

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)



(Campus Well, 2021)

What is Autism Spectrum Disorder?

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) or more commonly known as just Autism is a developmental disability caused by differences in the brain that often causes restricted, repetitive behaviours or interests and struggles with social interaction (Centres for Disease, 2022). NHS (2021) further details that being autistic just means that the brain works differently to those who are not, it is something you are born with and signs can be noticed when very young or later on in life. Autism is a spectrum disorder which entails that not all individuals with autism experience the same behaviours or need the same level of support (Autism Speaks, 2022b). Children with autism may show signs in both behavioural and social development (Autism Awareness Australia, 2021), as according to Raising Children.net (2023) some children show many signs of autism early on whereas others show very few that are hard to spot. NHS (2022b) details that often the signs and traits of autism are harder to spot in girls as they tend to copy other children's behaviours and therefore mask their own.

What are the signs of ASD?

- Avoiding eye contact
- Not responding to name
- Getting overstimulated by certain smells, sounds or environment
- Repetitive movements
- Not engaging with other children (NHS, 2022b)

Diagnosis of ASD

To get an autism spectrum disorder diagnosis the child would have to be referred for an assessment by someone such as a GP or a special educational needs co-ordinator also known as a SENCO (NHS, 2022a).

The ASD diagnosis process consists of a detailed interview with the parents or carers, a speech and language evaluation that assesses social communication, a occupational therapy evaluation to assess sensory difficulties and a direct behavioural play based observation in line with the Autism Diagnostic Observation Schedule (LANC Organisation, 2016).

According to Miller (2022) Doctors can be reluctant to diagnose children with ASD as there is a chance it may be something else, the doctor in the early screening often want to see how the child's natural development plays out first before the diagnosis. Lord *et al* (2006) suggests that the diagnosis of children with autism at the age of 2 years old remains a stable diagnosis at the age of 9 years old.

Communication Barrier

A barrier faced by children with Autism Spectrum Disorder is the communication, meaning the potential differences in communication for example a child being verbal or non verbal (Febriantini, Fitriani and Oktaviana, 2021). The National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders (2020) suggest that a child with autism may have difficulty developing their language skills and may struggle to understand what others are trying to communicate; eye contact, hand gestures and facial expressions can be a challenge for these children and therefore halt their development in this area (Salus University, 2020). In a blog from Lydia Denworth (2018) she expands upon this and pushes that children on the autism spectrum are not bad communicators and are just different in their approach to communicating with the people around them.

Children who have a better understanding of social and emotional cues may develop:

- Better social skills
 - Positive peer relationships
 - Higher self esteem
- (Uhls *et al*, 2014).

Tsai *et al* (2020) tells us how children who struggle to communicate are more likely to suffer from emotional and behavioural problems as their needs are not being sufficiently met. A contrast view here is put forward by Jarraya, Masmoudi and Hammami (2021) who voice that autistic children still feel emotion but can often struggle to portray it in a conventional way.

The Stigma Surrounding ASD

Leekham and Jones (2017) states that as many as 1.1% of the UK population has Autism spectrum disorder, yet there is still a negative stigma attached to the condition. This presents as a barrier for children with autism as their parents could sometimes feel shame due to the negative connotations of autism in society (Welsh Government, 2021). Liao, Lei and Li (2019) state that studies had shown that parents of children with autism perceived and experiences stigma that was varied based of behaviour and severity of symptoms. Sarris (2022) states that the negative stigma surrounding children with autism can have a negative impact on the child directly. Turnock, Langley and Jones (2022) agrees that stigma surrounding autism can have a negative impact on not only the child but the parents as well, for the child it can impact well-being, mental and physical health as well as reduced social connections. It can, as mentioned earlier, increase the risk of the child masking their autism traits.

What is an Advocate for Autism?

Advocacy is about promoting and protecting the rights of children with autism by giving them a voice and a right to have a high quality of living (The Spectrum, no date). Inspiring Progress Organisation (no date) supports parents as advocates and declares that it is essential that parents, caregivers and adults around the child are aware about ASD and how to support and empower the children with the disorder. Anvbody can be an advocate as long as they are committed to the welfare of the child (McLaughlin. no date).

Applied Behaviour Analysis

Applied Behaviour Analysis are interventions that are developed through behaviour analysis sessions; behaviour analysts examine causes and consequences of behaviour of children with autism and develop interventions to support based on this (Child Autism, no date). Fisher and Carr (2016) explains that ADA works through praise.

Strengths

- ABA Degree programs (no date) that the behaviour interventions that are used by the behaviour analysts teach children with autism essential skills.
- Aid in maintaining positive relationships through development of essential skills (ABA Degree programs, no date).
- Visual aids for the child to help support the understanding and expressions of language (Applied Behaviour Analysis Edu, 2023).

Weaknesses

- Hungate and Finch (2020) as abuse as it can be viewed as traumatic by the child as it subjects them to an overwhelming amount of stimuli for them and can often result in meltdowns.
- Heidi LoStracco (2014) highlights a pitfall in the ABA therapy as that children are taught the correct verbal behaviours in specific scenarios rather than flexible communication skills to be used generally.
- Lori Lawrenz (2021) supports this and agrees that ABA therapy can be rigid.

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