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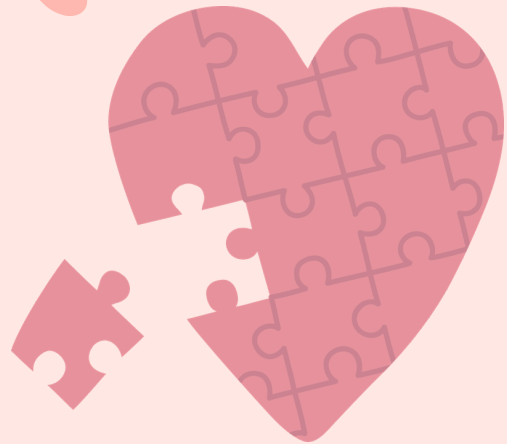
BMHP6029
Psychopathological Classifications and
Provisions Component

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AUTISM

6A02(ICD-11) Autism spectrum disorder

"Autism is not a disease. Don't try to cure us. Try to understand us." – Brian R. King.

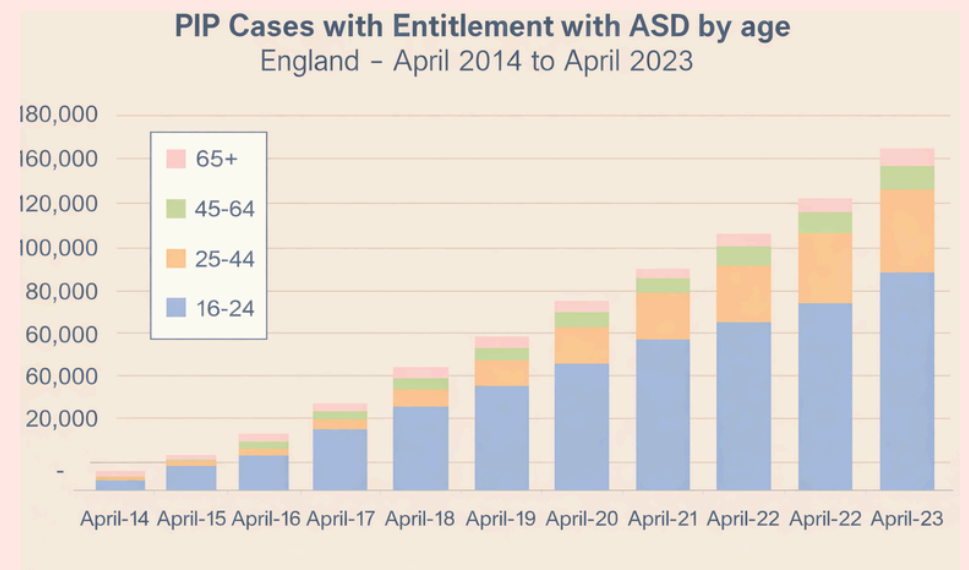


Introduction:

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a neurodevelopmental condition that affects how individuals process information, communicate, and interact socially. Neurodevelopmental conditions develop during early brain development and usually appear in childhood (NHS, 2022).

Definition:

Autism is a lifelong condition characterised by differences in how the brain processes information. These neurological differences may influence how autistic individuals perceive the world through their senses, as well as how they communicate and interact with others (National Autistic Society, 2025).



(North Yorkshire County Council, 2023)

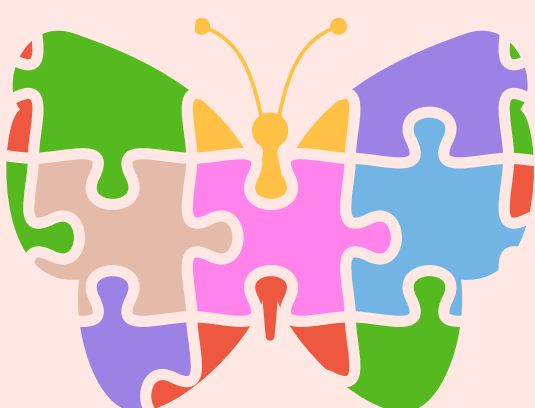


Causes:

- Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) has no single known cause and is believed to result from a combination of genetic and environmental factors.
- Genetic factors play a major role. Certain gene mutations and inherited conditions such as Fragile X syndrome and Rett syndrome may increase the risk of autism.
- Environmental influences during pregnancy, such as infections, complications, or exposure to pollutants, may also contribute (Mayo Clinic, 2025).

Symptoms:

- Difficulty with social communication and interaction, such as understanding social cues or maintaining conversations.
- Limited eye contact and difficulty interpreting facial expressions or body language.
- Repetitive behaviours or movements, such as rocking, hand-flapping, or repeating words.
- Strong preference for routines and predictable activities.
- Intense interest in specific topics or objects.
- Sensory sensitivities, including sensitivity to sounds, lights, textures, or smells (National Autistic Society, 2026).



Diagnosis:

- In the United Kingdom, autism is usually diagnosed by a specialist multidisciplinary team within the NHS, which may include psychologists, psychiatrists, paediatricians, and speech and language therapists.
- Individuals are typically referred for assessment by a GP, health professional, or school staff if autism is suspected.
- The diagnostic process involves observing behaviour, assessing communication and social interaction, and reviewing developmental history.
- Early diagnosis is important because it allows individuals and families to access appropriate support, education services, and interventions (NICE, 2021).

Historical Perspectives:

- In the past, autism was poorly understood and many autistic individuals were placed in institutions or treated as having behavioural or mental health problems.
- Some early theories wrongly suggested autism was caused by poor parenting, known as the “refrigerator mother” theory. This idea has since been disproved by scientific research.
- Over time, medical professionals recognised autism as a neurodevelopmental condition affecting brain development (sanja, 2024).

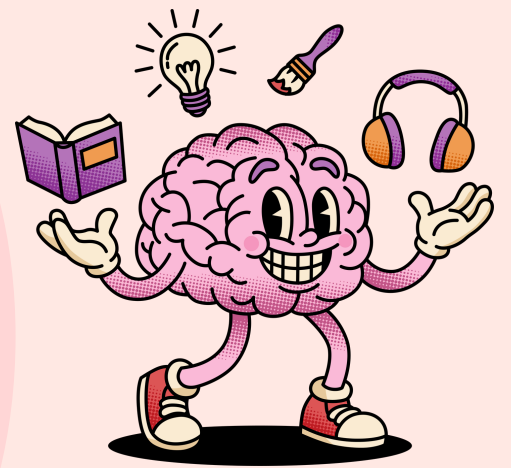


Treatments:

- Speech and Language Therapy – Helps autistic individuals develop communication skills, including verbal and non-verbal communication.
- Occupational Therapy – Supports daily living skills and helps individuals manage sensory sensitivities.
- Behavioural Interventions – Helps improve communication, social skills, and behaviour through structured support.
- Social Skills Training – Helps individuals learn how to interact with others and understand social situations.
- Educational Support – Children may receive an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) in schools.
- Medication (when needed) – Doctors may prescribe medication to manage related difficulties such as anxiety, hyperactivity, or sleep problem (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2024).

Current Services in UK:

- NHS Mental Health Services (CAMHS) – Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services provide psychological support and therapy for autistic children and young people.
- Social Care Services – Local authorities provide support such as care assessments, support plans, and assistance with daily living.
- Early Intervention Services – Support programmes for young children to help develop communication, social, and learning skills.
- Adult Autism Support Services – Services that help autistic adults with independent living, employment support, and community participation.
- Employment Support Programmes – Services such as Access to Work help autistic individuals find and maintain employment.
- Community Support Groups – Local autism support groups provide advice, social activities, and peer support for autistic individuals and their families (NHS , 2020).



Recommendations:

- Reduce waiting times for autism assessments so people can get earlier diagnosis and support (Autism Act 2009).
- Increase autism training for healthcare staff, teachers and social workers to improve understanding and support (Health and Care Act 2022).
- Improve support in education and workplaces to promote inclusion and equal opportunities (Children and Families Act 2014).
- Expand tailored mental health services for autistic people (NHS Long Term Plan; Equality Act 2010).
- Raise public awareness to reduce stigma and improve social inclusion (National Autism Strategy 2021–2026) (Hashmi, 2025).



Conclusion:

Autism Spectrum Disorder is a complex neurodevelopmental condition that affects individuals in different ways. Increased awareness, early identification, and appropriate support services are important to help autistic individuals achieve their potential and improve their wellbeing.

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