

Stop It Now!

WALES | CYMRU

Helping prevent
child sexual abuse

Promoting positive pathways for autistic children and young people who exhibited harmful sexual behaviour

Autism

Autism is a neurodevelopmental condition which can affect the way a person communicates and how they experience the world around them. It is considered a spectrum condition which means that while autistic people share some similar characteristics, they are also all different from each other.

Autism is not a mental health condition but some people do have difficulties with their mental health especially around issues with anxiety. Some autistic people also have specific learning difficulties but it is also not a learning difficulty. It can however impact on how a person can access education and impact on their learning. Autism is a lifelong condition and there is no 'cure' with the correct support all autistic people can live a positive fulfilling and happy life.

Sexual development and harmful sexual behaviour (HSB)

Sexual development is a normal part of a child's development. We expect to see some behaviours at different points of during a child's development. During adolescence there is often an increase in behaviours and experimentation within peer groups. Most children display 'normal' sexual behaviour throughout their lifetime. Sometimes some children can display more concerning behaviours which we may not expect. These behaviours maybe 'inappropriate', 'problematic' or 'harmful' Harmful sexual behaviour (HSB) is a term used to describe sexual actions that are outside what is safe for the child or young person's stage of development. HSB includes actions that put either the young person themselves, or another person, at harm. This can include a spectrum of behaviour such as; using inappropriate language, undertaking mutual sexual activity they are not ready for with peers or sexually violent behaviour.



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Why are we concerned about autistic children who display HSB?

Research in this area suggest that autistic children and young people and those with learning difficulties are over represented among those who exhibit HSB. We are receiving an increasing amount of helpline calls and referrals regarding autistic children and young people who have exhibited problematic or harmful sexual behaviour. Autistic children and young people often do not mean to harm another person and they are unaware of the possible serious legal consequences which may occur.

If a child displays HSB they can be viewed as 'risky' or 'harmful' towards others by some around them. These labels can last until adulthood if not properly addressed and this can have a negative effect on the children in later life. Whilst there is an over representation of autistic children displaying HSB this remains a small number overall. It is important to remember that autistic children and young people are vulnerable to abuse, grooming and sexual harm.

Why is there an over representation of autistic children and young people who display HSB?

This is an interesting and complex question. There maybe many reasons a child displays HSB. Many of the areas which may contribute to HSB can be exacerbated by some of the characteristic difficulties associated with autism. The current social view and expectations around sex and relationships for autistic children and young people may also have an impact on people's interpretations of behaviour.



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Questions to consider

Why do children and young people exhibit HSB?

Why do autistic children and young people exhibit HSB?

What areas do we need to support them with to help reduce behaviours?

How to support autistic children and young people who display HSB?

We must ensure that all children including those who have autism receive good comprehensive sex and relationship education. We need to increase the strengths which we autistic children and young people already have. We must support areas such as communication, relationships (social skills) and sensory needs which may increase the likelihood of HSB.

Further Resources

nspcc.org.uk
thinkuknow.co.uk
youngminds.org.uk
aimproject.org.uk
brook.org.uk
csacentre.org.uk

lucyfaithfull.org.uk
ambitiousaboutautism.org.uk
autism.org.uk
parentsprotect.org.uk
stopitnow.org.uk



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