

# Autism Spectrum Conditions (ASC)



Surrey Autism  
Partnership Board

## Introduction

This factsheet aims to give you a basic understanding about people with autism.

People think, process information and experience the world differently. This can lead to difficulties with communication, relationships and thinking & behaving flexibly.

## Each person is different

However, there are common experiences many people with autism share.

People may have a small range of interests that they are very passionate about.

People may have routines they rely on.



People often find it hard to work out what others are thinking and feeling.

People often find the way other people talk and behave confusing.



The world can seem like a mass of people, places and events which are hard to make sense of.

People may get anxious quite often.

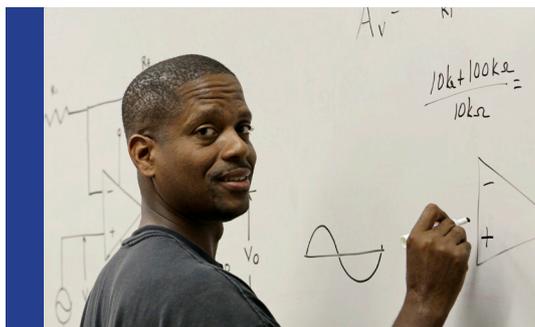


# The autism spectrum

In 2013 the term Autism Spectrum Condition (ASC) was introduced to cover and replace the different conditions previously diagnosed such as Autism and Asperger's Syndrome.

*People can be so different from each other that we think about ASC as a spectrum, like a rainbow.*

Although people's needs may be very different, everyone with an ASC shares a difficulty in making sense of the world.



## Brian has an ASC

- He is very knowledgeable and is doing a physics degree.
- He gets anxious in social situations.
- He has a small group of friends who share his interests.
- He finds it hard to understand other people's feelings.



## Tony has an ASC and a mild learning disability

- He takes words literally and makes mistakes socially such as being over friendly.
- He can sometimes get taken advantage of.
- He likes structure, routine and predictability and gets anxious if things change.



## Sue has an ASC and a profound learning disability

- She doesn't use speech, but signs a little.
- She joins in activities with support, but is often happy on her own.
- She loves going out in the car and walking on a windy day. She finds busy places frightening.

*People may have 'uneven abilities'*

A person may have GCSEs and even be able to drive a car but may still need a lot of support in other areas of life to be independent, such as shopping and cooking. People may have difficulties organising themselves and need support with this.

# There are over 500,000 people with an ASC in the UK

*There is strong evidence to suggest that there are more men than women with an ASC*

- The causes of ASC are still being researched. Many experts believe the pattern of behaviour from which autism is diagnosed may not result from a single cause.
- A lot of people say getting a diagnosis of autism has helped them understand why they have difficulties with some things and are especially good at other things.

## Strengths

People with an ASC have many strengths.



*Many people become experts in their areas of interest*

People with an ASC are often more passionate about their interests than other people.

# Difficulties people may have

## Social interaction and communication



- People may:**
- have difficulty making and keeping friends.
  - not value socialising as much as other people and struggle to understand social rules such as turn taking in conversations.
  - find it hard to understand other people's thoughts, point of view and judge how they are feeling.



- People may:**
- take the meaning of words literally and have difficulty understanding keeping up with group conversations which can be overwhelming.
  - have difficulties understanding and using non verbal communication such as eye contact, tone of voice, gesture and facial expression.

*Social interaction can be exhausting for people.*



- People may:**
- find the social side of work difficult. Things like lunch breaks and training courses have social rules which people can find hard to intuitively understand.
  - be 'on alert' during social events, trying to work out the right way to interact and avoid social mistakes. Being alert the whole time can be very mentally tiring.

See our factsheet on *Communication and social interaction*  
The issues explained on this page are explored in more detail in this factsheet.



# Difficulties people may have

## Interests and routines



Greg spends all day on his hobby

### People may:

- find choice difficult and have a small range of, often solitary, activities which they become absorbed by.
- become very fixated on the activity for hours at a time, ignoring other things they may need to do.
- struggle to imagine something they haven't done before. They can be anxious about doing new things.



Sue doesn't like plans changing

### People may:

- want to have set routines they follow and find unexpected or sudden changes difficult to cope with and get very anxious.
- find unstructured time stressful and find it hard to think of things to do to occupy themselves. People may rely on their routines and interests more than most people.

*People's interests can be a strength as well as a difficulty.*

People can become very skilled and knowledgeable about their interests. Being absorbed in their interest can be a person's most effective way of relaxing. Describing a person's interest as an 'obsession' can be unhelpful.

## Diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Condition (ASC)

A combination of the difficulties a person may have with communication, social interaction, interests and routines are used to diagnose whether people have an ASC.

*See our factsheet on Diagnosis for adults in Surrey*

The diagnostic service in Surrey is explained in detail in this factsheet.



# Difficulties people may have

## Sensory issues

People with an ASC may also perceive noise, light, smells, touch and tastes differently from other people. A person may be over or under sensitive in one or more of their senses.

Tim finds busy places overwhelming.

He doesn't like fluorescent lighting because it seems to flicker.



He doesn't like it when people stand too close to him.

He cuts the labels out of his clothes as they irritate him.

Some of Tim's senses are very sensitive

Aran loves music to be played loudly.

He doesn't notice strong smells and often doesn't realise food has gone off.



He's not aware of personal space and often stands too close to other people.

He likes movement and flaps his hands a lot.

Some of Aran's senses are under sensitive

Some people may need time to familiarise themselves with the sensory feel of a new environment.

## Filtering out the sensory world.

People with an ASC often find it more difficult to filter out background visual stimuli, noises, and even the smells that the world throws at us on daily basis.

A busy environment can feel like it's assaulting a person's senses. For example someone may struggle to focus on a timetable in a busy train station or pick out words in a conversation in a busy bar.

# Difficulties people may have

## Anxiety

*Anxiety is a common issue for people with an ASC.*

People often find the world a confusing place where the rules, and especially people are not consistent. This can lead to high levels of anxiety.



For many people with an ASC an important goal is to reduce the anxiety they feel in a world they often find intense and confusing.

People may need support to develop a range of strategies to help them to manage their anxiety.

### *Some things people may find difficult*

Many people with ASC find it hard to relax. They are constantly on alert trying to make sense of the world around them and its social rules – it can be exhausting.

People may panic and struggle to think of a way out of situations they are finding difficult.

People may have difficulty understanding their own emotions so at times do not realise they are feeling worried until it becomes overwhelming.

People may find it hard to switch off their mind and try to relax. Their mind can just keep going over the same thing again and again.

People may find it difficult to organise themselves and struggle to meet deadlines at work or college which causes stress.

People often like things to be correct and certain. They may worry a lot about minor details that others don't see as important.

People may worry about making social mistakes, or how they will manage a social event.



*See our factsheet on Useful Strategies For Life*  
Strategies for managing anxiety are explored in this factsheet.

# Useful websites

[www.autism.org.uk](http://www.autism.org.uk)

- The website of the National Autistic Society.

[www.nassurreybranch.org](http://www.nassurreybranch.org)

- The website of the National Autistic Society Surrey branch.



[www.surreypb.org.uk](http://www.surreypb.org.uk)

- The website of the Surrey Autism Partnership Board. Click the Surrey Autism Partnership Board logo on the home page of the learning disability partnership board site to go to our pages.

*There are seven factsheets in our series about Autism Spectrum Conditions.*

You can download our factsheets from [www.surreypb.org.uk](http://www.surreypb.org.uk)

This is the website of the Learning Disability and Surrey Autism Partnership Board



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5. Social care and community life
6. Health services and support
7. Our stories - three stories from people with ASC

## Credits

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