

# INFORMATION AND RESOURCES



**ADDvanced Solutions**  
Supporting you to find the answers

## Autism: Impact on Learning

Autistic children, young people and adults living have difficulties around **social communication** and with **fixed thinking patterns** (or rigid repetitive behaviours using the language of the diagnostic manual). From the perspective of learning skills, it is known that autistic people will usually have some differences in their **executive functioning** abilities in comparison with their peers. This means they can struggle with planning, organising, sequencing and self-monitoring and also with developing complex skills such as writing. This adds up to an enormous impact on their ability to function in a learning environment. (See our separate resource on this on our website resource page).

### Social interaction and communication

Difficulties with social interaction can cause major barriers to learning. Friendship can be tricky, and they may need support to make and maintain positive relationships with others. Autistic people often take statements very literally; for example, a teacher stating, “this textbook is absolutely useless” might result in the pupil refusing to believe anything contained in the book!

Autistic pupils could have difficulties with both verbal and non-verbal communication and may find it difficult to communicate their needs and intentions to teachers and to other pupils. They may not fully process verbal instructions or explanations and may find it hard to interpret the tone of voice and body language of others which can lead to misunderstandings. These misunderstandings can result lot of time may be spent on unnecessary activities, which can be frustrating for both pupils and teachers.

In addition, it is not unusual for autistic people to be perfectionist, which can lead to anxiety, frustration and a reluctance to move on from one learning activity to another before they feel they have finished.

There are many strategies that can be used to help children and young people to access learning and friendships within the school environment and beyond.

Liverpool / Halton / Knowsley / Sefton / Wirral: **0151 486 1788**

St Helens: **01744 582172**

Warrington: **01925 320863**

Email: **info@advancedsolutions.co.uk**

**[www.advancedsolutions.co.uk](http://www.advancedsolutions.co.uk)**



### Fixed thinking patterns

Pupils with ASD are often less able to see a situation from another's perspective, which can make group activities difficult, and some teaching strategies that rely on this ability will be ineffective. However, working in pairs can be very effective if this is set up thoughtfully.

Pupils will find it hard to move from one activity to another without support or warning. Change of routine can be distressing for autistic children and young people, and it will help them to be aware of any known changes in time for them to process them. Using visuals, timetables, schedules, checklists and other strategies can reduce their anxiety around change.

One aspect of the inflexibility of thought in autism is the ability to focus on a specific area of interest. Of course, all autistic people are individuals, and some special interests give themselves to being included in teaching more than others, but it is very rewarding if a child's special interest can be woven into the lesson. Perhaps they could use it as project material, or inspiration for story-writing or art. Many celebrated and revered academics, explorers and collectors are autistic.

**Special interests** can be a source of joy and comfort, and also a point of communication and connection with others. Maintaining boundaries may be helpful if the special interest starts to impact heavily on every aspect of the child's life to the exclusion of other things.

'**Rigid repetitive behaviours**' include rocking, hand-flapping, and other repetitive movements can be used to self-soothe and also just for enjoyment. Some parents and carers feel they need to restrict these activities, but it may be kinder to allow them in some form as they do fulfil a need for the child/young person.

**Sensory issues (SPD)** can be a major barrier to learning for children on the autistic spectrum, as with many neurodevelopmental conditions. For example, elevated levels of noise, certain smells or just being in close proximity to other pupils could significantly impact on learning for some pupils. Find out more about our training and resources on SPD on our website.

Use an individual sensory profile with the pupil to enable you to help them avoid particularly difficult sensory experiences.

*Understanding, and effective and appropriate support by their teachers is essential for these young people to succeed in school and to live with a positive sense of their own achievements and accomplishments.*