

A guide to help and support families

AUTISM



Clinical Partners
It's about getting better



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What is Autism?

A brief description of what autism is and the effect it can have on people's lives.



What is Autism?

Autism is referred to as a lifelong developmental disability.

People with autism often have a different perception of the world around them. Autism can affect how a person sees, hears and even feels their external environment.

Autism will affect every person differently

Autism is a spectrum of disorders that under new diagnostic guidelines (DSM-5), include Asperger's Syndrome, Pervasive Developmental Disorder- not otherwise specified, Childhood Disintegrative Disorder and Rett's Syndrome.

Although there is no actual "cure" for autism, different therapies can be really helpful to learn different strategies that can aide in their understanding and life experiences.

Autistic Spectrum Disorders

The ASD Umbrella



Understanding the differences caused by Autism

No two people with Autism will experience the same difficulties. Research has shown that a person with autism essentially has a different signal process within their brain. Whenever we hear, see, smell, taste or touch something, information is sent to our brain through a series of connections, which generally are quite straightforward.

However, the autistic brain seems to send this information on a different and longer route, often crossing many paths. Information can get mixed up, lost or take longer to be processed. This can result in some of the following common difficulties.

Some difficulties that someone on the autistic spectrum may have:

- Not always understanding others expectations
- Difficulties communicating their needs
- May not be aware of the social rules that explain how we are expected to behave in given situations
- Can become very anxious when there is too much information to process
- May take information literally "Take a seat" (Where should I take it??)

Some strengths that someone on the autistic spectrum may have:

- They may have a wide knowledge with regards to a subject of interest
- Able to notice the smallest of detail or when something is missing
- Can hear sounds from a much further distance than expected
- Have a terrific memory
- Can teach you about a different perspective to life and the environment we live in

Top Tips for supporting someone with Autism

- Speak clearly and calmly - raised voices can add to the confusion
- Explain what you are going to do or what is expected of the person, in small steps
- Change in routine is difficult, when possible, plan ahead for any change in routine
- Allow extra time for any information or instructions to be processed
- Eye contact can sometimes be difficult because the person is not always able to understand your facial expressions
- Talking at inappropriate moments or about inappropriate topics is not about annoying you, it's simply because the person is not aware that it is inappropriate!

Who are Clinical Partners?

- Clinical Partners are the UK's largest private mental health partnership. We help thousands of adults, children, families and organisations access the mental health care they need, every year.
- Here at Clinical Partners we are able to help with obtaining a diagnosis through our ASD Assessments – based on Gold Standards.
- We also offer ongoing therapy that can be benefit both the adult/child with a diagnosis and the family as a whole.

If you would like to find out more how we can help, please call Sarah on **0203 761 7026** or visit **www.clinical-partners.co.uk**

Recommendations for parents to help
children / young people with a diagnosis
of Autistic Spectrum Disorder / traits of ASD



Below are some recommendations that some parents and schools might find helpful. They are suggestions only and parents should use their own discretion as to whether they are suitable for their child or not.



Advice on behaviour management



Your child may benefit from clear and concrete language that provides explicit instructions. Breaking down a set of tasks into smaller parts will prevent overloading your child's processing systems. For example "Please put your shoes on" and then moving onto the next task, such as "Please get your school bag" may be much better than listing all the jobs to be done at once or asking them to carry out unclear jobs such as "You need to get ready for school".



Your child may also benefit someone double-checking their understanding, for example, when an instruction has been given, check by asking "what do you need to do?".



Reward systems can be used to target particular behaviours in order to try to encourage a child to do more or less of a certain thing. It is important that the reward the child is working towards is highly motivating. It is also important that in the early stages of setting up a reward chart, the child can be successful very quickly and so it is best to start at a level they are currently performing at before extending it to the desired level. By doing this, the child feels as though they can achieve the target and so is more likely to work harder to reach the reward.

Advice for the school environment



The child's understanding is likely to be supported with the use of pictures and other visuals to help them access the school curriculum.



If the child has specific social skills difficulties they may benefit from regular social skills lessons to teach them how to make and keep friends, to show remorse, to show empathy and so on. These lessons are best targeted within school, as it will help the child to generalise the skills immediately within this social situation. It is important that the child has an opportunity to role-play with their peers in the lessons before then trying to use these skills with others.



In order to support the child with any school transitions or changes such as with teaching staff, it may be helpful for the child, parents and school to develop an A4 Pen picture or PASSPORT. This is an A4 piece of paper which includes all the important pieces of information about an individual to help with any changes and transitions (for example, a supply teacher, a change of class, a change of school and so on). The hope is that this PASSPORT will provide enough information as a starting point for anyone to get to know the child and how best to help them. It is important to ensure that this PASSPORT is developed in collaboration with the child and their family and that it includes all the useful bits of information about them that other people who meet them would benefit knowing. An example of this can be seen at www.autismeducationtrust.org.uk



Advice on the home environment



It may help to introduce the use of timers (such as sand timers or kitchen timers) within the daily routine. These can be used to indicate that something needs to finish. For example, as soon as the timer goes off, the activity the child is doing, such as watching TV, has to stop and then they have to get their shoes on to go to school. It can be helpful to include the child in the setting of the timer so that they are prepared for it to go off and remind that the timer is about to go off shortly.



In addition, the use of a visual timetable may be helpful. Pictures or symbols as well as words can be used to depict the activities, such as bath time, get dressed, breakfast and so on.



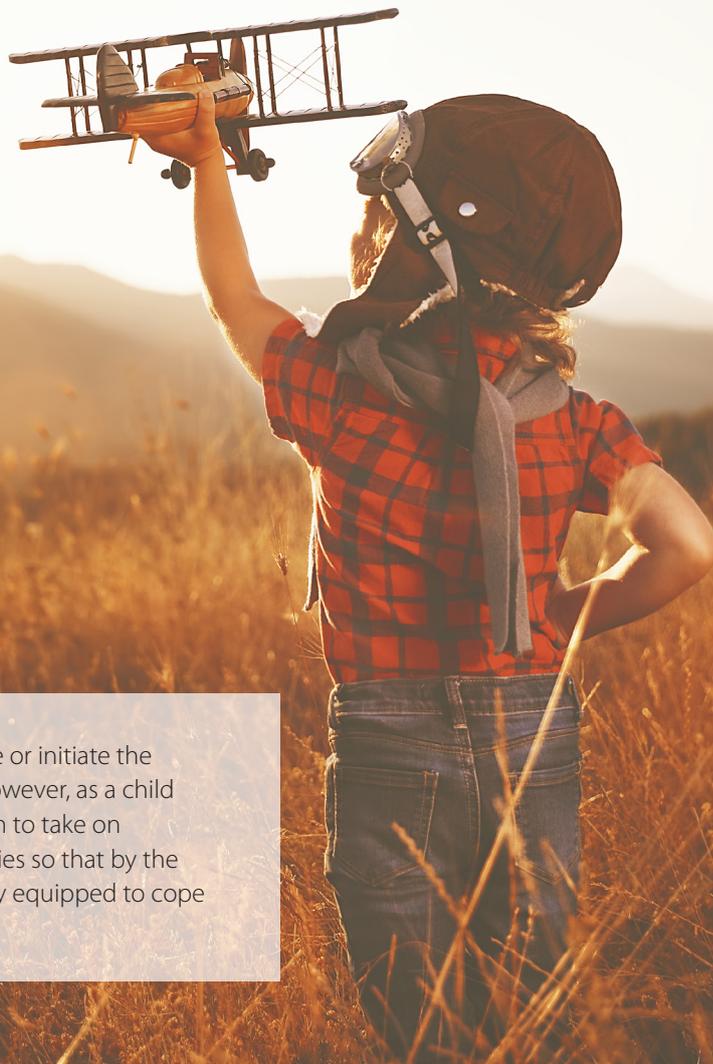
Over time, your child may benefit from having some time to consider their difficulties and what having Autism Spectrum Disorder means to them. It is often helpful for parents to spend some time with their child talking about ASD as a collection of strengths and differences. There are many books that can be shared with your child or teenager to help explain what ASD is, we have included a guide at the end.



Social stories are often used with children on the autistic spectrum. These are stories that are written to help explain to a child what is expected of them in a social situation and how they could respond; it can help to give them structure and concrete ideas. An example is a story that explains WHY the child needs to sit still and HOW she can go about trying to do this or WHY she has to check his work over and HOW she can do this.



Comic strip conversations are also frequently used with individuals on the autistic spectrum. A comic strip conversation enables a discussion about a situation that has occurred in order to help the child to learn from it. It is important that this conversation is had when the child is calm. The situation is drawn in a comic strip style and an alternative way of behaving in that situation is then discussed and drawn.



At first parents / carers may have to undertake or initiate the majority of these tasks on behalf of a child. However, as a child gets older it is really important that they begin to take on increasing responsibility for the above strategies so that by the time late adolescence is reached, they are fully equipped to cope without daily parental / carer dependence.

Sensory Snacks

A guide for parents





What are sensory 'snacks'?

Children who have difficulty processing sensory input require regular sensory information (sensory snacks) to help the brain organise and understand the sensations. Sensory activities can be activities involving the following systems:



Tactile



Vestibular



Proprioceptive



Oral (mouth)



Visual (eyes)

We receive a great deal of information from our senses (vision, smell, taste, touch, hearing). We use this information in many ways to help us understand our body, understand the environment and successfully interact in the world. In addition to the five sense that tell us about the outside world, we also have internal sensations relating to our body and movements, these are called proprioception and vestibular.

Sensory processing (sometimes called sensory integration) is the process of putting information from our senses together, sorting and filtering it and interpreting it so that we know how to act.

Sensory processing difficulties are the inability to use the information received through the senses in order to function smoothly in daily life.

By experiencing movements, the nervous system learns how to process the sensory information received and responds appropriately.

Children with sensory processing difficulties benefit from participating in sensory 'snack' activities a minimum of 5 times per day. For example; before school, at transitions times during the school day (e.g. when starting the first lesson, after morning break, after lunch etc) and then once in the afternoon / evening at home. It has been reported in research that even 5-10 minutes of an activity that involves the whole body in heavy muscle and joint movement can have an effect lasting up to 2 hours. The intensity of the work and the duration of the effort often needs to be a lot higher and longer than we imagine.

The following are some examples of activities for each sensory system. These activities are suggestions only. You may wish to seek advice from an Occupational Therapist who can advise on specific activities that will help your child.

Tactile snacks - deep touch pressure

This involves any kind of input that provides firm pressure over the skin. This kind of input is generally calming and helps the body develop better awareness of itself in space. Each input can be provided at different levels e.g. getting a gentle hug is not very intense but receiving a bear hug is more intense. Activities include -

- Firm hugs
- People sandwich: children lying on top of each other, can add blankets or furniture cushions or pillows or bean bags to the sandwich
- Roll a large ball, like an exercise ball, over a person whilst they are lying down. Use firm even pressure
- Roll the person up tightly in a blanket or rug leaving their face exposed
- Massage
- Slow back stroking with firm pressure or constant firm pressure on back with no movement
- Hot dog game – Have your child lie on their stomach: rub arms, legs, back etc. Apply toppings by pressing down e.g. pretend ketchup, cheese etc

Oral Motor Activities

Oral motor can be used to enable us to achieve the “just right” level of alertness which helps us to focus on tasks, some oral motor activities are altering while others are calming. Oral motor activities can also be used to increase awareness of the mouth and coordination of the tongue.

Oral motor control is important for many activities such as managing saliva, speech, feeding etc. The face, mouth and tongue are made up of many small muscles. Sometimes the mouth can be over sensitive and sometimes children put non food objects in their mouth.

- Use straw for drinks, if your child finds this easy use the curly straws requiring more effort to suck the liquid or use a straw to drink a yoghurt or thick milkshake
- Straw games – Blow football, race to move the raisins from one bowl to another by sucking up the straw etc
- Blowing bubbles
- Whistles, party blowers, harmonica
- Pull funny faces in front of the mirror e.g. sucking in or blowing out cheeks, sticking tongue out and trying to touch your nose with it, stick your tongue into cheek etc
- Cheek massage using hands or massagers
- Use an electric toothbrush for brushing teeth, the back of the head of the toothbrush can be used on the cheeks as vibration



Movement or Vestibular snacks

This includes any activity that moves the head or body. Vestibular input improves the muscles ability to work and affects balance / coordination.

Linear – this kind of input tends to be calming if it is slow and rhythmic and the movement is back and forth, activities include;

- Swing on swings
- Rocking in a rocking chair
- Jumping on a trampoline or mattress
- Sit on a therapy ball or move'n'sit cushion with feet on the floor instead of sitting on a chair
- Jumping and crashing into pillows, couch cushions, or an old mattress

Rotatory – This kind of input is fast and variable. It can lead to an emotional response i.e. giddiness, anger, sickness in some children. There can be a delay of up to 12-15 hours following activities. It is recommended that these activities are not done towards the end of the day and are followed by deep pressure. STOP activities if your child becomes pale, complains of neck pain, becomes agitated or displays out of character behaviour. Activities include;

- Spinning on a roundabout
- Hanging upside down
- Cartwheels
- Handstands
- Helicopter spinning

Visual

Some children will find visual stimulation very disorientating, so clutter and distractions can make it hard for them to concentrate or feel calm. Each child is different, for instance some children do better at the front of a class without the distractions, others do better sat at the back of the class where they can see everything going on and don't need to constantly turn around.

Activities that can help include:

- Rush hour online game
- Mazes, Dot to dots, find the hidden objects
- Torch games (eye spy in the dark, follow other peoples torch light, make torch pictures)
- Puzzles (jigsaws, crosswords, word searches)

The above activities are suggestions only. You may want to discuss them with an Occupational Therapist or Speech and Language therapist. It may be helpful to share this information guide with your child's teacher.

Proprioceptive snacks (stimulating joint receptors)

This is about our own movement and body position, like internal eyes. It tells us where we are in space, how our body parts relate to each other. It tells us how fast we are moving and how much force we need to apply. Proprioceptive stimulus involves movement, compression, or stretching at a joint. Activities include;

- Play catch with a large ball or heavy ball
- Press ups
- Table pushes / chair push-ups, wall pushes
- Manual work activities – vacuum, moving furniture, digging
- Pushing or carrying heavy objects – shopping trolley, grocery bags, laundry basket, books etc. Never more than 10% of your child's body weight
- Wheelbarrow walk – hold your child's legs securely while they walk on their arms
- Jump up and down in one place
- Skipping with a rope
- Play wrestling / pillow fights (with supervision)
- Tug-of-war
- Crawling (army crawl or on 'all fours' through and/or over an obstacle course)
- Hopscotch
- Trampoline
- Swimming
- Crab football

Animal walks:

Frog jump -Squat on the floor, placing hands on floor in front of you. Move both hands forward, then bring feet up to hands in jumping motion (remain in squatting position)

Bear Walk -With hands and feet on floor, move right arm and leg forward simultaneously, then move left arm and leg. If this is too difficult, try it on hands and knees.

Inchworm -Squat on floor with hands in front. Keeping feet stable, walk hands forward as far as you can so that you are stretched out. Keep hands stable and walk feet up to hands back to squatting position.

Elephant walk -Bend over with arms dangling toward floor. Clasp hands together to form trunk. Maintain position while walking, swinging trunk from side to side.

Kangaroo jump -Squat on floor, hands at sides, raise up and jump forward, sinking back into squatting position as you land.

Crab walk -Lean back and put hands on floor (supine with buttocks off floor) walk backwards, using hands and feet alternately.

Duck walk- Squat on floor with hands at sides. Remain in position while walking (waddling) forward.

Advice for a successful bedtime routine



A good bedtime routine may be hard to implement but will be worth all the perseverance! Below are some key pieces of advice that may help you and your child to have a happier bedtime routine.

Consistency is key, and things may appear worse before they get better. It can often take two to three weeks before these changes are accepted.

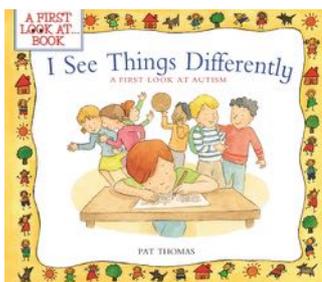


- 1** Make sure the routine is the same every time, this will help strengthen the body clock. This means going upstairs at the same time and waking up at the same time, even on weekends and during holidays.
- 2** All electrical gadgets should be switched off an hour before bedtime (television, computer, tablet etc). This is because the light from such items interferes with the body's natural sleep hormone, melatonin.
- 3** Fine motor skills such as colouring in, jigsaws and threading items can really help a child to relax.
- 4** A bath, 30 minutes before bedtime, is very relaxing. After getting out of the bath the body temperature drops slightly, this causes a reaction within the body to make it sleepy so as to rest and restore the optimal temperature.
- 5** Playing calming music in the background whilst the above activities are happening will also soothe and teach your child that bedtime is approaching.
- 6** A bedtime story is perfect for ending a busy day and also for spending quality time with your child.
- 7** It is not a good idea to allow your child to have the TV or music on in the background, particularly if they have sleep issues. They need to learn how to settle themselves at bedtime so that they are then able to resettle during the night should they wake. However, if your child has sensory difficulties it may be that the quietness is far too loud for them to cope with, in this case it is worth investing in a sound machine that makes soothing nature sounds, this will cut out the "white noise" that can be painful for children with sensory difficulties.
- 8** Use a visual schedule so that all involved are aware of the process. It can also be used as a warning system for the child.

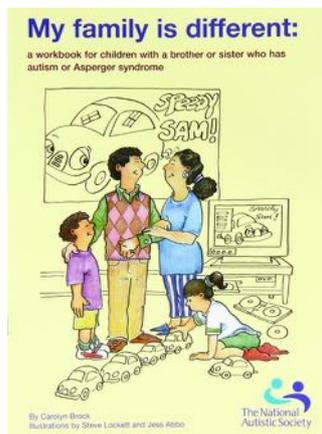
Recommended ASD books

The following book list may be helpful for you and your child. We have given age ranges as a rough guide, but would ask that you check you are happy with the contents before sharing with your child.

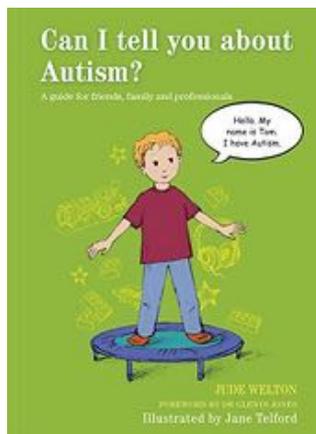
Suitable for under 7 year olds



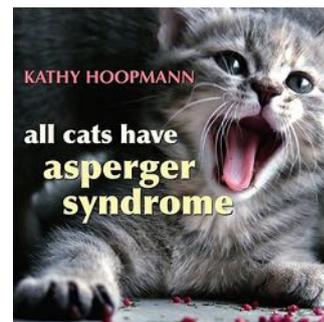
I see things differently
By Pat Thomas



My Family is Different
By NAS

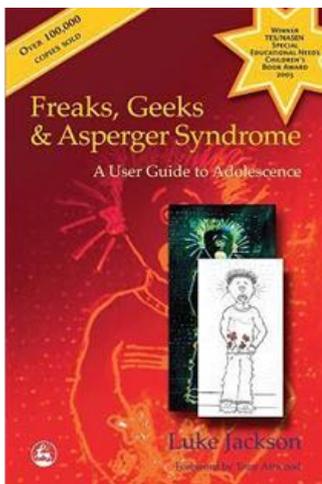


Can I tell you about Autism?
By Judith Welton

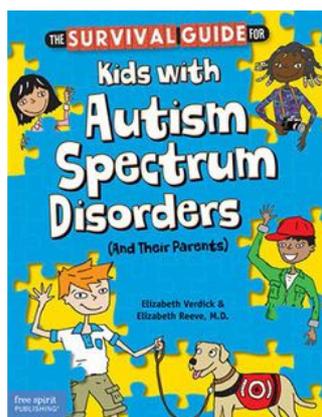


All cats have Asperger Syndrome
By Kathy Hoopman

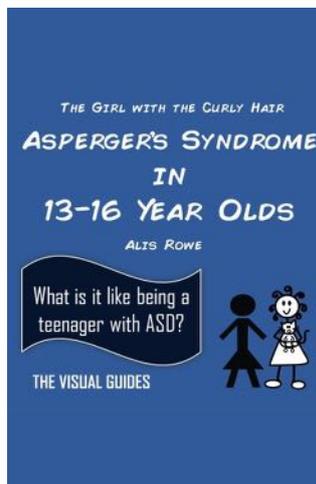
Suitable for children over 8



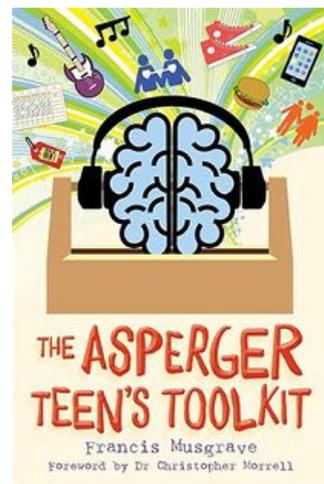
Freaks, Geeks and Asperger Syndrome
By Luke Jackson



The Survival guide for kids with ASD
By Reeve and Verdick

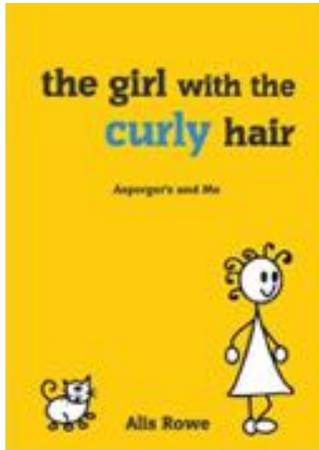


Asperger's Syndrome in 13-16 year olds
By Alis Rowe

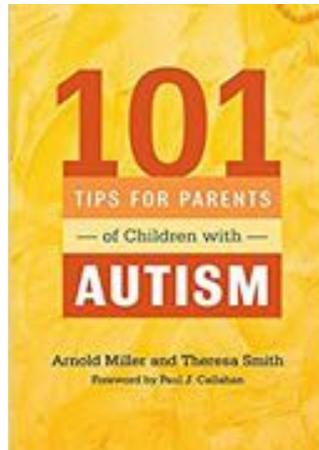


The Asperger Teen's Toolkit
By Francis Musgrave

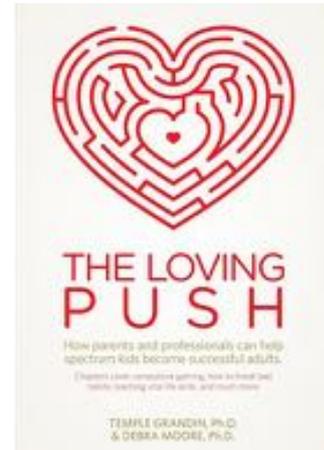
Information guides for Parents



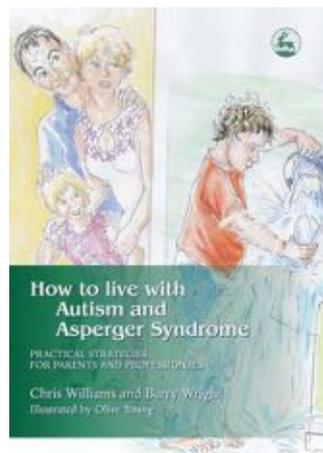
Asperger's and Me
By Alis Rowe



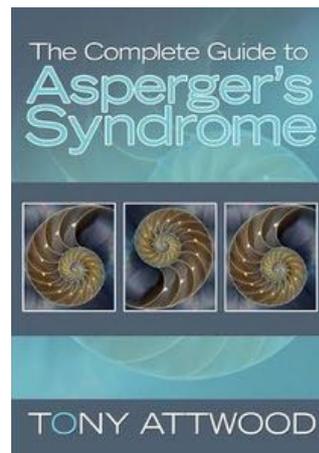
**101 Tips for Parents
of Children with Autism**
By Miller and Smith



The Loving Push
By Grandin and Moore



**How to live with Autism
and Asperger Syndrome**
By Williams and Wright



**The Complete Guide
to Asperger's Syndrome**
By Tony Attwood

Organisations that can help:

National Autistic Society (www.autism.org.uk)

Research Autism (www.researchautism.net) - information guides on a range of topics

Autism Education Trust (www.autismeducationtrust.org.uk)

Carol Gray Social Stories (www.carolgraysocialstories.com)

www.autismlinks.co.uk

There are also many organisations that are regional,
these can be searched for online for example in google, type "autism midlands".



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