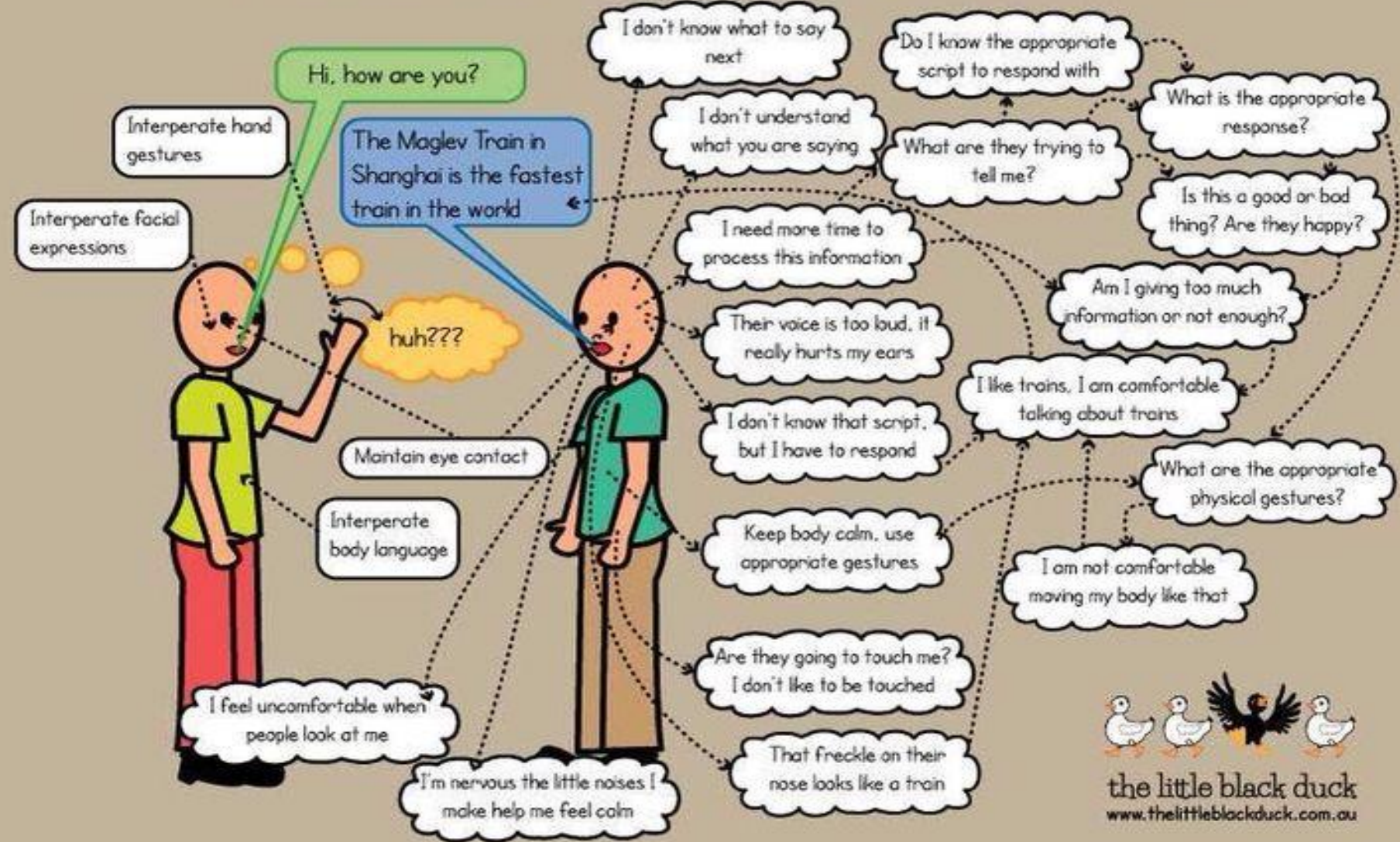


LANGUAGE

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Communication Differences

communication and autism



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Autistic People may have Communication Differences

May prefer to work, play or spend time alone

Use more direct language with less unnecessary or ambiguous language (can be seen as being 'blunt')

Invent unique words

Speech delays or advanced language use, o have limited speech.

May have more formal, precise and technical speech

Repeat words or phrases (known as echolalia)

May pause and not fill them with 'um' or 'ah' sounds

Intermittent speech loss

Communication differences can have a negative impact including judgement, anxiety, frustration and isolation impacting education and work.

Other communication methods include, writing, BSL, Augmentative and Alternative communication, vocalisations and gestures.

National Autistic Society

**Explore inclusive communication
and support strategies, attitudes
and environments.**

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Communication Differences and Support.

Literal and honest communication

Infodumping

Body language

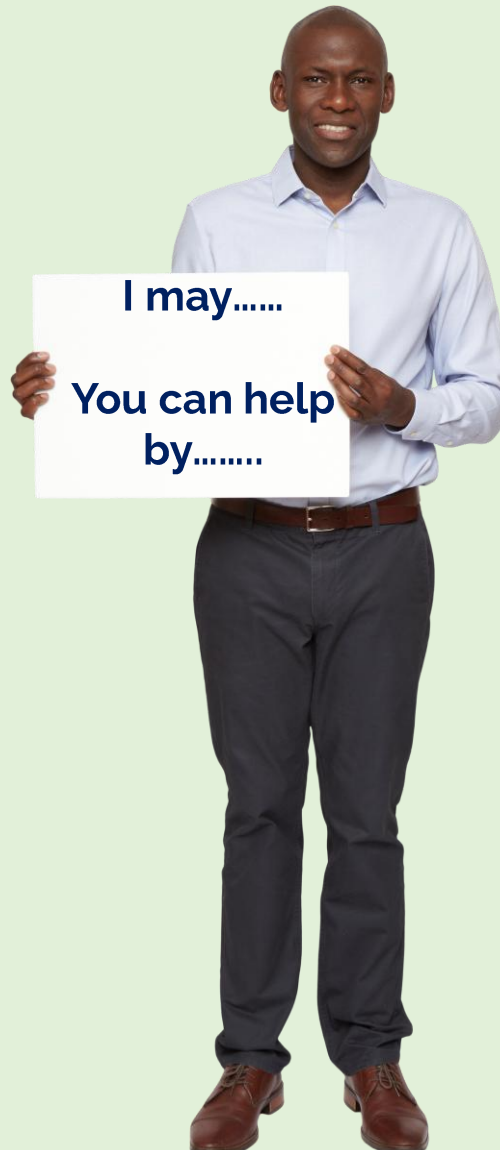
Echolalia:

Pre-prepared scripts

Alternative methods of communication

Friendships and social preferences

Reframing AUTISM



Presume competence

Ask about communication preferences

Be literal and clear:

Provide Context and Clarity

Reframe questions

Check for understanding

Allow time and recap conversations

Respect individual differences and remember communication is bi-directional

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Support Interventions	Self Management	How can others help?
Speech and language therapy Talking therapies and CBT Intensive Interaction Alternative and Augmentative Communication (AAC) Play based social learning programmes to increase sensitivity to individual communication styles for parents / carers / teacher and peer understanding. Remember – the autistic person is central to all decisions and interventions should be monitored and reviewed regularly.	Preparing for social situations Having a social support person Choose what to say no too Plan for overwhelm Decompression time built into activities. Make connections with others with similar interests / autistic people	Be patient Break verbal information down to aid processing Allow extra time for autistic people to process information and check communication preferences Recognise that behaviour is a means of communication All forms of communication are valid not just speech The National Autistic Society

Parents and Carers

It's an enormous battle, and we struggle with the local authority each year.

I live in fear that they will send him back to an institution.

I had always planned to retire and travel, Jacks 40 now but I wouldn't leave him for more than a week.

Her trauma became my trauma – I couldn't protect her.

When one of your children requires more focus than the others, it has a massive impact on your family.

We lost friends, their children moved onto different stages and their lives did too.

Trying to do what is best for your child, what ever their age, can be hard, but I wouldn't change anything, and my pride in her achievements is overwhelming.

The system can feel like an assault on your soul, you feel vulnerable and exposed.

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My child is not neurotypical.....

“But ... if you spend your life mourning the fact that you didn't get to Italy, you may never be free to enjoy the **very special, the very lovely things** ... about Holland.”

EMILY PERL KINGSLEY

Create inclusive environments (remember parents of neurodiverse children maybe undiagnosed adults.

Seek senior leadership buy-in and use role models to drive awareness and change.

Flexible work arrangements and accommodations, remote working, adjusted responsibilities and create designated areas for quiet work.

Creating an Inclusive Workplace Culture

Ensure that our workplaces promote a culture of awareness, acceptance, and support for **all differences**, we all have different challenges at different life stages.

**How can we help
within our
workplaces?**



Links to Support Organisations in the UK

Autism Family Support - [Autism Family Support - Hope is Where the heart is](#)

Autistica - [Home | Autistica | Autism research and campaigning | Autistica](#)

National Autistic Society - [National Autistic Society](#)

Autism Alliance UK - [Autism Alliance UK](#)

Support Autism – NHS Sheffield health and Social Care - [Support - autism | Sheffield Health and Social Care](#)

The Hub (Sheffield) - [The Hub S12 - Autism & Learning Disability Support South Yorkshire](#)

Autism Angels - [Alternative Wellbeing & Learning Provision – Autism Angels](#)

Thank you



www.akswellbeing.com

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Links to Videos

Samira Nazemi - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SEWkmAPl24s>

Ambitious about autism - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xTLUYda-oO8>

The world through my eyes - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GoD_839YFQU

The party - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OtwOz1GVkDg>

Uniting - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QXY5TyCUTlo>

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