

# How to Help Your Child with Autistic Spectrum Disorder

## What Is Autism?

Autism is a word that refers to a wide range of developmental disorders some people are born with or develop in the first 2 years of life. This group of disorders makes up what doctors call the Autism Spectrum. Someone whose condition falls within the spectrum has an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

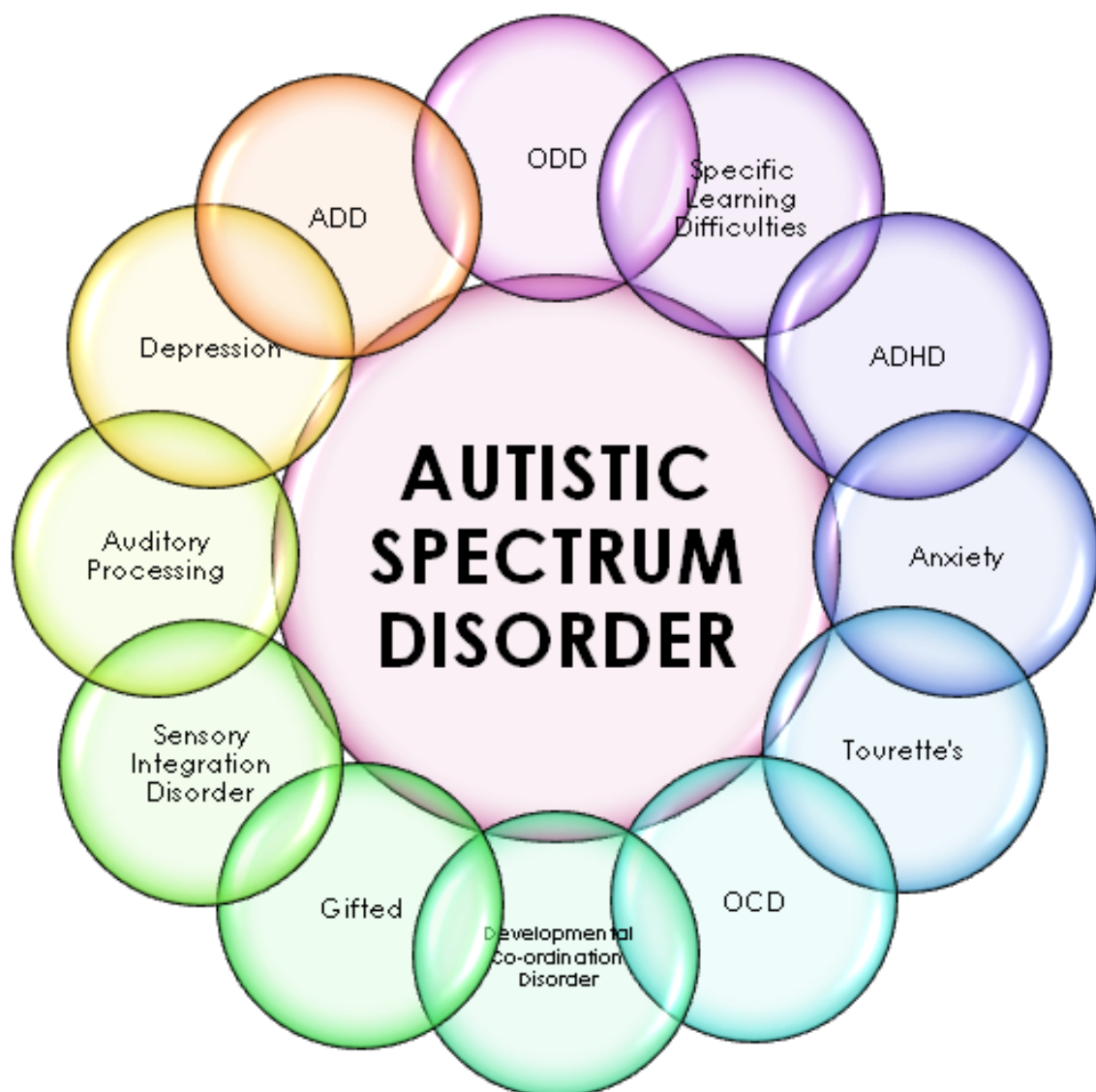
Autism affects the brain and makes communicating and interacting with other people more difficult. It also makes it difficult for parents trying to interact with their child.

This little booklet is a practical guide with information about ASD with tips and hints to help you if your child has the condition.



Not everybody with an Autism Spectrum Disorder has the same difficulties. Some people may have autism that is mild. Others may have autism that is more severe. Two people with the same spectrum disorder may not act alike or have the same skills. Some people with autism are especially good at music or computers or art. Others may have trouble with speech and balance and coordination. Everyone with ASD is unique - **once you have met one person with autism, you have just met one person with autism.** What works with one person will not necessarily work with another.

*ASD has links with several other disorders that can mask or be masked by one another.*



*The child with ASD may have many other issues or problems making the condition more difficult to deal with. It is important to try to separate the child from their conditions and see the person within.*

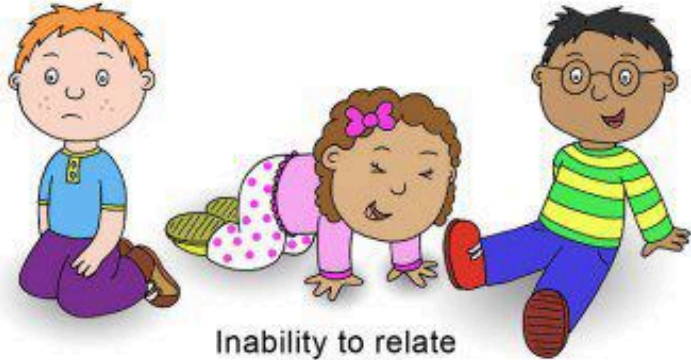


# Signs of ASD

Inappropriate playing with toys



Inability to relate to others



Hyperactivity or Passiveness



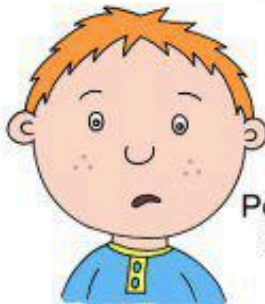
Inappropriate laughing or crying



Oversensitive or undersensitive to sound



Poor speech or lack of speech



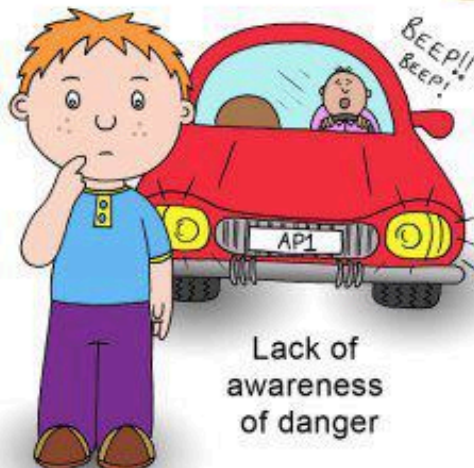
Strange attachment to objects



Difficulty dealing with changes to routine



Lack of awareness of danger





# Top tips to help your child with ASD

## 1. Changes are bad

Remember people with ASD do not like change and find it very stressful. Try to keep things in their lives the same as far as possible (within reason). Obviously certain things in life cannot always stay the same but where you have control, try to maintain order. There is comfort in order and routine.



## 2. Routine warning

If there is going to be some any change in your child's day warn them as far in advance as possible so they know what to expect. Discuss with your child why there is a change and what is going to happen and when. Glve them as much information as you feel they can manage. Forewarned is forearmed.



## 3. Repetition, repetition, repetition

Repeating actions or movements over and over again can give someone with ASD a sense of control and help them to manage the situation and feel more secure. Familiarity of actions being repeated can be like a security blanket especially in a new or stressful situation. Allow your child to make these motions but try to encourage them to 'tone it down' as you do not want your child to be ostracised by others if it can be helped. Perhaps encouraging 'fidget toys' would be useful.



## 4. Look me in the eye...or not

People with ASD often find it difficult to make appropriate eye-contact. Encourage your child not to stare at others while they are talking as this can be off-putting. On the other hand if your child finds it difficult to make eye-contact tell your child to look at someone's face at least, perhaps to look at their forehead or nose. If someone is looking the general direction of someone's face it make them appear more sociable. Do not try to *make* your child look into someone's eyes as they may find this very distressing.



## 5. Feeling Good

Being sensitive to others feelings can be a real challenge to people with ASD. They often find it difficult to read body language or even gauge emotions on others' faces. Practice with your child by using pictures of exaggerated facial expressions. Take pictures of yourself and others known to your child (or 'google' images of people) making faces to showing different emotions. Black and white silent movies are also good for showing facial expressions as the actors have to overlay emotions to show what is happening as there is no dialogue in the film.



## 6. Role play when things happen - social stories

People with ASD may find it difficult to know how to react appropriately in various social situations.

Try using a social story to help sort out a difficult situation or to help talk about what might happen in a new situation. You could use puppets or pictures. Even try using Comic Life using photos of your child to create a comic strip of the situation. Talk about what happened, what might happen and consequences of actions. Try a few different scenarios of how to act (or how not to act) socially.



## 7. Encourage social interactions with peers

People with ASD may find it difficult to make friends. Practise making friends with your child. Your child feels comfortable with you and doesn't mind talking you to and making mistakes. Once they have practised with you, try getting them to practice with other members of your family and family friends so they will feel less anxious about having social interactions. Then move to trying to set up play-dates. Talk to teachers about who might be a suitable friend. Explain to parents of children in your child's school what you are doing. Preferably start somewhere your child is used to so they will feel as relaxed as possible. Start small say with only half an hour at a time and then build it up.



## 8. Encourage social interactions in everyday life situations

Your child will be living in the real world some day, they need to do some activities alone. Try to think of little things they can do to promote independence.

Let your child pay for your shopping in the supermarket or pay for the tickets on the bus. Allow your child to do small errands like going to the corner shop. You can always wait in the car or look after the dog outside the shop while your child goes in. Let them bring something in to the next door neighbour or post a letter in the postbox. Every little helps. Make sure to praise every effort made, whether successful or not. Use every outcome as a teaching opportunity.

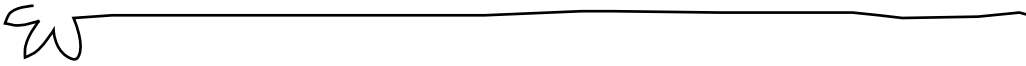


## 9. Use ICT to communicate

Often children with ASD find it difficult to communicate one-to-one. ICT can provide help in this way. The person with ASD can communicate without having to make eye-contact or worry about any speech impediment so what they say can be clearly understood.

It can also provide help with motor difficulties because typing is easier than pencil control when writing.

However, bear in mind that the computer may reinforce or provide a vehicle for some of the less desirable tendencies of ASD, like becoming less sociable.



## 10. A whole new world - Experience the world differently

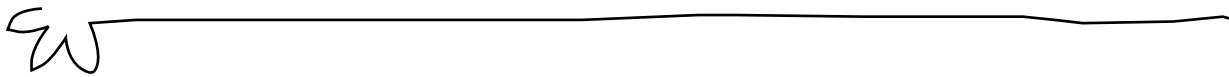
Try looking at the world through the eyes of your child. Try to read a book with Vaseline smeared on your glasses while sitting on a wobbly chair with white noise blaring in your ears. A world where every sensation is heightened and every sense feels overwhelmed. Every little activity is a chore and to complete it is a Herculean task. Understanding what life is like for your child to do simple tasks may help you be more sympathetic of your needs.



## 11. Sensitive to loud noises

People with ASD can be extremely sensitive to loud noises. Sometimes you might have special days planned and may experience loud noises unexpectedly like in a video show in a museum. Be prepared. Bring noise reducing headphones if they are particularly sensitive. But the best defense is preparation. Try to desensitize your child to noise by having background noise playing while they are carrying out tasks they enjoy. Hopefully they will then start to associate noises with times when they were relaxed.

Look for ASD-friendly showings in the cinema or special days at the zoo etc so your child can enjoy themselves in an accepting environment and you are not always worried about disturbing others if your child 'kicks-off'



## 12. Don't be a one trick pony

Often people with ASD can become extremely focused on one thing but this can frequently become an obsession and they may find it difficult to leave one activity and move on to something else. Encourage your child to have other interests too. Diversify their talents. Often if they become overly-focused on one thing they can be very intimidating or off-putting to others and be considered strange or weird. Reducing these barriers to social interaction should be encouraged so your child won't appear 'odd' before anyone has had a chance to meet them properly and find out what a great person they are.



### 13. Use the focus Luke... Strength in their focus

However the ability to focus on one task at a time is also a talent. Great discoveries have been made in science and technology by people who are determined that nothing will let them deviate from the job at hand. Or perhaps great advances have been made in art and music by people with a similar determination. Mozart, Einstein, Andy Worhol, Courtney Love, Tim Burton among many others are all suspected of having ASD and their focus in their chosen field no doubt helped them to accomplish great things.



### 14. Don't send 'distractions' to school

Perhaps your child has a strange attachment to certain objects or toys. Try to not allow your child to bring their 'distraction' to school whatever that may be. This may mean 'frisking' your child or checking their school bags to make sure they have not tried to sneak in something. If your child does obsess about something, say an action figure or a games console, they will not be able to focus on anything in school if they know that their obsession is in such close proximity without being able to touch it or play with it. Therefore it is better to take temptation out of their way in the first place. Or after discussing the matter with the school, send the object in and the teacher may allow her to play with the object at a specified time when it will not detract from teaching and learning in the classroom.



### 15. Visual timetable

We see and use visual prompts every day, for example road signs, maps and shopping lists. They help us to function, to understand the world around us, and provide us with valuable information. Many people with an ASD are thought to be visual learners, so presenting information in a visual way can help to encourage and support people's communication, language development and ability to process information. It can also promote independence, build confidence and raise self-esteem.

Visual timetables have been shown to be a very effective way of settling your child and making them feel secure. They can look at the timetable and see what to expect of their day.



### 16. Visit the school if transferring

If your child is moving schools ask the school for as much information about the school as possible. The school itself may have some kind of pack to help your child transition smoothly from one school to another with pictures of teachers, classroom assistants, the school nurse, principal or other important people in the school. Visit the school with your child and allow them to see the layout of the school. See if the school has a map of the building so you can go over this with your child. Look on the school website and check out if they have a virtual tour. Most of all be willing to keep all lines of communication open between you and the school.



# Autism



## the world from a different perspective

ASD is a spectrum ranging from people who are very highly functioning and can carry out regular everyday tasks but perhaps have problems with social skills to those people with learning disabilities who will find many daily tasks extremely difficult.

The child or young person with ASD has a different worldview. This can show others a different perspective on everyday situations and be very interesting and engaging.

Although it may be challenging working with children with ASD it is very rewarding. Hopefully this booklet will give you some tips and hints to help your child to settle into school smoothly.

Things need to start at home and parents need to work closely with the school and teachers to ensure that the needs of the child as an individual are met. When a good home-school relationship is found your child will go from strength to strength.



If you have any further questions feel free to contact us at the school.

**Belfast Model School for Girls**

Tel: 02890718111 Website: [www.belfastgms.org](http://www.belfastgms.org)