

An introduction to SEND and ASD

Slide 1

We are learning about SEND as the majority of the week we have visits from special schools and individuals from mainstream schools, and you may work with someone who has an additional need. Knowledge is power.

Slide 2-3

This exercise is to highlight how vast the term 'SEND' is and this isn't even everything. We are going to focus on ASD today as many of the young people we work with have autism.

Slide 4

The Autism Awareness Ribbon represents a puzzle – it symbolises mystery and complexity, different colours and shapes, the diversity of people and families living with autism, as well as brightness and hope through research and increased awareness.

The message is if you have met one person with autism, you have met one person with autism. Like anyone else who is neuro-typical, people with autism are individual and will present differently to another person with the disorder.

Girls and women often present very differently and are diagnosed much later in life because of this. Girls are typically better at mirroring behaviour of others; but this can be very exhausting and stressful and manifest in anxiety and feelings of being overwhelmed, often leading to misdiagnosis.

This talk is about gaining more knowledge and understanding so that when you do meet or work with someone with autism, you know ways that you can adapt your behaviour and communication to help them.

Slide 5

Autism is not a specific learning difficulty (like Dyslexia for example) but if adaptations aren't made, it can impact an individual's learning. It is a spectrum disorder, which means each individual may experience a wide range of issues and to varying degrees. Every individual is different and, therefore, presents differently. A child or adult would need all three for a diagnosis:

1. Social communication = i.e. may have difficulty interpreting gestures, facial expressions, tone of voice etc. The context can make this interpretation difficult – for example a raised voice can mean anger or excitement.
2. Social interaction = due to challenges with communication, people with autism may engage in long monologues or interrupt conversations in a way that may seem inappropriate. Can experience challenges with relationships and seem aloof or indifferent but this is linked to 'typical' communication.
3. Imagination = a weakness in the development of play and imagination – the "let's pretend" play that children often engage in. They can copy play that has been modelled but may struggle to come up with something themselves. Issues with social imagination can mean that someone with autism can find it difficult to visualise what is coming next and, therefore, this can lead to a reliance on structure and routines.

Sensory Proprioception = how the body senses where it is placed – this is the seeking feedback part from muscles, skin, joints. And can sometimes be the reason for 'stimming' behaviour. In classrooms, children can have 'wobble cushions' or slope boards to help with that regular feedback.

Vestibular = how the body handles movement is down to the vestibular system, in the inner ear. Vestibular activities include maintaining an upright position while focusing on a task - spinning tops help develop these connections between brain and body awareness.

Slide 6

[Echolalia in Autism: Types and Why Kids Echo Sounds \(verywellhealth.com\)](https://www.verywellhealth.com/echolalia-in-autism-types-and-why-kids-echo-sounds/)

Echolalia is the precise repetition (echoing out loud) of words and sounds. Not always used as sensory outlet for self-soothing, can be used as a way of communicating. Example “Back off, Lieutenant” – may seem out of context to you but they could be repeating a phrase from a context they know (someone angry) to communicate “I need space” or “I am angry”. Echolalia is part of typical child development and seen in toddlers.

Slide 7

Stimming – this is when an individual is seeking feedback from their environment. You can ask if there is anything they want or you can help with as this behaviour is often to do with their environment.

Emotions – can often find it difficult to communicate emotion or find it hard to understand the emotions.

Fascinations – if a child is engrossed with their topic of interest to the point of distraction from a task, give them a time later that you can talk about it together “That sounds really interesting and I want to hear it but shall we talk at snack time? We need to listen to Sarah now.”

Slide 8

[Understanding the Three Levels of Autism \(verywellhealth.com\)](https://www.verywellhealth.com/understanding-the-three-levels-of-autism/)

Level 1 – verbal but may have trouble with extended back and forth with neurotypical peers – can suffer burnout or anxiety from long term masking. These children can easily access mainstream but just require some support, often with social communication and routines / transitions.

Level 2 – these children find masking their behaviour much more challenging and veer outside of social norms. These children could still access mainstream school but often with a 1-1 and may be in an ASD provision within a school and access a typical class setting on a limited basis.

Level 3 – entirely unable to mask and have high self-regulation needs. Real challenges with communication. These individuals usually require specialist educational support in a specific setting.

Slide 9

[We need to stop saying “we’re all a little autistic” - Autistic Not Weird](https://www.verywellhealth.com/we-need-to-stop-saying-we-re-all-a-little-autistic/)

This statement can be hurtful and offensive to individuals with autism and their family as the experience of autism can be very difficult at times and it diminishes / trivialises their experience e.g. social isolation, anxiety, a life-time of not fitting in etc.

Helpful visual to explain what ‘spectrum’ really means.

Executive functioning – to do with skills such as planning, organising, emotional regulation, staying on task etc.

Executive function (EF) describes the “overarching regulation of goal-directed, future-oriented, higher-order cognitive processes” largely controlled by the frontal cortex ([Szczepanski & Knight, 2014](#); [Demetriou et al., 2019](#)).

These higher-order functions include skills related to planning, organizing, self-regulation, attention maintenance, emotion regulation, prioritizing, and staying on task. EF skills develop intensely from infancy to the preschool period and steadily improve into early adulthood (Carlson et al., 2013).

[Executive Function & Autism - Autism Research Institute](#)

Slide 11

- Melanie Sykes – diagnosed aged 51 – said it was a sense of relief and celebration
- Chris Packham – diagnosed in 2005. Has a documentary ‘Asperger’s and Me’ on Vimeo [Chris Packham: Aspergers & Me on Vimeo](#)
- Greta Thunberg – “The diagnosis was almost only positive for me. It helped me get the support I needed and made me understand why I was like this.”
- Elon Musk – has talked about being bullied as a child and said of social interaction “Social cues were not intuitive... Others could intuitively understand what was meant by something. I would take something very literally as if the words that were spoken were exactly what they meant. But that turned out to be wrong.” He credits his Asperger’s partly to his success as this fuelled an intense and specialised interest in science and technology. He says he has learnt to work with his brain, not against it.

Also Susan Boyle, Sia, Anthony Hopkins, Christine McGuinness, plus many figures in history who are thought to have had autism.

Slide 12

- Simplify your language – many children can benefit from ‘now and next’ e.g. “Now we are going to wash our hands and next we will make pizza.”
- Time to process – the idea of counting to 6 in your head after saying something.
- Non-literal language – you get to know which children benefit from explanation and I often say “I’m only joking” or “I’m just being silly” to clarify.
- Avoid idioms – many we don’t even think about: over the moon, see the light, a piece of cake, under the weather, you can say that again...
- Demonstrations / visual cues – all children, not just ASD children, benefit from being shown rather than told. When it comes to using pictures, it is better to use photos and not cartoons.
- New topics – children with autism can struggle to ‘generalise’ and apply a learnt skill to a new context e.g. tool safety
- Calm and simple – quiet, distraction free learning areas where possible. And sheets, really simple and clear.
- If you are in a situation where a child is having a ‘meltdown’, it is best to move the rest of the children to a safe place and an adult (their teacher) to stay with the individual who is upset.

Slide 13

- [How to Sign Makaton Part 2 \(youtube.com\)](#)
- [Learn Makaton with Justin Fletcher - Play the quiz to learn signs to do with The Great Outdoors - CBeebies – BBC](#)
- [Makaton Topic - FEELINGS / EMOTIONS - Singing Hands \(ft Dave Benson-Phillips\) \(youtube.com\)](#)
- [Makaton Topic - QUESTION WORDS - Singing Hands \(youtube.com\)](#)
- [Learn Makaton Signs for Earth Day | Something Special | CBeebies \(youtube.com\)](#)

Slide 15

[How it Works | The Zones of Regulation](#)

The Zones of Regulation is an approach based around the use of four colours to help children **self-identify** how they're feeling and categorise it based on colour. It is designed to help children **better understand their emotions**, sensory needs and thinking patterns.

The children learn different **strategies to cope and manage their emotions** based on which colour zone they're in.

It is important that we remind pupils that we will experience all zones and there are **no good or bad zones**, however our **success in regulating** our emotions depends on us recognising our emotions, understanding them and having various support strategies in place.