

Autistic Spectrum Disorder

Autism is a life-long developmental disability that affects the way people understand, and interact with, the world around them. It is a 'spectrum' condition because, while everyone with autism shares three main areas of difficulty, the condition affects people in very different ways. This condition affects a child's ability to socialise and to develop speech and language. The main characteristics are now described as a triad of impairments. These impairments affect:

- Communication – language impairment, which may include speech, intonation, gesture, body language or facial expression.
- Social interaction – difficulties such as lack of empathy and perception, inappropriate eye contact, poor grasp of timing or rejection of physical contact.
- Imaginative thought – inflexible or over-literal thought processes, which may include obsessional behaviours or repetitive movements and a resistance to change.

Children with autism will experience many of the same difficulties as children with Asperger syndrome. These difficulties may range from mild to severe. Like Asperger syndrome, this condition requires a multi-disciplinary diagnosis. Children with autistic spectrum disorder will have a different view of the world and of what is important.

It is thought that about two thirds of people with autism have sensory processing disorder.

Key Characteristics

Children with autistic spectrum disorder may:

- Find it hard or even impossible to look others in the eye.
- Prefer to be solitary, have great difficulty dealing with other children invading their personal space.
- Flap arms or hands, particularly when frustrated or upset.
- Have delayed speech – up to 50% of autistic children have difficulty with developing spoken language.
- Have difficulty understanding jokes, idioms or figures of speech – everything is taken literally, making it difficult to make friends, understand some oral instructions and follow parts of literacy.
- Have difficulties with language, such as parroting what others say, repeating one phrase over and over or speaking in a monotone.
- Fly into a rage for no apparent reason although this usually turns out to be because someone has moved something or changed a routine.
- Display repetitive behaviour, such as turning lights on and off, opening and closing doors, or watching the same videos over and over again.

Strategies we use in the Classroom

- Provide an area in the classroom where the child can have their own personal space, with the minimum of distractions.
- Ensure that the classroom has an element of continuity – not too many changes at the same time.
- Prepare them well in advance for any changes in school routine, if possible, as this can be very distressing for them.

- Be consistent in the management of behaviour.
- Use a visual daily timetable.
- Use visual task lists.
- Keep instructions clear and simple, checking that they understand by repeating the instructions to them individually as they will not understand that general instructions are for them unless their name is used.
- Use ICT to support their learning in a variety of ways.
- Explain jokes, idioms and figures of speech – what they are, what they mean and how they work.
- Teach the child how to interpret social signals.
- Use social stories to support a child in specific social situations.
- Teach self help skills.
- Use visual and concrete materials to support understanding of conceptual vocabulary.
- Use games and activities to teach social conventions and interaction, e.g.turn taking.
- Ensure that they understand that school and classroom rules apply to them.

Specific Interventions that we can provide at Claremont Primary School

1. Social Stories.
2. Sensory Circuits.
3. TEEACH.
4. The Incredible 5 point scale.
5. Lego Therapy.
6. Social Communication group.
7. Direct speech and language support.

Useful Websites:

www.autism.org.uk

www.autismeducationtrust.org.uk

www.autism.about.com

www.isn.net

www.ahany.org

www.tonyattwood.com

www.autismhangout.com

www.pecs.org.uk

www.teacch.com

www.oaasis.co.uk

Local parents' support:

Kent Autistic Trust (Email) office@kentautistic.com

Drop-in for parents at Tonbridge Cottage Hospital

A Sigh of Relief www.carersfirst.org.uk