

Children and Young People

Autism Support Recommendations

For Children and Young People aged 6-18 Years Old and
their Families

LAST UPDATED SEPTEMBER 2025



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We have included lots of information in this leaflet, covering many areas, so you can revisit as needed and your child's needs develop.

You don't need to read it all at once but can refer to this booklet or sections of it, now and in the future.



SECTION 1

Talking to your child about Autism

Finding out your child is autistic can be a life-changing moment for many parents/carers. You may have a lot of questions, concerns and emotions as you try to navigate this new path. It's important to remember that you are not alone in this journey, and there are resources and support available to you and your child.

As parents/carers, you are best placed to judge how and whether these conversations are right for your child in the future. When appropriate, it's important for children to know that they're autistic because it helps them understand who they are, particularly in relation to their peers. They need to know they are not alone; they are part of a larger diverse autistic community. However, there is no "best" time to start talking to your child. Be guided by when you feel ready and when your child is starting to ask questions.

You may also notice other signs that your child is ready to learn more, such as negative self talk, comparing themselves to others and asking questions like, 'Why am I different?' You can find out more about negative self talk here: <https://www.todaysparent.com/family/parenting/how-to-build-your-childs-self-esteem/>

Here are some suggestions from 'Acorn Autism Specialists' Anita Aherne, 2022 on how to explain to your child that they are autistic.

- 'Start with an open, honest discussion and keep it open'
- 'Talk about autism, strengths and differences in a positive way'
- 'Watch some videos from autistic individuals'
- 'Encourage your child to be themselves'
- 'Give them the choice of if they want to tell their friends'

Avoid telling your child everything at once, give small amounts of information and allow them to come back and ask questions at a later stage.

It should be on your child's terms who they choose to tell and when. Your child may want to tell their friends, or they may not. It is important for them to be comfortable in making these choices when and if they are ready. They might need time to understand and be comfortable with the diagnosis themselves before they tell others. Parents/carers may also want to support their child to practise what they could say about being autistic.

Websites that can guide you further on how and when to share with your child that they are autistic:

- <https://www.autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/topics/diagnosis/disclosing-your-autism/parents-and-carers>
- <https://www.acorn-autism.co.uk/how-to-explain-an-autism-diagnosis-to-my-child>
- https://autismwestmidlands.org.uk/wpcontent/uploads/2020/07/Talking_About_Autism_With_Your_Child_July_2020.pdf

Recommended websites and books

Recommended Websites

- 'Amazing Things Happen' is a short animated video which provides an uplifting introduction to autism. The video explains how every brain works and processes things differently and encourages embracing difference. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RbwRrVw-CRo>
- <https://neuroclastic.com/> (autism according to autistic people) shares free, accessible resources for autistic people and non-autistic parents, educators, service providers, partners, and other people who interact with autistic people. Articles shared are written by autistic people.
- The Curly Hair Project website offers alternative ways to explore autism along with some helpful tips: <https://thegirlwiththecurlyhair.co.uk/>

Books about Autism

- 'Beating Anxiety: What young people on the Autistic Spectrum need to know' by Davida Hartman
- 'Developing Differently: A Guide for Parents of Young Children with Global Developmental Delay, Intellectual Disability, or Autism' Dr Joshua Muggleton
- 'I Am Aspiengirl: The Unique Characteristics, Traits and Gifts of Females on the Autism Spectrum' by Tania Marshall
- 'Diagnosis Asparagus' by Catherine O'Halloran and Eva Penrose
- 'Aspergirls' by Rudy Simone

There are a number of fiction books, written by neurodivergent authors that young people may connect with, including:

- Books written by Elle McNicoll. Titles to date are "Show me who you are" and "A kind of Spark" <https://ellemcnicoll.com>
- Young author Libby Scott has also written a series of fiction stories, and she also presents a number of youtube videos and Twitter blogs. Titles of books include "Can you see me?" and "Ways to be me" and "All the Pieces of me" — Libby Scott Author (@BlogLibby) / Twitter
- The "Can You See Me?" series, by Libby Scott & Rebecca Westcott are books written for girls, age 9+ and are also available as audiobooks.

Emotional regulation and siblings

Emotional Regulation

Autistic children may have a greater need for a sense of control over their environment. You can help them to feel a sense of autonomy in their lives by:

- Engaging them in decision processes
- Trying not to fix everything on behalf of the young person
- Supporting them through meltdowns in order to build up resilience
- During meltdowns, the focus should be on supporting the young person to feel safe and calm
- Once the meltdown has ended and the young person is calm, then you may be able to talk about the issue and problem solve retrospectively. If the child/young person is struggling to do so verbally then that can be done so non verbally, for example, through 'Talking Mats' <https://www.talkingmats.com/>

It might help the young person to understand their social energy levels. Social energy refers to how much we are able to join in with social interactions. This is different for everyone and can change depending on things like tiredness, hunger, mental health, physical health etc. If there is an overload of social or sensory information then social energy reduces faster. This can also happen when we need to "focus" more in an environment. Learning how to understand their own social energy levels might help the young person to increase their tolerance of social situations. You can learn more about social energy by searching online for "Alis Rowe".

Your child may benefit from having the opportunity to meet with other autistic young people who can provide a positive role model. Ideally this would include access to neurodiverse 'mentors'. Talking about autistic celebrities could also help your child feel represented and encouraged to view their diagnosis positively.

Young people can benefit from psychoeducation sessions which support them in understanding their autistic identity as an explanation for some of their current feelings, behaviours and interactions with the outside world. Equally, if your child attends a school or education setting, they may be able to access counselling or therapeutic support there to help them to first recognise and then to regulate their emotions.

Goblin tools is an app and website aimed at young people with a range of different tools to support executive functioning, for example breaking down tasks to the desired level of detail, generating recipes, and analysing the tone of written communication, among others. <https://goblin.tools/>

Support for siblings

Siblings will also benefit from jointly exploring and understanding Autism. Links for further information, including recommended books:

<https://www.autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/topics/family-life-and-relationships/family-life/siblings>
<https://www.sibs.org.uk/supporting-young-siblings/parents/>

SECTION 6

Female and People who Menstruate Specific

It may be helpful if information about puberty is given to a young person in advance to help them cope with the changes. This will allow for the opportunity to ask questions and make checklists or routines for managing periods and other related changes. Research suggests that autistic people who menstruate may be more likely to experience increased [sensory sensitivities](#), including:

- Sensitivity to the smell and sight of menstrual blood
- The body or skin feeling more sensitive in general
- Sensory overload occurring more frequently just before and during menstruation
- Increased emotions and differences with emotional self-regulation which may lead to burn out.
- Increased executive function differences (impacting on knowing what to do and how to do things)
- Excessive menstruation symptoms, including unusually painful periods and heavy menstrual bleeding.

Keeping a diary or using a period tracking app, (or using chart which can be downloaded for free from the following website: <https://www.redschool.net/chart>) to track their emotions and physical changes during their cycle. This can help to recognise and understand when, how and why their emotions and body change through the 4 stages (or internal seasons) of a cycle, supporting a deeper understanding of how to harness their hormones.

It may be a journey deciding on what sanitary products work best. Many autistic people report that period pants are helpful in managing their periods, as they are much better from a sensory perspective than pads and you don't have to remember to change them in the middle of the day, e.g., at school.

Useful resources include:

- <https://www.autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/topics/physical-health/menstruation#Autism%20and%20menstruation>
- 'What's Happening to Ellie?: A book about puberty for girls and young women with autism and related conditions' by Kate E. Reynolds.
- 'Things Ellie likes: A book about sexuality and masturbation for girls and young people with Autism and related conditions' by Kate E. Reynolds.
- 'Girls growing up on the Autism Spectrum: What parents and professionals should know about the pre-teen and teenage years.' By Shana Nichols with Gina Marie Moravick and Samara Pulver Tetenbaum.
- 'The autism-friendly guide to periods' by Robyn Steward.
- 'Taking care of myself; a healthy hygiene, puberty and personal curriculum for young people and autism' by Mary Wrobel. (For older teens and adults)
- 'Period Power-Harness your hormones and get your cycle working for you' by Maisie Hill.

Male specific and mental health support

Male Specific

Given the strength in visual skills for autistic individuals, information about body changes in puberty is best given in a visual way. A social story is the ideal format for this. A social story can be personalised to the individual adolescent, and a separate social story can be written for each of the body changes the individual can expect.

Sheffield Children's Hospital have produced detailed support resources here:

https://library.sheffieldchildrens.nhs.uk/puberty-and-autism-in-boys/#cmtoc_anchor_id_1

Additional Useful Resources:

- Things Tom Likes: A book about sexuality and masturbation for boys and young men with Autism and related conditions. By Kate E. Reynolds.
- What's happening to Tom?: A book about puberty for boys and young men with Autism and related conditions by Kate E. Reynolds.
- The growing up book for boys: What boys on the Autism Spectrum need to know! by David Hartman.
- Taking care of myself: a healthy hygiene, puberty and personal curriculum for young people with autism by Mary Wrobel.

Supported Loving is a relatively new organisation which offers information and support to neurodiverse people around safe relationships, sexual/reproductive health and education: <https://choicesupport.org.uk/about-us/what-we-do/supported-loving>

Mental Health Support

Children and young people may want to access Mental Health Support services:

- **Shout** is a 24/7 text service, free on all major mobile networks, for anyone in crisis anytime, anywhere. It's a place to go if you're struggling to cope and you need immediate help. Text 85258
- **Night Owls** is an overnight (8pm-8am) listening and advice service. It is a confidential support line for children and young people. They can call 0800 1488 244 or text 07984 392700 or chat online at <https://www.islcs.org.uk/services/night-owls-helpline/>
- **Kooth** is an online resource for young people aged 11-18 where you can access free, anonymous mental health and well-being support. <https://kooth.com>
- The **MindMate** website has a lot of useful emotional wellbeing information, as well as links to other relevant services relating to children and young people's emotional wellbeing and mental health. <https://www.mindmate.org.uk>
- **Calm Zone by ChildLine** - breathing exercises, activities, games and videos to help let go of stress: <https://www.childline.org.uk/toolbox/calm-zone/>
- **Young Minds** has practical tips and advice for young people for managing and understanding their feelings, along with advice about mental health and support with speaking to someone. <https://www.youngminds.org.uk/>
- Due to differences in how they process information and understand abstract concepts, autistic children may have specific challenges in terms of how they respond to a death or bereavement: <https://www.childbereavementuk.org/supporting-a-bereaved-child-who-is-autistic>

Recommendations for School

We would recommend that the young persons' school is informed of their assessment outcome and a meeting is held to discuss plans for additional support at school, as new adjustments may be necessary.

The Ambitious About Autism website provides a useful toolkit which can be downloaded free of charge: <https://www.ambitiousaboutautism.org.uk/what-we-do/connecting-young-people/youth-led-toolkits/know-your-normal>. This document could be worked through with a trusted adult at school as well as with parents/carers at home.

In the long term, it is important that mental health and changes in mood are monitored by the young person and those around them in order to know when to provide additional support. A further free downloadable programme that 'Ambitious About Autism' offer specifically for secondary schools includes 'Autistic and Ok' which aims to build a whole-school community where autistic pupils feel understood and accepted: <https://www.ambitiousaboutautism.org.uk/what-we-do/connecting-young-people/youth-led-toolkits/autistic-and-ok>

School may want to consider implementing an 'energy accounting system' to review what the 'drains' and 'sustains' are for the individual. This could be based on sensory processing differences, interests and self-identified methods of self-regulation.

This website provides information and support for children experiencing school attendance problems and barriers to learning: <https://notfineinschool.co.uk/>



School strategies and emotional regulation

Strategies which autistic young people have found to be helpful are:

- Flexibility within the school timetable and length of day.
- Slow transitions which are agreed and predictable (so as to reduce uncertainty).
- A focus on building feelings of trust and safety with staff.
- The use of clear, specific language and for staff to allow time for possible processing delay (e.g. giving the individual more time to respond to questions).
- The use of visual materials such as a visual timetable or increased access to methods of recording information.
- For large tasks to be broken down into smaller chunks.
- To think about alternative ways for the young person to communicate if they need help with something, as they may find it difficult to independently ask for help.
- A quiet space for the young person to withdraw to if needed.
- Alternative areas to go to at break time if the young person does not feel able to interact with their peers.

Emotional Regulation Focused

It could be useful for school to focus on developing your child's emotional recognition and regulation skills as opposed to a focus on academic achievement or 'behaviour management'. For example, a Zones of Regulation approach could be used to enable more effective communication of emotional state. This is a framework that develops awareness of feelings, energy and alertness levels while exploring a variety of tools and strategies for regulation, prosocial skills, self-care, and overall wellness. It is a visual tool that allows young people to think and talk about how they feel on the inside and sorts these feelings into four coloured Zones. This may need to be adapted to be appropriate for individual levels of understanding.

<https://zonesofregulation.com/how-it-works/>

The Incredible 5 Point Scale is a resource aimed at teaching self-regulation and self-management of emotions and interpersonal abilities. Further information can be found at: <https://www.5pointscale.com>

It would be helpful for school to work towards increasing self-regulation strategies. This may include:

- Exploring activities which develop the 'mind-body' link, for example, yoga, drumming and sensory calming activities.
- Encouraging creative expression, for example, dance and movement.
- Supporting time to build upon individual strengths and interests.
- Mindfulness practice has been shown to improve interoception (knowing our internal senses and feelings). This could be done by using apps (Headspace/ Calm), online resources or by a trusted individual reading a script.

Sensory Differences

Once individual needs are better understood, 'Sensory Circuits' can be a useful way to provide some of the sensory feedback that they are seeking. The circuit should involve a physical activity that the young person enjoys and consist of a sequence of repeatable activities that provide them with the sensory feedback they are seeking. The idea is to start with something alerting, move to an organisation stage and then finally to a calming phase, to help prepare for tasks and engage in daily activities. Ideally, the circuit should be completed first thing in the morning, however some children may require more circuits throughout the day.

Trialling the use of fidget toys, wiggle seats, sensory rooms, sensory toys, 'Chewelry', ear defenders and trampolines can also be beneficial.

Advice and support for families of young autistic children to care for their teeth: <https://www.autismtoothcare.com/>

In addition to the family unit developing their understanding of a child's sensory processing differences, it is important that school understands the young person's specific strengths and differences too. Not only does this provide staff with an awareness of the impact that the environment has on the young person's emotional regulation, but it informs potential adaptations (such as a tailored low sensory environment). One useful method to understand a child's sensory needs is building sensory diaries and/or profiles, as they can inform the development of a 'sensory routine'.

The 'Autism Education Trust' (AET) offer a sensory audit template which helps school staff to assess and create an environment that enables the participation of autistic pupils.

More information on understanding sensory behaviour can be found at:
<https://www.autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/topics/sensory-differences/sensory-differences/all-audiences>

The Autism Education Trust (AET) website contains a range of training resources for schools and parents. AET offers both online resources for professionals, as well as a search engine for local training partners; <https://www.autismeducationtrust.org.uk/>

Food, eating and changing schools

Food and Eating

An autistic child or young person might be avoiding and/or restricting their food for a number of different reasons. The most common is that they might be very sensitive to the taste, texture, smell, or appearance of certain types of food, or only able to eat foods at a certain temperature. This can lead to sensory-based avoidance or restriction of intake.

Common challenges with eating amongst autistic children may include the following: Only eating a limited range of foods, refusing new foods/textures, not being able to eat outside the home, going long periods of time without eating, under/over eating, not interested in/able to feed themselves, subtypes of ARFID (Avoidant Restrictive Food Intake Disorder) and Pica (eating non foods).

More information regarding ARFID and ARFID type presentations can be found here:

<https://www.beateatingdisorders.org.uk/get-information-and-support/about-eating-disorders/types/arfid/>

The West Yorkshire Health and Care Partnership website has co-produced resources addressing (school) transitions, sleep, and eating, with top tips and suggestions to help neurodiverse children and young people find what's best for them. They emphasise reducing pressure and encourage young people to take their own path, with accessible videos, booklets and audio recordings:

<https://www.wypartnership.co.uk/our-priorities/mental-health-learning-disability-and-autism/neurodiversity/routes-and-routines>

Transition to Secondary School/Changing Schools

The National Autistic Society provides a guide containing advice for starting or switching schools in England.

This guide may be particularly helpful for parents with children transitioning to secondary school and covers topics such as preparing for change, managing anxiety and useful strategies to support your child. The guide also provides tips for parents on communicating with staff, what parents should expect from the school, and signposts further resources. The guide can be found here: <https://www.autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/topics/transitions/england/starting-or-switching-school>

Next steps, **sleep and financial** support

Transitioning into the Workplace or Further Education

- There is information on the department for work and pensions government website about the welfare support and benefits which are available to individuals whose working lives are impacted by neurodiversity: <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-work-pensions>
- SCOPE has a support to work programme. Their programme, Starting Line is designed to support neurodiverse individuals at the start of their journey into work too. <https://www.scope.org.uk/employment-services/support-to-work/>
- Student Minds works with students to develop their knowledge, confidence and skills to look after their own mental health. They have resources on challenges that student life can bring, including starting university, exam stress and mental wellbeing. They also offer peer support programmes and support finding on campus services: <https://www.studentminds.org.uk/>

Sleep

Autistic children and young people can often have trouble sleeping. There are a range of reasons for this including differences with relaxing or winding down, transition between day and nighttime routines and differences in melatonin levels. Advice on sleep can be found at:

<https://cerebra.org.uk/get-advice-support/sleep-advice-service/>
<https://www.autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/topics/physical-health/sleep>
<https://www.scope.org.uk/family-services/sleep-right>

Financial Support

There is information on the National Autistic Society website about the benefits available to families with autistic children under 16. For example, Disability Living Allowance, Carer's Allowance and Income Support. For more information, please visit: <https://www.autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/topics/benefits-and-money/benefits/benefits-you-can-get/benefits-for-autistic-children>

SCOPE offers respite care for parents and carers. If parent carers feel that this would be beneficial for them, they could look into applying for a needs assessment from the Local Authority:

<https://www.scope.org.uk/advice-and-support/finding-respite-care-short-breaks/>

Further Recommendations for Parent Carers

We all have a 'stress bucket', with experiences that fill it (add to stress levels) and strategies to help empty it (reduce stress/ self-soothe). By noticing these things, we can try to stop our bucket overflowing (having meltdowns), and learn new ways of coping.

An approach called "Kids Skills" could be useful. The principle of this is that any problem is a skill that is not yet learned. There is a website that you can use to guide you through the process: <https://www.kidsskills.org>

Some autistic people have described their experiences as being like a 'wrong planet syndrome'. They see that there is an enormously complicated set of rules and expectations about how people should behave, that nobody ever taught them. This is true – there are lots of social rules that we don't teach children, and that many children learn them through watching, copying and understanding why other people behave in certain ways. Autistic people tend to focus on facts more than the (confusing and vague) social aspects of situations. In a way, this is like being left in a foreign country without a translator – the language may sometimes be familiar, but the culture can be bewildering. The word autism can therefore help families to support the translation and know where to find the guidebooks that might be most relevant. The Wrong Planet website has a range of helpful resources and articles, some of which have been created for parents; <https://wrongplanet.net/>

Playing games together as a family can help build skills like turn-taking, accepting advice, delayed gratification, working in a team, managing disappointment, attentiveness and negotiating conflicts. Recognise that playing (and losing) games can be really hard for many children, and build up from games of chance to more strategic games. The book "The Asperkid's Launchpad" by Jennifer Cook O'Toole describes the benefits of playing together more fully. Being mindful that (developmentally speaking) board games where there is a clear winner can be tricky for any child up until the age of 9 years.

You can help your child to work out systems that make sense to them to monitor and express their emotions. This might include specific tools (such as emotion cards and Zones of Regulation), or planned process flows for a sequence of actions (first, second, third) to aid with planning which might be difficult for them.

Social stories can be used to support autistic individuals to manage new situations or identify emotional change. It could be helpful to purchase one of the Carol Gray, Social Stories books as this information could be used to support your child in managing daily activities.

Parent Carer Resources

- 'How to Raise Happy Neurofabulous Children' A parent's Guide by Katy Elphinstone
- Aim Higher is a charity which empowers families with autistic children and provides workshops, guidance, activities and support groups: <https://www.aimhighercharity.com/>
- SENSational Life is an autism parent/carer support group on Facebook, with tips, expert speakers and autistic advice: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/2267354546611746/>
- Dr Susan Young has a YouTube channel which offers expert advice on helping your child to manage a variety of difficulties: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC_4Y8vebbp_7jOxxH6PGd-g?app=desktop
- The Centre for Autism website also has some useful video resources for managing different situations; <https://best-practice.middletownautism.com/links-and-resources/videos//>
- For parent carers of children who present as anxious: 'Love in Love Out: A Compassionate Approach to Parenting an Anxious Child' by Dr Malie Coyne.
- The Charlie Waller website has a PDF booklet, 'Supporting a child with anxiety' which is available for download, free of charge: <https://charliewaller.org/resources/supporting-a-child-with-anxiety>



More questions?

If you have any questions about these recommendations, please get in touch — we are happy to help.

Contact Us ↗