



**CHILDWALL**  
SPORTS &  
SCIENCE ACADEMY

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LYDIATE  
LEARNING TRUST

# Autism Information: Guide for Staff

Childwall Sports & Science Academy

## Characteristics

Persons with autism may possess the following characteristics in various combinations and in varying degrees of severity:

- Inappropriate laughing/giggling
- No real fear of dangers
- Apparent insensitivity to pain
- May avoid eye contact
- May prefer to be alone
- Difficulty in expressing needs
- Inappropriate attachments to objects
- Insistence of sameness
- Echoes words/phrases

## What are ASDs?

An autism disorder is a lifelong developmental disability that affects the way a person communicates with, and relates to other people. It also affects how they make sense of the world around them. It is a spectrum condition which means that, while people with autism share certain difficulties, their condition will affect them in different ways.

The three main areas of difficulty (sometimes known as the “triad of impairments”) are: -

### 1. Difficulty with social interaction

This includes recognising and understanding other people’s feelings and managing their own. People with an ASD may:

- Not understand the unwritten social rules which most of us pick up without thinking: they may stand too close to another person for examples, or start an inappropriate subject of conversation
- Appear to be insensitive because they have not recognised how someone else is feeling
- Prefer to spend time alone rather than seeking out the company of others
- Not seek comfort from other people
- Appear to behave “strangely” or inappropriately, as it is not always easy for them to express feelings, emotions or needs.

## 2. Difficulty with social communication

This includes using and understanding verbal and non-verbal language, such as gestures, facial expressions and tone of voice.

Many people with an ASD have a literal understanding of language, and think people always mean exactly what they say. They can find it difficult to use or understand:

- Facial expressions or tone of voice
- Jokes and sarcasm
- Common phrases, sayings and metaphors; an example might be the phrase “It’s cool”, which people often say when they think that something is good, but strictly speaking, means that it’s a bit cold.

Others will have good language skills, but may still find it hard to understand the give and take natures of conversations, perhaps repeating what the other person has just said or talking at length about their own interests.

It helps if people speak in a clear, consistent way and give people with autism time to process what has been said to them.

## 3. Difficulty with social interaction

This includes the ability to understand and predict other people’s intentions and behaviour and to imagine situations outside their own routine. This can be accompanied by a narrow repetitive range of activities.

People with an ASD find it hard to:

- Understand and interpret other people’s thoughts, feelings and actions
- Predict what will happen next, or what could happen next
- Understand the concept of danger, for example that running on to a busy road poses a threat to them
- Engage in imaginative play and activities
- Prepare for change and plan for the future
- Cope in new or unfamiliar situations

How can I help children with ASD in school?

**Be as clear in your communication as possible and say exactly what you mean.** Anything merely implied will probably not be understood. For example, asking, “Would you like to get your work out now? May get the very honest \*but unintentionally annoying) answer, “No!” Similarly, you may ask, “Can you just sit over there? Or “Can you pick up that piece of paper and put it in the bin?” and get the answer “Yes”, followed by no action: the answer has been truthful, but the students may not well not have understood that you were actually asking them to carry out the action.

**Keep your language direct**, avoiding the use of double meanings, sarcasm, teasing, complex open questions or subtle jokes. Use his/her name, but don't necessarily expect to gain full eye contact.

You will probably need to **slow down your communication**- allow several seconds for the students to process new information and to respond before you give more information, or repeat your request.

Check that he/she understands what they have to do in class or for homework. Visual aids can help.

Avoid confronting an angry/upset student by arguing or raising your voice. Many people with an ASD are very sensitive to noise, some finding loud noise physically painful. Use a calm neutral tone of voice- do not shout, or expect him/her to be able to read facial expression and gesture. Instead try to divert and defuse the situation. For example, allow the pupil to "exit", giving a clear alternative choice, a compromise if possible

### **Tips for an Autism Friendly School and Classroom.**

- Staff to be aware that for children with Autism and slow processing it takes 7-10 seconds to process one piece of information. Therefore, waiting for this amount of time after asking a question for example, would allow adequate processing time and avoid information overload.
- Chunking work into broken down sections would allow children to have a clearer picture of what is expected of them. A visual timer alongside this would provide a clear end point to one activity and provide natural progression to the next.
- The classroom environment itself should be as de cluttered as possible. Some children with Autism have Weak Central Coherence which means that they see too much or too little detail in their environment. If a child sees too much detail in what is around them and there is a cluttered environment, this would increase the risk of dis engagement and lack of focus in lessons.
- Similarly, the area around the whiteboard should be clear. This is for the same reason as above. Children may find it difficult to concentrate on the lesson input while there are distractions in the same visual field.
- Some children with Autism have Weak Executive Dysfunction, this means that they have trouble organising themselves and their work. Therefore, some children may find it difficult to bring the correct equipment to class. Having spare materials available may help reduce anxiety if equipment is forgotten.
- Many children with Autism have sensory differences which may require subtle movements to help self-regulate their sensory needs. A box of fidget toys could be made available for those children who have sensory needs. Being able to self-regulate in this way will actually increase concentration as they will be less focused on regulating an unmet sensory need.