



# Level 1

Improve outcomes through raising awareness and increased knowledge



**acer** Autism Centre for  
Education and Research  
at Birmingham University

Supported by:  
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**acer** Autism Centre for  
Education and Research

 **OXFORDSHIRE  
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**To give you a better understanding and awareness of autism and the way it affects pupils in school.**

## Learning objectives

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All participants will be able to:

- **Identify the four key areas of difference that need to be taken into account when working with pupils with autism.**
- **Know the importance of understanding the individual pupil with autism and their profile of strengths and weaknesses.**
- **Identify the key areas to help pupils with autism build positive relationships with staff and their peers.**
- **Know that many pupils with autism can be unusually sensitive to everyday sights, sounds, touch, tastes and smells which affects their learning and emotional state.**

## Contents

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- There are 4 themes: **The individual pupil**, **Building relationships**, **Curriculum and learning**, **Enabling environments**.
- **12 Key Messages** reinforced by 5 films, 3 audio clips and 4 diagrams.
- **Activities, case studies, handouts and key resources** may also be used during this session.

## **Level 1 – Making sense of autism**

The background of the slide is a blue-tinted photograph of two young men. They are both wearing clear safety goggles and are looking down at something they are holding in their hands, possibly a small object or a piece of equipment. The man on the left is looking slightly to the left, while the man on the right is looking more directly at the object.

**The individual  
pupil**

**Building  
relationships**

**Curriculum  
and learning**

**Enabling  
environments**

//

**By understanding the hopes, dreams, strengths and weaknesses of autistic people, society can gain a deeper and rounder view of human nature.**

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Lawson, W (1998)  
Life Behind Glass. London: Jessica Kingsley. p.ii.



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

 Film – Dean Beadle discussing his view of autism.

Case Study – Brendan.

Case Study – Lisa.

Case Study – Nadim.

Case Study – David.

Case Study – Sophia.



It is a **spectrum condition**, which means that, while all people with autism share certain features, their condition will affect them in different ways.

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





**There are approximately  
134,000 children  
(or 1 in 100) with autism  
in the UK. This means that if  
you are not already aware  
of a pupil with autism in  
your school it is very likely  
that you will meet a pupil  
with autism at some point  
in your career.**



*Film – AET youth council. Shows range of pupils with autism.*





**//**  
**In an ideal world the education authorities, health professionals and social services will all work together with parents in an attempt to provide support for our unique children and their families. //**

Jackson, J.  
(parent of children with autism) (2003) Multi-coloured  
Mayhem. London: Jessica Kingsley. P.16.

**See the pupil as a partner in the education process and build on their strengths.**

**We cannot take for granted what a pupil can or cannot do.**

 Audio clip – John describing the uneven profile of pupils with autism: IDP.

**Understanding social behaviours and emotions usually develops from birth but pupils with autism do not easily learn or understand the skills involved in building and maintaining relationships.**



What are the key areas we need to be aware of to enable pupils with autism to build relationships with staff and their peers?

**Encourage parents to be actively engaged with school to support their child's progress and ensure information is shared effectively.**

🔊 Audio clip – Sam, a parent talking about home school links for her son Bill.

Activity – Personal space.

**//**  
**For us parents and for our children, every day is precious. Each day at school without the right support creates an added trauma, not only to the child but to the whole family. //**

Jackson, J.  
(parent of children with autism) (2003) Multi-coloured  
Mayhem. London: Jessica Kingsley. P.16.







**It is important for us to understand the individual pupil and how their autism affects them. This can help us understand their behaviour and enable us to work with them effectively.**



*Film – Dean Beadle AET diagnosis DVD discussing school and behaviour.*

**If your school works well for pupils with autism it is likely to work well for other pupils too.**

**//**  
**But inclusion rapidly turns to exclusion if you insist on fitting square pegs into round holes instead of shaping the provision to fit the needs of the pupils.** **//**

Stanton, M. Understanding Autism.

[mikestanton.wordpress.com/my-autism-pages/understanding-autism/](http://mikestanton.wordpress.com/my-autism-pages/understanding-autism/)

What are four key features of a good school for pupils with autism?

# We need to help pupils with autism to help themselves and become independent learners.

🔊 Audio clip – Ian talking about the use of TA support.

Activity – Why does she/he do that?



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**Everything is so busy at school and everyone else, all the kids and all the teachers, seem to have a purpose and I have never quite fathomed out what that purpose is ...It is like beginning a game without knowing any of the rules or password. //**

Luke Jackson (young adult with autism)  
(2002) *Freaks, Geeks and Asperger Syndrome:  
A User Guide to Adolescence.*  
London: Jessica Kingsley. p.114.



**Sensory differences can cause pupils with autism to experience stress and anxiety at school.**



**//**  
**It was easy for me to move into a state of sensory overload and when this happened, it was always difficult to stay among people. //**

Lawson, W. (1998)  
Life Behind Glass. London: Jessica Kingsley. p.3.



*Film – Extract from 'A is for Autism' this describes differences in sensory processing.*



**Pupils with autism find change difficult. Providing structure can help reduce their levels of anxiety.**

How can we structure the learning environment to enable pupils with autism to manage change?

**The learning environment  
needs to be adapted to  
better meet the needs of  
the pupil with autism.  
We need to know and  
listen to pupils with  
autism to understand the  
best way to achieve this.**

 *Film – Helen’s film from the AET website.*

*Activity – Sensory processing.*



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[www.birmingham.ac.uk/research/activity/education/acer](http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/research/activity/education/acer)

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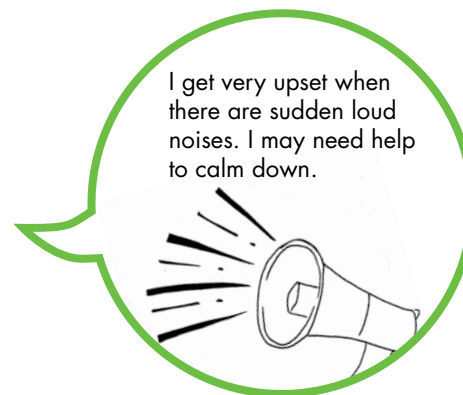
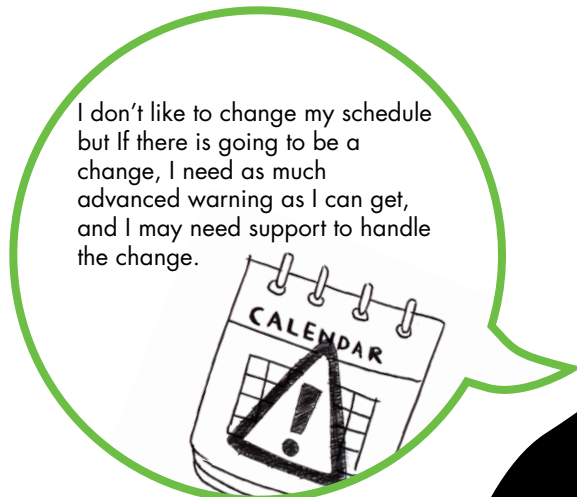
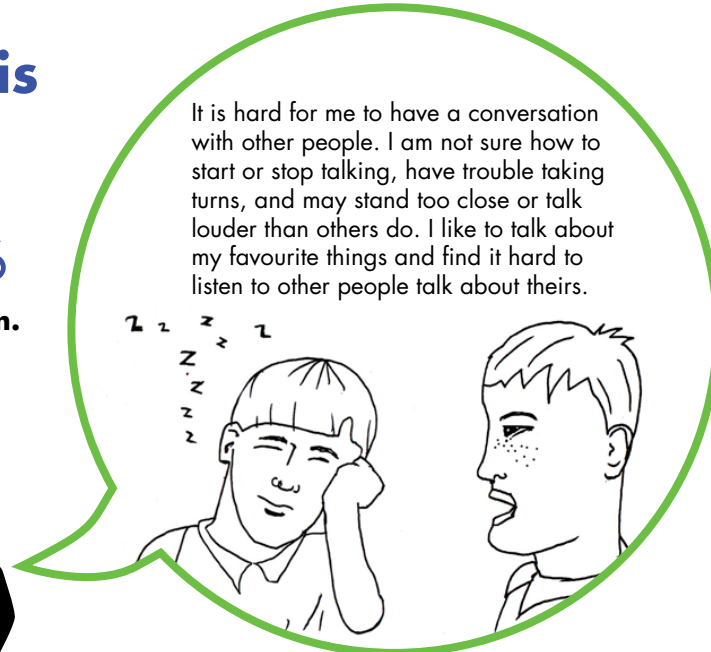
**[www.autismeducationtrust.org.uk/TrainingHubs](http://www.autismeducationtrust.org.uk/TrainingHubs)**



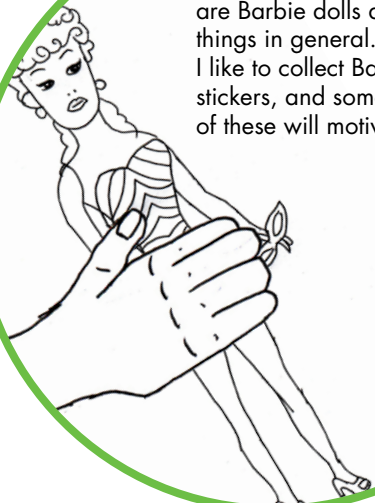
**Hi! My name is  
Brendan.**

**I am 10 years  
old and in Year 6**

**I have a diagnosis of autism.**



My favourite things  
are Barbie dolls and Barbie  
things in general.  
I like to collect Barbie  
stickers, and sometimes one  
of these will motivate me.



**Hi! My name is  
Lisa.**  
I am 7 years old and  
in Year 3

**I have a diagnosis of autism and  
have epileptic seizures sometimes.**

Listen

I AM  
!#@%&?!?  
ANGRY

I have good speech but have  
problems in saying some sounds.  
When I am upset I have trouble  
saying what I mean, and understand  
less of what people say to me. When  
I am anxious or angry it helps if staff  
slow down and keep their speech  
short and to the point.

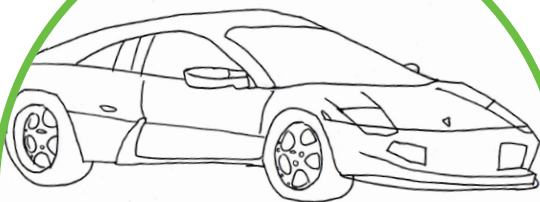
I am very sensitive  
to smells and tastes  
and sometimes  
I can feel quite ill  
with certain smells  
or tastes that do  
not affect other  
children.



I use a picture  
timetable that shows  
which activities I will  
do at school. If I don't  
want to do something,  
sometimes I will try to  
throw or break things.  
I am calmer if I know  
how long an activity  
will take, and what  
will happen next.







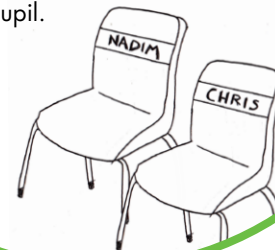
My favourite things are supercars and auto racing! I use pictures and some signs to communicate. When I can't make myself understood, I can get very frustrated and angry.

**Hi! My name is Nadim.**

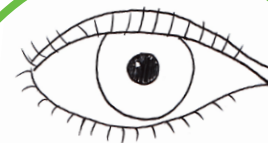
**I am 13 years old and in Year 9**

**I have a diagnosis of autism and learning difficulties.**

I use a picture timetable to show me what I have to do each day. It helps if people keep what they say short and simple, and use pictures and gestures to make sure I understand. It helps me if I use labelled trays and other visual aids, like having my name on my seat and table. I find sharing things and space with other pupils difficult. I need a lot of support to do an activity with another pupil.



Sudden loud noises make me really scared, especially high-pitched noises. I am also sensitive to touch and can be very irritated if something like a seam on my sock is bothering me.



I usually can't tell or show you what is upsetting me, so please could you keep an eye out for things that might do.

I listen to all the football results and like to see how the teams move up and down the league tables. I have a great memory for this information and it makes me feel good.

memory for his information and it makes me feel good.

A hand-drawn illustration of a football record book for the 2011-12 season. The top left features a crest with a lion and the word "THUNDER". To its right, the text "2011-12" is written. Below the crest are two columns labeled "HOME" and "AWAY". The main body of the book is a grid where rows represent matches and columns represent various statistics like goals scored, assists, etc. Some cells contain numbers or letters like "M". On the far left, there's a section with wavy lines, possibly for notes or player names, numbered 1 through 5. A green ribbon-like border frames the bottom and right sides of the drawing.

**Hi! My name is David.**  
I am 15 years old  
and in Year 11.

I love to talk to people about football. I tell my friends at school all the results when I get to school on Monday morning. They sometimes listen to me but other times they walk away. I wish I could figure out how to keep them interested.

I love working in school, especially maths and science. I like it best when I can get on with stuff on my own. Group work makes me annoyed. I get really upset if I make a mistake in my work.



I get very upset about unexpected changes. I need to know in advance if my classes or teachers are changing, and I need lots of time to prepare for things like assemblies or school trips.



I love music and playing the guitar. I play in a band with three boys and we do gigs. Sometimes other people say I'm not a good guitarist on Facebook. Mum says it's because they are jealous. Why don't they set up their own group if they want to play in one?



**Hi! My name is Sophia.**  
I am 17 years old  
and in 6th form

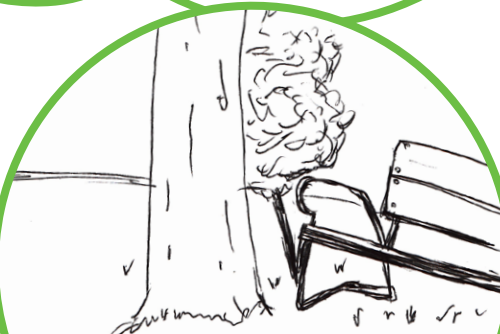
Lunch times are the worst thing about school. All the crowds and smells in the dining room, everybody talking at once and pushing in. Why do people push in? I hate it outside at lunchtimes too because I've been bullied. The bullies always seem to get away with it but they shouldn't.



I like my school work. I'm good at English and humanities. I like to organise my work in coloured files, so that I know where everything is and I don't lose anything.



Sometimes I need a quiet place to go where everybody will leave me alone. Other times I could do with someone to talk to.



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

### **Social communication**

Differences in understanding communication and language, jokes, sarcasm, tone of voice, facial expression and gestures.

### **Social understanding**

Differences in understanding social behaviour, understanding the feelings of others, how to start an informal conversation and forming friendships.

### **Interests and information processing**

Differences in perception, planning, understanding concepts, generalising and predicting, transitions and passions for interests.

### **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).



## What are the key areas we need to be aware of to enable pupils with autism to build relationships with staff and their peers?

### Communication

Pupils with autism and school staff need to learn how to communicate effectively with each other. Staff can change their communication and language to reduce the communication difficulties for pupils with autism.

### Skills

Pupils with autism will need to be taught specific social skills that they have not developed. It is important that they have opportunities to practise these skills in real life social contexts.

### Interests

Pupils with autism often have an area of special interest which they find pleasurable. Using their interests can be a good way to engage with them and provide pupils with the motivation to engage with others.

### Awareness

Raising the awareness and acceptance of staff and peers about difference can support their ability to build relationships with pupils who have autism. This can help to reduce the levels of bullying experienced by pupils with autism.





## Activity – Personal space

- Find a partner.
- You will need to stand up and find a space.
- Stand a metre apart facing each other.
- Walk towards your partner and stop when you begin to feel uncomfortable.
- Now take one more step forward towards your partner.

### Discuss with your partner:

- How did you feel?
- Which lesson in school taught you this?
- How would it affect your life if you had never learnt this skill?



# What are four key features of a good school for pupils with autism?

Staff are **flexible** and willing to make **adjustments** to address the needs of pupils.

Staff work with a **long-term perspective** and prepare the pupils well for the transition to the next phase of education or life.



There are effective systems of **communication** with pupils, staff, parents and outside agencies.

Work is done to enhance the **social inclusion** of pupils with their peers.

## Activity – Why does she/he do that?

Choose one of the pupils from the case studies and consider the following scenario:

**The pupil will not eat their food in the dining hall with other pupils and staff. They may scream and cover their face when taken towards the dining hall or may run around the dining hall and not sit down to eat their lunch.**

**Discuss the following with the person next to you:**

- Why do you think the pupil behaved in that way?
- Think of three things you could do to help the pupil?



# How can we structure the learning environment to enable pupils with autism to manage change?

## Language and comprehension

Use language that is clear, precise and concrete. Ensure a pupil has understood the information given to them.

## Visual cues

Use objects, symbols, pictures or written words to support a pupil's understanding of an activity.

## Timetables

Use these to help pupils predict what is happening next and to inform them of any changes to the usual routine.

## Unstructured times

Provide activities they enjoy either alone or with others at break and lunchtimes to reduce unpredictability.



## Activity – Sensory processing

Find a partner.

Person 1 - You are going to be given a telephone number by the trainer. You will need to remember the telephone number but do not write it down.

Person 2 - Before your partner is given the telephone number you will need to start talking to them about your favourite subject. Continue talking for 1 minute. Then swap roles and do the activity again.

**Imagine being a pupil with autism trying to listen to a teacher but not being able to ignore or filter out other information.**

**Think of three things that might help a pupil with autism to be able to focus better on an activity in school and discuss with your partner.**

