

# AUTISM

This fact sheet has been written by parent carers for parent carers.  
Clinical information has been approved by West Sussex practitioners.



## What is autism?

Autism is a lifelong developmental disorder that affects how a person communicates and interacts with other people, and makes sense of the world around them. Autism is a spectrum disorder, which means that although all people with autism have difficulties with certain things, the degree to which they are affected varies widely. Together, different types of autism are sometimes known as autistic spectrum conditions (ASCs). Around 1 in 100 people in the UK are known to have autism, with many more boys diagnosed than girls.

However, better understanding of how Autism presents in girls is now leading to an increase in the number of girls and women being diagnosed.

## Characteristics of autism

People with autism share difficulties in three areas. These are:

- Difficulty with social communication.
- Difficulty with social interaction, including reading emotions and facial expressions.
- Difficulty with social imagination.

Together, these three difficulties are known as the 'triad of impairments'. People with autism may also have sensory issues, with noise sensitivity being very common. Some people with autism also develop unusual and repetitive patterns of behaviour and obsessive interests.

People who are on the autistic spectrum may have varying degrees of learning disabilities. They may also have other conditions such as: attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD); dyspraxia, which affects co-ordinating thoughts and movements; hypermobility syndrome; epilepsy or Tourette's syndrome.

## Causes of autism

At the moment, the causes of autism are still unknown, although many experts believe that it may be the result of a number of different genetic and environmental factors.

## Types of therapy

There is no 'cure' for autism but there are a number of therapies that may help your child. Some therapies like ABA are controversial and divide opinion so we would strongly recommend discussing any potential therapies with your child's paediatrician or GP first:

- **Applied Behavioural Analysis (ABA)** – intensive therapy which breaks down skills into small tasks and teaches them in a highly structured way.
- **Positive Behaviour Support** – person-centred approach to identifying and meeting a person's support needs, commonly used with people with a learning disability
- **Social Stories** – short stories that teach children and adults with Autism what to expect in social situations or activities.
- **Speech and Language Therapy (SALT)** – specialist support provided by a therapist to help build language and communications skills.
- **TEACCH** – highly structured system of learning based on using visual prompts, which have found to be beneficial in teaching people with autism.
- **There are a number of 'alternative' therapies** available to treat children and adults with autism, some of which have little scientific proof of their effectiveness. It is advisable to consult your paediatrician or GP before proceeding with any therapy for your child.





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### Ask About

- **Aspens** – Autism charity in West Sussex offering behavioural advice services, parent workshops, children's groups and sibling support. Visit [www.aspens.org.uk](http://www.aspens.org.uk), or call: **01892 822 168**.
- **Autism and Social Communication Team (ASCT)** – Specialist teachers that schools can refer to for expert advice about the educational, social and emotional development of pupils with Autistic Spectrum Conditions or Social Communication Difficulties. See: <https://westsussex.local-offer.org/services/114-autism-and-social-team-inclusion>.
- **Disability Living Allowance (DLA)** – your child may qualify for DLA, a state benefit that will help with their care. For further information visit: [www.gov.uk/disability-living-allowance-children](http://www.gov.uk/disability-living-allowance-children).
- **Facebook support groups** – Autism by the Sea, Autism Support Crawley, Autism Parent Carer Group West Sussex, Bognor Regis Autism & SEND Support, Mid Sussex Parents of Children with Autism, Parenting Autism Together in Horsham, Reaching Families, SEND Support Sussex.
- **Learning and Behaviour Advisory Team (LBAT)** – Offers consultation & training to schools around learning and behaviour when a pupil's progress is being affected by these issues. Ask your child's school for details & visit: <https://westsussex.local-offer.org/services/229>.
- **Portage** – a home-based educational programme for very young children, tailored to individual needs: Crawley & East Grinstead: **01293 572480**, Chichester & Horsham: **01243 536182**, Mid Sussex: **01444 243150** & Worthing: **01903 242558**. Portage also manages an 'Early Bird' course for parents of under 5s with autism to help develop your child's communication & behaviour.
- **Reaching Families** – provides training, information & other fact sheets related to this topic. We also offer benefits advice, peer support, a Facebook group & handbook (see below) for parent carers of children & young people with SEND in West Sussex: See: [www.reachingfamilies.org.uk](http://www.reachingfamilies.org.uk).
- **Single Point of Access (SPoA) West Sussex** - a dedicated route to access specialist emotional wellbeing and mental health support for those aged 4-17. Anyone can refer to SPoA including children & parent carers. Referrals will be directed to the most appropriate help from Youth Emotional Support, YMCA Dialogue or Sussex Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS). Alternatively, signposting to other sources of support may be given. To make a referral, use the online form at: <https://e-wellbeing.co.uk/support> or Tel: **0300 304 0462**.
- **West Sussex Children's Services** – support from health and social care. If your child is under 18, contact the Integrated Front Door (IFD) for West Sussex Children's Services. Tel: **01403 229900** or email: [WSChildrenservices@westsussex.gov.uk](mailto:WSChildrenservices@westsussex.gov.uk). The IFD is also an entry point for the Children with Disabilities (social care) service for children & young people with severe and/or complex disabilities. Eligibility criteria apply – See: <https://westsussex.local-offer.org/services/265>. For over 18s call the Adults' CarePoint: **01243 642121**, or email: [socialcare@westsussex.gov.uk](mailto:socialcare@westsussex.gov.uk).

### Further reading and useful links

- ***Making Sense of it All: From Birth to Adulthood*** – Reaching Families' handbook for parent carers of children and young people with SEND in West Sussex. This provides essential information on money matters, including claiming DLA and PIP, as well as social care, health, leisure, travel, education and employment. Go to: [www.reachingfamilies.org.uk/guides.html](http://www.reachingfamilies.org.uk/guides.html).
- **Ambitious About Autism** – national charity for children and young people with autism. Visit: [www.ambitiousaboutautism.org.uk](http://www.ambitiousaboutautism.org.uk).
- **National Autistic Society** – [www.autism.org.uk](http://www.autism.org.uk), helpline tel: **0808 800 4104**.
- **NHS Health A-Z** has a section devoted to autism. Go to: [www.nhs.uk/conditions/autism](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/autism).
- **West Sussex Libraries** – For books on this topic available to borrow for free, go to: <https://arena.westsussex.gov.uk/welcome> and search the library catalogue for 'autism'.
- **West Sussex Local Offer** – go to <https://westsussex.local-offer.org> for local services, support and details of *Short Breaks* providers for children & young people aged 0 - 25 years with SEND.

