



---

# **AUTISM: 'the problem is understanding'**

---

**Dr Melanie Peter**

Senior Lecturer in Education

- Anglia Ruskin University

2016

**[melanie.peter@anglia.ac.uk](mailto:melanie.peter@anglia.ac.uk)**

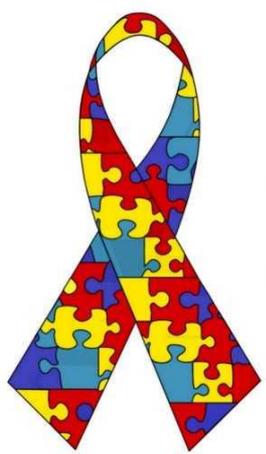
**0845 196 3536**



# Objectives

---

- **Implications of the autistic condition – ‘barriers to learning’**
- **Practical support strategies**
- **An inclusive approach in partnership**



# Areas of need from the SEND Code of Practice, 2014

---

- Cognition and learning
- Communication and interaction
- Emotional, social and mental health needs
- Sensory and physical
- Medical needs



# DSM5 Diagnostic Criteria for ASD, 2013

---

- Persistent 'deficits' in social communication and social interaction across contexts
- Restricted, repetitive patterns of behaviour, interests or activities



# Autism: the triad of impairments

Lorna Wing, 1996

Onset  
before 30  
months





Inability to relate to children or adults



Poor speech or lack of speech



Oversensitivity or undersensitivity to noises



Inappropriate toy play



Difficulty dealing with changes in routine



Inappropriate laughter or crying



Lack of awareness of danger



Hyperactivity or passiveness



Oversensitivity or undersensitivity to touch



Strange attachment to objects



Lack of eye contact





# Subgroups for Wing's Autistic Spectrum (1996)

	'Aloof'	'Passive'	'Active but odd'	'Overly formal'
<b>Language and Communication</b>	Absence of desire	Will express a need	Factual and/or irrelevant comments	Talks but without regard for response
<b>Social Interaction</b>	Solitary and indifferent	Accepts others	One-sided	Lacks subtlety
<b>Rigid Thinking and Ritualistic Behaviour</b>	No imitation or spontaneity	Copies without understanding	Repetitive /unvarying and stereotyped play and behaviour	Learned awareness of others and social codes



## Impact on the child –

- Perceptual differences
- Lack of social understanding
- Difficulty with transfer of learning, recall, personal memory
- Bizarre & repetitive behaviour
- Apparent lack of empathy
- Not seeking comfort or help
- Unaware of social possibilities
- Poor sequencing – prediction, outcomes, connections
- Lack of communicative intent & strategies
- Inability to understand and use non-verbal & verbal communication

**INSECURITY, ANXIETY, INTOLERANCE**



# Variations -

interaction of differences in psychological functioning & the child's environment

**Early experiences**

**Personality**

**Age**

**RIGIDITY OF THOUGHT**

Sensory & perceptual processing

Evaluating emotions & significance

Sense of experiencing self & personal memory

Theory of mind

Narrative

**Health issues**

**Education**

**Home**

**COMMUNICATION**

**SOCIAL INTERACTION**





# Autism... difficulty with Theory of mind- 'mind-blindness'

(Baron-Cohen, 1990)

---

- The inability to attribute feelings, thoughts and emotions to other people
- The inability to realise that other people don't know what's in your mind
- Lack of ability to understand the intentions of others



## Autism... difficulty with the desire to be social

---

- They are born lacking the drive to want to be social (Trevvarthen, 1979)
- Difficulty in infancy with understanding others' mental states (Hobson, 1990)



# Autism... difficulty with 'executive functioning'

(Ozonoff, 1995)

---

- Difficulty with switching attention from one stimulus to another
- Difficulty with being strategic in planning their actions



# Autism...

## a difficulty of 'central coherence'

---

- Attention to detail
- Difficulty seeing the 'bigger picture'

**'...the inability to draw together information... There is a fault in the predisposition of the mind to make sense of the world'.**



# Sensory sensitivity

(Olga Bogdashina, 2003)

---

- Certain stimuli (sounds, textures, smells, visual patterns, tastes) may trigger unusual responses
- May be hypersensitive or hyposensitive



*So what can  
we do to help?*

***Let's hear it  
for common  
sense!***



# Learn to **SPELL!**

The National Autistic Society advocates a common-sense approach:

---

**S**TRUCTURE

**P**OSITIVE

**E**MPATHY

**L**OW AROUSAL

**L**INKS



## **S**TRUCTURE –

- **Reduce stress**
- **Organise the environment**
- **Consider physical *and* social dimensions of a task**
- **Visual approach** – personalise using objects, photos, symbols and captions





toilet



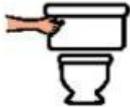
use toilet



wipe



flush



seat down



wash hands



Today is  
Friday 28<sup>th</sup> August

Today's weather is



Morning activities

Register	Wids and Shids	Learning Time	Snack Time	Outdoor Time	Art and Craft	Quiet Time
----------	----------------	---------------	------------	--------------	---------------	------------

Afternoon activities

Register	Maths	Logic Time	Outdoor Time	Phonics	Story Time	Home Time
----------	-------	------------	--------------	---------	------------	-----------

**Examples of  
visual support**



## **P**OSITIVE –

- Prioritise social foundations
- Warmth, humour
- Share and build on the child's shared interest
- Build a relationship
- Develop language in context

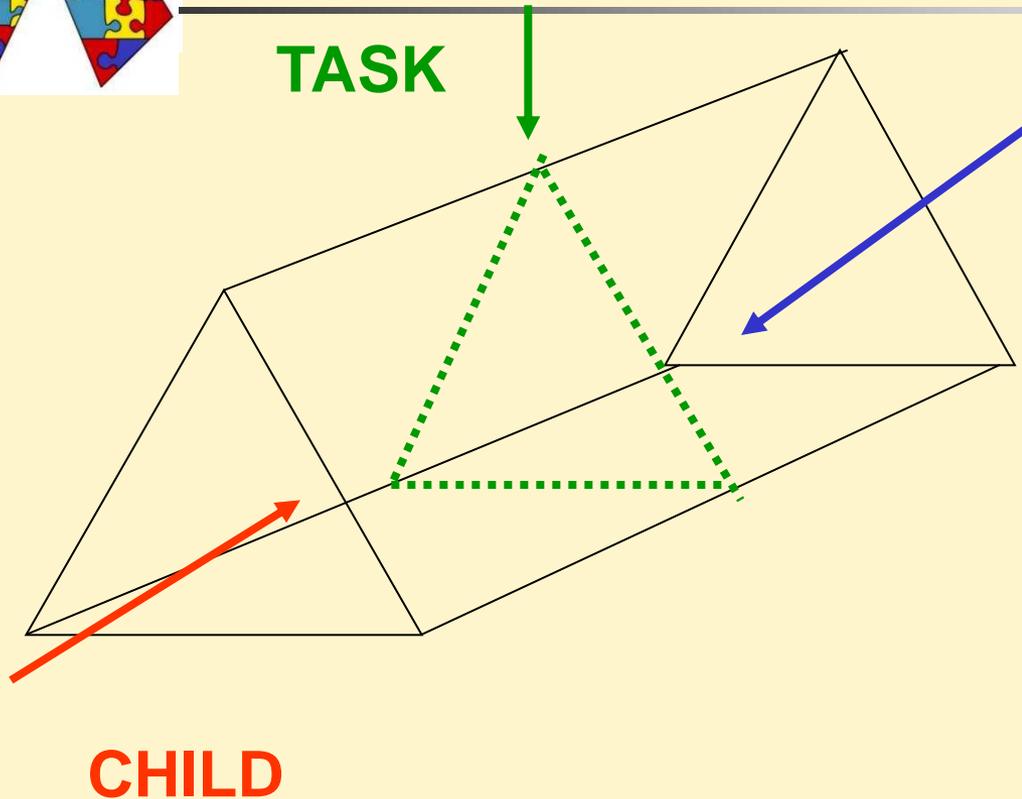


## EMPATHY –

- Respect uniqueness
- Personalise an approach
- Modelling, repetition
- Explain what to do, not just what not to do
- Say what you mean!



# 'Personalising learning': taking the perspective of the child



ADULT

*Try to  
see it my  
way*



CHILD



## LOW AROUSAL –

- avoid confrontation
- consider sensory sensitivity
- teach coping strategies
- plan for changes & transitions
- provide a 'chill' space – positive time out



## LINKS –

### **Work in partnership:**

- Parents, families
- Specialist professionals
- The whole school staff
- The child

### **Aim for a shared vision**

**Different views can be helpful!**

**Be non-judgemental – listen, respect**



Learn from one another and share strategies to address key challenges

---

**Sensory overload**

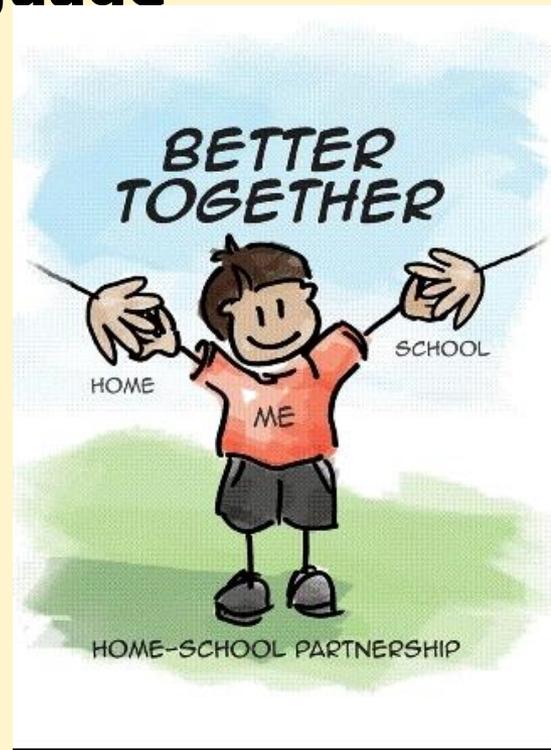
**Difficulty understanding spoken language**

**Inflexibility**

**Desire for consistency**

**Understanding emotional states**

**Challenging behaviour**





# Focus on prevention

---

- **Look for cues & try to redirect as precursors appear**
- **Are there any patterns:**
  - to undesired behaviour?
  - when the child is most engaged and co-operative?
- **Ensure the child has sufficient means to communicate**
- **Provide an autism-friendly environment!**



# A final word of advice...

---

**'Be patient... If you're trying to do something with them, stay calm and relaxed. Keep at it... Try to make what you're doing sound interesting... Make up games about things that they like. So if you're trying to teach them to count to 3, then say "Look Jesse, Postman Pat has 1, 2, 3 letters to post: Jesse, put the letters in door number three!"...Make it about them, and then they'll pay attention'.**

**Sam, aged 10  
(brother of a boy with autism and  
severe learning difficulties)**

***ENJOY  
OUR  
BOY!***