

What is Autism?

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a neurodevelopmental disorder which is characterized by deficits in social communication as well as restricted interests and also repetitive behaviours, (National Autistic Society, 2022), although CDC (2022) claim that ASD is developmental disabilities caused by differences in the brain. ASD affects the way a person can communicate and how they experience the world around them. Autistic people share some similar characteristics, but they are also all different from each other. The Autism spectrum varies, just as one person may vary from another whereas some Autistic people are able to live relatively independent life although others may face further challenges (Autism Society, 2022).

How is Autism diagnosed?

National Autistic Society (2022) claims that the diagnostic team is made up of various professionals. They are likely to assess the child separately, and the individual findings will be used by the team leader to inform the diagnosis. Manag (2017) goes on to say that although children do not often display signs of Autism until they are around 2 years old, Autism can be detected before aged 2, using the Modified Checklist for Autism in Toddlers (MCHAT). However, Furfaro (2017) argues that children who are younger than 20 months are 15% more likely to screen positive for Autism than those who are older than 20 months. Furthermore, Ribeiro et al. (2017) found that parents struggled to obtain their child’s initial diagnosis of ASD because the diagnostic process was a very long, complicated process.

How important is a diagnosis?

Priory (2022) state the importance of a diagnosis of a child with ASD, as without, life can become difficult. This can result in the child displaying difficult behaviour and a feeling of social isolation (Priory, 2022). Welsh Government (2021) go on to say that the Autism referral pathway must be easily accessible, and those waiting for an assessment must be offered support whilst doing so, however Welsh Government (2021) have set the diagnosis waiting time to 26 weeks, which is monitored by Welsh Government by NHS Wales Informatics Service (NWIS). Furthermore, Logsdon (2022) states that parents are often in denial that their child may have a disability, and put blame on their child’s teacher or spouse.

Signs and Symptoms

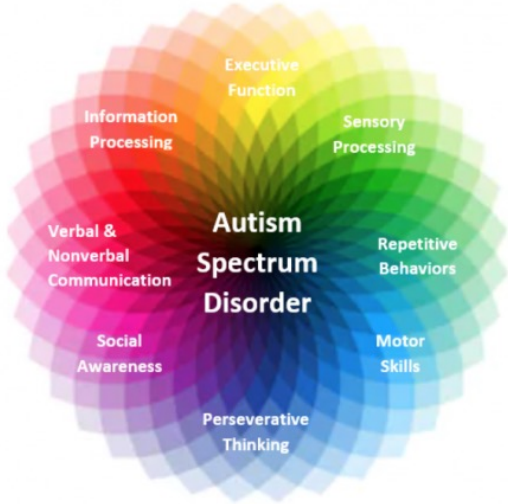
Autism Speaks (2022) mentions that people with Autism have difficulty with social skills, communication and interaction. These behaviours may include making little or no eye contact with others, appearing not to look at or listen to people which they are talking to, infrequently sharing interest, emotion, or enjoyment of objects or activities and also having difficulties with conversation (Autism Speaks, 2022). Similarly, National Health Service (2022) agree that symptoms also include avoiding eye contact and not responding to their name.

What strategies support Autism?

According to Warber (2022) play therapy has been an integral part of mental health since the early 20th century. Play therapy helps children to learn more about their emotions, communication, problem solving skills, dealing with behaviour issues and also develop coping mechanisms at their own level of comfort. Play therapy also focuses on developing language, speech and social skills as well as relationships with others (Warber, 2022). Lego therapy has been proven to have a significant increase in the development of listening skills, attention span, turn taking and problem solving (Brodie and Mather, 2017). Although according to the National Autistic Society (2022) not all strategies work for every child with Autism. It is important to explore other options, such as Aquatic therapy. Burhaïen and Phytanza (2019) go on to say that in particular, aquatic therapy can be most beneficial to children with Autism as it is known to have calming and therapeutic qualities. Aquatic therapy can improve and develop aspects of psychology, behaviour and emotions also including social and communication skills (Burhaïen and Phytanza, 2019). However Jephcott (2021) mentions that there is a need for more play therapists to work with children as there is a 19% increase overall in demand of children needing play therapy, where as there is a 4% increase in Wales.

What are the barriers?

Barriers include attitudes in society which are often based on prejudice and stereotypes (Disability Nottinghamshire, no date). Social Care Institute for Excellence (2017) mention the ‘invisibility’ of Autism as a condition as people with Autism do not have obvious physical signs and are sometimes thought to interact in ways that are simply odd or ill-mannered. Social Care Institute for Excellence, (2017) go on to say that disability and benefits legislation and assessments, which sometimes seem shaped by a perception that a disability must have a physical manifestation. Receiving support can rely heavily on good social communication and social interaction skills when completing forms or taking part in assessments which can sometimes prove difficult for those with Autism. Moreover, those with Autism can be very articulate. This can lead professionals to assume that they do not need social care or support when they do. (Social Care Institute for Excellence, 2017). Scope (no date) has an Everyday Equality Strategy which is based upon the social model of a disability. Scope (no date) go on to say that the social model recognises barriers which makes life harder for people with disabilities. Furthermore, Abousaadah *et al.* (2017) carried out research which showed that public awareness about Autism needs improvement as considerable misinformation and misconceptions were identified. A lack of awareness about Autism and understanding of how it might affect each Autistic person differently, from social care staff, other professionals and society generally however Autism Europe (2018) mention that training should be available to professionals to be aware of ASD and how best to support those with ASD.



(Autism Centre for Learning, 2022)

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