

Understanding autism

A short guide to this complex condition and how the National Autistic Society can help



A confusing and overwhelming world

Autism is a lifelong disability which affects how people communicate and interact with the world. It can often leave them confused and overwhelmed. Autism is a spectrum condition, ranging from individuals in need of 24-hour care to people who struggle with some aspects of everyday life including forming friendships, coping at school or managing at work. All autistic people are different. They will, however, share some of the following characteristics:

- communication issues, from not speaking to needing more time to process information
- repetitive behaviour and routines and difficulty with unexpected change
- anxiety in social situations and difficulty with interacting
- sensory sensitivity to light, touch, sound or smell
- intense and highly focused interests.

You're not alone

There are over 700,000 autistic children and adults in the UK with around three million family members and carers. Autistic people and their families can often feel isolated and hidden, but help is available.

For more information on autism and getting help:



visit us at www.autism.org.uk

You can also join our online community or find out where your local volunteer-led branch is.



or phone our helpline on **0808 800 4104**

Monday to Thursday 10am-4pm and Friday 9am-3pm.



“The National Autistic Society gave me excellent advice on where to find help for my son.”

Dan, dad of Thomas, tractor fanatic and autistic boy

I'm not naughty or rude, I'm autistic

Sensory overload and difficulty with unexpected change can lead to autistic adults and children having meltdowns or shutdowns, often in public. They can also appear insensitive because they struggle to 'read' people and understand what is expected of them in a conversation.



Highly focused interests

Many autistic people have very focused interests, special skills and extensive knowledge on their favourite topics. With the right support, environment and educational approach at key stages in their lives, autistic people can go on to have successful and fulfilling lives and jobs.



The benefits of getting a diagnosis

A diagnosis can help autistic people and their families to understand why they are experiencing certain difficulties. It also makes it easier for them to access the vital services, benefits and support at school, work or home they need.



Asperger syndrome and other terms

Currently, autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is the overarching diagnosis. But, you will hear terms such as Asperger syndrome and pathological demand avoidance (PDA). Terminology will continue to change and be redefined. For the latest, please check our website.



Girls and autism

It's not just men and boys who are autistic. Studies put the men to women ratio at anywhere between 16:1 to 2:1. Girls often go undiagnosed and are labelled as 'shy' or 'quirky'. Some professionals still fail to recognise girls on the spectrum.



For more information:

 visit our website at www.autism.org.uk

A portrait of Chris Packham, a middle-aged man with short, light brown hair, smiling slightly. He is wearing a dark green turtleneck sweater under a brown tweed jacket. The background is a soft-focus green foliage.

“The greatest discomfort for autistic people can be the social one. For me, it led to constant self-persecution because I was failing to manage the interactions. I was confused about why people behaved the way they did.”

*Chris Packham, animal enthusiast, autistic man
and National Autistic Society ambassador*

Here to help

The National Autistic Society is the UK's leading charity for autistic people and their families. Since 1962, we have been offering services, support and advice to help increase opportunities and reduce social isolation for autistic people. Our goal is to build a society that works for autistic people and help improve their lives.

Our services include:

- an extensive website with information and advice on autism
- contact centres and helplines that responded to over 70,000 enquiries in 2017
- 116 volunteer-led branches offering support and activities for autistic children and adults
- two child and adult diagnosis centres
- eight specialist schools for autistic children
- Over 70 care centres and services for autistic adults
- training and conferences for education, health and social care professionals
- two quarterly magazines – *Your Autism Magazine* and *the Spectrum*
- working with thousands of shops, businesses and local councils to provide more autism-friendly services and environments
- campaigning to increase public understanding and change government policy to help improve the lives of autistic people.

For more information on autism and getting help:



visit us at www.autism.org.uk



or phone our helpline on **0808 800 4104**



www.twitter.com/Autism



www.facebook.com/NationalAutisticSociety



“With the right support and access to equal opportunities, autistic people can lead happy lives and reach their full potential.”

Tasinda, project worker for Anouska, talented artist and autistic teenager

National Autistic Society

Transforming lives and changing attitudes since 1962

- Our helpline, website and 116 local volunteer-led branches provide information, support and practical advice to hundreds of autistic people and their families every day.
- We train over 11,000 teachers, health workers and other professionals every year to help ensure schools, health services and workplaces meet the needs of autistic people.
- Our *Too Much Information* campaign has reached 65 million people, helping to increase understanding of the difficulties autistic people face every day.
- In 2009, we led a campaign to persuade the Government to introduce the first ever Autism Act in England that guarantees the rights of autistic adults.
- Over 5,000 businesses take part in Autism Hour every year.
- To date, 52 organisations have been awarded our Autism Friendly Award, including Buckingham Palace, Edinburgh Airport and the BBC Media Centre in Salford.

With your help, we can do even more. Find out how you can become a member and other ways to support our charity at www.autism.org.uk



**National
Autistic
Society**

The National Autistic Society is a charity registered in
England and Wales (269425) and in Scotland (SC039427)
Job No: 3626_180918