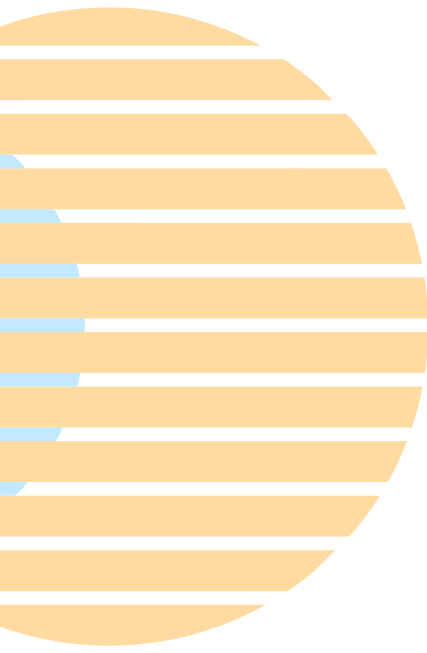


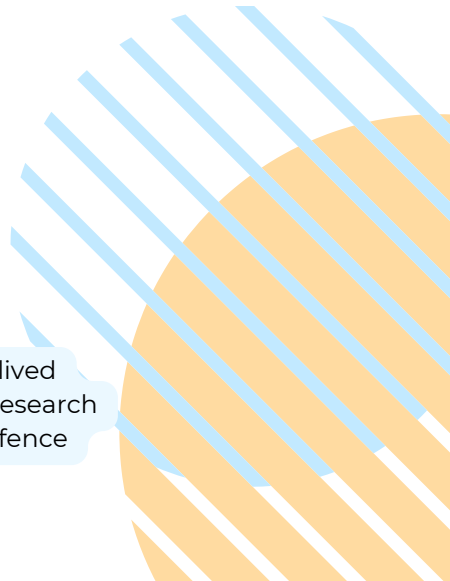


UNDERSTANDING AUTISM

An introduction for parents and carers:
What autism is, main areas of difference and tips for
supporting processing, communication and sensory
needs.



The language and terminology used in this resource has been carefully co-produced with individuals with lived experience and are what we believe to be the most up to date terms at the time of production, based on our research and professional experience. This may not reflect everyone's experience but, we do not wish to cause any offence

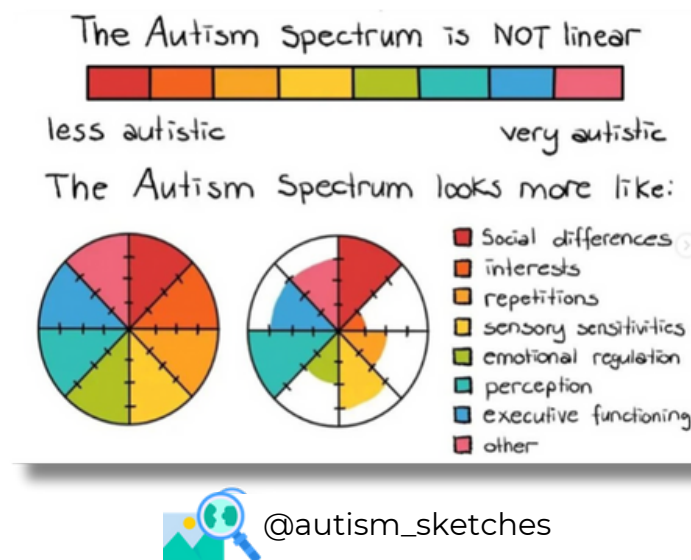


WHAT IS AUTISM?

- Autism is a neurodevelopmental condition that affects how a person communicates, interacts, and experiences the world. It's a spectrum — meaning every autistic person is unique.
- The spectrum isn't a linear scale of "less" to "more" autistic. It can be helpful to think of the spectrum more like the image on the right - each person has a different mix of strengths and challenges in some common areas.
- Main areas of difference for autistic people are with processing, communication, social interaction and sensory experiences.



Autism is something that is present from birth - no vaccines or medications can cause autism. Neither can vaccines or medications taken during pregnancy. Autism is not an illness or something that can be treated or cured. Autistic people may benefit from therapies or medications but, these are not to "treat" autism but support the individual with particular elements of their experience e.g. speech and language therapy and medication to support sleep, or emotional regulation, for example.



5 EARLY SIGNS YOU MAY NOTICE:

- 1 Intense focus on specific interests
- 2 Repetitive movements or speech
- 3 Not using toys for their intended purpose
- 4 Sensory sensitivities (e.g. sounds, textures, lights)
- 5 Challenges with changes in routine

PROCESSING

YOUR CHILD MIGHT EXPERIENCE:

- Challenges with transitions and changes to their routine
- Have very specific interests, some call them “special interests”
- Struggle with emotional regulation at times
- Repetitive behaviours, routines and rituals, and have challenges deviating from them
- Be literal thinkers
- Need more time to process information and requests
- May have strong pattern recognition, long term memory, and ability to hyperfocus

SOCIAL INTERACTION

YOUR CHILD MIGHT EXPERIENCE:

- Overwhelm in social situations
- Challenges understanding, predicting and responding to others behaviour
- Difficulty understanding relationship dynamics, boundaries and social cues
- Behaving differently than others might expect socially
- Masking in social situations which can be very exhausting
- A strong sense of justice and loyalty

Special Interests Feel Like:

@littlepuddins.ie

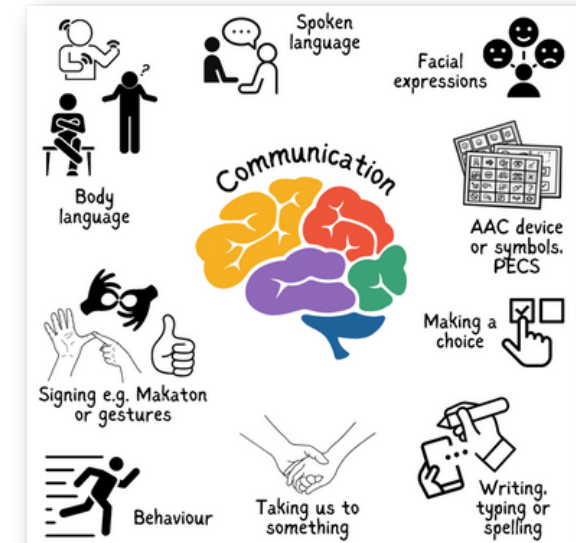


It is a common and harmful misconception that autistic people don't have/show empathy but it can just be experienced and displayed differently e.g. not being able to understand how they might feel, practical advice over consoling words, feeling deeply but not showing it etc.

COMMUNICATION

YOUR CHILD MIGHT EXPERIENCE:

- May speak late or use few words
- Might repeat phrases (echolalia)
- Takes things literally
- Struggles with back-and-forth conversation
- May use gestures, pictures, or devices to communicate



SENSORY EXPERIENCES

YOUR CHILD MIGHT EXPERIENCE:

- May seek strong sensations (spinning, jumping)
- Unusual reactions to pain or temperature
- Picky with food textures or tastes
- Discomfort with clothing (tags, seams)



Autistic children may face challenges with communication, social interaction, and sensory processing. They might struggle to express themselves, understand others, or cope with loud sounds, bright lights, or certain textures.

These differences can affect daily routines, learning, and relationships—but with support and understanding, children can thrive in their own unique way.

TIPS FOR SUPPORTING YOUR CHILD

- TRY SENSORY TOYS (FIDGETS, CHEWABLES, WEIGHTED BLANKETS)
- OFFER QUIET, CALM SPACES
- KEEP ROUTINES STEADY
- GIVE SIMPLE CHOICES
- PRAISE SMALL WINS
- USE SHORT, CLEAR WORDS
- WATCH FOR SENSORY TRIGGERS
- ADD MOVEMENT BREAKS (JUMPING, STRETCHING)

Sensory experiences – how to help

- Consider the environment - light, smells, patterns, temperature, noise
- Consider ourselves and our impact eg/ perfume
- Recognising precursors to sensory overload
- Aids – ear defenders, dark sunglasses, tactile items
- Preparation – to make informed decisions
- Option of breaks and time out in a low arousal space
- Understanding the function of stimming and not discouraging it
- Relaxation techniques and strategies – practice when calm



TIPS FOR SUPPORTING YOUR CHILD

Visual resources

Why is this so important?

- Increases **access** to communication
- Facilitates alternative ways of communicating
- Supports understanding and processing - autistic people may find visual information easier to process
- Can be referred back to

