



# Information Sheet: Autism

## What is autism?

Some learners in your class may be diagnosed with or display traits of autism. Autism is a neurodivergence that causes differences in the way that information is processed. Autism can be referred to as ASD (autistic spectrum disorder) or ASC (autistic spectrum condition). It is a lifelong condition which effects how learners communicate and interact with the world. Learners who have been diagnosed, or who you think are showing traits, may find the following areas difficult.

### Common traits of autism

- Difficulties relating to social interaction.
- Fixated interests.
- Extreme sensitivity to sensory input (light, noise etc)..
- Need for routine and sameness
- Repetitive actions or body movements – known as stimming, which is a way to calm the mind
- Difficulty interpreting non-literal or figurative language.
- Difficulty regulating emotions.
- Verbal and non-verbal language difficulties.

Rather than a linear line where people are 'a little bit autistic' or 'very autistic', there is an autistic spectrum where certain aspects can affect life more than others. These aspects are:

- Sensory sensitivities
- Social skills
- Communication
- Perseverative thinking
- Receptive behaviour
- Motor skills
- Executive functioning
- Information processing.

Girls with autism are more likely to hide this and feel the need to present or perform in a neurotypical way with their social behaviours. This is exhausting and families often report very different behaviours at home. It is important that learners who hide their autism are given time in the day to decompress.

## What can you do to support a child displaying autistic traits?

- Get to know the learner and ask them or notice what causes them distress.
- Complete a sensory checklist with parents to see what senses cause the learner distress (these can be found online).
- Establish routines and provide a visual timetable.
- Try to give as much warning as possible to changes in the timetable.
- Consider your choice of words – make instructions short and clear and avoid metaphors and similes.

- Try to integrate the learner's interests into teaching and learning.
- Do not always insist on the same output as from other learners e.g. they can draw a comic strip if that is what motivates them.
- Work with parents and carers as they will probably already know the learner's "dos and don'ts".
- Prepare the learner for general changes such as moving to a new class.
- If the learner has social anxiety, consider where you sit them and who you seat them next to and ask what worries them within the school day.

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