

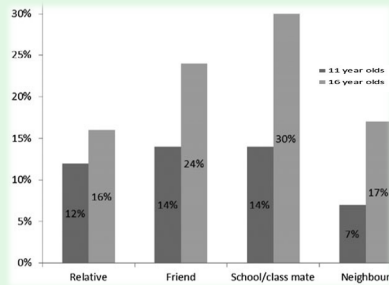
Introduction

Additional learning needs can include learning difficulties or physical disabilities that require additional support and provision to be put in place so that the child is able to access education appropriately (Welsh Government, 2019). The Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018 is legislation that now provides support for adults up to the age of 25. This approach is focused on putting the person at the heart of the provision that is made (Welsh Government, 2021). United Nations (no date) state that children and adults with disabilities also have rights under the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). This holds 30 articles identifying specific rights of children and adults with disabilities. In spite of this legislation, many disabilities still remain misunderstood, which is often the case for Autism Spectrum Disorder. In 1989 'World Autism Day' was introduced to try and raise awareness of this condition and secure acceptance and support throughout society. This on-going awareness raising is still extremely important today as without it, people cannot recognise or understand the disability. The world needs diversity and acceptance in order to be fully inclusive (Autism Explained 2021).

Strategy

Play therapy is a way of supporting children to express their feelings and to enable them to deal with their emotions through using play as a communication tool (Rudy 2022).

There has been a lot of evidence to show that LEGO therapy improves inclusion and social skills for children on the autism spectrum, enabling them to build friendships, improve social interaction and social competence. The paper also stated that there was a significant drop-in playing alone (Lindsay *et al* 2017). However, Peckett *et al* (2016) identified some barriers for families who have children with ASD. Their research showed that many parents found it challenging to implement the intervention consistently. They found it a cause of additional stress at home.



Dillenburg *et al* (2017)

Identification and diagnosis

Campisi *et al* (2018) identify the common symptoms of ASD as struggling with social, communicative and intellectual abilities and communication difficulties ranging from speech delays, monotone speech, pronoun reversal, poor comprehension to a complete lack of speech. However, identification and diagnosis of ASD can be a drawn-out and complex process (Hayes *et al* 2022). It can be difficult to distinguish between behavioural needs, Reactive Attachment Disorder (RAD) or ASD as the symptoms can be very similar. According to Davidson *et al* (2015) RAD and ASD can appear similarly when it comes to social relationship difficulties. Only 23% of primary care providers had adequate knowledge around autism. Of 304 GPs involved in a survey regarding their knowledge around autism, 88.1% did show a fair amount of understanding (Coughlan *et al* (2020). NHS (2022) advises parents and carers to talk to a range of professionals if they have concerns that their child might be on the autistic spectrum.

Conclusion

To conclude, from the research undertaken, it is evident that autism in the last decade has become far more visible. It is clear that many schools and settings are working hard to become inclusive to all learners but there are still significant training needs across the profession, ASD training is a specific area for development. The research also shows that the range of needs across the spectrum is extremely broad and that professionals need to be flexible and work closely with families in order to secure the most positive outcomes for children with ASD.

Barriers and Challenges

According to Dreisbach (2020) 25% of young children with autism are undiagnosed. Undiagnosed ASD is a serious challenge as it is essential that people get the correct support as soon as possible (Murphy *et al* 2016). According to Dworzynski *et al* (2012) girls are less likely to meet the diagnostic criteria for ASD as their symptoms can be very different from those of boys around whom most of the research has been based to date. The biggest challenge for those on the autistic spectrum, according to the National Autistic Society (2022), is not being accepted or becoming a part of society. Children on the autistic spectrum are three times more likely to be excluded from school, only 1 in 6 adults with autism have a full-time job and over a third have identified serious mental health issues. Lindsay *et al* (2013) also share some perspectives of teachers who have found teaching autistic children in a class of 30 very challenging. The paper states that only 5% of teachers in the United Kingdom had been on some form of training for ASD. From looking at the graph above (Dillenburg *et al*, 2017), we can see results from a survey that was carried out with 11- and 16-year-olds on their attitudes towards ASD. Therefore, it is increasingly important for all children, whether they have a personal connection to ASD or not, to be aware of and educated on the barriers and challenges faced by people with ASD. It showed that 16-year-olds, who had had more personal contact with someone on the autistic spectrum, demonstrated more knowledge, understanding and empathy and were far more accepting than those who had not had this personal contact. The paper also stated that girls were far more likely to be more aware and knowledgeable of autism, which could be linked to expectations of the caring roles of girls and boys and how we raise awareness of ASD with all children and young people (The children's society, 2020).

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