



Introduction Autism Spectrum Disorder ASD consists of a compilation of barriers within social interaction, communication, repetitive behaviours and can restrict interests for the individual (Chao *et al*, 2018). Autism affects around 1 in 100 people and research suggests that girls on average have to wait a further six years longer than boys to get a diagnosis (Autism Wales, 2020 and BBC News, 2022). It is usually prevalent before the age of 3 and is diagnosed four times more often than in girls, its characteristics are not impacted by socio-economic status, race, and region. Furthermore, over the last twenty years ASD has consistently grown and is now the fastest growing developmental disorder however, funding is not sufficient and more needs to be done to support these children and individuals. 40% of children with autism are non-verbal, 25-30 % can communicate some words between the age of 12-18 months however, then lose their speech and some children are non-verbal until they are older (National Autism Association, 2023).

Identification and Diagnosis

Identification of a disorder such as Autism Spectrum Disorder is not a process which can be accomplished promptly. Practitioners or parents of the child will need to approach either a health professional or an Early Years Additional Learning Needs officer or team to enable the process. Some indications of ASD may be present in the forms of poor eye contact, obsessive behaviour, disinterest in any social interaction and withdrawal (Mohammed Ali *et al*, 2019). Within Pembrokeshire practitioners can raise concerns and receive support initially through TAPASS meetings before a referral is made by themselves and parents (Pembrokeshire County Council, 2023). NHS (2023) gives tips for parents to think about when they receive their appointment.

- Write a list of the signs and symptoms that have been noticed.
- Ask friends, practitioners, and family if there is anything they have noticed.

Additionally, the website provides information about how a diagnosis will help your child.

- Understanding the needs of your child and how this will assist them.

- Manage and understand the support that will be offered at school for your child.
- An understanding of how ASD impacts on a child's daily routine.

Barriers

A number of barriers can arise that impact on a child with autism. Notably, the physical environment can influence the child's engagement within a setting such as lighting, background noise and even seating arrangements. A review was conducted, and the evidence suggests that not enough research is being done to clarify the impact that the physical environment has on an autistic child (Dargue, Adams and Simpson, 2021). However, during the covid pandemic children were taught at home and an



(Source: Autism Parenting Magazine, 2021)

interviews from six parents. The results indicated that their complex needs were influenced by the school environment and that environments that were ASD friendly would reduce sensory triggers (Hill, Kville and Ludlow analysis was formulated based on, 2021).

Strategies An equally important aspect to consider is strategies that can be implemented to support children with ASD. Child Autism UK (2023) states that, ABA Applied Behaviour Analysis is a range of interventions deriving from behaviour analysis. Furthermore, consequences and causes can be explored which can establish interventions to support the child. ABA varies in levels of empirical support, some programmes are intense and can last up to two years and some less than a year (Green, 2007). Within the UK, requiring funding to receive an ABA treatment is only obtained from a tribunal and some countries prevent parents from acquiring any funding. The U.S has incorporated ABA therapy within Law and interventions and strategies are linked to ABA to reinforce positive behaviour (Fennell and Dillenburger, 2018). A documentary was produced by the BBC about this intervention in 2013, meeting people who are both for the treatment and against it (BBC, 2023).

Conclusion

It is evident that acquiring a diagnosis and support for ASD is challenging. The Additional Learning Needs and Educational Tribunal Wales Act 2018 was introduced to reinforce the system, improve outcomes, produce a clear rights of appeal and provide a mandatory ALN code. However, in light of this each child with autism is unique and there are many barriers to overcome within the physical environment and the beliefs and understanding surrounding ASD. ABA is an intervention that is supported by science, however it is believed to be a strategy that is intense. Practitioners need to be adequately trained, resourceful, be able to intervene and provide strategies they can implement within the classroom to ensure the child reaches their full potential. Reflection between practitioners will ensure that training, guidance, and support for their concerns about any child they look after will be followed up and taken further by all health care professionals.

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