Children on the spectrum
A short guide for parents and carers of autistic children

The National Autistic Society is a charity registered in England and Wales (269425) and in Scotland (SC039427)
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With your help, we can do even more. Find out how you can become a member and other ways to support our charity at www.autism.org.uk
Having an autistic child can be challenging. Getting help shouldn’t be.

There are around 150,000 autistic children in the UK, many undiagnosed. A diagnosis can help parents understand their autistic child better and why they are experiencing difficulties. It can also make it easier to access the services, benefits and support they need at home and school.

Children on the autism spectrum:

• find it hard to understand non-verbal communication, like facial expressions and tone of voice
• have difficulty understanding people's behaviour and recognising other’s feelings or expressing their own
• take language very literally and find metaphors and idioms confusing
• engage in repetitive behaviour and routines and can develop intense and highly focused interests
• find change and unexpected situations stressful and very scary
• are very sensitive to light, touch, sound or smell.

Getting a diagnosis for your child

If you feel your child may be autistic, ask your GP for a diagnosis referral. Not all GPs have an in-depth knowledge of autism, so give clear examples of any difficulties your child has had with the above characteristics. Show them a copy of our guidance for GPs (on our website) to explain their duty to refer you for a diagnosis to a psychiatrist, clinical psychologist or multi-disciplinary team.

www.autism.org.uk/childdiagnosis

Your child’s rights to support in school

If you think your child needs support at school, your local authority has a duty to carry out a needs assessment. This could help with support at school or pre-school, from teachers, support staff and other services such as speech and language therapy.

www.autism.org.uk/education

“The best way to create a society that works for autistic people, is to join one.”

Chris Packham, animal enthusiast, autistic man and National Autistic Society ambassador and honorary member
Meet Levi
Levi is a non-verbal 12-year-old who often finds social situations very challenging and is prone to meltdowns. Levi’s parents, Paul and Michael, used our helpline for advice and to find out about local services to help.

Meet James
James was two when he was diagnosed. His early diagnosis meant his family could attend our EarlyBird programme. This early intervention and the right support has helped James, who was non-verbal and displaying challenging behaviour, flourish at school.

Meet Harry
Harry, who is 13, experienced a few bad years at school due to a lack of support and understanding from his teachers and school. So mum, Jody, contacted our Education Rights Service for advice.

Meet Selina
Selina is a 12-year-old cat lover who was diagnosed when she was seven. She attends a National Autistic Society school and is hoping to become an RSPCA officer when she grows up.

Meet Soffi
Soffi is a 15-year-old autistic girl and active member of her local National Autistic Society branch. Meeting other young autistic people and hearing about their experiences has really boosted Soffi’s confidence.

For more information on all of our services:
visit our website at www.autism.org.uk
When your child is first diagnosed, it can feel like you’ve entered a whole new world and you can worry about your child’s future. So, it’s really important to get as much support as you can as early as you can.”

Dr Carrie Grant and David Grant, parents to autistic children