

The logo features a stylized orange star with a white outline on the left. To its right, the word "ASCEND" is written in large, bold, orange-outlined letters. Below "ASCEND", the words "Parent Course" are written in a smaller, orange-outlined font.

ASCEND

Parent Course

NAME:

CHILDS NAME:

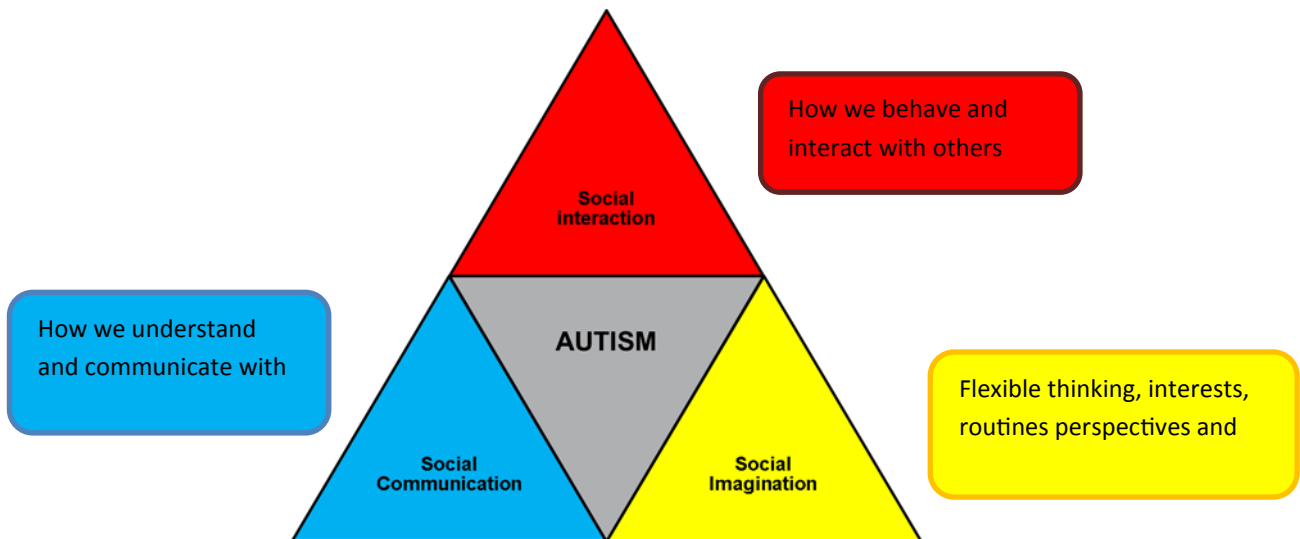


Central London
Community Healthcare

What is autism?

We each have our own set of strengths and difficulties.

Autism describes a particular pattern of difficulties across three main areas.



The way we understand the world depends on how our brain processes all of the information streaming through our senses. People who have autism process this information in a different way meaning that they perceive their world and communicate with others in a way that may be considered unusual or different.

These differences can make everyday life very tough for a person who has autism; their responses to situations may seem unexpected, unusual and sometimes challenging.

What causes autism?

Autism is referred to as a lifelong neurodevelopmental condition; this means it is present from birth and results from differences in brain development.

The exact cause of autism is still being investigated. Research suggests that a combination of factors (genetic and environmental) may be account for changes in brain development.

What we do know is that autism is not caused by a person's upbringing or social circumstances, and it's not anyone's fault.

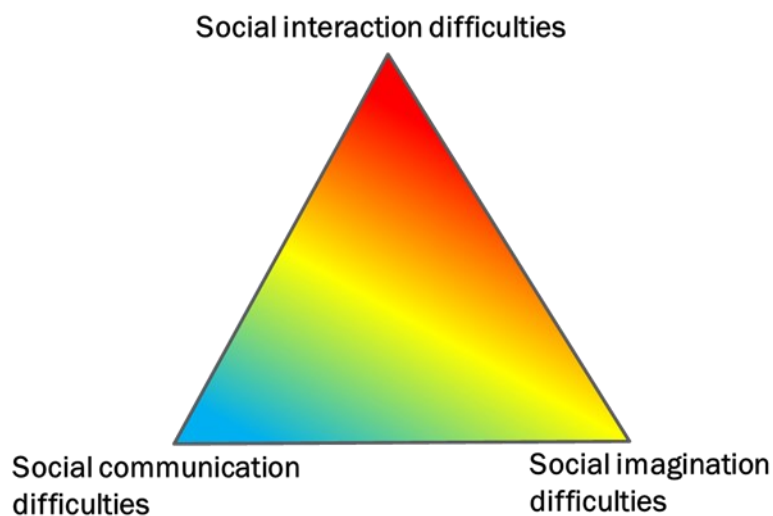
Is my child's autism "mild" or "severe"?

All people with autism share three main areas of difficulty. The extent to which these difficulties impact on their life will vary according to a number of factors, for example:

- Personality i.e. resilience
- Language skills i.e. their ability to communicate their needs to others
- Any other conditions that affect information processing e.g. ADHD
- Social factors e.g. whether they have the opportunity to socialise

A person may develop skills that help them manage or cope with their difficulties in certain situations and they may be better able to use these skills on some occasions more than others.

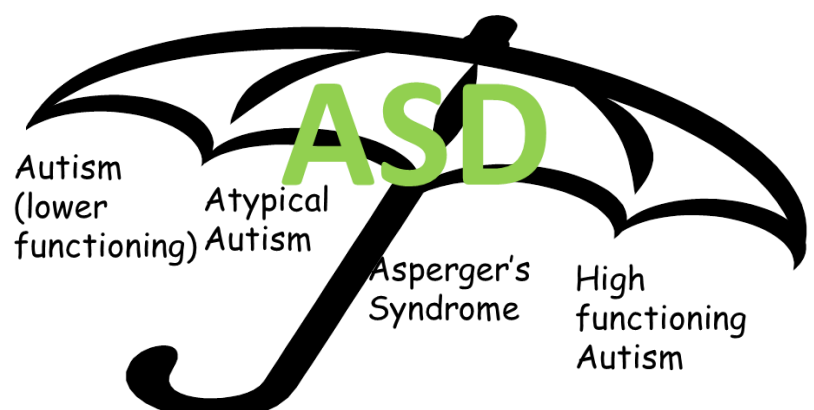
A person's difficulties will likely shift between "mild" and "severe" across settings and at various stages of their life.



Autism can be better understood therefore as a spectrum condition

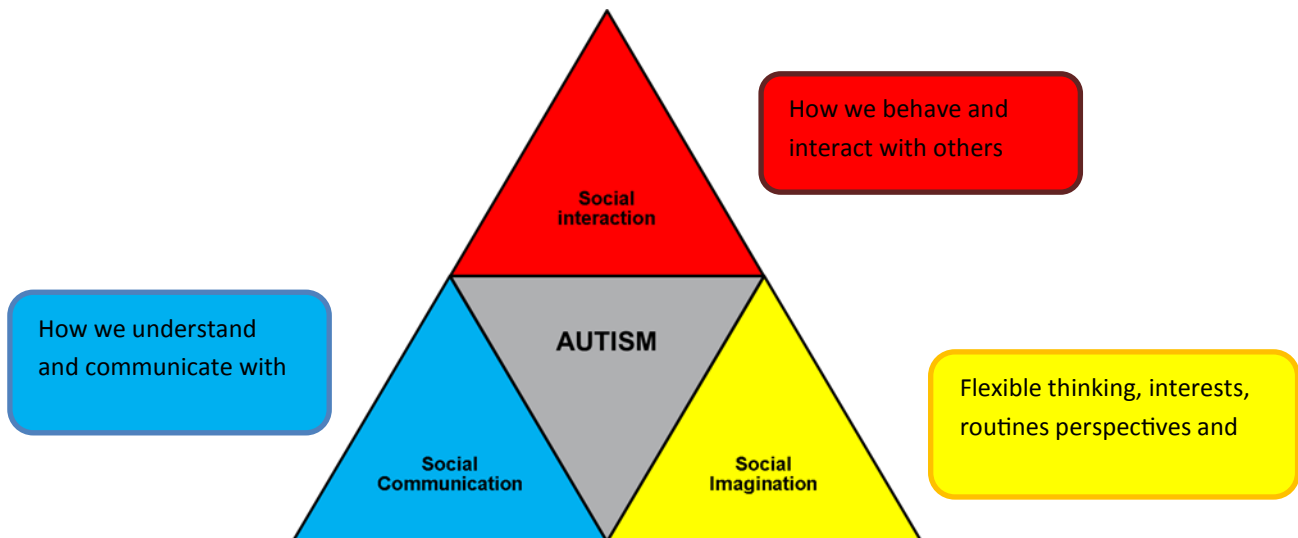
Why all the different terms for autism?

[Autism Spectrum Disorder \(ASD\)](#) is an umbrella term



Behaviour: What do we see?

Children with autism have difficulties in three main areas. Sometimes these are noticed soon after birth. Often, they appear after a year or two where you start to notice differences between your child and other children of the same age. We call the three areas in which children with autism have difficulties “the triad”



Social communication: the manner in which a child develops and uses language and communication

Things you may recognise with your child:

- Unusual sound of voice, sound of words/phrases (for example, they may sound “grown up”), echolalia (repeating words they have just heard), using words out of context (for example, seeming random or inappropriate)
- Difficulties understanding other people’s communication e.g. not understanding jokes/ humour/taking things literally and/or misinterpreting body language, facial expressions and tone of voice
- Lack of communication for purely social reasons e.g. may not respond to their name, does not initiate communication outside of own interests
- Difficulty starting and keeping up with conversation (and taking turns)

Social Interaction: the manner in which a child relates to other people and manages their emotions

Things you may recognise with your child:

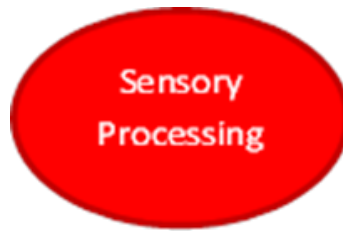
- Difficulties with friendships (including lack of interest, difficulties making or keeping friendships)
- Difficulties understanding other people's intent and emotions and responding to these appropriately (e.g. offering comfort)
- Differences using non-verbal skills when interacting with people (e.g. eye contact, gestures, facial expressions)
- Difficulties recognising and managing their emotions appropriately (for example, their emotions may appear intense, sudden and disproportionate to the situation)

Social Imagination: how flexibly a child thinks about their world and behaves within it (including play and interests)

Things you may recognise with your child:

- Enjoys routine and finds changes to routine and/or transitions difficult
- Having a preferences for routines and rules
- Special and/or unusual areas/objects of interest that may appear
Obsessive or intense
- Play may be less imaginative or repetitive
- Sensory sensitivities
- Unusual use of body e.g. flapping hands

Underlying factors: why do we see the behaviour?



We make sense of our environment through the information we receive via our sensory organs i.e. eyes, ears, nose, joints/muscles, mouth, and skin.

Each of us 'processes' this information in a different way. Our ultimate aim is to balance this information so we can organise our actions to achieve a goal. This enables us to achieve tasks and perform our daily routine.

How do sensory processing skills support our social communication?

- Listen and respond to instructions/ conversation despite distractions in the environment
- Respect personal space
- Willingness to experience new things (e.g. places, foods, activities)

How might this be different for my child?

94% of children with ASD have unusual sensory processing patterns. They can be over-responsive or under-responsive to sensory information. Touch and auditory information are often the most difficult to process.

<u>Area of difficulty</u>	<u>How could this be explained by Sensory Processing?</u>

Theory of mind (ToM) refers to:

- The ability to know that other people have thoughts, feelings and experiences separate to our own.
- The ability to make accurate guesses about what these might be i.e. what other people might be thinking, feeling and how they might behave.

How does TOM support our social communication skills?

- Use changes to voice, eye-contact, gesture and facial expression to help support communication

- Have a social “map” which tells us what to say, when to say it and how!

- Take another person’s perspective e.g. talk about their interests

How might this be different for my child?

In children with autism, TOM is delayed or impaired. Understanding the world from another person’s perspective is very difficult

It can be hard to understand that other people may feel and think differently

This means that:

- Social interactions can be very difficult

<u>Area of difficulty</u>	<u>How could this be explained by Theory of Mind?</u>

Getting the Gist

Getting the Gist (or central coherence) describes our ability to draw together lots of information from a situation in order to make sense of it

- We do this in social situations
- When we look at a picture/photo
- In conversations
- When we read something

We use our memory from previous events to help us explain what is happening

How does “Getting the Gist” support our social communication skills?

- Understand jokes and sarcasm
- Keep up with the flow of conversation
- Adjust behaviour according to the social context
- Have a wide range of interests

How might this be different for my child?

Children with autism find “getting the gist” much more difficult

Focus on the small details and they struggle to pull information together and make sense of it, so they may not make sense of the bigger picture

<u>Area of difficulty</u>	<u>How could this be explained by getting the gist?</u>

Executive Functioning

Executive functioning is like the CEO or the manager of the brain. It allows us to:

- Imagine, Think Flexibly, Sequence Thoughts, Maintain Attention, Plan, Organise, Manage Time and Space

Executive functioning uses our memory and imagination to help us plan and predict the future, be flexible, switch our focus and regulate our thoughts and emotions to stop us saying/ doing inappropriate things in certain situations.

How does Executive functioning support our social communication skills?

- Feel confident talking about a range of topics
- Know what to do in tricky social situations e.g. managing falling outs
- Think about what you say before you say it
- Understand the concept of time

How might this be different for my child?

Young people on the spectrum are often said to have “weaker” executive functioning skills leading to difficulties with impulse control, time management, prioritising, sequencing , planning

Why? Because imagination is often delayed and may develop more slowly for people with autism. Instead of using imagination to create solutions/ideas and navigate their world people with ASD tend to use their memory, knowledge,

<u>Area of difficulty</u>	<u>How could this be explained by Executive Functioning?</u>



Emotional Regulation

Emotional regulation is the process of noticing, labelling and managing our emotions.

- Mutual regulation: The ability to receive assistance from others in regulating your own arousal levels e.g. getting a hug, calling a friend.
- Self-regulation: The ability to independently reach an optimal level of arousal e.g. deep breaths, going for a run, meditating.

How do emotional regulation skills support our social communication?

- | |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow us to Label our emotions • Communicate our thoughts and emotions to others |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognise and respond to emotions in others • Seek support from others |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Imagine how we might feel in situations |

How might this be different for my child?

Children with ASD find it difficult to identify and label their emotions. If we cannot identify/label our emotions it is harder for us to understand and manage them. Without this understanding, the emotional world can be a scary place!

- Emotions can be experienced suddenly and very intensely

<u>Area of difficulty</u>	<u>How could this be explained by Emotional Regulation?</u>

What is the behaviour communicating?

Every behaviour has a meaning and purpose

How do we find this out?

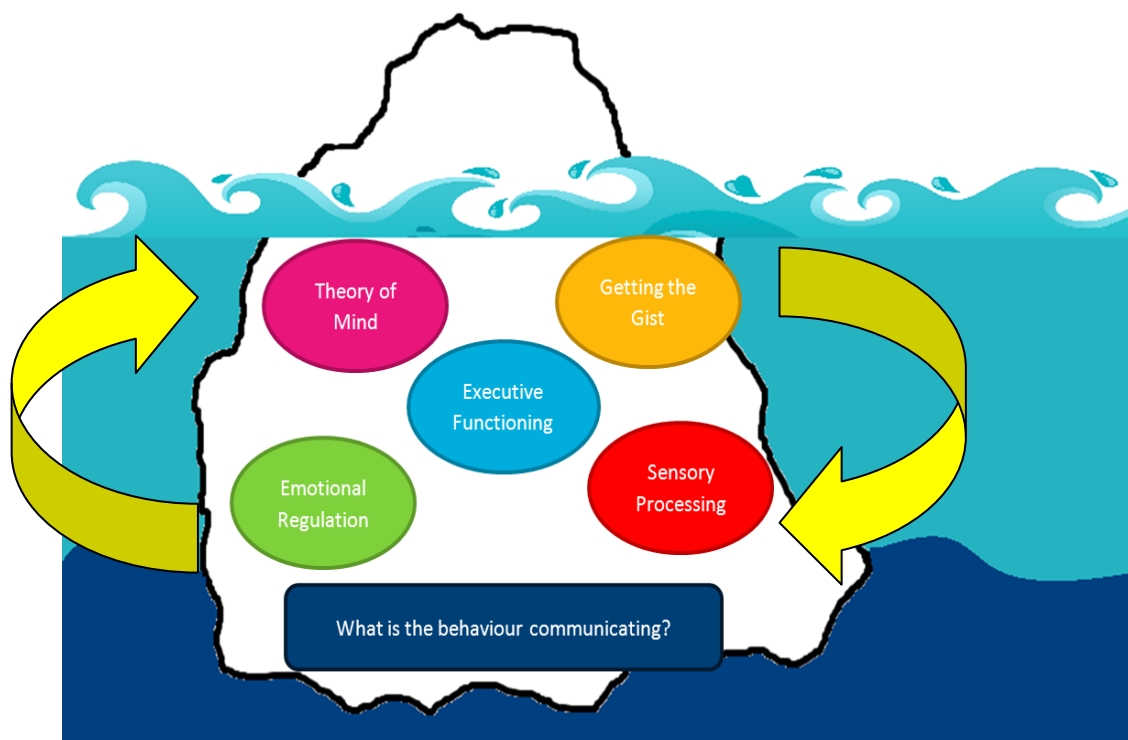
Observe the behaviour and ask yourself ...

“what does the behaviour do?”

Does it...

- Tell you a person is in pain?
- Tell you that the person is feeling good internally (Sensory)?
- Tell you that the person wants to escape or avoid something?
- Tell you that they want access to an item?
- Tell you that they want attention or an interaction?

Once you have an understanding of what the behaviour may be communicating, the underlying factors you identified (e.g. ToM etc.) may provide you with clues as to what factors triggered the behaviour.



Strategies

ENGAGE



Theory of Mind

Getting the Gist

Executive Functioning

Emotional Regulation

Sensory Processing

- Meet your child at their level
- Use your child's areas of interest

ENVIRONMENT



Visuals

Theory of Mind

Getting the Gist

Executive Functioning

- To support communication (Makaton sign language, PECs)
- To support routines (“Now and next”, visual timetables, calendars)
- To support instructions (Shopping lists, maps for directions, booklets about new places)

Routines

Theory of Mind

Getting the Gist

Executive Functioning

Emotional Regulation

Help to create stability and order, acts as cues to what is happening next e.g. before bed, can be used to learn new skills.

Scheduling

Emotional Regulation

Sensory Processing

Scheduling involves thinking about tasks or activities your child finds easy or difficult and balancing them out throughout the day.

- Aim for a balance between low and high demand activities
- Support transitions between high and low demands activities
- Build in flexibility
- Reduce demands around “trigger points” in the day
- Schedule in recommended activities

Rewards



- Choose rewards/ reward charts that your child will find motivating
- Work on one or two things at a time
- Be specific about target behaviours and focus on positive behaviours
- Make small steps and work up to a bigger goal
- Involve your child
- Keep discipline separate
- Fade out tangible rewards and replace with social approval

Our communication



Reduce and simplify language, be explicit and provide cues to help your child understand.

- Use their name
- Keep it simple
- Pause
- Break down into steps
- Give an ending

Ask one question at a time and make them less open ended.

Rules should be short and simple. *Tell your child what you want them to do* not what you want them to stop doing. At the right time, provide clear explanations for why behaviour was not acceptable.

SKILL BUILDING



Functional communication



Safe effective ways of getting our basic needs met

- Telling someone you are in pain
- Requesting attention/interaction
- Access something we want
- Ask to escape or avoid a situation—saying “no”
- Telling someone something feels good internally (sensory)

Waiting



- Teach waiting for something positive
- Start with waiting for a very short period of time and build up
- Use a visual cue e.g. stop watch, phone timer
- If you cannot provide a fixed waiting time use “first, then” or offer helpful distraction

Coping with “no”



- Reduce the occurrence of situations where you need to say no
- Increase opportunities of positive experiences of asking for something (“yes”)
- Practice coping with no by providing alternatives
- Use different language

Emotional literacy



Emotional literacy is our ability to recognise, communicate and manage our own emotions and be able to recognise and adapt to the feelings of others.

Explain emotions in everyday situations

- Label (What is the emotion you are feeling?)
- Describe (What does the emotion feel like?)
- Manage (how will you try to cope with this situation?)

Use emotion projects to recognise emotions in self and others. For example Inside Out (film), face scrapbook, emotion diary, emotion thermometer.

Social Skills



- Create opportunities to socialise
 - Give your child control
 - Start small and build up
 - Centred around something your child enjoys
- Create space (and time) for feedback and learning
- Create opportunities to practice. Supporting tools
 - Role play
 - Comic strip conversations
 - Social stories

Independence



Develop opportunities for your child to be independent: special roles and responsibilities; offering choice; opportunities to be an “expert”.

Resources

Videos

Session 1

Amazing things happen- YouTube- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7JdCY-cdgkl>

Meet Saffron: inside the colourful mind of a girl with autism- the Guardian- https://www.theguardian.com/global/video/2017/jun/14/when-saffron-opens-her-world-its-amazing-video?CMP=Share_iOSApp_Other

Session 2

Stephen Wiltshire- YouTube (search for his name)

Session 3

Autism: see the potential- Vimeo- <https://vimeo.com/144769608>

Session 4

Life, animated (2016)- YouTube- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fp00zt9NtX4>

Other Useful Websites

The art of autism: <http://the-art-of-autism.com/understanding-the-spectrum-a-comic-strip-explanation>

Autism and girls: <http://limpsfieldgrange.co.uk/#tab-a1983d6095d8f9923c7>

National Autistic Society: <http://www.autism.org.uk/>

After your child's diagnosis: <http://www.autism.org.uk/about/diagnosis/children/recently-diagnosed.aspx>

Autism explanation (easy read): <http://www.autism.org.uk/about/what-is/asd/intro-easyread.aspx>

Autism Education trust: <http://www.autismeducationtrust.org.uk/>

Support for siblings (Not ASD specific): <https://www.sibs.org.uk/>

Telling your child about their diagnosis: https://www.eastsussex.gov.uk/media/3096/telling_a_child_about_their_diagnosis_v2.pdf