



# Quick guide to autism

What it looks like and how you can help

# Aspect Community Connections

## What is autism?

- Autism is a lifelong neurodevelopmental disorder
- We don't know what causes autism but we do know genetics plays a role
- 1 in 100 Australian children have autism (Autism Spectrum Australia, 2013)
- It is suggested that the increase in autism is due to our increased awareness of early signs of autism and more sensitive diagnostic criteria
- Autism can present very differently in children that is why the word "Spectrum" is used

**Autism is characterised and diagnosed by differences in two main areas; social communication and patterns of behaviour** (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

### Social communication differences

- Initiating and responding to others
- Displaying and responding to non verbal communicative behaviours (eg eye contact, body language, facial expression and gestures)
- Developing and maintaining relationships with others that are appropriate for their developmental level

### Restricted and repetitive patterns of behaviour, interest and activities (special interests, routines, rituals or preoccupations)

- Repetitive speech, (echolalia), repetitive movements, (rocking, flapping), repetitive use of an object or toy, (spinning wheels of toy car)
- Preferring routines (doing thing the same way each time, difficulty with flexibility within these routines)
- Restricted interest in a narrow area
- Sensitivity to the environment around them
  - » Over-sensitivity to their environment - finding loud noises, bright lights, busy environments upsetting.
  - » Under-sensitivity to their environment - seeking out specific experiences such as smells, tastes, not registering pain.

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## Social Communication

Children with autism may find it difficult to....

Talk to you

Understand your non-verbal communication, (eg eye contact, body language, facial expression and gestures)

Socialise with others, both adults and children

Here are some ideas to support communication:

- Speak less, simplify your language and use key words
- Express one idea at a time, in the order that they will happen
- Use simple and natural gestures, pictures and objects to support your spoken language
- Go slow, use pauses to allow time for processing of information
- Use positive statements; it is easier to understand positive sentences that say what to do, rather than what not to do, eg. "We walk inside", rather than, 'don't run'
- Use statements rather than questions as instructions, eg. "Come and sit on the mat for story" rather than "Can you come and sit for a story"
- Use visual supports! Pictures, charts and objects



# Aspect Community Connections Behaviour

All behaviour is communicating something.  
Children with autism may display challenging behaviours as a reaction to the difficulties they face.

## Children with autism may:

- Play alone
- Have unusual interests or attachments
- Only play with a few toys
- Have difficulty coping with change
- Have unusual behaviours/ repetitive movements such as rocking, flapping hands or walking on tip toes
- Play with objects in unusual ways, such as repetitive spinning or lining up
- Display unusual distress or reaction to everyday sights, sounds and movements

## This may happen because children with autism may:

- Not understand what is being said
- Not be able to express what they want or need
- Have sensory difficulties
- Need routine, consistency and sameness
- Have difficulty understanding others people's perspective/feelings
- Have difficulty understanding what is happening in the environment

## Some ideas to support positive behaviours:

- Provide an organised environment
- Have routine and structure
- Use clear communication
- Use visual supports to make the environment easier to understand
- Promote a calm atmosphere

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## Sensory Processing

Sensory processing is the ability to organise and interpret information we receive through our senses of sight, sound, taste, smell, touch, balance and body awareness. Sensory processing allows us to produce appropriate responses for particular situations, tasks and environments.

### Children may present as being **over sensitive** to sensory input.

#### The Sensory Sensitive Child

These children register sensory input intensely but won't necessarily remove themselves from the situation.



#### The Sensory Avoider

These children register sensory input intensely and will actively avoid the sensation.



### Children may present as being **under sensitive** to sensory input.

#### The Sensory Seeker

These children need more sensory input and actively seek this out.



#### The Child with Low Registration

These children do not register sensory input and do not actively seek additional sensory input.



### How to support children with sensory processing difficulties...

- Talk to the family and ask what the child likes and dislikes
- Think about your environment and what could cause sensory processing challenges (ie loud noises, bright lights etc)
- Provide a quiet space

# Aspect Community Connections Visual Supports

Children with autism can generally **understand what they see more than what they can hear.**

Most children with autism are visual learners. They use visual information to interpret the world and make sense of what is happening. An important rule to remember when working with children with autism is to **SHOW what you want rather than TELL.** We call this “using visuals supports”.

Visual supports help children with autism to:

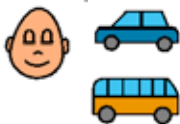
- Understand what is expected of them
- Communicate

Visual supports can be:

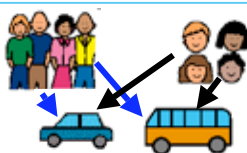
- An object
- A photo of an object or action
- A chart or timetable
- A schedule or list of steps to complete a task
- A story explaining a situation or task
- A movie demonstrating a situation or task



Seat belt  
on



We need to be  
safe in cars and  
buses



Adults sit in the  
front seat and  
children sit in the  
back.



We always sit  
sensibly and wear  
our seat belts.

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## Paying attention & following instructions

Children with autism may find it difficult to pay attention and follow instructions

Some children may find it difficult to pay attention or follow instructions because they:

- May not understand how to respond to their name
- May not understand what you have said
- May forget what you have asked them to do
- May only remember part of what you asked them to do

You can help children by:

- Getting their attention first
- Approach from the front before you speak
- Getting down to their level/in their line of view when you speak to them
- Give one instruction at a time
- Model what you want them to do
- Give positive feedback when they respond
- Using visual supports





Autism Spectrum Australia (Aspect)  
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aspect  
practice  
autism practice that works

1800 ASPECT (1800 277 328)

[autismspectrum.org.au](http://autismspectrum.org.au)