



Supporting a child with Social and Communication Differences – Family guide

Autism is a processing difference that can have an impact on many areas of a person's life. Autistic people can often experience differences in how they process communication, their sensory environment and how they interact with other people. Some people say 'autistic', some say 'person with autism'.

Communication

The way autistic people communicate happens in a variety of different ways:

- Some may speak very clearly and don't appear to struggle with language.
- Some may muddle words or talk at different volumes to what you might expect.
- Some may not use words to communicate or only a few words.

Interaction

Autistic people may show difficulty with:

- Understanding the social rules of different situations.
- Working out when to talk about something.
- Understanding or showing facial expressions.
- Tone of voice and what different tones mean.
- Knowing when someone wants to socialise or be left alone.
- Understanding turn taking or conversation rules.

Processing Information

We process information as an input and output. When there is too much information people can struggle to understand it all. Autistic people may need more time to process information, smaller amounts of information and information in different formats.

Sensory Processing

Autistic people can experience the world differently to non-autistic people. The sensory environment can have a big impact on how you process the world around you. Senses can be overwhelming or muted. Sensory processing affects sight, sound, touch, taste, smell, temperature and body awareness.

Meltdowns and Shutdowns

A meltdown isn't a tantrum. It is the response to a situation that is so overwhelming the person just needs to get out. To support someone in a meltdown help them to leave the overwhelming situation and try not to judge them for their response. Shutdowns can also happen when someone is overwhelmed. They are so overwhelmed that they can't respond to a situation. People often need time to recover to feel better again.

Ways to support a child with Social and Communication Differences at home:

- Accept you may have to do things differently; it may be challenging. All children are different and can react differently to the same way of parenting. Understanding your child's uniqueness is the key to supporting them.

- Make sure you are allowing your child to communicate how they are comfortable. You may need to use 'trial and improvement' to find the right way for your child. PECS (Picture Exchange Communication System), drawings, notes, Talking Mats)
- Try to use clear language to make things easier to understand.
- Give your child time to respond to you. They may be thinking about what to say.
- Prepare your child for social events with the use of days/times/people who may be there/the journey/what to expect. Use pictures/websites so they can become familiar with a new place. Don't force them to get involved in social events if they struggle.
- Allow for 'down time' when a social event or meltdown has happened. Give your child space/quiet time to help them regulate their feelings and reduce built up anxiety.
- Weighted blankets/ear defenders/sensory toys may help to reduce anxiety.
- Inform relatives/friends/neighbours about your child's needs. You may need support from them and they can only do this if they understand your child.
- Make time for yourself. A child with additional needs will thrive with a parent who makes time for their own well-being.

Websites:

- Stockport's Local Offer page for advice and information about ASD – <https://stockport.fsd.org.uk/kb5/stockport/fsd/advice.page?id=G53tLI5WH5Q>
- National Autistic Society – information, support and schools: www.nas.org.uk
- Ambitious about Autism – services, awareness-raising, campaigns: www.ambitiousaboutautism.org.uk/page/index.cfm
- Anna Kennedy Online – offers information, training and advice, and supports families with autism: www.annakennedyonline.com
- Curly Hair Project – information, support, training and resources: www.thegirlwiththecurlyhair.co.uk
- Research Autism – the only UK charity dedicated to research into interventions in autism: <http://researchautism.net/pages/welcome/home.ikml>
- Talk about Autism – a safe and friendly online community: www.talkaboutautism.org.uk
- Caldwell Autism Foundation – providing communication support to people on the autistic spectrum: <http://thecaldwellfoundation.org.uk/>
- Royal College of General Practitioner – childminders, parents and childcare staff may wish to hand this useful information about making the most of a visit to the GP to the parents of children with autism: www.rcgp.org.uk/clinical-and-research/clinical-resources/~media/Files/CIRC/Autism/RCGP-Making-the-most-of-a-visit-to-your-GP-March-15.ashx
- Autism Connect – an online social network for people with autism and their families: <https://autism-connect.org.uk/site/index>
- The Autism directory – find autism friendly resources in your local area and beyond. From CAMHS and coffee shops to SaLT's and special schools you can find them here: www.theautismdirectory.com/default.asp?contentID=1
- Child Autism UK – Support, advice and services for children with autism See more at: www.childautism.org.uk