



IMMANUEL COLLEGE

PARENT RESOURCES

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

IS ASD COMMON?

ASD is more common than you may imagine.

It affects around 1 in 68 children.

Boys are 4-5 times more likely to have ASD than girls.

WHAT CAUSE ASD?

Research continues into the cause of ASD, as at present, there is no definitive answer. The following categories for cause, however, have been suggested:

- **Neurodevelopmental disability**
- **Genetic predisposition**
- **Environmental factors**
- **Unknown factors**

Research has indicated that it is not a result of poor parenting.

HOW WILL MY CHILD MANAGE AT SCHOOL?

It is advisable to have a discussion with our child's Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCo) in order to highlight any concerns you may have. They will be able to assess your child's individual needs and design a bespoke programme of support.

In some circumstances, we may suggest an application should be made for an Education Health Care Plan (EHCP) in order to provide emotional support for your child.

The school has a toolkit of strategies to help support children with ASD.

Autism affects the way a child communicates and how they experience the world around them. ***It is classed as a hidden disability.***

This is a spectrum disorder, which means children could have varying levels of severity. Whilst they may have similar characteristics, all are unique in the way they present. Some can also have comorbid disorders (an additional disorder which co-exists with the ASD.)

Every child with ASD is different. Make sure they have a support programme that is as individual as they are. ASD children will have unique and exceptional skills and abilities which need to be celebrated.

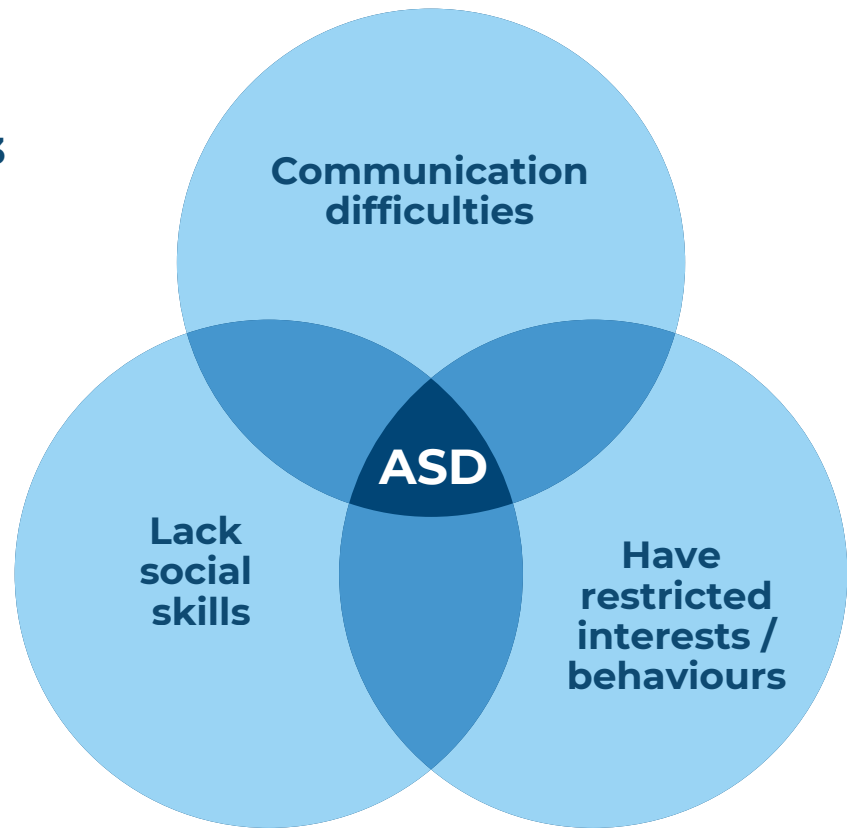


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CHILDREN WITH ASD WILL OFTEN FACE CHALLENGES IN 3 MAIN AREAS.



BEHAVIOR QUANDRY

As a parent of a child with ASD, it is often difficult to establish if your child is exhibiting inappropriate behaviours as a result of their ASD challenges, or, as with most children at times, because they want their own way.

Read on to see what ASD traits could be triggering your child's behaviour.

WHAT TRIGGERS DYSREGULATION?

All children have their own personal triggers, which can result in them becoming dysregulated. For ASD children, however, there are some common triggers. These include:

- Restraints on them having repetition
- A change of environment/people
- Communication challenges
- A lack of empathy in regard to their compulsive behaviours/rituals.
- Sensory overload
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Try to monitor which of these triggers cause challenges for your child in order to understand which behaviours are most likely driven by their ASD.



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REPETITION

ASD children will often function more effectively if they need to have repetition to meet particular routines/rituals, which are vital for them, as it reduces anxiety by not having to process new information. They often find life very confusing and complicated, so by having regular routines, they feel comfortable that they can cope.

It is vital that any change to such routines/rituals are explained to your child prior to them happening, in order that they don't become overwhelmed. Even small changes can have a huge impact, so don't underestimate the effect of these on your child.

COMMUNICATION

ASD children often find it difficult to understand what is trying to be communicated to them. They are unable to filter the less important information, and so feel overwhelmed by the amount of information they are trying to process. They also may not engage if the subject matter is not one that has particular interest for them.

TIPS TO HELP WITH COMMUNICATION

- Use their name at the start of your sentence, so that they can be really clear that you are talking to them.
- Ensure that they are paying attention - if they are transfixed on their favourite Xbox game, there will be little chance of you communicating successfully.
- Try to build the discussion / request around something that holds special interest for them.
- Say less and speak slowly - the less language they have to process, the better chance of them understanding.
- Use keywords and keep repeating these as they sink in. For example:
 - "Mary, it's 7.00 pm, so it's time to brush your teeth now"
 - "Mary, it's now time to get your toothbrush to brush your teeth"
 - "Mary put the toothpaste on and brush your teeth."
- Make questions short and don't use open-ended questions. Consider:
 - "Did you like your lunch today?"
 - Instead of -
 - "How was lunchtime today?"
- Avoid using irony, sarcasm or rhetorical questions as they won't understand these.

USE VISUAL AIDS

Words can be confusing to them as they often find it difficult to understand the meaning of these in certain situations.

Use pictures to remind them of particular things, especially for regular routines.

Images can also be useful to help keep them safe - for example, a stop sign on a door.



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WHY DOES MY CHILD HAVE SO MANY RITUALS?

Imagine your child's ritual to be like a comfort blanket. They find the world a confusing and challenging place, and their rituals help them to feel safe within it. By always doing things a certain way and at certain times, it takes away the unknown and this is what causes them to feel anxious. By following rituals they have control, and feel comfortable with the familiarity of the things they are doing.

They may also have a need for verbal rituals and will often ask the same question or want to receive the same answers. Not only does this reassure them that things are the same, the repetition also enables them to process the information more successfully.

Where possible and if safe to do so allow your child to follow their rituals as this is a good way of them self-regulating. Show them empathy and patience when they are unable to diverge from a ritual.

STIMMING

Stimming is often present in ASD children and refers to them finding self-stimulation through the repetition of movements, sounds, words or moving objects. This repetition helps to sooth them and reduce anxiety.

It is very common for them to use repeated sucking or chewing in order to create a desired sensation. Commonly children are sucked or chewed and often cuffs will become damaged as a result of this. Other objects which are sometimes less than suitable including Blut Tac, paper or hair are also used.

It is important to let your child find a way of stimming. If they have to chew or suck find them suitable safe ways to do this. Cereal bars, carrots, apple slices or fruit rolls are safer alternatives. Special aids can also be purchased on line to support your child's need to chew or suck.

HOW DO I EXPLAIN MY CHILD'S BEHAVIOUR TO MY FAMILY?

Tell them that your child has a spectrum disorder so his/her traits will be unique to other children. Try to outline why they behave the way they do - this could include:

- A lack of social understanding - they are not being rude.
- Eye contact is difficult for them.
- They struggle to process information so may not understand what is being asked of them.
- Sensory overload is common for them - their senses can be undersensitive or oversensitive resulting in difficulties with touch, smells, sounds or sight.
- They may not like having their photograph taken.
- Their attention span may be less than other children in the family.
- They will have particular rituals and may have one particular obsession.

As well as asking family members to support your child's needs, encourage them to embrace the positives - They will be honest, funny and have a wealth of knowledge to share.



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SENSORY OVERLOAD

It is common that ASD children can face sensory challenges. Some will be under-sensitive and others over-sensitive to smell, sight, or sound. It is really important that such difficulties are established and supported in order to prevent dysregulation.

UNDERSENSITIVE SMELL

Children who are under-sensitive to smell have no or little sense of smell. This can be challenging for them especially regarding their personal hygiene as they are not aware of their body odour. They may not realise their underwear or clothes need washing that they need to be washed.

They may also lick things in order to get a better sense of what they are by taste rather than smell.

SUPPORT FOR UNDERSENSITIVE SMELL

- Try to find strongly scented toiletries.
- Use their knowledge of taste to help them understand smell. Consider discussing tastes that they may compare to a fresh smell like citrus fruits, cucumber or mint, and tastes which they may compare to a stale smell, like stiffish, brussel sprouts, cabbage, or leeks.
- Discourage them from licking inappropriate objects by teaching them good hygiene.
- Devise a visual game when you work out together what they are safe to lick.
- Be mindful that they might try to seek out strong odours which aren't very pleasant - faeces is often an example of this. Offer more pleasant alternatives, such as lavender or lemon oil, to satisfy this sensory need.

OVERSENSITIVE SMELL

If a child is over-sensitive to smell they find odours intense and overpowering. This can often cause dysregulation as the smell is so severe it can make them feel really uncomfortable and can be physical symptoms. Particular scents can also cause them to have dislikes to people or places.

SUPPORT FOR UNDERSENSITIVE SMELL

- Accept that your child can't help finding certain smells challenging.
- Once problematic odours are identified, plan, where possible, how to avoid these. Consider:
- Minimising cooking smells when preparing dinner.
- Avoid using perfume/aftershave when near your child.
- Keeping a distance from animals.
- Devising a diet of suitable-smelling foods.
- Keeping a suitable scent with you which can be used to mask a problem odour.
- Adapting activities if their odour is a problem (e.g. chores in swimming pools).
- Be mindful of washing powder and fabric conditioners, especially on bedding.



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UNDERSENSITIVE OR OVERSENSITIVE SIGHT

A child's lack of concentration or understanding can be due to problems with their sight.

UNDERSENSITIVE SIGHT CAN:

- Make objects dark or lose their features.
- Central vision can be blurred, but peripheral sight stays sharp.
- A central object can be magnified and the periphery blurred.
- There can be poor depth perception, which hinders throwing, catching and can make a child clumsy.

OVERSENSITIVE SIGHT CAN:

- Make sight distorted, objects appear really bright or jump out at you.
- Make images appear fragmented.
- Make it easier and more pleasurable to focus on a particular detail rather than the whole object.
- Makes sleeping difficult due to the sensitivity to light.

UNDERSENSITIVE OR OVERSENSITIVE SOUND

As with sight problems, hearing difficulties can also significantly impact a child.

UNDERSENSITIVE SOUND CAN RESULT IN:

- only hearing in one ear or having partial hearing.
- not being able to place/acknowledge particular sounds.
- a desire to be in crowded places or hear noise or loud bangs.

OVERSENSITIVE SOUND CAN RESULT IN:

- noise being magnified, sounding distorted or muffled.
- hearing conversation in the distance.
- having an inability to cut out certain sounds.

If you are worried that your child might be encountering either undersensitive or over-sensitive sight or sound it is advisable to seek advice from an optician or seek a hearing test.



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SUPPORTING SIGHT AND SOUND SENSITIVITIES

- Remember your child may see things very differently to you. Asking them to tell you verbally what they see helps to understand their perspective.
- Assess the impact of bright lights on your child, so this can be managed accordingly.
- Bear in mind events with fireworks or disco lights might be difficult for your child to manage.
- Equip them with useful aids - sunglasses are a great way to reduce the brightness of light, sound reducing headphones can help.
- Consider their sleeping environment - would black out blinds make a positive difference to their sleeping patterns.
- Try and plan activities which help with their special awareness and ball skills which will develop their catching and throwing.
- Be mindful that they may be clumsy and try to assess any potential risk for them when planning activities.
- Be patient if they can't always respond to you, as it may be that they are being distracted by another sound.
- Take time to explain things fully and check understanding as they may not acknowledge particular words or only partially hear.
- Embrace noise at times if your child needs the stimulus of loud sounds.

TOUCH

As with other senses ASD children may need to seek sensory stimulation from touch. They can however also avoid touch if they feel uncomfortable with the sensation it brings.

Often it is the repetition of touch which the child will find soothing and reassuring. They may continually stroke the fur on a teddy or squeeze a piece of Play Doh repeatedly. By allowing your child to seek this sensory support it can help reduce their anxiety and result in less dysregulation.

ADVERSE REACTIONS TO TOUCH

There may be some things that your child can't bear to touch. These are often items that result in heightened sensory stimulus which causes anxiety and then dysregulation. Remember that for ASD children often their senses are much more heightened than ours.

Imagine how you feel when a label in the back of your T-shirt is itchy. For many of us the scratchy sensation irritates so much we cut out your label. Your child could potentially have that sensation but a 100 times worse than you would feel.

Think of that the next time your child starts to dysregulate about how an item feels.



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EXPERIMENT THROUGH MESSY PLAY

A great way to explore how tactile your child is can be through messy play. Encourage them to play with lots of different materials to try and discover what they feel comfortable with and if any of these could be used as a soothing mechanism.

Be mindful however that some ASD children would find such an activity too challenging. If this were the case try to encourage them gradually to explore how they felt about certain materials.

OBSESSING ABOUT A SENSATION

It is common for ASD children to obsess about a particular sensation.

The main reason for such obsessive behaviour is fear. If your child feels anxious about encountering a new material for example, the chances are they will react badly or accurately due to their anxiety levels being heightened. Try to inform them of what the activity will involve, and if there are materials being used which are new to them, offer a suitable comparison with another item they have already used and become familiar and comfortable with.

If they get a particular sensation on their hands they may want to remove it immediately and will then continue to wash their hands repeatedly until they feel sure it has gone. This is due to a lack of ability at times to complete sensory processing effectively. Their brain is unable to establish that the substance is gone and with it the feeling.

Try to reassure them, allow them more washing time in order that their sensory processing can catch up and show them visually that the substance has gone.

It is also useful to have gloves available to allow them to participate in particular activities without having to have direct skin contact.



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PARENTS/CARERS WELL-BEING

Parenting/caring can be rewarding, but at times physically and emotionally draining. To enable you to support your child effectively, you need to ensure you are monitoring your own well-being. Keep a check on your personal physical and mental health and seek your own support when needed.

USEFUL CONTACTS

www.autismeducationtrust.org.uk

Childautism.org.uk 01344882248

www.autism.org.uk/enquiry

www.autism.org.uk

USEFUL PARENT/CARER SUPPORT

www.nhs.uk/reach4wellbeing

www.supportline.org.uk 01708765200

www.family-action.org.uk/what-we-do/children-families/send/send-info

www.earlyhelphub.co.uk 01905822666

RECOMMENDED READING

