

Autism Spectrum Disorder

Barriers for children with Autistic Spectrum Disorder.

An ASD diagnosis differs from many other ALN's, such as down's syndrome and epilepsy, as it cannot be determined by more traditional medical methods such as a blood test or an MRI scan. Instead, a developmental screening tool is used. Centres for disease control and prevention (2022). One such screening tool is the M-CHAT checklist, this is available to help both parents, practitioners, and healthcare workers alike to carry out an assessment as to whether or not a child is likely to have ASD. However, the M-CHAT toolkit only consists of yes or no answers with no variables, which is not consistent with each person with ASD being unique and no two diagnoses being the same. Autism Speaks (2023). The M-CHAT screening is normally carried out at both 18 and 24 months of age, However, Furfaro (2017) states that screening toddlers at 18 months old does not produce accurate ratings and therefore it would be more suitable to carrying out screening at 24 months old. The Institute for Health and Care Excellence, advocate that no one should be waiting longer than 3 months between a referral and an initial appointment with a specialist NICE (no date). However, as of May 2022 the waiting time for and assessment for ASD in Wales was more than 20 months. NHS (no date). Similarly, data collated by NHS England highlighted that in December of 2022, there were 140,000 people waiting to be assessed for ASD, which equate to an increase of 169 % when compared to pre pandemic levels. National Autistic Society (2023). In order to overcome these barriers to diagnosis, the British Medical Association states, that adequate funding must be made available to ensure that local health boards can deliver support to the children in their communities, that can encompass both their and educational needs, and reduce waiting times for assessment to the recommended 3 month waiting period. BMA (2019). Moreover Crane (2018) has suggested that the reduction of funding and the increase in professional workload as well as the lack of resources, are all factors that have impacted the support of children with ASD and their families.

Identification and of ASD

The autistic spectrum is rather broad and not everyone will display the same signs and symptoms of the disorder. However, most will have difficulties in their social emotional and communication development. National Health service (no date). Welsh Government (2021). ASD can present in many different ways such as difficulty in social interactions, being unresponsive to others when they are trying to initiate a conversation, a child may present as completely nonverbal. Other signs also include, avoiding eye contact, distress when the routine is changed, repetitive language and movements. Zwaigenbaum, Brian, and Ip (2019). Similarly, the child's play may be less imaginative and more repetitive, they could also be more aware of sensory input such as smell. Sound, texture and light this may be hypersensitivity the avoidance of sensory items and or activities, or they could present as hyposensitive whereby they seek sensory stimulation. Autism speaks (no date). NHS (2017).

Research has shown that the early identification of ASD and the implementation of interventions centred around the child supports a higher likelihood of improved development. Koegel, L. *et al.* (2013) Camarta, S. (2014). Furthermore Koegel, L. (2000) suggests that non-verbal children who receive interventions in the early years have a higher chance of becoming verbal than their peers who do not engage in any kind of interventions until they are aged 5 or over. However, identification is not always straight forward, the first signs of ASD typically appear during the early years before the child attends full time school, and is at a pre-school setting, it has been suggested that some early years practitioners do not have the relevant knowledge and or experience to identify certain traits linked to autism. Macleod, J. Perepa, P. (2022). Fontil, L. *et al.* (2020)

Strategies for children with ASD

Traffic lights are a visual aid used in early years settings to make children aware of up-and-coming changes or transitions. All children can easily become consumed in an activity, particularly those with ASD as their play can sometimes be repetitive and even rigid in routine, and they may find it hard to stop what there are doing and move on to something else. Hume (2010). Children with ASD may be confused and lack understanding of why the routine has changed. When using transitional aids such as traffic lights the child's ability to understand is increased as the strategy is visual, which may help in avoiding upset and distress. Mesibov, Shea, and Shopler (2005). The traffic light transitional aid consists of three circles attached to a lanyard which is worn by practitioners, and are made up of 3 colours, red, green and yellow. When an activity is about to end the child is shown the yellow card and is verbally told that something is about to finish, but they must be given ample warning, Myles and Green (2000). For instance, if it is almost time to come inside a few minutes before doing so the child is shown the yellow traffic light and the adult will say "outside is nearly finished" once its time to move on the red card is shown and the child is told outside is finished now. And the green colour is used to signify the start

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