

making sense of autism

Raising awareness

These presentation materials are designed to give you a better understanding and awareness of autism and the way it affects young people.

Principles

The materials will be used to promote the following principles:

- 1. Focus on difference and not deficit.**
- 2. Promote positive attitudes to autism.**
- 3. All staff can have a positive impact.**

Contents

There are 4 themes:



Terminology

The term autism is used in all the training materials. Some professionals may refer to autism by a different name. This may include autism spectrum condition (ASC), autism spectrum disorder (ASD), classic or Kanner autism, and high-functioning autism (HFA) or Asperger Syndrome (AS).



Learning objectives

All participants will be able to:

- Identify the four key areas of difference that need to be taken into account when working with young people with autism.
- Know the importance of understanding the individual young person with autism and their profile of strengths and areas for development.
- Identify the key areas to help young people with autism build positive relationships with staff, peers and people in their community.
- Develop an awareness of the sensory and communication differences that young people with autism may experience.

- The key messages in each theme are consistent for all young people with autism and relevant to all types of provision. Many will also be relevant to other young people with special educational needs.
- These key messages are reinforced in a range of film clips which reflect the views and experiences of young people with autism, their parents and the professionals who work with them.
- Activities and case studies may also be used during this session. We have provided further information, including top tips to help support young people with autism in your setting.

Supported by:



Department
for Education



// Any understanding of autism should not be approached from a position of 'deficit', but rather from a position of 'difference'. Autistic people are not neuro-typical people with something missing or something extra added on. They are different. If we are serious about equality and inclusion within any area, then we must first of all understand that difference. //

Christine Breakey (2006)
The Autism Spectrum and Further Education.
A guide to Good Practice. London: Jessica Kingsley

Key messages

Autism is a lifelong condition which affects the way that a person communicates and relates to people and the world around them.

It is a spectrum condition, which means that, while all people with autism share certain features, their condition will affect them in different ways. There are four key areas of difference: sensory processing, communication, social understanding, interests and information processing. We need to be aware of these differences to understand the educational needs of young people with autism.

There are approximately 500,000 (or 1 in 100) with autism in the UK. Some young people with autism are very able intellectually. Others have considerable learning disabilities in addition to their autism. Providing the right support at the right time can enable young people with autism to build on their strengths and manage their areas for development effectively.

Sources of information

You can find out more about autism on the [AET website](http://www.autismeducationtrust.org.uk) (www.autismeducationtrust.org.uk) or on the websites of two of their founding members:

- [Ambitious about Autism](http://www.ambitiousaboutautism.org.uk)
www.ambitiousaboutautism.org.uk
- [The National Autistic Society](http://www.autism.org.uk)
www.autism.org.uk

Top tips

Following these will help you to reduce the anxiety a young person may be experiencing and will enable them to work more effectively in a welcoming and safe environment.

1. Find out about the young person's likes and dislikes; what is motivating and what creates anxiety. There should be a profile of this information available for everyone who works with the young person.
2. Build self-esteem by valuing the young person.
3. Identify and use a young person's strengths and interests when working with them.





What are the four key areas of difference that need to be taken into account in the education of young people with autism?

Communication

Differences in understanding and expressing communication and language, with skills ranging from individuals who are highly articulate, to others who may be non-verbal. Good language skills may mask a deep level of misunderstanding.

Interests and information processing

Differences in perception, planning, understanding concepts, generalising, predicting, managing transitions, passions for interests, and ability to absorb auditory or spoken information.



Social understanding

Differences in understanding social behaviour and the feelings of others, which informs the development of friendships and relationships.

Sensory processing

Differences in perceiving sensory information. Hypo (low sensitivity), hyper (high sensitivity), touch, sight, hearing, smell, taste, vestibular inner ear (balance), proprioceptive (body awareness).



// One person can make all the difference. If it wasn't for Trystan and his dedicated staff, I dread to think where our lives would be now. If you are in a position to help a family like ours, please do, you may be that one person. Some days just a smile can do it for us and all that costs you is less effort than a frown! //

Jan Greenman (2010)

Life at the Edge and Beyond: Living with ADHD and Asperger Syndrome" London: Jessica Kingsley

Key messages

Ensure that the young person with autism is at the heart of all decisions about their future, together with everyone who is important to them and their aspirations.

It is important to understand the individual young person and how their autism affects them. This can help us to understand their behaviour and support the development of positive relationships.

Most people acquire an understanding of social behaviours and emotions naturally but young people with autism may need support to learn or understand the skills involved in building and maintaining relationships.

Raising the awareness and acceptance of staff, peers and the wider community about difference can support their ability to build relationships with young people who have autism. Using the interests of those young people can be a good way to engage with them and provide them with the motivation to engage with others.

Top tips

Following these will help you to reduce the anxiety a young person may be experiencing and will enable them to work more effectively in a welcoming and safe environment.

1. Ensure everyone who works with the young person is informed of support strategies and any current issues.
2. Encourage families and carers to be actively involved in supporting the young person's progress and ensure information is shared.
3. Help to reduce the levels of misunderstanding and bullying experienced by young people with autism by sharing positive messages about autism and difference.





“You can be the cleverest kid in the world but you won’t get anywhere in life if you can’t have a conversation. For people like me a social and emotional education is so much more valuable than an academic one.”

Jan Greenman (2010)
Life at the Edge and Beyond: Living with ADHD and Asperger Syndrome” London: Jessica Kingsley

Key messages

See the young person as a partner in their learning and build on their strengths. Challenge stereotypes, avoid making assumptions and have high expectations.

Help young people with autism to help themselves to become more independent learners.

It is important that the curriculum is relevant and meaningful to the aspirations’ of young people with autism, and prioritises learning which will enable them to lead the lives they want.

Use real life situations for learning wherever possible.

Top tips

Following these will help you to reduce the anxiety a young person may be experiencing and will enable them to work more effectively in a welcoming and safe environment.

1. Ensure that learning goals are relevant to the young person’s needs and aspirations.
2. Teaching/training strategies and staff responses need to be differentiated to support the learning of young people with autism.
3. Ensure expectations are ambitious but realistic and individual to the young person. Provide learning activities which ensure continued motivation and success.





“If we listen to what autistic people tell us about autism, then one of the first things that we learn is that even though they may describe a war, or a battle with autism, autism in itself is not the problem. Their relationship with us and the environment is.”

Christine Breakey (2006)

The Autism Spectrum and Further education. A guide to Good Practice. London: Jessica Kingsley

Key messages

Sensory and communication differences can cause young people with autism to experience stress and anxiety.

Young people with autism may find change difficult.

Providing structure can help reduce their levels of anxiety.

The learning environment needs to be adapted to better meet the needs of the young people with autism.

Creating safe spaces and using a low arousal (calm and quiet) approach can help young people with autism to manage their anxiety.

If your setting works well for young people with autism it is likely to work well for everyone.

Top tips

Following these will help you to reduce the anxiety a young person may be experiencing and will enable them to work more effectively in a welcoming and safe environment.

1. Check the environment for potential sensory distractions for individual young people with autism (flickering lights, strong smells, noises, busy spaces).
2. Use visual cues such as objects, symbols, pictures or written words to support a young person's understanding of an activity. Use language that is clear, precise and concrete. Ensure a young person has understood the information given to them.
3. Use timetables to help the young person predict what is happening next and to inform them of any changes to the usual routine.

