

autism.west midlands provides the following services:

Information Helpline	0121 450 7575
Education Coddington Court School	01531 640 541
Training	0121 450 7576
Supported Living (ASSET)	0121 450 7589
Supported Employment (ASpire)	0121 224 7844
Family Support	0121 450 7574
Residential Services	0121 450 7584

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# A guide to Autism

*autism.west midlands is an independent provider of services  
for people with Autistic Spectrum Disorders*

# What is Autism?

You may hear several different names used to describe autism. These could include:

- Classic autism
- Kanner Syndrome
- High-functioning autism
- Able autism
- Atypical autism
- Asperger Syndrome
- Semantic Pragmatic Disorder (SPD)
- Autistic tendencies
- Pervasive Developmental Disorder (PDD)

**Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD)** is an umbrella term often used to describe these conditions because it groups together all the different variations of this disorder. The idea of a spectrum is useful because it shows that people with a diagnosis of autism can range from having average or above average intelligence to having severe learning disabilities, and may be accompanied by mental health difficulties.

## Some facts about autism

- It is a 'hidden disability' because people with autism are usually no different in appearance from anyone else
- It is now believed to affect as many as 1 in 110 people
- It is believed to be 4 times more common in males than females
- It is a lifelong disability, but getting the right help and support from people who understand can really make a difference
- Nobody knows for certain what causes autism, but research points to a genetic link
- People with autism can be very sensitive to sounds, tastes, smells, touch or the sensations caused by what they see

## The Triad of Impairments

Autism affects the way a person relates to other people and this can cause confusion with social interaction. Because all people are different, the way autism affects individuals is also different. However, they all have difficulties in 3 main areas, often known as 'The Triad of Impairments'.

### Communication – Talking and Understanding

Language difficulties range from no speech at all to fluent speech, often repetitive and mainly talking about or focussing on their own areas of interest, rather than true conversation. There is always difficulty in understanding spoken language, as well as the other clues to meaning in what we say or do e.g. confusing signals from body language, gesture, tone of voice, facial expression.

### Social Interaction – Getting on with other people

Difficulties range from indifference and aloofness to wanting desperately to make friends but not understanding social rules and other people's behaviour and feelings well enough to do so successfully. Some people with autism have real difficulties with social situations.

### Imagination – Thinking and Behaviour

There may be deficits in imaginative and conceptual skills, and difficulties in making sense of the world. These lead to a rigid way of thinking and doing things, repetitive activity and narrow interests. Changes of routine cause anxiety and distress.

## What can help?

### Language

- Keep your own language simple
- Keep sentences short and to the point
- Use the person's name to get their attention first
- Give time for the person with autism to process what you say and to respond
- Avoid 'flowery' phrases and abstract ideas
- Speak clearly and watch for signs of understanding what is said

### Visual Support

- Give visual clues, if appropriate, to aid understanding e.g. photos, picture symbols, objects of reference
- Using sign language where appropriate, may help get your meaning across

### Structure

- Provide a clear structure to a day so s/he knows what to expect and when
- Keep to predictable routines
- Explain any changes in advance, if possible, to minimise anxiety
- If you need more information, please contact our Information Helpline on 0121 450 7575, or email [info@autismwestmidlands.org.uk](mailto:info@autismwestmidlands.org.uk)