

Individuals with ASD are described as single channelled and have an inability to channel information in a multi-channelled way. They only seem to hear part of the sentence or a certain word and process information at a much slower rate.

As individuals with ASD find the world around them confusing and hard to relate to they tend to favour routine and predictability and find changes to their routine very hard to cope with. Change or the concept of change results in high anxiety levels and subsequent unwanted or challenging behaviour.

ASD is a complex disorder which is on a continuum. Therefore individuals with ASD are very different. However, they all experience these core deficits and differences and will need careful support, understanding and tuition if they are to be able to make sense of and communicate with the world around them and subsequently reach their full potential.

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County Durham Autistic Support Group

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Autism Spectrum Disorders

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County Durham Autistic Support Group

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is thought to be a neurobiological condition which impacts on the individual's development. It is a pervasive developmental disorder which affects the way an individual relates and communicates with the world around them. Autism is a spectrum disorder which includes individuals diagnosed with Autism, Autism Spectrum Disorders, High Functioning Autism and Asperger Syndrome. Individuals vary from those with learning disability to those with average or above average IQ's.

Diagnostically individuals with ASD experience difficulties in three main areas: social communication, social interaction and imagination or flexibility of thought. This is referred to as the triad of impairments. They also experience differences with processing the world around them in terms of sensory input and this often results in odd responses to sensory stimuli.

ASD is a disorder of communication rather than language so the language level of the individual does not relate to their ability to understand or use social communication. The use of speech varies in individuals with ASD from no speech at all in about 20% of individuals with autism to those with a very good level of language. Individuals with ASD do not see the purpose of language and therefore communicate only to have their needs met because they have no appreciation of social uses of language or communication. As a result of this impairment they tend to talk at people but not with them

and come across odd and often inappropriate. Their speech can be very stereotyped and they often use words in a ritualistic way which makes them appear pompous or rude.



Individuals with ASD also lack the ability of understanding of facial expression, gestures and language emphasis such as tone and pitch of voice. This means that they miss or fail to interpret much of the communicative information and meaning of communication of others around them. They tend to ask for

things to fulfil their needs but find it hard to appreciate the needs of others as they also experience what is described as a lack of theory of mind. This lack of theory of mind means that they have no idea of other people's feelings or thoughts and will take things very literally. Individuals with ASD do not recognise their own or the emotions of others so they cannot identify emotional states and respond appropriately. They therefore have difficulty understanding concepts such as humour and cannot understand mental states, beliefs, or the intentions of others.



This lack of theory of mind results in a limited ability to play imaginatively with toys or objects and with other people and often results in the use of copied, rigid and repetitive activities. This problem with imagination and understanding creative activities creates a need for sameness, obsessions and problems with 'change'. They also experience problems with generalising learned experiences and cannot transfer automatically one learned experience from one environment to another.

Due to the problems with social interaction individuals with ASD can appear indifferent to other people and often aloof. Or they will approach other people but appear odd or inappropriate as they don't pay attention to the responses of others. Some can also appear uninterested in the world around them or withdrawn. This results in characteristics such as not making eye contact, appearing not to listen and often not responding to their name. Individuals with ASD often want to socialise but find it hard as they cannot read facial expression, gestures and understand the non-verbal signs involved in social communication.

Their sensory differences and processing difficulties mean that individuals with ASD focus on small aspects of the world instead of the seeing the 'whole thing'. They often have unusual reactions to pain or pleasure and don't like being touched by others or will touch others inappropriately. They also experience problems with environmental input and experience sensory overload which can result in violent or aggressive behaviour or 'meltdowns'.