



What is autism?

Understanding a different brilliant[®]

In this information sheet, we explore some of the common characteristics of autism, such as differences in social relating and sensory preferences. That said, it's important to remember that these characteristics vary greatly between individuals. Autism is truly a spectrum, and every Autistic person is unique.

Our purpose a different brilliant[®]

Understanding, engaging and celebrating the strengths, interests and aspirations of people on the autism spectrum.



What is autism?

Autism is a neurodevelopmental condition that affects how a person's brain develops and functions, and an estimated 1 in 40* people are on the autism spectrum. Autism can be diagnosed in people of all ages, all cultural backgrounds and economic status.

** Based on prevalence studies conducted over the past five years.*

Social interactions

Many Autistic people feel uncomfortable in busy and complex social settings – and may find it easier connecting through online chat, games or video.

Autistic people can also experience difficulty when it comes to reading social cues or understanding how non-Autistic people think.

Regulating emotions can be a challenge, and some Autistic people prefer their own company to their peers' (both in the playground and into adulthood). As a result of all this, building and maintaining friendships can be a challenge.

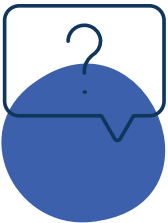
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Sensory awareness

Many Autistic people have heightened sensory awareness – making them more sensitive to sounds, smells, tastes and physical touch. As a result, they might:

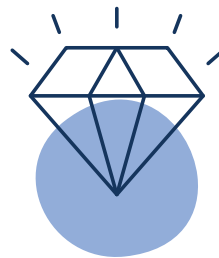
- Feel distressed or overwhelmed by things like loud noises, bright lights, the feel of certain fabrics or 'up close and personal' experiences like getting a haircut.
- Try to block out discomfort by covering ears or hiding in quiet places.
- Repeat certain movements when stressed or excited, such as hand flapping or pacing.
- Seek reassuring sensory experiences, whether it's running hands along certain textures, sniffing objects or flicking fingers in front of eyes.



Communication preferences

Compared to neurotypical people, those on the autism spectrum can communicate in a way that's overly honest and direct, sometimes to the point of being blunt! They may have little interest in small talk, have difficulty understanding sarcasm or humour, and can find non-verbal communication, such as gestures and facial expressions, hard to read.

Due to the way the Autistic brain processes information, they may take a little longer to understand spoken information, and sometimes repeat words or phrases in a way that can seem unusual or out of context.



Strengths and interests

Of course, personal strengths vary – but many Autistic people are particularly good at logical or visual thinking, remembering facts and figures, having a keen eye for detail, and understanding technology.

A very strong focus and deep interest in a specific topic or activity is another characteristic that a lot of Autistic people share, making them experts in a chosen area.

On a personal level, Autistic people often display character strengths such as honesty, loyalty, reliability, persistence, fairness and kindness.

"The one thing I would love for other people to know is that having a diagnosis of autism isn't a negative thing and that all the stereotypical associations with the condition are not all true. We are all "a different brilliant" and all have our own special interests and are well versed in a wide range of topics." Alexandra

Based on the idea of a different brilliant®, Aspect's approach:

- Respects difference and diversity
- Builds a person's skills based on their strengths, interests, aspirations and support needs
- Develops autism-friendly environments
- Supports others to understand and embrace autism and to develop respectful supportive interactions.