



ASD resource pack for teachers

Contents

What is autism?	2
A school's guide to Asperger syndrome	3
How can I help a child with autism at my school?	8
Lesson guide	11
Introducing Asperger syndrome in your classroom	18
Autism: books for children and young people	22
Help and support from The National Autistic Society	30

If you would like further information on autism and education, please contact the NAS Information Centre Team. Telephone 0845 070 4004 (Monday-Friday, 10am-4pm) or email: info@nas.org.uk Our postal address is Information Centre, The National Autistic Society, 393 City Road, London EC1V 1NG.

What is autism?

Autism is a lifelong disability that affects the way a person communicates and relates to the world around them. The autistic spectrum encompasses children with profound learning disabilities and little or no verbal communication, through to those with average or high IQ, including those with Asperger syndrome. Everyone with the condition shares three main difficulties, known as the 'triad of impairments'.

Social interaction

Difficulty with social relationships ranging from being withdrawn to appearing aloof and indifferent, to simply not fitting in easily. People with autism may also seem insensitive to the feelings of others. This can lead to problems in the playground, with making friends and, in turn, bullying.

Social communication

Difficulty with verbal and non-verbal communication, ranging from difficulties developing speech, to repetitive or formal use of language. People with autism may also not fully understand gestures, facial expressions or tone of voice. Understanding teachers and participating in class can be challenging as a result.

Social imagination

Difficulty with understanding how others think and feel and in the development of interpersonal play and imagination. Difficulty in this area may also manifest itself in a resistance to change, so children with autism may find it hard to cope with changes to their timetable, for example. They may also struggle with subjects that use abstract ideas.

A school's guide to Asperger syndrome

What is Asperger syndrome?

Asperger syndrome¹ is a developmental disorder on the autistic spectrum. The difficulties caused by the condition are there from birth or soon after and continue throughout life, although often people learn to cope better as they get older. There are genetic and other factors involved in the causation of the syndrome. It affects approximately 1 pupil in every 250, and the majority of those affected are boys. The average age for diagnosis for Asperger syndrome is around 9 years old and it is entirely possible for an individual to remain undiagnosed well into adulthood

Students with Asperger syndrome typically have a low average to higher IQ but comparatively low *social* performance and emotional awareness of others feelings and thoughts, struggling to read facial expressions and body language. They have difficulties communicating effectively with others, often having problems interacting with adults and other children appropriately and adhering to the 'unwritten' social rules, which come naturally to other children.

Each pupil with the diagnosis will be different. Some will be very quiet, others will be noisy and 'in your face'. What unites each pupil is a fundamental difficulty in the understanding of other people (an inability to put themselves in the other person's shoes) and an inability to behave in a way that will make them make and keep friends easily.

Some of the indicators of Asperger syndrome in school age children

Having Asperger syndrome does not affect someone's physical appearance. The signs of whether a child has the syndrome are evidenced in a pattern of behaviour that requires careful observation. Asperger syndrome is more common than generally realised.

These are some of the behavioural signs that are indicative of Asperger syndrome. If the child demonstrates many of these signs you should contact the SENCO for further advice regarding discussing this with the child's parents, assessment and possible diagnosis. Does the child:

- Struggle to make and maintain friendships with children of the same age, due to poor social skills, or show little interest in other children?
- Find it hard to understand instructions unless very clearly spelt out, have difficulty completing class exercises or homework, despite reasonable intelligence?

¹ Although this factsheet uses the term Asperger syndrome the practical pointers and information will be relevant for all pupils who have a diagnosis of autistic spectrum disorder including high functioning autism

- Often become a potential or actual target for teasing and bullying because of how he or she appears and reacts to other pupils? Act aggressively as a result of bullying?
- Find unstructured social time difficult to use appropriately – for example, sits on his or her own at lunchtime or tries to join in games unsuccessfully at playtime?
- Show a poor awareness of others and how they may be affected by his or her behaviour – for example, contradicting or non-compliant to teachers, not sharing or allowing other children to join in his or her games, making inappropriate comments in class, talking too loudly, over-reacting to losing?
- Find changes to his or her routine quite difficult to cope with – for example getting annoyed if he or she has a supply teacher or has to move classroom. Is he or she quite concerned if things don't happen in a set order?
- Find group activities difficult, for example, because he or she has poor social skills or because he or she wants everything to be done his or her way?
- Often appear quite anxious in busy, noisy social situations, for example dining halls or during PE?
- Have body language that makes him or her stand out, for example, holds him or herself awkwardly, lacks spontaneity in gestures and displays limited or unusual facial expressions?
- Have a voice tone that is unlike those of his or her peers?
- Communicate using words and phrases that are unlike those of his or her peers?
- Exhibit behaviours or interests that make him or her stand out from the other children in the class?

What is it like having Asperger syndrome?

An alien culture

Imagine being suddenly placed in a culture alien to your own, where the people seem different from you, where you are always in danger of breaking social rules you don't understand, and you struggle to keep up with the flow of interaction that comes naturally to those around you. This is what it can feel like for pupils with Asperger syndrome in school: bewildering.

Reading people

As soon as we meet someone we make all sorts of judgments. Just by looking we can often guess their age and status, and by the expression on their face, what they are feeling. This enables us to judge what to say and how to say it. We intuitively adapt to the other person without much 'thought'. This ability most people have is the central communication difficulty for pupils with Asperger syndrome.

How to communicate effectively with pupils who have Asperger syndrome

- *Be patient* is the number one guideline! A few pupils will seem to be intentionally aloof (avoiding eye contact), rude or disinterested. This is rarely the case. Students with Asperger syndrome usually do not have the basic social understanding to realise how they appear to others. Occasionally pupils will say or do things that seem to threaten a teacher's authority. Try not to take this personally, deal with it in a calm way. The person's difficulties are the result of biological differences in the parts of the brain that regulate social behaviour and understanding.
- Be as clear in your communication as possible – say exactly what you mean! Anything merely implied will probably not be understood. For example, asking 'would you like to get your work out now?' may get the very honest (but unintentionally annoying) answer, 'no!'
- You will probably need to slow down your communication – allow several seconds for the pupil to process new information and to respond before you give more information, or repeat your request.
- Keep your language direct - avoid use of double meanings, sarcasm, teasing, complex open questions or subtle jokes, unless you are sure the person understands. Ensure you have the person's attention before communicating, use their name, but don't expect the person to give you full eye contact – this can be difficult for pupils with Asperger syndrome.
- Do not talk 'down' to the person, but do check he understands what he has to do. Don't assume he understands just because he can repeat back the instruction you have just given. Processing verbal information tends to be harder for the pupil with Asperger syndrome.
- Do not confront an angry/upset pupil by arguing or raising your voice. Firstly, many people with Asperger syndrome are sensitive to noise. Secondly, raising your voice will not help the pupil understand what you want. Instead try to divert and defuse the situation: for example, allow the pupil to 'exit', give a alternative choice, compromise if possible. Use a calm, neutral tone of voice – do not shout, or expect the pupil to be able to read facial expression and gesture. Sometimes a visual support, such as a card with a photo of the quiet room, will enable the pupil to understand what you want him or her to do next. If there is no room for compromise, make the request a couple of times, allowing plenty of time for the child to process this information, then calmly, with few words, implement the consequences of non-compliance (which the pupil should already have been told).
- Ensure the pupil knows what is expected of her, for example, where she should be for each lesson period; how to negotiate around the school site; what homework is expected; where she is able to go at break and lunchtime; if being in the playground causes too much stress - what time the day trip will return to school. Most difficulties occur as a result of insufficient information about what to do in different social situations.

- Ensure there is an exit route available if a pupil has behaviour difficulties in class, for example, a quiet room he can go to for when stress levels get too high.

Circle of friends

This is a fairly straightforward and useful way to support a pupil with Asperger syndrome. It involves carefully selecting a small group of sensible pupils to look out for the person with Asperger syndrome.

The group will need awareness and training on how to communicate and make the person feel more included. The form of support will depend on the pupil's needs, for example – helping the person join in lunchtime games, walking the student home after school to prevent bullying, reminding the student about homework or getting them to the next class on time. The group usually meets one lunch-time every few weeks to review the support methods and progress, with close monitoring and support by staff. (Barratt, P. et al, 1998, *British Journal of Special Education* vol.25 no.2)

'We can't change the rules for one pupil...'

People with Asperger syndrome think and learn differently. Therefore they require a different approach and this may mean different application of the rules on occasion.

This is not to excuse poor behaviour, but it is an understanding that punishing a pupil with Asperger syndrome is often counter-productive since their behaviour difficulties usually stem from their lack of real understanding.

For example, aggressive acts are more often related to anxiety from an inability to understand the behaviour and motives of other people around them. Attention seeking behaviour is often about feeling left out from being unable to follow the subtleties of everyday social interaction and jokes going on around them. Under the law schools need to make 'reasonable adjustment' for pupils with this disability (SEN and Disability Act 2001).

'He behaves OK at school, but at home he is a nightmare.'

This is a common occurrence and is rarely the result of poor parenting. The over-riding physical state for most people with Asperger syndrome is anxiety. This anxiety is a result of trying to constantly keep up with teachers' demands as well as other pupils' jokes and conversation.

It can be difficult for people who have not come across Asperger syndrome before, to appreciate the level of anxiety especially as many pupils have learnt to develop a superficial veneer of coping - appearing to 'fit in' socially in order to avoid being labelled 'odd' and because many pupils with the diagnosis are keeping up with school work.

However, many pupils explain that by the time they get home they are feeling stressed, angry and worn out. These true feelings inevitably come out when they are at home and they can vent their frustrations in safety.

How can I help a child with autism at my school?

There are various approaches and strategies that teachers and support staff can use to help develop the behaviour, language and communication skills of children with autism.

Visual aids

Many children with autism find it easier to understand the world about them through visual aids. Teachers may use a visual timetable showing times and simple drawings of the activities, so that the pupil knows exactly what they will be doing and when. Many schools use computer software packages to write out stories, descriptions and instructions in both words and symbols simultaneously. Other visual supports include written lists, objects and calendars to help children understand sequence and predict what is happening.

Comic strip conversations

Comic Strip Conversations assist children with autism to develop greater social understanding, by providing visual representations of the different levels of communication that take place in a conversation, using symbols, stick figure drawings and colour. By seeing the different elements of a conversation visually presented, some of the abstract aspects of social communication (e.g. recognising the feelings and intentions of others) are made more concrete and are therefore easier for the child to understand.

Social Stories™

Children with autism who can read may be taught how to cope with different situations using the technique of Social Stories™. Stories are written for the individual child, explaining in words and pictures, step by step, what will happen in situations where they may feel anxious and how they should cope with situations they find difficult. For instance, a Social Story™ might be used to explain what a child should do on a bus journey or when they hear a fire alarm.

Social skills

Some children with autism respond well to drama and role play activities to help them learn social skills such as greetings, turn taking in conversation and watching for cues in social skills groups. A 'circle of friends' or buddy system can also help a child with autism understand the social world of the classroom and the playground.

Circle of friends

Circle of friends encourages the development of a support network for a child in a structured setting, which can also extend to outside of this setting. It is not an approach

to provide instant friendship, but over the course of meetings and evaluation of set targets, it is hoped that the child will be able to build closer and better relationships with other children. Six to eight children are recruited as volunteers to form the circle of friends. Through a series of meeting they help the focus child to express his or her feelings and decrease anxiety levels. This can lead to improved social integration and higher levels of peer contact.

The Picture Communication Exchange System (PECS)

PECS is a commonly used approach to teach children who have limited language. Teachers use pictures as symbols to teach children the names of different objects. Gradually the child is taught to exchange a picture for the object he or she wants, to construct simple sentences using the pictures, and indicate choices between various objects.

TEACCH (Treatment and Education of Autistic and related Communication handicapped Children)

This approach is widely used within special schools and can be adapted for use within a mainstream setting. It focuses on altering the environment and using visual supports, such as timetable and schedules, to help provide structure, reduce stress and improve understanding. Children are given clear instructions for every stage of an activity, usually presented in a visual way.

SPELL

The SPELL framework has been developed by The National Autistic Society's schools and services to understand and respond to the needs of children and adults with autism. It recognises the individual and unique needs of each child and emphasises that all planning and intervention be organised on this basis. SPELL stands for Structure, Positive, Empathy, Low arousal, Links.

- **Structure** makes the world a more predictable accessible and safer place and can aid personal autonomy and independence.
- **Positive** approaches and expectations seek to establish and reinforce self confidence and self esteem by building on natural strengths, interest and abilities.
- **Empathy** is essential underpin any approach designed to develop communication and reduce anxiety.
- The approaches and environment need to be **low arousal**: calm and ordered in such a way so as to reduce anxiety and aid concentration.
- Strong **links** between the various components of the person's life or therapeutic programme will promote and sustain essential consistency.

Behaviour

The behaviour of some children with autism can be very difficult to deal with. It may not always be immediately obvious why the child is behaving in a particular way, and it can be hard to control the situation without knowing more about what lies behind it and what kinds of strategies to use. With limited verbal communication, a child with autism may, for example, not be able to express their feelings of anxiety, discomfort, or frustration except in an outburst of unwanted behaviour. They may have learnt from experience that such behaviour generally achieved their desired object. Therefore the teacher needs to analyse what had been going on before the outburst that might have upset the child, and teach them some other way of communicating what they want.

Further information and help

If you would like more information about these and other teaching strategies, please contact The National Autistic Society's Information Centre. Tel: 0845 070 4004 or email: info@nas.org.uk

Information sheets about the topics and approaches mentioned in this article can also be found on the National Autistic Society website: www.autism.org.uk/a-z

Lesson guide

Introduction

These materials have been prepared for a two-lesson introduction to autism and Asperger syndrome. They include two case study sheets and some games for introducing autism to a class.

Points to highlight in the lessons are:

- that autism affects a person's social and communication skills
 - that autism is a broad spectrum of need and different individuals have different needs
 - that structure can really help someone with autism
 - that it is important to treat all people with autism as individuals.
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Lesson 1

One – ten minutes

Do a ten-minute brainstorm with the whole class on what social and communication skills mean:

- speaking
- listening
- making friends
- understanding people.

This list can be added to. You can also use the ideas on the games sheet, which follows.

Ten – 30 minutes

Explain that autism is a disability that affects a person's social and communication skill and that it affects different people in different ways.

Over the next two lessons the class will be looking at what it involves, how it can affect different people and discussing what support can help people with autism, leading to a written piece on the subject.

Hand out case study sheets including questions. Read through with the class and have a discussion. Ask the students to study the different ways David and Helen are supported in matters of structure, routine and anxiety. Ask them to answer the questions below.

- how autism affects them
- how independently do you think this person is able to live? (Give three reasons for your answers)
- how would they deal with social situations?
- in what ways are they able to communicate and express themselves?

30 – 55 minutes

In groups of four or five ask students to discuss the questions. Give each of the groups a case study to work on, then ask them to answer the question below:

- How can you best support someone with autism or Asperger syndrome?

Ask them to prepare three key points for a class discussion on the issue in the next class.

55 – 60 minutes

Plenary – draw class back together and go over the key points discussed in the class.

Lesson 2

One – ten minutes

Recap points from previous lesson. What is autism?

Ten – 25 minutes

Go back into groups and go over key points discussed last lesson, for whole-class discussion.

25 – 50 minutes

Class discussion on how to best support someone with autism.

Draw out points such as being reliable, making things structured, giving clear instructions and helping individuals not to feel anxious. Sign language can help for those who are non-verbal. Emphasise that both case studies are very different. David Downes is very able. Helen Burnell is much more dependent. Highlight the importance of treating people as individuals with different needs.

If a person with autism is in the class, they should be encouraged to explain things that help them. Other students should be encouraged to explain things they do that help support that person.

Games for introducing autism to a class

Memorise a sequence game

This is a game that some people with autism that have a fascination with order and sequences would find very enjoyable and would be very good at.

Ask the class to form a circle and choose one person to start the game by saying. 'Today I went to the shop and brought myself a....', thinking of an item and adding it to the end of a sentence. The next person in the circle then has to say the sentence with the item the last person said along with their own choice of item. This continues around

the circle until someone makes a mistake. That person is then asked to sit down, and the game continues around and around the circle until the last person is left. You can adapt the sentence to suit the class's interest.

- You can introduce an off-putting noise such as a drum, vacuum cleaner or a radio. This will make it harder for people to concentrate, giving a clearer understanding of why people with autism find distractions hard to cope with.
- Ask the students how this game made them feel. Did any of them feel frustrated when the loud noise started?

Sensory game

This game is good to help the students to understand why unexpected occurrences can be uncomfortable, which many people with autism have to cope with every day.

Select a range of edible and textured object and place them in a box. These things can range from instant coffee granules to jelly. Ask for one volunteer to sit up at the front of the class and blindfold them. With each of your selected sensory objects, allow the student to either taste or feel them. The more unexpected the sensory object, the more surprised the student will feel. Things like coffee granules will be very unpleasant and give a better understanding of how unexpected events can sometimes be distressing. With the different students you selected, ask them to explain how they felt when experience a taste or feel of an object they did not like.

- You could also offer the class something to eat or drink that looks like something they are used to but in fact is something else like a chocolate spread sandwich, with a dollop of mustard hidden inside or a glass of lemonade or water with some colourless flavouring in it such as aniseed. The unexpected can be more shocking than we expect. Ask them how important trust and respect is when building relationships with people with autism.

Speaking game

Address the class in a severe tone of voice, but saying friendly, positive words. Then speak to them in a friendly voice, but using negative words eg. 'You are a very naughty group and I am angry with you all.'

This highlights the importance of tone and volume in communication. People with autism can miss these clues.

Listening/understanding game

Address the class in 'gibberish' or a foreign language, at the same time focusing on one pupil. Through gesture, indicate you wish them to stand. When they do so ask them why they are standing. Tell them you weren't indicating for them to stand but were actually indicating to them to do something else (dependent upon what your gesture looked like!).

This highlights the importance of non verbal clues in language and how instinctively we react to them.

Explain that someone with autism would not be able to follow non-verbal clues. They might misinterpret them or not notice them at all.

Making friends game

One young person with Asperger syndrome, Mark Segar, put together a list of his 'Rules for Life' – advice and tips for others with Asperger syndrome and autism on how to interact and communicate with people. Share the following examples with the class:

- if you wish to chat up someone else, the best thing to do when you first meet them is just to talk to them and NOT get too close
- suitable boundaries may vary from one person to another (see body language)
- it is important not to appear too eager
- if you are a man, don't wear too much after shave
- don't chat up just anyone, make sure it's someone you like.

Ask the class, what do you do when you go out? Do you go with someone? How do you get a girlfriend?

What do the class think it would be like doing these things for someone who doesn't understand the ways that people communicate and interact?

Understanding emotions game

Make two pupils face each other at a space of about five metres apart. Ask one to walk towards the other, then stop when it's comfortable. Ask them why they feel it's comfortable.

Then tell them to take one more step, then another, until they are practically touching. Then join them.

Ask the class where this level of closeness is acceptable – eg on the bus, in a football crowd, on the tube, etc.

Ask them where it is not acceptable, eg at the beach.

Ask where this understanding is written.

Highlight that we do things instinctually, but people with autism have to learn these social rules, which are changing all the time dependent upon who is involved, where and when.

Case study 1: David Downes

David Downes is an artist who has Asperger syndrome. He is becoming increasingly well known for his art and works part time in an art shop, supported by The National Autistic Society's employment consultancy, Prospects.

David is very successful in his art work. He completed an MA at the Royal College of Art in Communication Design in 1996. In September 1999, he set out to record the BBC's most important architecture at the turn of the century. In June 2000, he became artist in-

residence to BBC Heritage. In 2000, David's life and career were the subject of a book written by Shelia Pain titled *Artists emerging*.

David was diagnosed with Asperger syndrome in July 2002. David has always been aware that he deals with things like money and relationships differently from other people. 90% of the time David says that he feels like he does not have Asperger syndrome. He explains that his disability means he can see things very clearly, like the buildings he paints, but that other things are sometimes confusing, such as communicating with people. David finds unpredictable events difficult to cope with. At an important exhibition David had this year, he became anxious because an aspect of the show did not go as planned. Because David was anxious, he forgot about other important aspects of the show, even though he had only been working on them the day before. Before David was diagnosed with Asperger syndrome, he did not understand why he would get so anxious about things. Since he has been diagnosed he and his family can find ways of dealing with problems. David's family have been very supportive throughout his life and have helped him to achieve his full potential.

David found out about Prospects, the NAS employment consultancy that supports people with autism and Asperger syndrome, who helped him to find a job and support him at work. David said that Prospects help him at work by offering different perspectives on a problem and coping strategies with uncomfortable situations. They have given support and advice for David when he has organised exhibitions.

Case study 1: David Downes worksheet

- David Downes is an artist who has Asperger syndrome, a disability that affects the way a person understands other people and the world.
- David was diagnosed with Asperger syndrome in July 2002.
- David says that having Asperger syndrome means he can see things very clearly, such as the buildings he paints, but that other things can be confusing, such as having conversations with people.
- David finds unpredictable events difficult to cope with. At an important exhibition David had this year, he became anxious because a part of the show did not go as planned. Because David was anxious, he forgot about other important parts of the show, even though he had only been working on them the day before.
- Before David knew he had Asperger syndrome he did not understand why he would get so anxious about things. Now he knows, he can understand his feelings more and he and his family are able to find ways of dealing with problems he may have.

- David's family are very supportive and help him a great deal.
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Case study 2: Helen Burnell

Helen Burnell was diagnosed with autism at the age five and attended the first NAS School in 1965. Back then there was even less of an understanding about autism; psychiatrists believed that Helen should go to a home. It was with the help of her mum, Ilse, Sybil Elgar (a dedicated teacher) and a group of determined parents that the first National Autistic Society (NAS) school was set up. The Sybil Elgar School for children with autism. Helen was one of ten children who attended the school in Ealing. The school followed the same curriculum as the national system and taught the children, initially deemed unable to be educated, to talk, read, write and socialise with others.

Once Helen and other pupils reached the age of fifteen, their parents realised that there were not any other options or education available to them and worked together to provide a safe, happy environment for their children to grow and develop into adults. They worked together to build a residency in Somerset called Somerset Court which Helen still attends today.

Helen is one of the less able residents and because of this she is unable to work. This does not mean that she prefers to do nothing. Helen enjoys routine and helps her carers with keeping her home tidy. She also enjoys activities in the form of games which help her with social situations, Helen also enjoys swimming and going on outings.

Makaton is a form of sign language and symbols which Helen uses to communicate to people because she is unable to talk. This allows Helen to express herself. Not being able to have a form of communication and expression would be very frustrating and could result in negative behaviour. When Helen was a young child she would often break things, this was the only way she was able to express herself without Makaton. Helen is very attached to her mother and father and, with the help of a residency like Somerset Court, Helen and her family are able to have a positive and loving relationship and she is able to be quite independent.

“Somerset Court has given Helen an environment where she is able to get the most out of life.” **Helen's mum, Ilse Burnell**

Case study 2: Helen Burnell worksheet

- Helen Burnell was diagnosed with autism when she was five and attended the first National Autistic Society school in 1965.
- Helen is unable to talk.

- Helen now lives in a residential service in Somerset called Somerset Court.
 - Helen is one of the less able people at Somerset Court. She is not able to work.
 - She enjoys routine and helps the people who care for her to keep her home tidy.
 - Helen enjoys activities like games, and playing games can help her to work with other people.
 - Helen also enjoys swimming and going on outings.
 - Helen now uses a form of sign language to communicate because she is unable to talk.
 - Before she learnt this sign language she would often get frustrated because she couldn't communicate with people. She often behaved badly because of this.
 - Helen is very close to her mother and father and with the help of them and the staff at Somerset Court is able to lead a positive life.
 - Helen's mum, Ilse Burnell, says: "Somerset Court has given Helen an environment where she is able to get the most out of life."
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Introducing Asperger syndrome in your classroom

Introduction

Martin joined Grange Hill as a Year 7 pupil in 2001 and he was seen as 'weird' by his classmates. His social skills are poor. For example, he will continue to talk about a subject (eg tarantulas), unaware that people have lost interest. He does not understand when someone is making a joke, taking it literally. For example, when a fire broke out in the school, one of the pupils joked that they could toast marshmallows. Martin believed that she really was going to do this and told her it was dangerous. Martin excels at maths and science and is very knowledgeable about certain topics such as dinosaurs.

However, Martin is not weird. He has a condition called Asperger syndrome.



©BBC

What is Asperger syndrome?

Asperger syndrome is part of what is known as the 'autistic spectrum'. People who are 'autistic' have a special kind of disability that affects the way they communicate and relate to people around them. They may also have special ways of doing things. Martin has to put in things in his bag in the same way every day. 'Spectrum' means range.

You may know somebody with a disability, for example, someone who is deaf or blind, or uses a wheelchair, or who has learning difficulties. Autism is a very difficult disability to understand. Children and adults with autism look just like anyone else without the disability (although they may behave differently). Asperger syndrome is a form of autism named after the Austrian doctor who first described it. It is at the higher end of the autistic spectrum. This means the individuals are of average or higher than average intelligence. People towards the other end of the spectrum (classic autism) have learning difficulties and sometimes do not learn to talk.

It may be that you have a person in your class or school who has Asperger syndrome. They may have some of the talents or difficulties experienced by Martin. However, it is very important to understand that all people with Asperger syndrome are different, just as you are different from your friends. He or she will not be exactly the same as Martin.

Characteristics of Asperger syndrome

People with Asperger syndrome may want things to be the same all the time. For example, they may find it difficult to cope with changes to their school timetable or a different teacher. Martin insisted that the knots on his shoe laces had to be tied in exactly the same way. He also lined up the things he needed to take to school and got angry when his brother interfered with them. Another example can be found in the 'Blue

Bottle Mystery' (see reading list below), Ben gets very upset when his father mentions he is thinking about moving house. He is unable to see the advantages of a new home.

Having Asperger syndrome can make it difficult for people to understand what other people are feeling or thinking. You may need to tell them what you are feeling. It is also hard for the person to explain how they are feeling or thinking themselves. Sometimes they may talk on and on about the subject in which they are interested. You may need to let them know when they have told you enough. One idea is to suggest they only talk about their favourite subject at break times.

Children and adults with Asperger syndrome sometime have difficulties in understanding language. They may take things literally. For example, when Josh says to Martin 'You scratch my back and I'll scratch yours', meaning 'you help me and I'll help you', Martin replies 'But my back doesn't need scratching'. They also have difficulties in understanding non-verbal communication. Ben in the 'Blue Bottle Mystery' has to be taught about crying and tells his friend 'Grandma says tears mean someone's sad'.

How do doctors test for Asperger syndrome?

Sometimes, if you are unwell and go to see the doctor, s/he will do tests, such as a blood test, to find out what is wrong with you. At present, it is not possible to test in this way for autism or Asperger syndrome, although research is being carried out all the time to achieve such a test. Instead, a paediatrician (a children's doctor) or another qualified health professional will carry out an assessment. This assessment may include observing the child in the clinic, at home or in school; intelligence and language tests. A detailed history of the child's development from their parents will be taken.

Causes

It is thought that Asperger syndrome is caused by differences in the brain. This does not mean that people with Asperger syndrome are stupid. As can be seen in the example of Martin, although he has difficulty with English, he is extremely good at maths and science. He is also very knowledgeable about certain subjects such as spiders and dinosaurs.

Making friends

Children and young people with Asperger syndrome find it very difficult to make friends. However, that does not mean they don't want friends. Martin tells his brother how much he wants to make friends – but they don't understand him and he doesn't understand them. This is where you can help your classmate.

The most important thing is to try to get to know him or her. Find out what their interests are and let them use them. (For example, Martin's knowledge of tarantulas will be very important in his class's science project on spiders. Kristopher, a child with Asperger syndrome, is excellent at kicking a ball. His friends invented a game, Krisball, where his skills at kicking a ball really high are used.) Talk to them like you would talk to any of

your other friends. You may have to be very patient. You may have to explain things. Sometimes it may take longer for them to do something or answer a question.



Martin © BBC

Sometimes you may get frustrated with your friend with Asperger syndrome. That's okay, but remember you also get frustrated from time to time with your friends or your brothers and sisters. Remember, too, that just as there are times when you want to be alone, there will be times when your friend wants to be left alone. If you don't know what they want, ask them! At other times, they may get frustrated with you. An example of this is when Martin is unable to understand that one word can be a noun, verb or adjective. He throws his chips in the air with frustration.

It is also important to try not to get cross with them for something they do that bothers you or something they don't do that you think they should. Sometimes they cannot understand what is expected. Remember how it feels when you are trying to do something you find very difficult.

Be a buddy

Children and young people with Asperger syndrome can be the target of bullies. One young person with Asperger syndrome describes how bullying left him in tears for hours every night. What made matters worse, was that he was being bullied by someone he thought to be his best friend.

One of the reasons that students with Asperger syndrome are bullied is because they find it so difficult to communicate and relate to others. For example, when they don't understand a joke, other people may tease them about this. What is needed is a 'buddy' like Kathy in Grange Hill. She explains to Martin when someone is joking and calms him down if necessary. To be a buddy all you need do is look out for your friend with Asperger syndrome. Ways in which you can help include explaining jokes, teaching the rules of games, and helping them if they are being bullied e.g. by encouraging them to tell the bully to stop. You may like to talk to a teacher first. If you would like to discuss how you can help a friend with Asperger syndrome, you can contact our autism helpline. You can email them: autismhelpline@nas.org.uk or telephone them on 0845 070 4004 (10am-4pm weekdays).

People with Asperger syndrome can be extremely sensitive to certain sounds, tastes, smells, touches etc. Martin provides an example of this when he becomes distressed by an innocent touch from another pupil. Kathy has to calm Martin down and explain that Josh was only joking. It is important to be aware that touch and sound can actually be painful to the person with Asperger syndrome. Martin finds the noise of a drill unbearable. Be careful not to make fun of someone if they cover their ears at such sounds. Kenneth Hall, a young boy with Asperger syndrome, describes the sound of children's chatter as 'dynamite going off in my ears'.

Some children and young people with Asperger syndrome find it easier to be with just one other person at a time. It can be very difficult to be in a group. This can be particularly hard during break times, when there are a lot of children running about making a noise. In some schools, the child with Asperger syndrome may be allowed to sit quietly in the library. It may be that you are allowed to keep them company before returning to the normal routine of lessons.

Learning more

If you want to learn more about autism and Asperger syndrome, the following resources might help you:

Websites for young people

faculty.washington.edu/chudler/aut.html

www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/kids/kautismpage.htm

Websites by young people with Asperger syndrome

www.rusalka.demon.co.uk/

www.gareth25.supanet.com/flash.htm

The National Autistic Society's website

www.autism.org.uk

Autism: books for children and young people

Ages 3-5

Campbell, K. *I have autism*. Hertford: Hertfordshire County Council. 1899662483
Explains to young children what it is like to have autism. Colour illustrations.

Campbell, K. *My brother has autism*. Hertford: Hertfordshire County Council. 1899662487
Explains to young children what it is like to have a brother with autism. Colour illustrations.

Campbell, K. *My sister has autism*. Hertford: Hertfordshire County Council. 1899662485
Explains to young children what it is like to have a sister with autism. Colour illustrations.

Campbell, K. *Someone I know has autism*. Hertford: Hertfordshire County Council. 1899662489
Written for young children who know someone with autism. Colour illustrations.

Edwards, B. and Armitage, D. (1999). *My brother Sammy*. London: Bloomsbury. 0747539960
A full-colour picture book with simple text introducing young children aged around 3-6 years to autism.

Fairfoot, E. and Mayne, J. (2004). *My special brother Rory*. London: The National Autistic Society. 1899280960
Sibling of a boy with autism explains what it is like to have a brother who has autism. Written when the author was 6½-years-old and illustrated by her drawings. Available from NAS Publications.

Gorrod, L. (1997). *My brother is different*. London: The National Autistic Society. 1899280502
A book for pre-school children about having a brother with autism. Available from NAS Publications.

Lears, L. (1998). *Ian's walk: a story about autism*. Morton Grove, Illinois: Albert Whitman. 0807534803
A story book about autism for young children. Fully illustrated in colour.

Sullivan, C. (2001). *I love my brother!: a preschooler's view of living with a brother who has autism*. Stratham, New Hampshire: PHATArt4. 0970658117

Aimed especially at pre-schoolers, this book is full of colour drawings and photographs with simple text.

Watson, E. (1996). *Talking to angels*. San Diego, California: Harcourt and Brace. 190152010777

Written for young children and illustrated with colourful drawings. Tells of the likes of the author's sister, who has autism.

Age 5-8

Amenta, C. (1992). *Russell is extra special: a booklet about autism for children*. New York: Magination Press. 0945354444

A book about a family with a young child with autism. Illustrated with black-and-white photographs.

Bishop, B. (2002). *My friend with autism*. Arlington, Texas: Future Horizons. 1885477899

Written for young children, with black and white drawings.

Ely, L. (2004). *Looking after Louis*. London: Frances Lincoln. 184507119

An introduction to autism for young children. Fully illustrated.

Gagnon, B. and Myles, B. S. (1999). *This is Asperger syndrome*. Shawnee Mission, Kansas: Autism Asperger Publishing. 0967251419

A book for 5-8-year-olds, written 'as if' by a young boy with Asperger syndrome. Pictures could be coloured in.

Graham, G. (2004). *Cassidy's adventures: my first day at school*. Victoria, British Columbia: Dunham Publishing. 0973427302

A book for young children about a little girl with autism.

Lowell, J. and Tuchel, T. (2005). *My best friend Will*. Shawnee Mission, Kansas: Autism Asperger Publishing. 1931282757

A book written by a child telling of her friendship with a boy with autism. Available from NAS Publications.

Age 6-11

Bleach, F. (2001). *Everybody is different: a book for young people who have brothers or sisters with autism*. London: The National Autistic Society. 1899280332

A comprehensive book aimed at siblings aged between seven and 13 years. Available from NAS Publications.

Edwards, A. (2001). *Taking autism to school*. Valley Park, Missouri: JayJo Books. 1891383132

Aimed at primary school children who have a classmate with autism.

Ogaz, N. (2002). *Buster and the amazing Daisy: adventures with Asperger syndrome*. London: Jessica Kingsley. 184310721X

A story about how, with the help of a rabbit, a young girl with Asperger syndrome overcomes bullying. Aimed at primary school aged children. Available from NAS Publications.

Peraltra, S. (2002). *All about my brother: An eight-year-old sister's introduction to her brother who has autism*. Shawnee Mission, Kansas: Autism Asperger Publishing. 1931282110

Simmons, K. (1997). *Little Rainman: autism through the eyes of a child*. Arlington, Texas: Future Horizons Inc.

A book for confident readers written as if from the point of view of a five-year-old with autism. Illustrated in black and white throughout.

Spilsbury, L. (2001). *What does it mean to have autism?* Oxford: Heinemann Library. 0431139253

Explores autism in its various forms, this fully illustrated book is aimed at children between seven and 12 years.

Telno, I. C. (2004). *Play with me: including children with autism in mainstream primary schools*. London: The National Autistic Society. 1899280480

A delightfully illustrated book which gives classmates a better understanding of autism. Aims to answer difficult questions. Available from NAS Publications.

Thompson, M. (1998). *Andy and his yellow frisbee*. Bethesda, Maryland: Woodbine House. 189062702X

Written for primary school children, this book is about a child with autism in a mainstream school. Colour illustrations.

Twachtman-Cullen, D. (1998). *Trevor-Trevor: a metaphor for children*. Cromwell, Connecticut: Starfish Press. 0966652908
This book has been written in the form of a story to be read to children by adults.

Wilson, P. (1983). *If you knew Nicky*. London: Angus and Robertson. 0207145253.
A book for primary school children about the day-to-day life of a young boy with autism. Colour photographs throughout.

Age 9-13

Band, E. B. and Hecht, E. (2001). *Autism through a sister's eyes: a young girl's view of her brother's autism*. Arlington, Texas: Future Horizons. 1885477716
Told in the voice of ten-year-old Emily, this book tries to answer some of the questions young people have about their brother or sister with Asperger syndrome.

Clark, J. (2005). *Jackson Whole Wyoming*. Shawnee Mission, Kanas: Autism Asperger Publishing. 1931282722
Tells of a friendship between two boys, one of whom has Asperger syndrome.

Ellis, D. (2000). *Looking for X*. Toronto, Ontario: Groundwood Books. 088899382
A story for 11 - 13-year-olds about a young girl who has twin brothers with autism.

Davies, J. (1994). *Able autistic children - children with Asperger's syndrome: a booklet for brothers and sisters*. Nottingham: University of Nottingham, Child Development Research Unit.
Aimed at children of about seven years upwards. Mainly text. Available from NAS Publications.

Davies, J. (1993). *Children with autism: a booklet for brothers and sisters*. Nottingham: University of Nottingham, Child Development Research Unit.
Aimed at children of about seven years upwards. Mainly text. Available from NAS Publications.

Gartenberg, Z. M. (1998). *Mori's story: a book about a boy with autism*. Minneapolis, Minnesota: Lerner Publications. 0822525852
Written by an eleven-year-old boy about his nine-year-old brother who has autism. Illustrated with photographs.

Hall, K. (2001). *Asperger syndrome, the universe and everything*. London: Jessica Kingsley. 1853029300

Written by a ten-year-old with Asperger syndrome, this gives a first-hand account of what it is like to have Asperger syndrome.

Hoopman, K. (2001). *Blue bottle mystery: an Asperger mystery*. London: Jessica Kingsley. 1853029785

This novel tells a story of two young boys, one of whom is diagnosed with Asperger syndrome during the story. Available from NAS Publications.

Hoopman, K. (2001). *Of mice and aliens: an Asperger adventure*. London: Jessica Kingsley. 184310007X

An alien crash-lands in the backgarden. A follow-up to *Blue bottle mystery*.

Hoopmann, K. (2002). *Lisa and the lacemaker: an Asperger adventure*. London: Jessica Kingsley 1843100711

The third in the series about Ben, this novel focuses on Lisa, who also has Asperger syndrome, and the mystery of a derelict hut.

Katz, I. and Ritvo, E. (1993). *Joey and Sam*. Northridge, California: Real Life Storybooks. 1882388062

A book about two brothers, one of whom has autism. Illustrated with black and white line drawings for primary school aged children.

Messner, A. W. (1996). *Captain Tommy*. Stratham, New Hampshire: Potential Unlimited Publishing. 096507000X

An illustrated story written for young children. It tells how Tommy befriends a boy with autism at summer camp and how he learns why his new friend is different.

Ogaz, N. (2004). *Wishing on the midnight star*. London: Jessica Kingsley. 1843107570

Tells the story of a family with two young boys, one of whom has Asperger syndrome, through the eyes of the sibling. Aimed at young teenagers. Available from NAS Publications.

Rodowsky, C. (2001). *Clay*. New York: Farrar Straus Giroux. 0374313385

A novel about an eleven-year-old girl and her younger brother with autism who are kidnapped by their mother.

Welton, J. (2004). *Adam's alternative sports day: an Asperger story*. London: Jessica Kingsley. 1843103001

Tells the story of a nine-year-old who dreads sports day until his teacher announces an alternative sports day.

Age 13+

Haddon, M. (2004). *The curious incident of the dog in the night-time*. London: Red Fox Definitions. 0099456761

Aimed at older children, this is a book written from the point of view of a teenager with Asperger syndrome. Available from NAS Publications.

Hoopmann, K. (2003). *Haze*. London: Jessica Kingsley,. 184310072X

For older children and teenagers, this is an exciting story about computer fraud, which has an Asperger thread running throughout.

Jarman, J. (1999). *Hangman*. London: Andersen Press. 0862648661

A novel for young teenagers about a boy with Asperger syndrome who is bullied whilst on a school trip to Normandy with potentially devastating consequences.

Rees, C. (2000). *Truth or dare*. London: Macmillan Children's Books. 0330368753

A novel for young teenagers about a boy who discovers that a relative has Asperger syndrome.

Books for children and young people with autistic spectrum disorders

Buron, K. D. (2003). *When my autism gets too big!: a relaxation book for children with autism spectrum disorders*. Shawnee Mission, Kansas: Autism Asperger Publishing. 1931282825X

Helps children with autism understand about their autism and what to do when they are overloaded with stress. Available from NAS Publications.

Carter, M. A. and Santomauro, J. (2004). *Space travellers: student manual*. Shawnee Mission, Kansas: Autism Asperger Publishing. 1931282625

Using a space theme, this is an interactive manual for developing social understanding, social competence and social skills.

Doherty, K., McNally, P. and Sherrad, E. (2000). *I have autism...what's that?* Lisburn, Co. Down: Down Lisburn Trust/South Eastern Education and Library Board.

A simply written booklet to introduce primary school-aged children to their autism spectrum disorder. Line drawings. Available from NAS Publications.

Elder, J. *Different like me: my book of autism heroes*. London: Jessica Kingsley. 1843108151

Introduces children aged eight to 12 to inspirational and historical figures who may have had an autistic spectrum disorder. Available from NAS Publications.

Gerland, G. (2000). *Finding out about Asperger syndrome, high-functioning autism and PDD*. London: Jessica Kingsley. 1853028401

Written by a person with Asperger syndrome, this is a useful little book for children and young people with Asperger syndrome or high-functioning autism. Available from NAS Publications.

Ives, M. (1999). *What is Asperger syndrome and how will it affect me?* London: The National Autistic Society. 1899280146

Aimed at eight to 13-year-olds this booklet explains Asperger syndrome in simple jargon-free language for children with Asperger syndrome. Available from NAS Publications.

Jackson, L. (2002). *Freaks, geeks and Asperger syndrome*. London: Jessica Kingsley. 1843100983

Written by a 13-year-old boy with Asperger syndrome, this book is for young teenagers with Asperger syndrome. It covers topics such as bullying and dating. Available from NAS Publications.

Murrell, D. (2001). *Tobin learns to make friends*. Arlington, Texas: Future Horizons, 2001. 1885477791

Written by a parent of a child with Asperger syndrome, this fully illustrated book uses trains to explain the rules of making and keeping friends. Available from NAS Publications.

Schnurr R. G. (1999). *Asperger's, huh?: a child's perspective*. Gloucester: Ontario, Anisor Publishing. 0968447309

Written from the perspective of a child with Asperger syndrome, starting with his diagnosis at age ten.

Vermeulen, P. (2000). *I am special: introducing children and young people to their autistic spectrum disorders*. London: Jessica Kingsley. 1853029165

A workbook for children with an autism spectrum disorder. The first part is a theoretical introduction; the second part a series of worksheets. Available from NAS Publications.

Information sheets

Autism worksheet for primary schools. London: The National Autistic Society, 2000.

Introduces primary school children to autism. Specifically written for children who have a classmate with autism. Available from the NAS Information Centre or from the NAS website at www.autism.org.uk/18324

Asperger syndrome in your classroom. London: The National Autistic Society, 2001.

Written to complement the Grange Hill TV programme, this factsheet introduces Year 7-9 pupils to Asperger syndrome. Aimed at pupils who have a classmate with Asperger syndrome, can also be used in youth clubs etc. Available from the NAS Information Centre or from the NAS website at www.autism.org.uk/18320

Autism: An information sheet for secondary school and college students. London: The National Autistic Society, 2001.

Written for students studying autism at GCSE, 'A' level or GNVQ/NVQ/SVQ level. Available from the NAS Information Centre or from the NAS website at www.autism.org.uk/17391

If an item is marked as available from NAS Publications please contact:

Central Books Ltd
99 Wallis Road
London E9 5LN
Tel: +44 (0)845 458 9911
Fax: +44 (0)845 458 9912
Email: nas@centralbooks.com
Online orders: www.autism.org.uk/pubs

If an information sheet is marked as available from the NAS Information Centre, contact:

Information Centre
Tel: 0845 070 4004 (open Monday – Friday, 10am – 4pm)
Email: info@nas.org.uk



Help and support from The National Autistic Society

The NAS runs a wide range of services for people with autism, their families, carers, professionals, and others wanting information on autism and education throughout the UK.

Services

Advocacy for Education Service

The Advocacy for Education Service provides advice and advocacy on special educational needs provision and entitlements for families whose children have an autistic spectrum disorder.

Tel: 0845 070 4002

Email: advocacy@nas.org.uk

www.autism.org.uk/advocacy

Autism Helpline

The Autism Helpline offers impartial, confidential information, advice and support for people with autistic spectrum disorders, their families and carers. The helpline's advisers offer information on a range of issues including choosing the right school for children with autism and aiding their educational development.

Tel: 0845 070 4004 Mon-Fri, 10-4

Email: autismhelpline@nas.org.uk

www.autism.org.uk/helpline

Information Centre

The NAS Information Centre holds a database of some 17,000 references from a wide range of journals, reports and books covering the autistic spectrum, related and associated disorders. The centre gives information to students, teachers and other education professionals.

Tel: 0845 070 4004

Email: info@nas.org.uk

www.autism.org.uk

Training and events

The NAS runs nationwide courses, conferences and events on a range of educational issues including the SPELL framework, educating children in mainstream schools, as well as accrediting external courses, many of which have an educational focus.

Tel: 0115 911 3367

Email: training@nas.org.uk or conference@nas.org.uk

www.autism.org.uk/training

NAS schools

The NAS runs six non-profit-making schools for children and young people up to the age of 19, with widely varying needs. The schools offer flexible responses to the needs and circumstances of each individual and his/her family and are increasingly offering outreach support to colleagues in local authority schools.

www.autism.org.uk/schools

Online services

NAS website

Our website contains a wealth of information about autism and Asperger syndrome and details the broad range of help and services offered by the NAS.

Visit: www.autism.org.uk

PARIS (Public Autism Resource and Information Service)

PARIS holds detailed information on education services including schools, nurseries and colleges, local authorities, parent partnerships and educational outreach services. PARIS also provides details of training courses for teachers and other educational professionals.

Visit: www.info.autism.org.uk

Publications

The NAS produces and sells a wide range of publications about autistic spectrum disorders aimed at parents, people with the disability and professionals.

Tel: 020 7903 3595

Email: publications@nas.org.uk

www.autism.org.uk/pubs

Membership

For ongoing advice and information from a dedicated team both nationally and locally, there's no better support network than membership of The National Autistic Society (NAS). Our generous membership benefit package is designed to offer you assistance where you need it the most, as well as keeping you up-to-date with the latest information and developments.

The new 2006 membership packages includes a 10% discount on NAS publications, a bi-monthly email bulletin of the latest articles and publications, *Asperger United* magazine for individuals with an ASD, low-cost personal liability insurance, members-only web access and *Communication* magazine. For more details or to join, visit www.autism.org.uk/joinus, telephone 020 7903 3563 or email membership@nas.org.uk