



AUTISTIC SPECTRUM DISORDER (ASD)

Reintegrate School Toolkit

Supporting Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

Definition

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a lifelong neurodevelopmental condition that affects communication, social interaction, behaviour, and processing of information. Children with ASD may have differences in how they:

- Communicate and interact socially.
- Process sensory input.
- Learn, play, and engage with the world around them.

Each child is unique — ASD presents differently in every individual.

Challenges Children with Autism May Face

1. Social Communication and Interaction

- Difficulty starting or maintaining conversations.
- Struggles to read facial expressions, tone of voice, or body language.
- May not know how close to stand to others.
- Difficulties making and maintaining friendships.

2. Restricted or Repetitive Behaviours

- Intense or “special” interests.
- Repetitive routines, rituals, or body movements.
- Distress at changes to routine.
- Hypersensitivity or hyposensitivity to sound, light, touch, smell, or taste.

3. Unstructured Times (Play & Lunch)

- Discomfort in noisy or unpredictable environments (e.g. dining hall).
- Anxiety due to lack of routine.
- Fear of bullying or social exclusion.
- Slower processing of social interactions.

4. Emotional and Behavioural Responses

- Heightened anxiety leading to meltdowns or shutdowns.
- Behaviour differences between home and school.
- Stress from sensory overload.

Recognising Autism

Behaviours that may indicate ASD include:

- Repetitive play (lining up toys, repeating games).
- Resistance to change or new routines.
- Limited or unusual social interactions.
- Sensory-seeking or sensory-avoidant behaviours.
- Communication challenges (verbal or non-verbal).
- Self-stimulatory behaviours (hand flapping, rocking).
- Behaviours such as biting, pinching, kicking, or **pica** (putting non-food items in the mouth).

Note: Only a **multidisciplinary diagnostic team** (e.g., paediatrician, psychologist, speech & language therapist) can formally diagnose ASD.

Supporting Strategies

1. Communication

- Always use the child's name at the start of an instruction.
- Gain attention before speaking – check they are engaged.
- Keep language clear, short, and specific.
- Use pauses to allow processing time.
- Limit and structure questions (offer choices where possible).
- Use **visual supports** (symbols, social stories, timetables, “now and next” boards).
- Avoid relying solely on non-verbal cues if the child is anxious.
- Be mindful of sensory environment when communicating.

2. Classroom Support

- Provide a consistent routine and **prepare for changes in advance**.
- Create a personal workstation or quiet space in class if needed.
- Use visual timetables, timers, and “now and next” prompts.
- Allow processing time after giving instructions.
- Use **social stories** or **comic strip conversations** to develop understanding.
- Adjust seating to reduce sensory overload (e.g. away from doors, bright displays, or noise).
- Address bullying immediately – use drawings or visuals if the child cannot verbally explain an incident.
- Where possible, incorporate **special interests** into lessons to boost engagement.
- Keep a behaviour diary to identify triggers and “hot spots.”
- Provide a safe space for regulation (bean bag, tent, calm box).
- Use social skills programmes such as *Time to Talk* or *Socially Speaking*.
- Allow use of **exit passes/time-out cards** to manage anxiety.
- Maintain open communication with parents/carers.

3. Playtime & Lunchtime Support

- Provide structured lunchtime clubs around shared interests.
- Offer quieter eating spaces if the dining hall is overwhelming.
- Use buddies or a buddy bench to support social connections.
- Staff on duty should receive **Autism Awareness training**.
- Reinforce anti-bullying policies consistently.
- Use social stories to rehearse tricky social situations.
- Provide a card system for pupils to signal when they need help.

4. Organisation

- Use **visual aids** such as colour coding, checklists, and task boxes.
- Record instructions (e.g., voice notes) for replay.
- Provide clear labels on resources and books.
- Break down tasks into simple, structured steps.
- Use “now and next” prompts and countdowns for transitions.

Useful Resources

- **National Autistic Society** – www.autism.org.uk / Helpline: 0808 800 4104
- **Autism Education Trust** – www.autismeducationtrust.org.uk
- **Child Autism UK** – www.childautism.org.uk / Helpline: 01344 882248

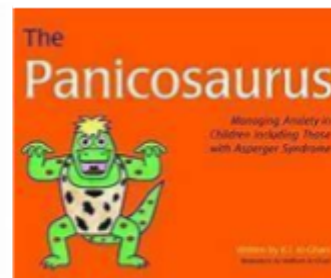
Key Takeaway

Children with Autism thrive on **structure, predictability, and understanding**.

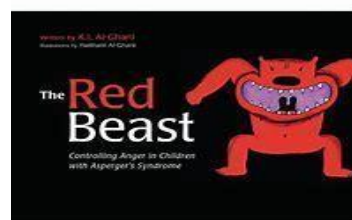
Visual supports, calm communication, and a safe environment are essential.

Strong school-home partnerships and Autism-aware peers can significantly reduce anxiety and increase inclusion.

Suggested Reading



The Disappointment Dragon
The Panicosaurus
The Red Beast Author –
K I Al- Ghani



The Autism Discussion Page
Core challenges of Autism
Anxiety, Behaviour, School
and Parenting Strategies

Author Bill Nason