

FIGURE 2
HOPKINSON (2023).



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FIGURE 1 LIBGUIDES.COM (2015)



WHAT IS ASD

AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER (ASD), IS DEFINED BY THE WORLD HEALTH ORGANISATION (WHO) (2023) AS A DIVERSE RANGE OF CONDITIONS RELATED TO BRAIN DEVELOPMENT. MANY OF THESE CONDITIONS RELATE TO HAVING SOME DEGREE OF DIFFICULTY WITH EITHER SOCIAL INTERACTION OR COMMUNICATION. FURTHERMORE, PATTERNS OF BEHAVIOURS OR ACTIVITIES, AS WELL AS STRUGGLING WITH TRANSITIONS ARE OFTEN PREVALENT IN THOSE WITH ASD. THE NATIONAL AUTISTIC SOCIETY (2025A) ALSO ACKNOWLEDGES THAT ASD HAS A SIGNIFICANT INFLUENCE ON HOW PEOPLE CAN SEE AND INTERACT WITH THE WORLD. STATISTICS FROM AMBITIOUS ABOUT AUTISM (2022A) SHOW THE STARK RISE IN CHILDREN DIAGNOSED WITH ASD. THEY STATE THAT THE NUMBER OF CHILDREN AGED 5 AND UNDER WHO HAVE BEEN DIAGNOSED WITH ASD HAS RISEN EXPONENTIALLY FROM 14,000 IN 2015 TO 31,000 IN 2023/24. THIS SHARP RISE SHOWS THE NEED FOR PROFESSIONALS TO HAVE A CLEAR UNDERSTANDING OF WHAT ASD IS AND WHAT SUPPORT THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN DIAGNOSED WITH IT NEED TO SUCCEED WITHIN SETTINGS.

HOW IS ASD DIAGNOSED

AMBITIOUS ABOUT AUTISM (2022B) NOTE THE VITAL IMPORTANCE OF EARLY DIAGNOSIS AND INTERVENTION FOR THOSE WITH ASD. HOWEVER, THEY ACKNOWLEDGE THAT CURRENT NHS WAITING TIMES ARE HINDERING THE LIKELIHOOD OF THAT EARLY DIAGNOSIS. NHS ASSESSMENTS FOR AUTISM ARE CARRIED OUT BY A MULTIDISCIPLINARY TEAM OF SPECIALISTS, THE NATIONAL AUTISTIC SOCIETY (2025B). THIS PROCESS OCCURS AS THE INVOLVEMENT OF A RANGE OF SPECIALISTS HELPS TO MAKE THE ASSESSMENT MORE ACCURATE, DUE TO IT ALLOWING VARIOUS DIFFERENT ASPECTS OF A PERSON'S CHARACTERISTICS AND EXPERIENCES TO BE IDENTIFIED. AS THE NHS (2024B) STATES A COMMONLY USED TOOL USED IN SETTINGS ACROSS THE UK TO IDENTIFY AUTISM IS THE AUTISM DIAGNOSTIC OBSERVATION SCHEDULE ASSESSMENT, OTHERWISE KNOWN AS ADOS. PROFESSIONALS USE THE ADOS TOOL TO ASSESS AUTISM IN CHILDREN AND YOUNG ADULTS.

HOW IS ASD DIAGNOSED

DESPITE IT BEING A HOLISTIC APPROACH THAT CLINICIANS CAN FACILITATE EASILY, ADOS DOES HAVE ITS LIMITATIONS. AS LINCOLNSHIRE CHILDREN'S THERAPY SERVICES (N.D.) NOTES NO ACTUAL DIAGNOSIS OF AUTISM WILL BE MADE FOLLOWING THE ADOS. ADOS IS ONLY ONE PART OF THE ASSESSMENT PROCESS AND FOLLOWING THESE, ASSESSMENTS WITH THE MULTIDISCIPLINARY TEAM WILL TAKE PLACE. WHILST MULTIDISCIPLINARY TEAMS ARE COMMONPLACE IN AUTISM ASSESSMENTS ACROSS SETTINGS, DRAWBACKS IN REGARDS TO THEM HAVE BEEN ACKNOWLEDGED. BERESFORD ET.AL. (2020) STATES THAT THE SHEER NUMBER OF REFERRALS IS THE GREATEST CONCERN THAT FACES MULTIDISCIPLINARY TEAMS. FURTHERMORE, THEY NOTE THAT ALL SERVICES ARE REPORTING YEAR ON YEAR INCREASES, WITH THE NEEDS OF THE REFERRALS ALSO BECOMING FAR MORE COMPLEX. THESE FACTORS CAN CAUSE DELAYS IN CHILDREN BEING SEEN BY THE MULTIDISCIPLINARY TEAM, UNDERMINING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE ADOS.

BARRIERS CHILDREN WITH ASD FACE

THERE ARE MANY BARRIERS THAT CHILDREN WITH ASD WILL ENCOUNTER THROUGHOUT THEIR LIVES, THE FIRST OF WHICH IS COMMUNICATION BARRIERS. THE ABILITY FOR A CHILD WITH ASD TO COMMUNICATE AND USE LANGUAGE DEPENDS ON BOTH THEIR SOCIAL AND INTELLECTUAL DEVELOPMENT, STATES THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE ON DEAFNESS AND OTHER COMMUNICATION DISORDERS (2015). AUTISM SPEAKS (2024) GOES ON TO EXPLAIN, SENSORY ISSUES OR SENSITIVITY ARE COMMONPLACE IN THOSE WITH ASD AND ARE EVEN INCLUDED IN THE DIAGNOSTIC CRITERIA FOR ASD. MANY AUTISTIC CHILDREN SUFFER FROM HYPERSENSITIVITY TO THINGS SUCH AS BRIGHT LIGHTS, CERTAIN TASTES, TEXTURES AND SMELLS. THIS OVERWHELMING SENSATION CAN LEAD TO SENSORY AVOIDANCE, WITH THE CHILD TRYING TO GET AWAY FROM WHAT IS TRIGGERING THEIR SENSORY SENSITIVITIES. THIS CAN LEAD TO HUGE CHALLENGES WITHIN THE SCHOOL OR EARLY YEARS SETTINGS ENVIRONMENT.

FIGURE 3 ASD (2025)



SUPPORT STRATERGIES

HERE ARE VARIOUS LEGISLATIONS THAT HAVE BEEN IMPLEMENTED ACROSS WALES IN AN ATTEMPT TO OFFER SUPPORT TO SETTINGS WHO ARE WORKING WITH CHILDREN WITH ASD. THESE INCLUDE THE ADDITIONAL LEARNING NEEDS SYSTEM, WELSH GOVERNMENT (N.D.), AS WELL AS THE ADDITIONAL LEARNING NEEDS CODE, WELSH GOVERNMENT (2021). THERE ARE ALSO CHILD CENTRED SUPPORT STRATEGIES THAT SETTINGS CAN IMPLEMENT TO HELP CHILDREN ON AN INDIVIDUAL BASIS, DEPENDING ON THEIR NEEDS AND THEIR TRIGGERS. ONE EXAMPLE OF A SUPPORT STRATEGY USED TO SUPPORT THOSE WITH COMMUNICATION DIFFICULTIES ARE PICTURE EXCHANGE COMMUNICATION SYSTEM OTHERWISE KNOWN AS PECS. NHS (2024) EXPLAINS THAT PECS IS A COMMUNICATION SYSTEM, OFTEN USED BY AUTISTIC CHILDREN, WHICH USES SYMBOLS OR PICTURES TO HELP THOSE CHILDREN COMMUNICATE THEIR WANTS OR NEEDS. THE MAIN TARGET OF PECS IS TO TEACH COMMUNICATION SKILLS THAT CAN BE USED IN DAY TO DAY LIFE AND EVENTUALLY DEVELOP SPOKEN LANGUAGE.

SUPPORT STRATERGIES

THERE ARE ALSO SUPPORT STRATEGIES THAT CAN BE PUT IN PLACE TO AID THOSE CHILDREN WITH ASD WHO STRUGGLE WITH SENSORY SENSITIVITY. AS ACTION FOR CHILDREN (N.D.) STATES, RECOGNISING THE CHILD'S NEEDS OR TRIGGERS IS THE FIRST STEP IN SUPPORTING THEM. THEY ADVISE THAT BEGINNING A BEHAVIOUR CHART OR DIARY IS A GOOD PLACE TO START AS IT COULD ALLOW PRACTITIONERS TO NOTICE A LINK TO SPECIFIC TASKS, ROOMS OR PEOPLE THAT TRIGGER THOSE SENSORY ISSUES. FURTHERMORE, THEY SUGGEST THAT ONCE THOSE TRIGGERS HAVE BEEN IDENTIFIED, THEN SUITABLE ADJUSTMENTS CAN BE MADE TO PREVENT THESE SENSORY ISSUES ARISING AND MAKE THE SETTING AS SUITABLE AS POSSIBLE. A SUPPORT STRATEGY THAT IS BECOMING MORE POPULAR WITHIN SETTINGS IS SENSORY AIDS OR TOYS. GLOUCESTERSHIRE HOSPITALS NHS FOUNDATION TRUST (2024) GIVE EXAMPLES OF THE VARIETY OF AIDS THAT ARE USED TO SUPPORT CHILDREN WHO ARE IN SENSORY OVERLOAD.