

Introduction: The term ALN has been defined by Welsh Government (2021 and 2021a) as a person having varied learning, physical or sensory delays. These delays make it more difficult for children to learn and understand matters, particularly in comparison to other children their own age (Dewis Cymru, 2023). This poster will explain to you my research and analysis of the identification and diagnosis of Autism, whilst providing understanding of support strategies and the impact of potential barriers.

Identification and Diagnosis:

ASD is a lifelong developmental disorder impacting on social interactions and communication skills which can lead to repetitive patterns of behaviour (Macleod and Perepa, 2020). The difficulty for EYP's in identifying ASD traits is that children experience and show varying symptoms (NHS, 2022). For example, some children may be advanced in communication skills, whilst other children may be non-verbal (CDC, 2022).

Within EY's an ASD developmental screening tool called an M-CHAT can be used to observe children's behaviour through answering a series of questions (Autism Speaks, 2009). This tool may be used to help identify ASD traits, such as stimming, sensory sensitives and repetitive patterns (CDC, 2020). However, according to Sturner *et al* (2022), this screening tool lacks sensitivity as only 38% of children in 2022 were then diagnosed with ASD through using this tool. As a result of a delayed diagnosis (Priory Group, 2023) and lack of interventions (Marlow, Servili and Thomlinson, 2019) children can be restricted academically and socially, causing a lack within potential development.

According to Johnson *et al* (2020) when ASD traits are identified by EY's practitioners it is important honest, sensitive conversation are had with the parents/carers. These conversations can be successful, bringing relief to a parent due to their already observed concerns, but on the contrary some parents can be saddened and even be in denial at the thought of their child having autism says Social Care Talk (2019). It is vital practitioners show genuine support throughout the screening, referral and diagnosis process (National Autistic Society, 2023).

Barriers:

It is the role of the EYP to monitor and review children's progress, development, and behaviour, noticing signs and symptoms of varied ALNs (Department for Education, 2014). Early identification of ASD is important for children's development and progression (Janvier *et al*, 2016). However, research proves there is no definitive clarification on how to put guidelines, such as monitoring, into practice (Macleod and Perepa, 2020). Often practices created within the macrosystem are not easily understood and relatable to that of the mesosystem (Newman and Newman, 2020).

A common barrier for EYP's is that they fear they are not qualified to identify and support children with ASD (Guldborg *et al*, 2020). Due to limited opportunities for continued professional development practitioners lack insight and good, up-to-date understanding and knowledge limiting their ability to implement support strategies for ASD children (Corral-Granados, 2022). The Welsh Government's aim is to raise standards and skills among EY workers (Care Council for Wales, 2016), however Gibbin (no date) believes that the EY's sector is one of the least funded areas of education.

Every setting should have a SENCO responsible for co-ordinating any ALN provision, whilst keeping themselves and others up-to-date with current ALN training (Department for Education, 2015). This should provide equal opportunities for all ALN children (Goodall, 2015). However, due to the limited training provided it is found that the quality of inclusion is at a reduced level (Biktagirova and Khitryuk, 2016). This could mainly be due to a lack of government funding (PACEY, 2021) however, there is debate as to whether EY workers are taking seriously the importance of continuous professional development regarding ASD (Sheridan *et al*, 2009).

Strategies:

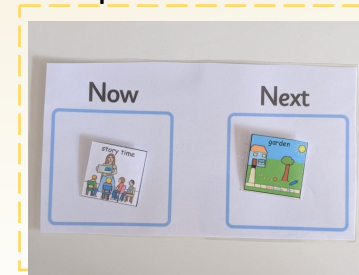
Adjustments for children with ALN within the setting should be made to better their educational experience (Equality Act, 2010). The SEND Education Provision Strategy (Southwark Council, 2022-2025) believe that EY workers can be equipped to support ASD children to achieve and thrive. It is vital EY practitioners know their ASD children well and that regular open conversations are had with parents/carers to allow for personalised strategies to be implemented both at home and within the setting (Autism Education Trust, 2022).

Visuals are an effective strategy used with many ASD children (National Autistic Society, 2023). Due to difficulties and limitations within their ability to communicate and process information, visuals can be a tool that can develop these areas, whilst enhancing confidence (Autism Speaks, 2011). However, this technique can be time consuming to create, and use (Hayes *et al*, 2010). With a lack of EY's funding, this strategy may not always be used to its greatest potential due to a lack of 1-1 support available (Bonetti, 2022).

There are many visual supports that can be used with ASD children, such as photographs, short videos, coloured pictures, symbols and written words to name a few (National Autistic Society, 2023).

This tool can help ASD children understand what they are currently doing and what will be asked of them next (The Autism Page, 2023). This visual can lead to less challenging behaviours due to lowered anxiety levels and greater understanding of routine (Hayes *et al*, 2010). It can also give them a sense of autonomy and confidence to make choices and express needs (Hobb, 2021).

An example of a 'Now & Next' board:



(Source: The Autism Page, 2023)

Conclusion:

I now understand the importance of personal professional training and development, particularly surrounding the topic of ALN as EY workers often do not feel adequately equipped to support such children. I want to be confident in my role to identify and support children with ASD; noticing signs and symptoms, personalising strategies and overcoming any barriers.

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